Speak To Me, Stranger:
Subjectivity, Homosexuality and the
Preliberation Narratives of James Courage

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Figure 1: A pencil sketch of James Courage (1903-63) drawn in 1932. Artist unknown. [MS-0999/190, S12-505h, Hocken Collections, Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of Otago]
Abstract

This thesis surveys the life of expatriate writer James Courage (1903-63). More than a literary biography, *Speak To Me, Stranger* exhibits the ‘strangeness’ and unique historicity of past lives. It uses one man’s experience to elucidate the complexities, ambivalences and potentialities of ‘pre-liberation’ New Zealand and Britain.

Drawing on journals, personal correspondence, photography and literature, this thesis exposes the multifarious, divergent and sometimes incoherent ways that one individual’s identity was produced, experienced and transformed through time, space and text. It appraises stories – cultural, personal and fictive – as a means to unveil the complexity of past lives. In particular, *Speak To Me, Stranger* follows recent assertions made about modernity and its role in producing individuation. Modernity is best understood as a localized and partial process that has specific and diverging effects on individuals. These divergences speak very carefully to various categories of identity and experience – class, nationality, and gender, in particular – that, together, help shape modern subjectivities.

Courage’s story is in turns dramatic and mundane, triumphant and tragic. Courage resided in London from 1923, making only one return trip to New Zealand in 1933. But his story bridges multiple worlds – both centre and periphery. Engaging the problematic category of ‘pre-liberation’, this thesis seeks to challenge the assumptions and timescale common to a number of assessments of the pre-Stonewall era. Liberationist articulations of the past have tended to paper over the complexities of past lives. Such impulses have grouped people together without differentiation and sometimes undercut questions of agency.

Perhaps for the first time, this thesis traces the unfolding of history through emphatically queer and New Zealand eyes. Alike or alien, familiar or foreign, Courage’s personal and literary stories speak to modernity, subjectivity and narrative in powerful ways. They show the unique variegation, complexity and dynamism that is evident across a single lifespan, and forces a reconceptualisation of what it meant to be a queer New Zealander in the years before liberation.
Acknowledgments

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The task of researching and writing this thesis was also made easier through the assistance and knowledge of staff at a range of research institutions around New Zealand. In particular, I want to acknowledge the staff at the Hocken Collections, University of Otago, the Alexander Turnbull Library, Special
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Finally, I dedicate this thesis to memory of my father Brian Richard Burke. Your spirit and intellect inspire me always. I could not have made this journey without you.
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# Timeline of Key Events

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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Key events</th>
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<tr>
<td>1912</td>
<td>Attends Dunelm Preparatory School in Christchurch. Courage boards with his headmaster, Clement Lester Wiggins and family. The experience later becomes the inspiration for his most successful novel, The Young Have Secrets (1954).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1916</td>
<td>Attends Christ Church, in Christchurch. Courage begins writing creatively. He pens his only surviving piece of juvenilia, the play Margaret's Platonic Marriage (1920). Courage spends his summers with his maternal grandmother Ida Florence Peache, at her Mt. Somers’ property, near the Southern Alps. He also cultivates a friendship with Ronnie and Rosamond Peter at nearby Anama (the latter of an intimate nature).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>Courage experiences the first of several mental breakdowns, possibly precipitated by the unwanted sexual advances of his maternal uncle and Courage’s deep unhappiness with boarding school life. Both incidents become the subject of later literary endeavours.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1923</td>
<td>Leaves New Zealand for England to pursue a Bachelor of Arts in English at Oxford University. He enters St. John’s College in October 1923, and graduates with a second in June 1927. He forms a number of close attachments. Most notable is his relationship with artist Christopher Wood (1901-1930).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>Courage has two plays, New Country and Life’s Too Short, performed by the Oxford Dramatic Society, in November 1926. Whilst also contributing to student magazine Isis, he also makes his first foray into short story. His ‘From a Balcony’ is published in The London Mercury, in August.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td>Graduates from Oxford and immediately embarks on a trip to Greece with friends. The experience is recorded in his ‘Journal of My Journey Back from Greece’ (unpublished). Courage returns to England and remains based in London, and later St. Ives, Cornwall. He is now chiefly concerned with writing fiction professionally.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>Begins work on An Episode in Early Life. It is autobiographical and described later by Courage as a ‘long short-tale on a homosexual theme’. It is rejected for publication, and Courage destroys the manuscript.</td>
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<td>1930</td>
<td>Meets Frank Fleet. An Argentine, the pair meet on the Cornish Express, and pursue an intimate relationship in London. Frank returns to Argentina in March of the same year. Courage leaves soon afterward, arriving in Buenos Aires at the end of the 1931. He stays for some three months. While Fleet marries in 1934, the men are romantically involved until Courage’s death.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>Courage returns to England in April and is quickly diagnosed with pulmonary tuberculosis. The symptoms persist and Courage is admitted to Mundesley Hospital, in Norfolk, in September.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>Finishes revisions to The Promising Years, an autobiographical novel of Courage’s life from early childhood until his admission to Oxford University. It is rejected for publication because of its (coded) homosexual themes, and limited audience appeal.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>Publishes One House. It is Courage’s first successfully published novel. Courage leaves Mundesley soon afterward and embarks on his only return trip to New Zealand. He remains in New Zealand, largely in Canterbury and North Otago, until</td>
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<td>1935</td>
<td>Whilst in New Zealand, Courage begins work on <em>Some Other Being</em> (unpublished and later destroyed). It is later revised and parts of it incorporated into <em>The Call Home</em> (1956).</td>
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<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td><em>Private History</em>, a play, opens at the Gate Theatre, London. The play centres on a homosexual relationship between two young men and is a critical and box office success. A West End production is denied by the Chief Censor.</td>
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<td>1939</td>
<td>England declares war on Germany. Courage is declared unfit for military service but works as a firewarden during the bombing of London. Courage pursues two notable relationships at this time, both with younger men. The first, with a seaman known only as Chris; the other, with a R.A.F. captain named Ivon Alderson.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>Begins work at Wilson's Book Shop in Hampstead. Courage becomes its manager in 1946 but steps down in 1950 because of mounting health concerns.</td>
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<td>1945</td>
<td>Publishes 'Uncle Adam Shot a Stag'. The story is Courage's first publication since 1933 and appears in the 1945 edition of <em>English Story</em>.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1948</td>
<td>Publishes the <em>Fifth Child</em>. The novel centres on Courage's childhood in Amberley and the marital problems of his parents. The novel creates significant strife in the family.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>Publishes <em>Desire Without Content</em>. The novel, which refers to his uncle, precipitates a complete mental breakdown. Courage is admitted as a voluntary patient at Napsbury some time in May. He lives for a time afterward with poet Basil Dowling and his family. Courage begins aggressive psychotherapy in November with a Dr. Larkin, a proponent of Freud and Klein. Courage continues regular treatment for the rest of his life.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>Publishes <em>Fires in the Distance</em>, a novel with homosexual themes and partly based on his relationship with Ronnie and Rosamond Peter.</td>
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<td>1954</td>
<td>Publishes <em>The Young Have Secrets</em>. It sells over 100,000 copies and is a Book Society Book of the Month. Courage also meets insurance broker Stuart Hurrell. The man is twelve years his junior, and the pair are intimately involved until Courage's death in 1963. Along with Frank Fleet, Stuart is also a beneficiary of Courage's will.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>Publishes <em>The Call Home</em>. The novel is partly based on Courage's visit to New Zealand in 1933-5 and incorporates aspects of his failed <em>Some Other Being</em>. <em>The Call Home</em> is Courage's last novel to be set in New Zealand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>Publishes <em>A Way of Love</em>. It is the first story of same-sex love to be published by a New Zealander. It receives a special release in the United States (via Putnam) and is a modest success in Britain and elsewhere. It is initially received indifferently by New Zealand critics but does not garner immediate controversy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>Courage experiences difficulties in returning to creative endeavour. He focuses instead on writing in his journals about his experiences under psychotherapy, and of his various mental torments. Each journal (unpublished) beginning with 'The Diary of Neurotic' for 1960-1 numbers in excess of 1,000 pages in length.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td><em>A Way of Love</em> is withdrawn from circulation in New Zealand after the novel is brought before the Inter-Departmental Committee responsible for the censorship of indecent literature. The experience sparks for Courage renewed psychology antipathies. His final novel, <em>A Visit to Penmorten</em>, is published at the end of the year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>Suffers a heart attack and dies in England after some months of declining health. Courage's ashes are returned to New Zealand and scattered at Seadown, on the banks of the Waipara River.</td>
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Introduction

Telling stories

‘Do you remember all the little things that gave us such shy pleasure’, New Zealand novelist James Courage composed, in verse, on the 30th of May 1922. Writing in his diary from his parents’ home at Seadown, a sheep station near Amberley, New Zealand, Courage, then nineteen, reminisced of a night when he and an unnamed lover ‘lay half scared of one another’ in the ‘dry brusque oak leaves’ of an autumnal night.¹ Courage wrote wistfully of half-covering his companion in leaves, of ‘a russet moon’ that ‘salted’ his friend’s face with pale light, and an adolescent mawkishness that brought, in hindsight, a touch of comic relief to the scene. ‘You [...] [p]retended to be scared’, Courage records with fondness, ‘but I, I knew!’²

Such a vignette is tantalising for its insights into one young man’s private liaisons. Given Courage’s status as an invert, the term he most preferred to describe his attraction towards men at the time, it is tempting to assume that his love interest was male. The succeeding two pages, however, are excised from the volume, cut with almost surgical precision, presumably with a knife or other sharp implement. One might imagine all manner of reasons for this censorship – shame, a broken heart, a safeguard against blackmail – or, deeming them too indelicate for public consumption, perhaps some future custodian of Courage’s estate removed these entries in the interests of public respectability. Whichever the case, the location of Courage and his companion, his friend’s identity and gender, indeed, even whether the incident was pure fact or fiction, remains unclear.

What the incident does highlight, however, are some of the ways queer New Zealanders may have found space for sexual and social interaction in the years before gay liberation (1972, in New Zealand contexts).³ This poem, and the entries that follow, tell us much about Courage’s personal development – both as an artist and an ‘invert’. Reflecting candidly on his life and experience these confessions were
never meant to see the light of day. In fact, anyone perusing Courage’s first slim volume of writing is faced with the censorious by-line: ‘for “MYSELF” and no one else’. His voice, though, (a teenager, and queer) is one seldom heard in New Zealand’s historical register, and hardly ever with such clarity. Courage’s picture of New Zealand in the early part of the twentieth century is a vivid and often-surprising one. Courage depicts a nation that is neither utopian paradise nor a cultural backwater. New Zealand is as much a zone of liberating possibility as it is a space of puritan inhibition.

We see that Courage belonged to an impressive, if loose, network of like-minded men and women. These early connections extended from New Zealand’s southernmost cities – Christchurch, Dunedin, and Invercargill – to its rural hinterlands – the farming locales of Canterbury in particular. While Courage lamented New Zealand’s perceived tendency to celebrate athleticism and social uniformity, his records demonstrate strong ties to a lively cohort of artistic, and sexually expressive young New Zealanders. The evidence for this includes photographs that depict parties of cross-dressing youths in Peel Forest (southern Canterbury), diary entries that underscore shared passions for the dramatic arts and musical performance, and letters from one Ronnie Peter, a male friend who wrote of a romantic liaison with Courage as much experienced through art and literature as it was in the flesh.

Archival traces from nearer the end of Courage’s life, however, paint an entirely different perspective on national spaces. Further, they demonstrate shifts in Courage’s personal investment in sexuality and its expression. In 1960, and at the age of 57, Courage’s identity, both as a queer man and a New Zealander, was troubled by Freudian psychoanalysis and the newer, largely middle-class values of homosexuality. For Courage, and many men like him, psychoanalysis had the potential to re-write notions of identity and selfhood. It shed new light on the mental patterning and frustrations that shaped men’s adult lives, and explained the profound effect of certain violent early traumas exerted on individuals. These experiences were, analysts contended, usually connected to men’s home lives and
their relationships with their mothers, and 'explained' the disruption to otherwise 'natural' and well-adjusted minds and bodies as adults.6

Courage described in later life how he had 'come down from Oxford' in 1927.7 He had remained based in England since his graduation. Courage wrote how he had 'slunk off' to Cornwall, and then to Hampstead, London, ‘passively [...] intent’ on writing and not, it seems, the ‘competitive commercial life’ his father had originally intended for him.8 This ‘passivity’ – sexual and otherwise – undermined the masculine code of conduct Courage believed to be at the centre of New Zealand’s national culture. He wrote how the men of the Antipodes were active, virile and practically-minded. 'You don’t realise the force of prohibition imposed by my colonial background', Courage told his psychiatrist Dr. Larkin.9 Courage wrote how English analysts were incapable of seeing New Zealand’s ‘manly imperative’ as the ‘enormous conditioning factor’ it was.10 Courage suggested he had been ‘brought up to be a farmer’ and ‘educated’ precisely ‘for that purpose’.11

Courage ‘discovered’ that his life had been gravelly affected by what he learned to see in analysis as a series of personal calamities: a natural propensity towards a ‘passive homosexuality’, sexual interference by a maternal uncle, a dour and strict father, and an emotionally inaccessible mother. In ‘recovering’ these experiences Courage revised prior conceptions of selfhood and resituated his sense of self within the discourses of Freudian psychiatry. Although Courage continued to see inverted and artistic identities as closely related these older ideas were supplanted – or at least revised – by a newer and scientifically-infused set of views on sexuality and human development. Courage's ‘homosexuality’, Dr. Larkin reasoned on the 25th of February 1960, formed part of the ‘negative pattern’ of Courage’s life.12 This, Larkin suggested, was the result of a ‘misdirected aggression’ brought about by Courage’s malformed childhood; a personality disorder that had to be ‘turned round’ and corrected in therapy.13
**Introduction**

**From stories to experience**

These diary excerpts are of interest in their own right. They give voice to the experience of men usually positioned as marginal within 'mainstream' histories. Queer New Zealanders, as I have noted already, seldom appear in our national storytelling and, until recently, have either constituted secondary considerations within wider historical discussions (such as morality, violence, or literary enterprise, for example), or are excluded from scholarly accounts of the past entirely.

Taken collectively, however, Courage's accounts do more than just allow historians to read queer experience back into the historical register. They provide a means through which scholars can start to account for the complex ways that historical subjects themselves negotiate and renegotiate their identities through time and space. Such a process is uniquely subjective, and, as I will demonstrate, not reducible to simple terms. Plainly put, fashioning a sense of self was as messy and troubling for queer men in the past as it is for the historians whose job it is to untangle and begin to make sense of them today.

H. G. Cocks has recently argued that such accounts of the past offer fruitful means for discussing the ‘diverse identities and selves’ that exist within modern sexual lives.14 ‘Different regimes of knowledge’, Cocks writes, bring into existence ‘new relationships, new modes of being, and new forms of discipline’.15 Queer does not sit in simple binary opposition to heterosexuality. Non-normative – or queer – sexualities are increasingly understood as generated and produced from ‘localized’ and ‘partial processes’ of modernity.16 Historical contingencies as disparate as geography, age, class and ethnicity form, alongside others, the tools and materials from which sexual selfhood is assembled. Joan Scott has likewise called for more thorough-going historical analyses that perceive the individual ‘process[es] of invention’ used to form coherent lives.17 These lives, of course, are never coherent in reality, but use terms like ‘heterosexuality’ or ‘homosexuality’ to generate group or collective affiliation.18 Historians should be aware of the ‘illusory sameness’ implicit
in these signifiers, Scott writes, and suggests that academic histories ought to upset the ‘arbitrary temporal designations’ (pre- or post-liberation, for example), as well as the finite sets of possibilities often ascribed therein.  

This thesis sits at this historiographical juncture. It teases out the complexities of queer and wider identity constructions, and seeks to deconstruct the specific permutations of individual subjectivities as they occur in time and text. This thesis concerns itself not merely with the material realities of everyday life (though these are important) but considers how these materialities intersect with the narratives and explanations that one man committed to text; a process of self invention that turned on issues of identity and belonging, place and displacement. As this thesis will demonstrate, Courage and men like him only ever engaged partially with dominant discourses and social scripts, never fully evacuating past conceptions of selfhood, nor investing completely in new and revised conceptions of the self. Their stories help elucidate our understanding of subjectivities, space, and self knowledge, and they demonstrate how one life could be invested with (sometimes ambivalent) shape and meaning.  

This body of material constitutes the fragments or, in Bronwyn Dalley’s words, the ‘cultural remains’ of individual lives. These lives were never fully or wholly formed to begin with. Identities are always in a state of flux, and group signifiers like homo- and hetero-sexual frequently obscure the incongruity and complexity of identities. Rather, informed by queer theory and cultural history, I seek to account for the wider ‘culture of sexuality’ that pertains to a given spatial framework and chronology. This analysis places the process used to create ‘sexual selves’ at the forefront of academic debate. It shows how language and material conditions helped to produce categories of self-conception in the recent past. Identities are formed, though not determinatively, through specific pressures and at specific points in time and space. As Scott Bravmann has argued, historians must ‘begin thinking about “the making of the modern homosexual” not as “fact” but as an argument, fundamentally as a narrative with serious implications for addressing issues historically’. Such
accounts, Joan Scott adds, will look 'beneath' group identifiers, like 'homosexual', to uncover the 'divisions and discontinuities, absences and differences' that separate subjects in and out of time.25

This thesis appraises stories – cultural, personal and fictive – as a means to unveil the subjectivity of past lives. Such an impulse follows the call of historians like Michael Roper who urge fellow scholars to take greater care in illuminating the substance of historical subjectivities.26 Here I follow Sara Maza and others in their view of narratives not as 'inert containers' but as sources that are 'actively implicated' in historical and personal change.27 Personal narratives can be used to bridge the 'analytic gap' between 'outside positionalities and interior worlds', the social and the individual.28 Courage's stories emerge from particular social, cultural and historical settings in ways that are 'unabashedly subjective'.29 These are the cultural and individual negotiations made by a subject as they develop and change over time.30 More than isolated 'snap shots' of experience they offer considerable insight into an individual's sense-making and show how at least one pre-liberation life may have been lived.

Courage's story is a particularly rich one. He is, for example, one of several queer literary men (others include Frank Sargeson and D'Arcy Cresswell) to visit London before 'gay liberation' in New Zealand. These men's ability to negotiate and construct 'coherent' lives relied, in part, on the fixed and discursive formations that informed their material existence. Thus, the complications of queer transnational migration – a major and ongoing feature of New Zealand's queer experience – and the body's relationship to specific spatialities – national or international, public or private, urban or rural – helped produce the cultural contingencies that affected individual lives and artistic outputs. Aside from a return trip to New Zealand from 1933 to 1935, and along with his permanent residency in Hampstead, London, Courage also made several trips to continental Europe and lived for some months in Argentina. In doing so, Courage acquired a crucial role within national and international queer and literary networks, and, given the extent of this trajectory,
was subject to a wide range of identity constructions, social scripts and meanings – both queer and otherwise.

**Queering history**

While some theorists claim that ‘queer’ has no fixed definition or aim, others suggest that a critical density now exists with regard to its approach to history. Queer histories, Cocks suggests, treat identities in their own terms and recognise that ‘sexuality cannot necessarily be subsumed’ within catch-all signifiers like ‘hetero’ or ‘homosexual’. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has similarly stated that queer refers to the ‘open mesh of possibilities’ that inform individual identities. Scholars do not simply posit an ‘expanse’ of possible identity types but analyse an identity’s constituent elements: the ‘gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses’ that inform subjectively-experienced lives. Elsewhere, historian Julian Carter has argued for greater sensitivity in detecting ‘excesses and dissonances’ in source materials. Carter suggests that ‘queer’ best fits individuals whose relationship to ‘homosexual desires, genders and identities’, are, like Courage’s, ‘simultaneously intimate, ambiguous, and changing’.

Such scholarship underscores the general non-conformity of individual identities to monolithic constructs. This, of course, does not mean that people do not at times share beliefs, ideologies or perspectives. Nor does it mean men and women conceive of their identities as being hived off from those around them. I argue that queer perspectives in historical research are instead useful for the sensitivity they bring to understanding individuation in articulating and performing social scripts – those broad recipes of behaviour that inform everyday social life. This is a process of which the social actor may be unaware and can bring much greater sensitivity to an analysis of source materials that might otherwise resist conventional reading methods.

The term ‘queer’, I argue, is crucial for giving conscious acknowledgement to the ambivalence and capriciousness that underlies group signifiers. I follow Matt
Houlbrook’s use of ‘queer’ as an analytic and descriptive category in historical scholarship. Here ‘queer’ denotes ‘all erotic and affective interactions between men and all men who engaged in such actions’. Though ‘queer’ would also have formed part of Courage’s ‘everyday discourse’ Houlbrook argues that ‘queer’ most sensibly obviates problems in applying contemporary terms (like ‘gay’ and ‘straight’) onto those that lived in the past.

There are of course critiques of queer historical approaches. Certainly, all ‘queers’ are not measured the same – and it is important that historians consider the unique distinctions – and disjunctures – evident between even those social actors who claim to be most like their neighbours. Alongside ‘queer’, I employ the terms and signifiers that Courage himself used at particular moments of his life. Wherever possible, I place these terms within the contexts that Courage himself appears to have understood them. ‘Inversion’, for example, is for Courage as much an artistic identity as a sexual one. And ‘homosexuality’, as I discuss in later chapters, did not necessarily connote sexual relationships with men only.

It is important to note from the outset, however, that the historian plays a crucial role in ordering and making sense of this information. Assessing meaning and making interpretative statements is, as always, a partial process. ‘Queer’, then, remains helpful for giving voice to the greatest number of identity permutations without extinguishing the possibility that there may indeed be others.

Such an approach, as Judith Halberstam points out, opens spaces for ‘new life narratives’ and ‘alternative relations to time and space’. Courage’s experience complicates more than just national and spatial conceptions of sexuality, for example. His story challenges the chronological progression of sexual identity sometimes assumed in discussions about queer pasts. Courage’s life spans a large spectrum of identity usage – from just after the end of the Victorian period to the early 1960s, when ‘gay’ and gay liberationist rhetoric began to acquire a pervasive presence in most western contexts. Courage’s life was not ‘closeted’, nor was it lived free from fear or dissatisfaction.
Introduction

A close look at Courage’s life allows us to gauge national and international patterns of identity construction in these highly ambivalent contexts. His life narrative describes (however tentatively) how individual and subjective lives were configured. This is a rich vein of cultural life – one which moves from a period of tremendous multiplicity – where some men identified (sometimes simultaneously and interchangeably) as sodomite, Uranian, effeminate, camp, or invert – to later periods of increased fixity where ‘homosexuality’ and ‘gay’ became the sole descriptors for articulating male same-sex desire.43

Current perspectives and revisions of historical progression

Engaging the problematic category of ‘pre-liberation’, this thesis seeks to challenge the assumptions and timescale common to a number of assessments of the pre-Stonewall era. Liberationist histories have tended to be reductive in their approach to queer experience.44 These scholars – some of whom I consider below – view ‘liberation’ as an option open only to those living in the relatively recent past. As Annamarie Jagose suggests these accounts are whiggish in their approaches to understanding the ‘progression’ of sexual life in culture.45 ‘Liberationist discourses’, she writes, favour a linear trajectory that cast the ‘liberated present’ as progressive and enlightened.46 By extension, the future is an inevitably optimistic and utopian certainty; a ‘reality’ (and one that this thesis challenges and upsets) that reinscribes pre-liberation experience as wholly oppressive and disfiguring.47

As Jagose points out, liberationist articulations of the past have tended to paper over the complexities of past lives. Such impulses have grouped people together without differentiation and sometimes undercut questions of agency and multiplicity. For New Zealand’s queer authors, this has been doubly so.48 Traditional academic views have tended to reproduce the notion that, until very recently, New Zealand was wholly unsuitable for those with artistic (and non-normative) sensibilities. Puritanism formed the ‘consistent’ reality for writers working from New Zealand spaces, Lawrence Jones suggests.49 This was New Zealand’s signature
engrained fear of ‘any variation of the norm’; a propensity that writer Bill Pearson famously characterised as ‘a contempt for love, a sour spit, a denial of life itself’.50

By looking to one man’s experience we see that such assumptions do not always hold water. Identities are complex, so too is the relationship between the individual and his or her historical context. The field of queer history in New Zealand is not a large one.51 Much existing ‘mainstream’ historiography, however, tends to support the view that New Zealand offered little to support creative output and personal difference in the last century. Whether consciously or not, these histories have been guided by liberationist assumptions, and have perceived New Zealand’s ‘pre-liberation’ past as a largely unhappy one.

In contrast to the episode I used to open this chapter, general histories, like those of Michael King, have narrated queer experience as inherently marginalising. It was not ‘until 1986’, King writes, that Fran Wilde’s ‘Homosexual Law Reform Act decriminalised homosexual acts and lifted the burden of secrecy and anxiety which had blighted the lives of so many’.52 While James Belich makes more nuanced claims in Paradise Reforged – connecting the production of modern homosexual identities with the expansion of New Zealand’s urban environment, for example – his suggestion that queer visibility was ‘always muted’ reflects a tendency to cast queer experience in the past as covert and unsatisfying.53

Elsewhere, journalist Nigel Gearing has argued that New Zealand in the 1950s and 1960s was a ‘morally conservative country’ and that, quite definitively, ‘[h]omophobia was the norm’ at every level of society – from the government to the family.54 Justin McNab makes important contributions in his social historical overview of gay life in New Zealand. His position, though, that queer agents remained largely ‘invisible, isolated and unable to talk about their experience’, casts New Zealand spaces as oppressive and stifling.55 These histories have tended to view power as especially manifest in state authority, a proposition that elides the ways in which power plays out: as discursive, decentred, and, therefore, open to access (if at varying intensities) at all levels of society.56
Chris Brickell's *Mates and Lovers* has been the first history to treat questions of power and agency with more sophistication. Brickell argues that, far from being invisible or silent, queer men were able to negotiate and explore non-normative possibilities with varying degrees of freedom. He notes that the colonial masculine identities of the nineteenth century were not fixed and that notable and visibly queer communities had formed in New Zealand as early as the 1920s. This expansion was sustained, in part, by the emergence of a ‘modern’ urban environment. Brickell argues that these changes to the national landscape gave men freer access to the ‘more extensive and less easily regulated worlds of strangers’.57 Men were in fact able to access an array of spaces for ‘sex and sociability’ – urban and rural.58 Echoing Michel Foucault’s notion that ‘the modern gay man was made not born’, Brickell states that New Zealand men were not merely repressed by ‘external social forces’ but took active roles in constructing queer identities and spaces.59

New Zealand’s literary scholarship has also made some inroads in assessing the lives of queer male writers. Peter Wells’s ‘Introduction’ in the literary anthology *Best Mates* represents one of the few scholarly treatises on queer male literature, and tracks critically the creative and cultural contributions made by queer men to New Zealand’s national literature.60 Sarah Shieff’s work on Frank Sargeson has explored his trip to Europe in 1924 and its impact on his sexual and creative tastes.61 Other publications, such as King’s *Frank Sargeson: A Life* and Paul Millar’s *No Fretful Sleeper: A Life of Bill Pearson* have offered perspectives into the private lives of iconic homosexuals – both of whom were Courage’s friends and contemporaries. My own work has explored the linkages between dominant and alternative narratives of sexual selfhood. I have suggested that fictional narratives are active texts from which historians can construct a matrix of cultural experience. They also allow for the determining role these stories play in understanding gender and sexuality in New Zealand.62
Introduction

Overall, however, queer literary scholarship in New Zealand remains open to much further research. Two Masters theses currently exist on Courage. While Grant Harris’s 1993 thesis is a conventional reading of Courage’s fiction, John Lee’s “A Private History”, submitted in 2000, is the first to consider Courage’s life in any detail. This, however, is not consciously situated in historical paradigms and is hampered by the research embargo that remained in force on Courage’s personal materials until 2005. Other scholarship has been confined to a few references to Courage, Sargeson, and Pearson in Belich’s and King’s national surveys. Some work has considered Sargeson’s role as a homosexual writer, but, aside from Shieff’s article, seldom in socio-historical contexts or at any length. This work has typically resisted queer readings of Sargeson’s stories, instead seeing his stories as critiques of New Zealand’s so-called puritan ethos.

Source materials
The sources used in this thesis range from standard materials used in much historical research – diaries, letters, official government documents, and ephemera – to literary materials, both published and unpublished. This includes novels, short stories, plays and poetry, which, I argue below, have formed useful historical resources in international historiography but have yet to be fully mined in New Zealand.

Many scholars continue to view the archive as a ‘storehouse’ of historical information from which to reconstruct the ‘secrets’ of the past. Yet ‘queerness’, as post-colonialist Anjali Arondekar has suggested, ‘emerges as the structural secret’ of most archives. Bronwyn Dalley, writing generally about constructing histories of sexuality, has likewise written of the complications faced by historians in New Zealand. She contends that early historical documents (pre-liberation material included) yield little information at first glance. These artefacts require careful deconstructive work to ‘uncover’ cultural traces that resist conventional readings. Meaning, Dalley argues, must be accessed by ‘reading the signs in documents’. This
includes ‘reading against the grain’, seeing the ‘oblique references’ to sexuality, looking at how ‘contemporaries shrouded discussion’ of sexual matters in euphemism, or ‘focusing on ideology rather than the experience’.69

The status of Courage and other queer authors as some of New Zealand’s earliest and most notable literary men has meant that elements of their personal histories have been preserved in national archives of varying kinds. Unlike other queer social actors – the ordinary men and women who populated New Zealand’s towns and cities and whose records may have been less carefully preserved – the cultural standing of literary men works in favour of historians interested in investigating how queer lives were lived. Literature, statespeople and historians have likewise presumed, plays an important role in cultural formation and nation-building. This has often meant that safeguarding that material has proven a priority for many archives. Furthermore, while at times it is necessary to adopt ‘reading against the grain’ techniques in close analysis (in certain early published narratives, for example), many sources – Courage’s included – prove far more fruitful than one might expect.

Courage’s archive is large and, as I indicated in my discussion of Courage-focused theses, has yet to be fully utilised. While Courage lived much of his adult life in England, most of his personal materials have made their way back to New Zealand archives. This includes assorted letters, photographs and some probate material held at the Special Collections Library at the University of Auckland, the Alexander Turnbull Library in Wellington, and the Christchurch branch of Archives New Zealand. Some three linear metres worth of archive space held at the Hocken Collections, Dunedin, however, represents the largest quantity of Courage materials in the country. This includes several boxes of correspondence to and from family members, friends, lovers and literary admirers, a large visual archive extending from childhood and beyond, literary manuscripts at varying stages of completion, financial papers illustrating sources of income, newspaper clippings, and some audio recordings of family reminiscences.
Aside from this varied material, Courage’s fourteen unpublished diaries represent one of the greatest single resources for reconstructing a queer New Zealander’s changing sense of self. Courage’s personal narrative spans much of the 20th century – from the age of 17 in 1920, until his death, at the age of 60, in 1963. Sometimes explicit, sometimes circumspect, these journals are of a personal tenor, and, as Courage himself suggests, they function as a confessional for private experience.70 Courage’s journals traverse a full range of topics. They include reflections on sexual experience, sexual partners, and intimacy more generally. Courage also gives insight into his wider views on the world, his family life, and his own artistic output.

Courage’s journals attest to contact with a plethora of men and women. Both metropolitan and peripheral, the famous and the ordinary, these encounters suggest how a colonial writer might access the plasma of queer communality that existed in the metropolis and elsewhere. These same encounters also show how some subjects might, in turn, come to occupy a pivotal role in social networks – both metropolitan and peripheral. Added to this, Courage’s diaries provide valuable first hand information about the changing conception of sexual identities, the differences evident between spaces and social actors, even how certain modes of life might overlap or interchange with one another. This material is therefore a valuable source from which to establish the meanings surrounding queer identities, both within, and outside of national spaces.

Courage also engages critically with issues of sexuality and identity in his published and manuscript material. Courage published eight novels in his lifetime, many of which he set in New Zealand. Most of his work touches on issues of male queerness – explicitly or implicitly – and, as I argue in this thesis, his literary works constitute a substantial archive in their own right.

Courage’s 1938 play Private History, for example, dealt with the experience of youths at an all-male boarding school. This was performed at the Gate Theatre in London to public and critical acclaim but was cut short by Britain’s Chief Censor in October of that year. His 1954 novel The Young Have Secrets, a Book Society’s Book
of the Month selection, is perhaps his most enduring prose story, and sold in excess of 100,000 copies internationally. It follows the adolescent Walter – an autobiographical projection of Courage as a youth – as he seeks to understand the adult world of secrets, sex and repressed passion.

However, it was Courage’s 1959 novel, *A Way of Love*, that marked a major touchstone for queer literature in New Zealand. It tells the story of a relationship between an older and a younger man, and (as I suggest later) sits alongside other homosexually-themed novels of the period. As New Zealand’s first story of explicitly same-sex love it met with success in Britain and abroad (Putnam produced a special edition for the American market) – but it was reviled by many in the New Zealand literary community as ‘pornographic’. *A Way of Love* was ultimately withdrawn from national circulation in 1961, an act that cost Courage much emotionally and seemed to signal to him the continued narrowness of life in New Zealand.71

I have argued elsewhere that literary and artistic material is useful for establishing the adjacent stories that exist beyond the dominant, usually state-sanctioned narratives of sexual otherness.72 Until recently, these stories have resisted contributions of the queer persons they chiefly concern. Literary productions, on the other hand, can provide insight into some of the key modes of resistance employed by men before and after ‘liberation’.

Courage’s fictional narratives are not merely extensions of this cultural contest, however. As he frequently confirms in his diaries and correspondence, they are drawn directly from his own lived-experience. Some stories ‘translate’ events directly into fictional constructs; other stories manifest as composites drawn from several events or encounters; still others remove the author’s ‘mask’ entirely and are overtly autobiographical.

Most, then, have some bearing on Courage’s material experience and can be used multiply in assessing the meanings he attached to life and his own identity. At times fictional material allows the tentative plugging of holes that might otherwise exist in Courage’s life narrative.73 At other moments stories connect to the images, meanings
and events that people his private narration. Courage’s stories are therefore far from imaginative fancies. They are highly attuned cultural texts that share much in theme and quality with his personal journals and correspondence.

**Using stories in history**

The source materials used for this study are invariably stories of one kind or another. This approach is not antithetical to historical research but, in many ways, reflects the impulse amongst some scholars to reevaluate the use and import of narrative in framing accounts of the past.

Sociologist Ken Plummer argues that stories provide the central foundation for articulating and making sense of experience. He writes that the ‘social world’ operates as a ‘vast flow’ of interactions, practical activities, symbols and languages.\(^74\) It is through stories that experience acquires its reality and specificity: its ‘periods and places, its purposes and programmes, its people and plots’.\(^75\) This does not mean that stories are without substantive connection to the material world. As Plummer himself maintains, narrativity is ‘grounded in social processes that, by definition, are “beyond the stories”’ (in the material realities of everyday life, for example).\(^76\) In this sense, stories are not simply narratives in the abstract but operate as ‘truly sociological phenomena’.\(^77\) It is through the ‘formation and shaping of a narrative’, Dalley adds, that people ‘impose order on life’, engaging with the meanings, interactions and events that populate their worlds.\(^78\)

Fictional narratives are similarly a part of this process. Julie Abraham argues that literary sources must remain salient to studies of queerness.\(^79\) This is due in part to the way literature so often forms a vector for producing identities. As I show in Chapter Two of this thesis, literature forms a central resource in Courage’s own process of meaning-making. This material formed a ‘veritable archive of sexual lore’ that Robert Aldrich suggests could be passed from one generation of queer men to another.\(^80\) Historians have elsewhere used fiction to help elucidate conceptual hierarchies (like race, class and nationality) that undergird the ‘historical
conditions’ of fiction’s production and the ‘lived experiences of [its] creators’.81 Such analyses do not necessarily ‘unveil’ an ultimate truth intended by the author but treat the text as literary artefact from which more complex meanings can be established.82

Taken collectively, these materials – literary and archival – present a plethora of narratological forms and strategies with which to make sense of Courage’s identity. This thesis makes use of this material by subjecting textual fragments to intense scrutiny using a form of analysis known as narratology – an approach to history that emerged from convergences in anthropology, linguistics and literary criticism. Used by historians like Steven Maynard and Joan Scott, narratology treats apparent statements of fact as if they were a ‘series of stories’.83 In doing so, scholars distil the metaphors and other literary devices used to tell stories and highlight, in the process, the constructedness of all historical materials.84 Narrativity is a productive tool for historical analyses. As Mieke Bal notes, narratology applies to ‘virtually every cultural object’, as ‘practically everything in culture’ is expressed (and limited) by some ‘narrative aspect’.85

I also understand historical findings using symbolic interactionism; an approach popular in sociology. Symbolic interactionists explore how ‘meanings are created, assembled, negotiated and modified by members of society’.86 Moreover, these scholars suggest how social worlds and meanings are constructed through interactions and discursive formations.87 Following John H. Gagnon and William Simon, Chris Brickell has described how:

The symbolic interactionist historian might search for surviving fragments of life stories that allow for careful readings of the processes of meaning making operative in their own time [...].88

In doing so, Brickell suggests that ‘we can start to explore how individuals [...] guided’ identity constructions, and simultaneously, describe the complexities of relationships and the ‘wider sphere of socio-sexual meanings’ to which they
belong. Such strategies provide historians with a remarkable sensitivity with which to isolate and deconstruct social scripts at varying levels; personal and social. Symbolic interactionism lends insight both into individual and group social organisation and, with its focus on the-subject-in-context, makes powerful assessments of personal agency and meaning-making.

**James Courage’s queer lives**

This thesis organises analyses using a thematic structure. In doing so, I move beyond a simple re-telling of events and encounters that factor in Courage’s narrative (though these are of course important) and instead offer compelling perspectives into the social and historical forces that drove them. This thesis is not, after all, a biography in any conventional sense. While my thesis inevitably ‘tells a story’, and, as is typical in biographical accounts of the past, produces a ‘perspective’ into these life-narratives, I am not, as a whole, interested in producing a definitive assessment of Courage’s life from birth to death. Nor do I claim absolute authority in the conclusions drawn. I am much more interested in the meanings that emerge from Courage’s own narratives and what these might tell us about his sense of self and social environment.

I open this thesis with a consideration of how Courage’s narratives cluster around certain social scripts and meanings. Chapter One ascertains how tropes like ‘invert’, ‘queer’, and ‘homosexual’ were mobilised at certain times and in certain ways in Courage’s life-story. This chapter explores how Courage himself understood these terms and how they, in turn, gave shape and meaning to the world around him. While these identity constructions were central to Courage’s sexual expression we will also see that other scripts were important too. Such analyses suggest not merely how Courage understood himself as queer, but also how he understood himself in relation to other categories like race, religion, nationality and gender.

My research gives powerful insights into the textual sources used to gather such information. Acknowledging that ideas and self-knowledge are drawn as much from
social interaction and spatialities as through textual readings, Chapter Two builds on the analysis of scripts by delving into the textual sources Courage identified as key to composing and sustaining these modes of identity. These range from literary and creative materials to key treatises on medicine, psychiatry and history. Courage’s private journals contain many key quotations from textual sources, as well as his critical assessment of this material. Responses to current events and various social encounters, both in his diaries and in his fiction, also reveal how Courage mobilised these texts. Such analysis suggests how these ideas helped give shape to the world around him, and, in turn, how Courage may have understood these insights in practice.

Chapter Three maps Courage’s movement through various spaces and different zones of experience. It gauges his experience and suggests the kinds of influences changing backdrops may have exerted upon the development of his identity and outlook. This chapter considers Courage’s constructions of ‘national’ space and experience and appraises narratives of belonging and displacement to ascertain where, in various physical, social and imagined worlds, Courage pictured himself and other queer men. Courage, I suggest, appears as both alien and citizen, empowered and disempowered, by various social forces and spatialities. These articulations complicate the ‘marginal’ status of queer actors within heteronormative spaces, but equally show that possessing a queer identity did not necessarily guarantee one’s sense of belonging within queer spaces either.

If spaces are collections of ideas, they are also collections of bodies. Recent scholarship has underscored the body’s centrality in historical analyses of the self. Chapter Four acknowledges the ways in which the body acts as a site for ‘sexual identity-formation’ and as a ‘vector of movement’. For Courage, the body operates as a focal point for various pleasures and anxieties. The body is constantly manifest in discussions of identity, citizenship and mobility, illustrating how ‘meanings and power relations’ are mapped onto the ‘bodies and experiences of men’ as they traversed through time and space. Chapter Four analyses sexual expression,
sexual intercourse, bodily difference, well-being, and sexual danger. It finds that, just as sexual scripts and identities change over time, so too do the meanings given to bodies and bodily experience.

Friendship is increasingly considered a productive place from which to assess queer identities. Chapter Five clarifies the meanings Courage gave to friendship and its function at the level of material life. This chapter uses friendship to frame Courage’s sometimes-ambivalent notions of intimacy, association and attachment. Houlbrook argues that considerations of intimacy, friendship and love act as potent tools for the reconfiguration of the ‘putative boundaries between public and private’. Rather than search for solely romantic and male liaisons, I argue that friendship formed a central means for Courage’s negotiation of national, professional and gendered experience. Courage’s intimate connections were dynamic and persistent – they crossed national boundaries and lasted decades in an age where emerging technologies (like telephones) and letter-writing allowed people to cultivate relationships with individuals from far afield.

The two final chapters of this thesis move our focus firmly to Courage’s literary life and output. Chapter Six explores how Courage’s career as a professional writer and artist informed his own subjectivity. As I have already shown, Courage’s stories frequently bore a close relationship to his own lived-reality. This chapter considers how Courage transposed lived experience into fictional constructs, and foregrounds the role fiction played as a vehicle for self exploration and expression. Of course, published stories are different from Courage’s private narration. These published stories are negotiated narratives. They must generate and sustain audiences, as well as pass sometimes rigid editorial interventions. Courage was not unconstrained in what he could represent in text and frequently ran up against issues of class, genre and gender expectation in producing published work.

Chapter Seven concludes my analysis of Courage’s life by taking a closer look at the substance of his artistic output. This chapter explores how literature functioned for Courage as an imagined space for exploring identity and displacement. Rather
than a simple exploration of his writing, however, I look to the ways that fiction manifested as a zone for critique and self-praxis. In doing so, Private History and A Way of Love stand out as Courage’s staunchest defense of queerness. By employing queer reading techniques, and applying what we know about Courage’s own evasive abilities in Chapter Six, however, this chapter also unveils a much wider critique of heteronormativity that can be traced from some of Courage’s earliest creative forays.

This thesis takes it name from a list of story titles that Courage devised in the course of his writing but never used. These were scribbled rather furtively in small pocket notebooks that Courage kept throughout the 1950s and ‘60s. Speak To Me, Stranger refers very consciously to the mediated dialogue that arises whenever people converse. What we ‘uncover’ in these conversations is entirely dependant on the historian’s ability to elicit information. Similarly, questions of language, representation, composure – even wilful silences – can both enable and confound the directions this conversation might take. While the metaphor of dialogue reminds us of the reciprocal nature of this process (it brings to mind the historian’s own subjectivity, for example), the notion of ‘strangeness’ also alludes to the fundamental ‘otherness’ – and ‘queerness’ – of all historical actors.

Speak To Me, Stranger is not a ‘rescuing’ or hagiographical study. I do not seek to highlight Courage as New Zealand’s missing queer hero – even though it is clear that men like Courage made significant contributions to New Zealand’s emerging national literature and culture. Instead, this thesis calls for a revaluing and reframing of historical concerns through the lens of sexuality and identity more generally, and through this, an ‘opening out’ of New Zealand historiography. How did one man negotiate the spaces, life-ways and ideologies available to him? What did it mean to be a queer man, a queer artist, and a queer New Zealander in the years before gay liberation? Clarifying some of these questions will bring a renewed perspective to issues too frequently obscured and help shed light on how pre-liberation lives were lived by those who experienced them.
Notes

1 James Courage, Journal, 1920-1924, 30 May 1922, MS-0999/078, HC.
2 Ibid.
3 The Stonewall riots certainly reverberated in some New Zealand contexts. But scholars suggest that 'liberation' in New Zealand crystallised out of largely national circumstances. This occurred when Ngahuia Volkerling (later Te Awekotuku) – Māori, and a self-identified lesbian – was denied a visa to travel to the United States on the grounds that she was a known 'sexual deviant'. The Gay Liberation Front – based in Auckland, but renamed the following year – was set up in this aftermath. It was followed by several similar organisations in Wellington, Christchurch and elsewhere. For a more detailed discussion of these developments see Laurie Guy, Worlds in Collision: The Gay Debate in New Zealand, 1960-1986 (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2002), p. 96.
4 Courage, Journal, 1920-1924, Dedication, MS-0999/078, HC.
5 For a more detailed discussion of this relationship, see my analysis of Courage and Peter’s friendship in Chapter Three of this thesis.
7 Courage, Journal (‘The Diary of a Neurotic’), 1960-1961, 23 August 1960, MS-0999/089, HC.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
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15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
17 Joan Scott, ‘Fantasy Echo: History and the Construction of Identity’, Critical Inquiry, 27, 2 (Winter 2001), p. 286. Many scholars have enumerated the productive capacities of this kind of analysis. In particular, advocates note how this approach safeguards against essentialism on the one hand, and the view that all identities are ‘mere inventions or constructions’ on the other. For a more detailed discussion see Arthur Aughey, The Politics of Englishness (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2007), p. 12.
18 Scott, ‘Fantasy Echo’, p. 286.
19 Scott, ‘Fantasy Echo’, p. 285. Matt Cook has similarly asserted that queer histories, while not dismissing the significance of recent social change, should ‘question knee-jerk reactions about “progress” or the idea that lives and loves are necessarily easier and happier now than in the past’. He writes that, though sex and desire has always existed between men, the meanings and identities given to this behaviour have diverged widely. See Cook, ed., ‘Introduction’, A Gay History of Britain: Love and Sex Between Men Since The Middle Ages (Westport, Conn: Greenwood, 2007), p. xii.
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23 Ibid.


26 Michael Roper suggests that historians have described how certain conditions of modernity have opened up spaces for new subjectivities. However, these same histories have largely failed to explain what these subjectivities are. He argues that the ‘psychic is elided into the cultural’. This has largely been at the expense of developing a wider and more detailed picture of individuation and change. See Roper, ‘Slipping out of View: Subjectivity and Emotion in Gender History’, History Workshop Journal, 59 (2005), p. 58.


28 Mary Jo Maynes, Jennifer L. Pierce and Barbara Laslett, Telling Stories: The Use of Personal Narrative in the Social Sciences and History (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 2008), p. 16.

29 Ibid.

30 Maynes, Pierce and Laslett argue that narrative materials offer information key to understanding how subjects find meaning in their material and symbolic worlds. These are the ‘emotions, desires, accumulated wisdom, acquired associations and meanings, clouded judgments, and psychic makeup’ derived from a lifetime of experience. See Maynes, Pierce and Laslett, Telling Stories, p. 16.


34 Ibid.


36 Eve Shapiro, Gender Circuits: Bodies and Identities in a Technological Age (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 179.


38 Ibid.

39 These range from queer’s apparent opposition to epistemes to the perception that queer analyses are much less rigorous in their consideration of other important specificities – the categories of class and ethnicity for example. Other critics perceive danger in queer’s deployment as a ‘blanket term’ for all non-heterosexual desire. For these discussions and more see Max H. Kirsch, Queer Theory and Social Change (London and New York: Routledge, 2000); Lovas, Elia and Yep, LGBT Studies and Queer Theory; Arlene Stein, ‘Sisters and Queers: the Decentering of Lesbian Feminism’, Socialist Review, 22, 1 (January 1992), pp. 33-55; Howard H. Chiang, ‘Empire of Desires: History and Queer Theory in an Age of Global Affect’, Critical Studies in History, 1 (December 2008), pp. 50-71.


41 As Antoinette Burton states, all historical narratives are ‘highly situated knowledge[s]’ that ‘remodel as they remember’, leaving, to a greater or lesser extent, ‘the “original” [meaning of historical source materials] always in doubt’. It is
the job of the historian to draw ethical and convincing conclusions from this information. This might include placing historical documents within their social and cultural contexts, or mobilising existing understandings of the subject’s background to help shed light on then-contemporary experience. See Burton, *Dwelling in the Archive: Women Writing House, Home, and History in Late Colonial India* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 62.


46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.

48 This has been reflected in much New Zealand fiction, such as Robin Hyde’s *The Godwit’s Fly*. Here the desire to escape the oppressive confines of New Zealand for the liberated metropole – which the novel itself ultimately upsets – is treated as a ‘compulsion [New Zealanders] barely understand’. This feeling animates those with an artistic temperament to seek zones of artistic and moral tolerance in cities beyond that of so-called ‘puritan’ New Zealand. See Hyde, *The Godwits Fly*, 1939 (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1993), p. xviii.


56 Michel Foucault, for example, writes that ‘where there is power, there is resistance’, which, like power, exists at a ‘multiplicity of points’ and is ‘present everywhere in the power network’. He suggests that power is often ‘mobile and transitory’. Resistance produces ‘cleavages in a society that shifts about, fracturing unities and effecting regroupings, furrowing across individuals themselves, cutting them up and remolding them, marking off irreducible regions in them, in their bodies and minds’. See Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge*, 1976 (Auckland: Penguin, 2008), pp. 95-6.


58 Ibid.


61 Tracing archival data and reading against the grain of Sargeson’s three autobiographies, Shieff suggests that Sargeson’s ‘Italian adventure’ was ‘inextricably linked with his love-affair with Carlo’, an Italian stonemason he met in Genoa, Italy. This affair of ‘enduring significance’ formed Sargeson’s blueprint for the Bohemian way of life he established in Takapuna. See Shieff, ‘Risotto with Pipis: Frank Sargeson in Italy’, *Journal of New Zealand Literature*, 26 (2008), pp. 44-5.

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67 Ibid. (emphasis added).
69 Ibid.
70 Courage conceives of his journals as ‘confessions’ at several instances throughout his life, once even suggesting the hope that, through their writing, his private admissions would trigger a personal ‘rebirth’ and an increased perception of the world. See Courage, Journal, 1929-1931, 23 June 1929, MS-0999/080, HC.
75 Ibid.
77 Ibid.
79 Abraham, *Metropolitan Lovers*, p. 43.
80 Aldrich, ‘Gay and Lesbian History’, p. 16.

84 Ibid.


89 Ibid.


93 Houlbrook, *Queer London*, p. 41.

94 See James Courage, pocket notebook, 1960, MS-0999/093, HC.
Chapter One

‘I fight with my back against the wall’: Social scripts and James Courage’s quest for wholeness

Introduction: A new script?

‘This illness is relentless’, James Courage opined from London in the days before Christmas 1960.¹ Lamenting years of personal disarray, Courage considered with admiration the ‘breakthrough’ modern psychiatry offered to men like him: its diagnosis of the internal breakages that impeded life, a vocabulary that so precisely described individuals’ lived realities, and, finally, a strategy with which to heal the so-called ‘psychic deficiencies’ that Courage believed had tormented him since birth.² Existence thus far, Courage privately conceded, had been less than satisfying. Depression and self-loathing menaced his every move. Under analysis, however, Courage felt there existed the possibility for ‘remission’ and a hope that, one day, he might be spared from ‘self reproach’ and anxiety.³

Psychoanalysis did more than simply reframe Courage’s personal insights though. A careful analysis of his personal narrative reveals how medical intervention fundamentally transformed Courage’s perception of the world. Confiding in his diary, for instance, Courage related his perceived sexual failures within these new paradigms. He noted how guilt confounded his most profoundly intimate moments and reduced one sexual episode in 1960 to a release ‘inhibited short of climax’.⁴ This was no aberration, Courage believed. Instead the then-57 year old felt that his inability to achieve orgasm, even through masturbation, was explained by the failure of his parents, Zoë and Frank Courage, to provide an environment that would have allowed Courage to grow psychologically and sexually whole.⁵

While Courage’s therapist suggested that these faults lay deep in Courage’s New Zealand past (a point I explore in later chapters), Freudian psychiatry offered means for acquiring mental equilibrium in the present. Dr. Larkin’s continual insistence
that Courage view him as ‘the good father’ reflected his belief that ‘transference’ would unlock Courage’s hidden infantile trauma. Larkin would excavate and correct these breakages as a clinician, whilst simultaneously offering benevolence and love as a father-substitute. Although Larkin failed to penetrate Courage’s superego, Courage remained largely convinced of psychology’s efficacy throughout his decade-long treatment. Even a partial intervention ‘mitigate[d]’ his ‘conscience’ and, most importantly, ‘enabled’, even temporarily, a return to creative endeavour.\textsuperscript{6}

Such conclusions conformed to key social scripts then surrounding sexual identity, and resituated Courage’s broader life narrative within Freudian psychiatric paradigms. These assessments indicate interesting shifts in the ways Courage viewed projections of self. No longer considered an innate part of an artistic male psyche, Courage was asked to accept his ‘homosexuality’ as symptomatic of a wider mental degeneration that had been set in motion near the very beginning of his life. This was an ‘illness’, Larkin explained. An inhibiting force, it was something to be ‘treated’ as one might tend the surface of a deeper wound.\textsuperscript{7} Courage found himself embattled. ‘A frightful cycle was unconsciously set in motion at the very beginning and threshold of my life,’ he wrote on the 17\textsuperscript{th} of December 1960: ‘I fight with my back against the wall’.\textsuperscript{8}

These medical interventions characterise just one of the scripts available to Courage as he negotiated his life. This chapter explores several different bodies of scripts to test the range of meaning-making evident in Courage’s life narrative. A script, as we shall see, is something more than discourse. It is also more than a singular word or signifier. Kenneth Plummer writes that scripts are ‘composed and orchestrated construction[s]’ – conceptualisations that unfold through interaction – whether with persons, texts or through a combination of both.\textsuperscript{9} Its emergence from symbolic interactionist scholarship brings a thoroughgoing interest to questions of the social. Conceiving ‘reality’ as a ‘stage’, these theorists see scripts as a ‘metaphor for staging appearances and performances’.\textsuperscript{10} Scripts inform collective meanings, and provide subjects with crucial knowledge about roles and social relationships in
society. Scripts are central to virtually every aspect of social life, underpinning conceptions of the self and our sense of relatedness (or difference) to others.

Scripting therefore describes the process under which individuals take up, shape and negotiate the broad raft of social meanings that exist at any one time. As sociologist Eve Shapiro suggests, scripts, including those of gender and sexuality, operate as the ‘recipes for behaviour’ that inform how we make sense of the world.\textsuperscript{11} Shari L. Dworkin and Lucia F. O’Sullivan have likewise written how scripted analysis supplies a rich understanding of subjectivity: scripts describe how ‘individuals negotiate the cultural, interpersonal and [the] intrapsychic’ processes that make up one’s material life.\textsuperscript{12} These analyses usually focus on particular episodes of experience, providing ‘snap shots’ or case studies of how individuals draw sense from the social world that surrounds them.\textsuperscript{13} I argue these representations can be appreciated through reading (sometimes against the grain) an individual’s entrenched repetition of signs and signifiers: their preference for certain codes and conventions indicated in literal statements of fact or in extended metaphors and images.

Assessing in detail how queer lives were assembled over one lifetime is a productive means for extracting information about the complexities of preliberation experience. Scripts are, of course, never incontestable and, as interactionist theory suggests, people remain active agents in determining their real-world applications.\textsuperscript{14} Indeed, as I will show here and elsewhere in this thesis, Courage’s views could frequently appear incongruous, even at times self-contradictory. They demonstrate the proposition favoured among sociologists that identities and scripts are ‘neither always prescriptive, nor stable’.\textsuperscript{15} Rather meanings are constantly ‘re-entrenched, contested, transformed and challenged’ as subjects move through time and space.\textsuperscript{16} This thesis is not interested in merely charting Courage’s transition from one subject position to another. As I will demonstrate, no such seamless ‘evolution’ can be borne out from the primary evidence. This chapter instead assesses the broader experience of everyday life, and carefully places sexual identity within its wider cultural and sociological contexts.\textsuperscript{17}
I divide this chapter into three parts. The first tracks the social scripts already available at Courage’s birth. This places Courage’s later experience within a pre-existing cultural milieu. It also shows how meanings surrounding social relations and gender normativities – effectively how to conduct oneself as a man and a gentleman – persisted well into Courage’s own twentieth-century experience.

The second section of this chapter moves to an appraisal of social scripts as they were experienced by Courage in everyday life. It considers the wider foundation of day-to-day living, using conceptualisations like masculinity (both normative and otherwise), nationality, religion and the role of the artist in particular to explain how Courage may have conceived of his identity at its widest limits.

My analysis of the social scripts surrounding sexual identity occurs in the third and final section of this chapter. Here I consider Courage’s identification as an invert and a homosexual. These scripted ideas were complex and multifarious in the ways they were taken up and experienced. Moreover, they show that sexual identity was never disconnected from broader conceptions of the self – artistic scripts, for example – but sustained through, disrupted, or augmented by, tenacious connections with other life processes.

**The antecedents**

Born on the 9th of February 1903, to a well-to-do farming family near Amberley, New Zealand, James Courage, like all social actors, emerged into a specific social and symbolic universe. Scripts governing social behaviour and modes of interaction already guided both queer and heteronormative relations. Many, such as the use of classical narratives in contemporary same-sex contexts, had persisted within queer subcultures for some centuries (though their meanings had certainly changed over time). Further scripts, including those surrounding homosexuality, had just begun to enter New Zealand usage, fusing with, augmenting, or revising existing notions of sexual identity. Still others, the scripted notions of nationality and masculinity in particular, placed continued emphasis upon what it meant to be a man in New Zealand.
As a colonial outpost, New Zealand borrowed many of its social scripts from the metropole. Yet, conditions specific to New Zealand’s social and cultural landscape – its urban development and political networks, as Chris Brickell has suggested – meant that scripted ideas were taken up and experienced within different, and specifically local, contexts.\(^{20}\) Normative masculinity, for example, acquired precise and often excluding force within colonial settings. As historian Charlotte MacDonald has argued, pioneer accounts of masculinity that cast late-nineteenth century New Zealand as a society ‘forged by typically vigorous young men in an untrammelled place’ contrasted with that of the British Isles: a space that was ‘crowded, domesticated and over-mannered’ in its feminine excess.\(^{21}\) While, in reality, an array of masculinities would have typified the gendered landscape, expressions of pioneer manliness helped shape New Zealand’s picture of itself.

This view of masculinity had a curious effect over New Zealand’s ‘imagined community’ and, as I demonstrate below, remained one of the few normative scripts to persist with relative stability throughout Courage’s life.\(^{22}\) Katie Pickles writes that gendered archetypes about who, or what, constituted an acceptable ‘gendered character’ were continually replicated within the discourses of the colonial regime, and persisted well into the twentieth century.\(^{23}\) New Zealand’s masculine heroes were celebrated for their physical prowess, emotional austerity and heterosexual virility.\(^{24}\) These men were as at home on horseback as on the rugby field and, supported by theories of eugenics and bodily improvement, symbolised a national masculine ideal.\(^{25}\) Such archetypes, then, were not innocent of wider, emerging notions of the nation state but conceived the corporeal bodies of men and the gendered body of the nation as one and the same.\(^{26}\)
Figure 2: Courage's life began in New Zealand's South Island. Amberley, where his family was based, is located 50kms north of Christchurch. His grandparents' Mt. Somers property, another key site during his early years, was located 120kms southwest of the city, at the foot of the Southern Alps. [Paul Golding, *Picturesque New Zealand* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1913), p. 13.]
Historians interested in New Zealand’s gendered past have long stressed the connection between its supposed masculine ethos and the vastly disproportionate numbers of men that made up New Zealand’s earliest communities. In Canterbury, the numbers of men and women had only just begun to reach equal footing when Courage was born in 1903 but, along with the positive associations of masculine friendship that had lingered from the nineteenth century, the same masculine values had assisted in the creation of a national culture that permitted close homosocial bonds between men.27

An interesting tension existed in the years leading up to the twentieth century: on the one hand, many gendered scripts prescribed a narrow vector of masculine existence; one that stressed a fixed standard of masculine normativity that was explicitly antithetical to queer subjectivities. On the other hand, however, the same masculine culture, rather than stifle same-sex relations, had helped sustain close and intimate relationships between men. The queer world Courage would have had access to in the early part of the twentieth century was far from void of romantic and sexual opportunity. Colonial processes and spaces sustained a queer subculture that, though not always visible to the public gaze, was, by the 1920s, nevertheless deeply imbedded within the historic and sociological makeup of the country.28

This pre-existing homosocial network also supported and produced alternative modes of masculinity and sexual expression. At times same-sex intimacies occurred without label or categorisation, suggesting that sexual acts were not always connected to specific identities. Other same-sex-attracted men sought existing cultural precedents to explain their sexual makeup.29 They reached into the past for cultural scripts they felt best supported these sexual outlooks. The classical world contained numerous accounts of love between men and boys, for example, and these were reconfigured to support intimacies between men of like ages as well. As I show below, and at greater length in Chapter Two, these classical models were central to claims of queer legitimacy and contrasted with the comparatively hostile reactions to homosexuality common to many modern experiences.30 Terms like ‘Greek love’ operated as a sexual shorthand for intimacies between men, and school curricula
featured classical texts (Plato’s *Symposium* in particular) that affirmed male-male relations.\(^{31}\)

Alternative cultural scripts were also produced through more recent narratives. As I have argued elsewhere, relevant narratives were present early in New Zealand’s history.\(^{32}\) Local scandals, like those of Samuel Butler or the Reverend William Yate mingled with other metropolitan stories of sexual liaisons between men.\(^{33}\) While these experiences were transposed into narratives of sexual danger and served to tighten regimes of ‘normality’, the reportage of such stories also helped produce queer knowledge and identities. As H. G. Cocks has suggested, and as I show in Chapter Two of this thesis, these exercises in social and legal authority provided paradoxical opportunities for representation and self-making.\(^{34}\) Such cases helped disseminate what it ‘meant’ to be sexually other and, where stories mentioned the circumstances of arrests, refined men’s negotiations of power.\(^{35}\)

Figures like Oscar Wilde, who loomed largest on the cultural landscape, held special significance for the young James Courage in 1923. Writing as a youth, Courage wrote passionately of Wilde’s ‘genius’ and deemed him an object of unparalleled ‘worship’.\(^{36}\) These kinds of episodes signalled the continuing revelatory power of some Victorian men’s lives well into the twentieth century.\(^{37}\) Sexual terminologies, however, were much slower in acquiring widespread usage. While ‘homosexuality’ as a category of identity had emerged in German contexts by the 1860s, it did not percolate into British usage until the 1890s.\(^{38}\) Its arrival in New Zealand was still later – receiving only cursory usage in printed sources from the turn of the last century.\(^{39}\) As I explore below, other terms, like sexual inversion, an ‘inborn’ (as opposed to ‘acquired’) ‘constitutional abnormality’ as Havelock Ellis termed it, received far more critical attention by men like Courage.\(^{40}\)

These sexual and cultural meanings did not confer men’s ability to live as they chose, though it certainly meant that there existed a diverse range of scripts from which men could draw. Other scripts regulated the extent to which nonnormative identities could be publicly enacted. Kirsten McKenzie, for example, writes that ‘respectability’ acquired increased amplification in Britain’s settler colonies.\(^{41}\)
Colonial cities offered space for new opportunities and new kinds of identities. Removed from the white civilising spaces of Europe, however, the colonial world, with its much less well established social order and moral policing, appeared culturally and sexually threatening to many. Rather than ‘liberate’ colonists from metropolitan social regimes, cultural norms surrounding public and private life received increased – and often anxious – emphasis.\textsuperscript{42}

Scandal acquired increased significance in this context. As McKenzie suggests, ‘[m]iddle class colonial identit[ies] remained precarious, wracked by self doubt and always aware of a censorious metropolitan gaze’.\textsuperscript{43} Scandal broke down the divisions between public and private worlds by ‘pulling hidden transgressions’ into unwelcome view.\textsuperscript{44} Resulting economic hardship and social exclusion could have a profound material impact on families and individuals. '[F]amily enterprise', as historian Standish Meacham has argued, ‘depended upon cooperation from the entire [family] membership and an understanding that collective reputation took precedence’.\textsuperscript{45} Yet, if scandal threatened a public fall from grace it simultaneously functioned as an important resource.\textsuperscript{46} Successful performances of respectability provided ‘weapons in a ceaseless jostling for position’, exerted and reinforced claims of social prominence, and explain, in part, why anxieties surrounding public decorum and respectability factored so highly in Courage’s own moral cosmology.\textsuperscript{47}

Certainly, notions of propriety in New Zealand had not eased by the time of Courage’s birth. As Karen Duder notes, imperatives of a ‘respectable life’ continued to factor centrally in colonial discourses well into the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{48} Added to this, Courage’s family was not middle-class, but of a distinctly gentrified and upper-class dispositions. Both parents belonged to elite farm-owning families’ that owned sheep stations in northern Canterbury. Courage’s mother Zoë Courage (née Peache) had been raised in some splendour near Mount. Somers, while Courage’s father Frank Hubert Courage had inherited Seadown, near Amberley, in 1903.\textsuperscript{49} It is true that families like the Courages would have had increased access to the material ‘accoutrements of respectability’.\textsuperscript{50} However, this did not ease the directive that people conduct good and decorous lives – a reality that would have been amplified
by the Courages’ class position. As anthropologist Elvin Hatch suggests, Canterbury settlers sought to create a British rural hierarchy in establishing ‘men of means, education, and high standing’ as the stalwarts of commerce and community.\textsuperscript{51} Families like the Courages were active participants in the moral economy of the region, though no less regulated by its normativities.

As members of the local Anglican church, too, the Courage family was imbedded in further social processes that deepened the scripts that spoke to respectability and decorum. As John Stenhouse has recently argued, religious practices in New Zealand formed one of several ‘centrifugal forces’ that galvanised the social framework of the colony.\textsuperscript{52} Religious societies actively contributed to broader constructions of identity and, particularly in the nineteenth century, played a central role in establishing New Zealand’s prevailing moral code.\textsuperscript{53} As I explore below, Courage’s own religious views were varied and divergent. His upbringing though, was a typically Anglican one. In this Courage was part of a wider institutionalised form of knowledge-making. As Stenhouse suggests, around 95% of all settlers in New Zealand identified as Christian by the end of the nineteenth century and, of those, four out of ten colonists belonged to the Church of England.\textsuperscript{54}

Many New Zealand parishes demonstrated ‘unspectacular orthodoxy’ in their approach to moral teaching. They tended to promote ‘moderation’ in faith and politics, for example, but, in opposing first-wave feminism, continued to ascribe relatively narrow sets of meanings to gendered and sexual normativities.\textsuperscript{55} The church officiated at important community events, provided education for children at Sunday Schools and, through ritual and other Christian rites of passage, contributed to the material lives of New Zealanders in profound ways. Like many Protestant denominations, Anglicanism emphasised thrift and hard work as important Christian values. Unlike Catholic ideas of good work, Protestant notions of diligence, hard work and worldly success signalled one’s suitability for personal salvation.

Such associations helped shape broader notions of work and respectability. For women, domestic duties and household appearances received increased emphasis. For men, being a ‘good worker’ had a central bearing on the construction of
masculine identity. In Canterbury, farming, in particular, required specific sets of skills. Regardless of their class, men were expected to show an unyielding capacity for hard, physical labour. Being a ‘good worker’ and being a ‘good farmer’ were one and the same. As Hatch suggests ‘the farmer [...] was not interested so much in accumulating wealth as [...] acquiring a reputation for hard work, good judgement, and excellent management abilities’.\textsuperscript{56} Taken broadly, such characteristics imply the importance of self-reliance and good reasoning as central to successful performances of masculinity. Such qualities went right to the heart of what it meant to be a man and a New Zealander.

**Exploring Courage’s scripted world**

**Queer masculinities**

If these scripts of masculinity and decorum seem exacting by modern standards, in practice, they manifested as deeply disaffecting for Courage in the early part of the twentieth century. As I will show here, and further in subsequent chapters, these social pressures – questions of respectability, work, and social decorum, among others – all had ongoing significance for Courage as a young man, and continued to do so throughout his adult life.

I do not mean to suggest that all of Courage’s social meanings were imported from an early age and remained imbedded, unmoved and unchanged, for the remainder of his life. Indeed, as we see below, Courage was constantly integrating new scripts and new bodies of knowledge throughout his life course. For all this, however, an analysis of these older traces shows how many scripts connected to older and very specific social values, while others were augmented or revised completely by new social meanings as they were incorporated into Courage’s frame of experience.\textsuperscript{57}

As a teenager Courage felt connected to a community of like-minded individuals – people who, he felt, celebrated ‘the beautiful things in life’ and held ‘progressive’ views on how life should be lived.\textsuperscript{58} It is clear, however, that Courage often saw
himself at odds with the broader and much more established social outlook of his
day. Such perspectives, he felt, placed masculinity within narrow and finite
parameters. Conventional thinking viewed artistic and social nonconformity as alien
and, for Courage, writing in the 1920s, this acted as a constant source of anguish and self doubt.\textsuperscript{59} ‘I have a feeling all the time that I am not the same as these people’,
Courage wrote on 20\textsuperscript{th} of March 1920.\textsuperscript{60} Courage’s sensitivity was itself a marker of
difference: a distinction that signalled the heightened sensibilities of a certain kind
of man; one ill at ease in the ‘primitive’ and ‘hostile’ society he seemed to find
himself in.\textsuperscript{61}

Courage characterised this milieu as ‘pagan’ and ‘egotistical’, and he argued
strongly against any environment that reduced men’s and women’s scope for self-
expression. On the 21\textsuperscript{st} of March 1920, for example, he spoke of music as a central
‘way in’ to the joys of life. He opined that:

I daresay to many people this definition of Happiness [sic] would
seem absurd. However ‘he enjoys himself’ they say. The rest go ‘via
trita via tuta’ [the well-worn way is the safe way], but I chose to go off
the beaten path [...]\textsuperscript{62}

From the outset, then, Courage’s earliest narratives posit a stark polarity between
the social masses (the ‘people’) and a course of life (a ‘path’, in this case), that would
carry him away, however problematically, from the mundane normalcy of everyday
life. More than isolated incidents, these moments formed a central pattern of
Courage’s scripted repertoire: one that was repeated over time and continually
reinforced by his varied social and symbolic encounters.

Rather than seek cohesion through performing the sorts of social scripts that
would pave the way into conventional and gendered respectability – the hard-
working farmer, for example – Courage was at pains to express a conscious
departure from such a position. ‘I must have originality. I must have individuality’,
Courage reasoned with passion.\textsuperscript{63} ‘Individuality is a great comfort’, he suggested,
because ‘no two people are exactly the same’.\textsuperscript{64} In this way, a cultural paradigm that
called for Courage’s conformity to a specific gendered code not only threatened the vitalities of life but, for Courage, living as he was ‘off the beaten track’, would upset his trajectory into a new kind of pioneering – one that would not, he suggested, be achieved by farming sheep at *Seadown.*

Yet, if individuality had a bearing on leading a fulfilling life, this did not mean that normative forms of masculinity did not intrude upon Courage’s apparently Bohemian aspirations. It also did not mean that all differences were measured as equal. Courage was in reality ambivalent about standards of masculinity – embracing some non-normative behaviours and modes of being, while simultaneously rejecting others.

Strong definitions of ‘normality’ and ‘abnormality’ run throughout Courage’s diaries and they remain a feature of his self-described outlook for much of his life.65 On the 19th of May 1929, for example, Courage wrote of an evening spent with one young man who failed to meet benchmarks of masculine ‘normality’. In a prose vignette entitled ‘Portrait of a Bloody Fool’ Courage revealed clear limits to acceptable divergences in masculinity. The episode identified his unnamed male companion as unrepentantly ‘sissified’ and deserving of public approbation. Courage viewed the man as a ‘fawning, scented spaniel’; someone compromised by emotion and fits of flamboyance.66 ‘I think you’re a bloody little fool’, Courage eventually lashed out. You talk utter rot; you stink of disgusting scent; you want every man to make love to you; you’ve never ever experienced a sincere emotion in your life; in fact you ought to be shot’.67

That Courage found his companion attractive was no defence for the lapses Courage detected in his friend’s moral constitution. While Courage fixated on the qualities he found most distasteful – the man’s excessively ornate appearance, his affected demeanour, and especially his tendency to gush verbally – it was the visibility of his acquaintance’s masculine difference that most upset Courage’s sensibilities. Courage likened the man to the stereotype of the Edwardian pansy. He was at best a figure of attractive amusement, at worst irredeemably vacuous and shallow. Courage reported how the man was ‘thrilled’ by the thought of ‘seeing
himself’ in a story (the man was enamoured by Courage’s profession as a writer).\textsuperscript{68} One senses Courage’s extreme discomfort at the man’s ‘arch’ demeanour, his ‘wriggling posterior’ and his green tie – a (to Courage) vulgar means for signalling his sexual interests for other men.\textsuperscript{69} Courage was not, he concluded, ‘of the same species’.\textsuperscript{70}

At other moments, Courage’s masculine self representation was much less stable. ‘My sexual nature is comprised almost equally of sensuality and of acute fastidiousness’, Courage confided in his diary one day in 1928, connecting feminine (and sublime) and masculine (and rational) associations to each in turn.\textsuperscript{71} Balancing one’s feminine sensuality, though, with one’s masculine fastidiousness was no easy matter. Courage felt that he was the sum-total of his parents – individuals, he believed, who embodied gendered colonial ideals like those discussed earlier. ‘My father is intensely practical, resolute and single-minded’, Courage emphasised, ‘my mother has a sensibility and a longing for perfection’.\textsuperscript{72} He concluded that the two natures did not agree:

The first thirsts after the struggle and the rush of life; the second loves but is afraid of life. ‘Go out and dirty yourself and fight and make yourself feared of men,’ says my father. And my mother – my truer self – says ‘No; stand back and try to understand life, give yourself a chance to love it, drink in the loveliness of music and verse and Nature, and of all arts. That is your surer road to happiness.’ At present I stand and argue ceaselessly: \textit{Which}?\textsuperscript{73}

If Courage’s ‘truer self’ reflected the artistic and feminine realm of art, questions of queer sexuality often threatened to overwhelm his sense of social equanimity. A visit to Madame Tussauds with his friend Ernest in 1930, for example, left the then-27 year old in a state of abject despair. ‘His [Ernest’s] easiness in taking life as it comes, his complete lack of spiritual questioning, his physical beauty and strength – all have a terrible, heart-aching attraction for me’, Courage wrote.\textsuperscript{74} Ernest, though, was not subject to the same kinds of despair and anxiety as Courage. Ernest’s ‘sexual normality’ was so absolute as to make their relationship ultimately untenable.
Ernest was ‘of another race’ and on the ‘true path of life’. Courage feared that he would remain ‘forever outside it, fecund in mind only’.75

Fusing eugenic and spiritual conceptualisations, Courage understood himself as ultimately incapable of embracing ‘true’ masculinity – something that was more than just a surface performance, but an inescapable aspect of one’s nature. As I show here and in later chapters, such a condition had a profound effect on the unfolding of Courage’s life. He found his twofold status – as simultaneously masculine and feminine – both enabling and disabling. What Courage understood to be his feminine sensitivities as an invert led – as we see above – to apparent incompatibilities with other masculine types. Just as Courage refuted the advances of a ‘pansy’ as someone who belonged to another ‘species’ of men, the same sorts of masculine distinctions prevented Courage from pursuing a lasting relationship with Ernest. Ernest belonged to another ‘race’ again, Courage explained. He believed that Ernest would go on and raise a family (fecundity signalling fertility and childbirth), whereas Courage’s own life would remain arranged around his desires for men.

These same scripts of gendered identity, however, led Courage to coping mechanisms that he felt fed the psychic demands of his own sexual nature. Courage found emotional sustenance in music: ‘I [...] put a stupid sentimental record (“I’ll always be in love with you”) on the gramophone and cried [...]’.76 Literature, too, offered therapeutic qualities. Courage found solace in reading a biography on modernist author D. H. Lawrence, learning, as a result, how Courage was not alone in his inadequacy.77 Lawrence, whom Courage believed to be an invert, confronted similar dilemmas in his own life. Courage read how slippages in masculine composure were so often juxtaposed against the vitalities of the invert’s gifted vision. In himself Courage discovered, there existed a ‘hawking after a masculinity’ which Lawrence did not possess and ‘could not have possessed’ except by the ‘loss of the other rarer qualities which were the very man’.78 Courage was thus comforted by claims of exclusivity and privilege. As I show in my closer analysis of inversion below, this provided Courage with alternate modes of self expression, and his sense of belonging to a community of like-minded men.
While the qualities of inversion supplied considerable comfort to Courage, normative understandings of masculinity were braced or heightened by external events. World War II, for example, brought to the fore scripts that pertained to work and masculinity once again. At the outbreak of war, Courage, who was 36 years of age, was not immediately eligible for military service. He had contracted tuberculosis in his twenties, and suffered from chronic inflammation of the legs. On the 22nd of September 1939 Courage went with some deliberation to the High Commissioner’s office in the Strand to offer his services to the New Zealand government for ‘the duration’ of the war in ‘any clerical capacity’. Depictions of martial masculinity (fighting men especially), however, merited much greater respect in Courage’s estimation. And these feelings of respect and admiration often exacerbated Courage’s own sense of inadequacy.

In 1927, for example, Courage recounted his reaction at seeing a film that commemorated the experience of men who fought in World War I:

Last night saw the official film of [the] Battles of [the] Coronel and Falkland Islands. All those men in action, covered with sweat and full of animal desire to kill their enemies, made me think I was living a very pale, ineffective existence indeed. The pen may be mightier, but it’s a damn sight too genteel for a man with a [sic] decent physical equipment.

War, Courage suggests, was a testing ground for the men’s natural masculine instincts. This was socially and sexually desirable to Courage, who expressed both personal and erotic overtones in his assessment. Courage’s preference, though, for the ‘dark and tough’ men that made up his erotic register spoke as much of his sexual proclivity as it did his own desire for sexual normality. Seeing a solider on the street in 1927, for example, both awakened Courage’s sexual appetite (‘I devoured the narrow, strong hips and loins with my eyes’) but also stirred a deeper, and less conscious, desire. ‘Downright lust’, he found, mixed with ‘a terrible, soul-destroying desiderium’, for an ‘ideality’ he could not, himself, attain.
Courage’s new-found socialist aspirations combined with guilt in his discussions of masculinity in the 1940s. ‘What to do?’ Courage asked himself, confronting a major crisis of identity as the German blitz of London loomed. ‘I fully admit that [...] as a rentier I am a sinner’.83 A bourgeois and sedentary existence rendered Courage more than simply passive though. Courage’s existence, reliant as it was on an income drawn from his father, made Courage a ‘traitor to society’ when so many sacrificed or went without.84 Courage imagined himself as unwittingly complicit in fascist attempts to undermine the British way of life. Courage’s decision to leave the comfortable surrounds of Hampstead for more modest lodgings in a public boarding house reflected a desire to ‘live more humbly’ and ‘work for others’ good’.85 His artistic aspirations were, by implication, selfish and ‘naïve’ in these new contexts, and his writing therefore drew largely to a halt for the duration of war.

Despite these changes, and his training as a fire warden (‘the first real crack in the ivory tower?’), Courage’s sense of inadequacy did not ease.86 ‘I dislike feeling a crock, whether it exempts me from military service or not’, he wrote in December 1940.87 He considered it an ‘inescapable fact’ that he was ‘a parasite’ and ‘had been’, so he believed, ‘all of [his] life’.88 ‘The fact is,’ Courage wrote, becoming still more morose, ‘that I am a bourgeois manqué’, a ‘despicable person’, failing to achieve success even within the confines of his own profession (Courage had published only one novel, One House in 1933, by this point. His play Private History – initially a success – was closed by the Public Censor in 1939).89 Courage’s status as artist and invalid placed him at odds with the narratives of masculine heroism that circulated in newspapers and in public discourses. War rendered him abject. This state, though, was classed as well as gendered. It connected notions of excess and passivity with feminine dissipation, and heightened the already persistent connections between the two.90

Scripted analysis of this material shows the degree to which Courage’s self expression was riven by ambivalences and the specificities of his own very particular experience. These episodes indicate how Courage was forced to juggle his own sense of difference while, simultaneously, negotiating the gendered and classed
landscape of daily life. I show later in this chapter how Courage’s status as an artist eased these gendered expectations somewhat. External events, however – like war or the emergence of socialist ideals – tended to exacerbate an already pre-existing discomfort. And Courage’s own inverted nature could not guarantee compatibility with all men with same-sex desires. For the most part, scripted processes surrounding normative kinds of masculinity (‘ideality’ in both body and moral behaviour) persisted throughout Courage’s life course. These were voiced with relative consistency, and seldom deviated from the dominant narrative forms that had been established in the early twentieth century and before.

Courage’s homosexuality was allowed some breathing space under his psychiatric treatment in the 1950s and ‘60s. Homosexuality was understood as an ‘illness’. Following this logic, Courage was blameless for his attraction towards men. Indeed, expressed in these terms, it followed that Courage was prey to a psycho-sexual condition that could befall anyone. The social values surrounding masculine normality, though, were powerful and disfiguring, and stood in marked contrast to ‘progressive’ views on sexual identity and its expression. Courage suggested for example that ‘[o]utside prejudices and assumed disapproval’ were omnipresent in his own mind while writing A Way of Love. ‘Homosexuality’, Courage considered, was ‘both a valid human theme and a clinical phenomenon’. Yet same-sex attraction remained a subject fraught with exigencies of ‘balance’ and respectability.

Courage’s status as a New Zealander heightened his sense of incongruity. In one episode in 1963 Courage reflected on the unsatisfying turn his life had taken:

Extremely cold to-day. [...] The courtyard outside full of grayish snow. Small birds must be dying by the thousands from thirst and hunger. I can think of them with a kind of frustrated love like a passion, and am filled with guilt that I used to shoot fantails, tom-tits, white-eyes, blackbirds, linnets, sparrows, thrushes. All this when I was 15-20, in N.Z. [with] a .22 rifle. Trying to be a man when I wasn’t one, not even a tough colonial boy. What a false face it was – as I obscurely knew at the time, per a kind of under anxiety, continual.
‘Toughness’ and its performance (appearing here as a mask) offered little nostalgic solace. Courage instead revised his colonial past to show the origins of his contemporary failure – as something deeply rooted in a much longer genealogy. In other episodes Courage wrote that, by New Zealand standards he was ‘simply a mistake [...] or worse, a freak’ – someone, or something, quite clearly ‘beyond the pale’ of normative life.97 Elsewhere, Courage recalled how ‘guilty panic’ informed the ‘atmosphere’ of his colonial upbringing. ‘Home and school’ generated an almost constant despair and insecurity.98 He could never be free of official or material surveillance and, rather guiltily, he feared, was never able to ‘measure up’ to its exacting expectations either.99 He had, he felt, ‘never once been off the defensive’. Rather, Courage had become inhibited by a need for self-protection and ‘obsessed with an underlying inferiority’ of being something ‘unnatural, guilty, unthinkable’.100

**Losing his religion?**

Guilt remains an implacable feature of Courage’s scripts, deepening, if anything, with age and compounding mental pressures. This prevented ‘mental cathexis’, and had a significant impact on Courage’s creative output. Several diary entries fixated on notions of self blame, and implicate Courage’s feelings of moral culpability in failing to conform to normative ideals of masculinity. For example, Courage confided to Dr. Larkin in 1960 that he fought with his masculine ‘inadequacy’ ‘entirely and incessantly’. 101 Courage sought to abase himself in these interchanges, and suggested that his ‘lapses’ in masculine decorum were profound and inexcusable.102

While normative masculinity operated with relative evenness throughout Courage's life narrative, other cultural scripts displayed much greater elasticity. Courage’s story is, at heart, a secular one. Certainly, these traces suggest that Courage was not a regular churchgoer, nor does he appear to have affiliated with any particular faith later in life. In these ways, Courage's life fits existing stories of modernity that see secularisation and the increasing dominance of medical and legal discourses as central to self-making and sexual identity.103
However, religious notions need not be writ large. As scholars of religion have been at pains to emphasise, religious discourses inform a number of secular processes (state formation, social policy, public health, to name a few). Taken collectively, these forces shaped regimes of sexual knowledge in key ways. The scripts they produced informed manifold possibilities for identity constructions. Many formed a ‘congenial location for the expression of unconventional sexualit[ies]’ and frequently acted as a central vector in the creation of selves, even for individuals with avowedly secular lives.

Such a supposition is borne out in material that married religious dogma with Courage’s personal predilections. Some episodes, for example, indicate how Courage fused religious ideas with his early Bohemian aspirations. Here the cultural symbol of the aesthete is reconceived within contexts that eased some of its less positive associations. Such a strategy acknowledged, perhaps, society’s perceived connection between the male aesthete and qualities of moral dissipation and effeminacy, and sought to offset these reductive associations. On the 28th of July 1920, Courage ‘confessed’ his secret fondness for ‘beautiful things’. ‘I am passionately fond of clothes’, Courage confided, concluding that looking ‘smart’ was both an ‘ambition’ but also an inherent quality of his character. This affinity with materiality was balanced, though, by a conventional Christian outlook:

My ideal house would have a great many beautiful things in [it] [...] But I must not delude myself into thinking that because I worship beauty I am an atheist. I am not. I worship God. I take all my troubles to him in my prayers and ask him to help me.

Here Christian and aesthetic worldviews inhabit the same space. Courage conceived Christian philosophies as an antidote to moral turpitude. Hedonism, Courage implies, reflected a ‘peculiar mind’, one subject to self deception and a false perspective onto the world. Conventional religious ideals brought instead a groundedness to everyday life and guarded against dissipation and the potential loss of Christian salvation.
Courage continued to express conventional Christian views in 1921, writing of his ‘smallness’ in God's scheme of things, and of the considerable respect he held for the teachings of a Reverend E. C. Crowe.¹¹⁰ The intervening several years following this encounter, however, reveals a change to Courage's religious conceptions. In 1927, at the age of 24, Courage related of his now being a self-described 'atheist'. Church and family life, he suggests, had forced him to adopt Christian principles as a child. This socialisation had been ‘arbitrary’, its spiritual logic therefore unreasoned and capricious.¹¹¹ Residing as an adult in London, he sought to shuck off these conventions and live beyond the precepts of the church.

By the 1930s, Courage had begun to associate Christian religious doctrines with vacuity and naïveté. Courage had met and fallen in love with Frank Fleet, an Argentine man his own class and age he had met at the start of that decade. The pair had met in England in 1930, and their romantic and intellectual connection had been an immediate one. This relationship – which I look at in much greater detail in Chapter Five – was complicated, but not ultimately extinguished, by Frank's return to Buenos Aires. Courage himself followed his lover to South America just days after, and only when Frank married did the relationship ultimately founder. (Though, as I show in Chapter Five of this thesis, even then this did not ultimately extinguish the intimate aspects of their friendship.) His record of shipboard life, however, is an interestingly fulsome one.

En route to Argentina in 1930 Courage wrote scornfully of one passenger described in his journal as a devout Christian:

[...] [I] sit in the moonlight on the top-deck, watch the heat-lightning over the land, and discuss poetry, money and (of course) religion with the Nottingham ‘chap’. He is deeply shocked to find that I am an atheist [...] Mentally he ceased growing from the age of 16: says, for instance; ‘Well, God has done a lot for us; you can’t deny that.’ Argument becoming acrimonious, we mutually agree to go to bed [...]¹¹²
By this time religious conventionality had, for Courage, become the domain of the less culturally enlightened. The Englishman is naïve for assuming that Courage – outwardly refined and respectable though he was – would choose to ignore the existence of a divine master. Courage concluded that any true debate was impossible given how his companion's beliefs were only ever ‘accepted at 2nd hand'; acquired, it seemed, through indoctrination.113 In other tracts around this time Courage called into question religious indoctrination entirely, suggesting it to be a ‘vanity' on the part of the ‘proselytiser'.114 Accepting few anomalies, Courage believed intellect now prevailed over ‘empty superstition' in Britain and all of her colonies.115

However, Courage's repudiation of spirituality often belied his continued and sometimes self-contradicting adherence to religious thought. Courage privately admitted that his atheism was primarily an ‘intellectual revolt' from the authority of the church.116 While Courage frequently claimed to reject Christianity, his continued interest in religious ideas spoke of an ongoing desire to place himself within a spiritual cosmology.117 ‘My lack of religion has lately been troubling me', Courage opined in 1927, ‘especially at moments of intense aesthetic appreciation'.118 This was a time when ‘something crie[d] out' in thanks to an ‘amorphous almighty' that a ‘saner attitude rejects', he suggested.119 Certainly, religious scripts continually fed Courage's ability to express his views on art and nature. Such associations eschewed conventional articulations of aesthetic intellectualism in favour of Wordsworthian and romantic assertions of the sublime in nature.

Courage's religious ideas oscillated between statements of outright atheism, like the ones above, and pantheistic expressions of the divine in nature. In a one-line entry written in January 1930, Courage simply identified himself as ‘a Sun-Worshipper with Christian principles'.120 In other extracts Courage explained how this hybrid philosophy might function in practice. Speaking of William Wordsworth in 1932, for example, Courage used scripts that posited privilege for those who followed such precepts. He suggested that ‘[o]nly the purely spiritual man is absolved from the flux of existence'.121 An observance of nature ensures that ‘the
spiritual does not violate the animal, nor *vice versa*, and provided one with the greatest ‘point of integrity’ for the purposes of attaining balance in life. This, Courage suggested, was the ‘flame in the blood’: the animating force accrued from the natural world, with its all-important power to renew and inspire the artistically-inclined.

Overall, however, Courage’s relationship to established forms of religious worship remained indifferent at best. Courage’s reading of history, for example, tended to view religion’s part in it as wholly negative. In other episodes Courage viewed Christian ritual with suspicion and disdain. One senses that, as time passed, religious faith seemed less in touch with the realities of the world as Courage perceived them:

At 3.15 the choir were led forth to their seats [in Saint Paul’s Cathedral], looking, I must say, as if they’d been collected in a van from nearby pot-houses: red-faced, elderly and middle-aged men, most of them chewing their teeth. I sat in my front row seat and hence had a good view of the whole scene […] It was so long since I had attended a service in a church that I had almost a pagan’s viewpoint – and it all struck me as highly extraordinary. Those references to the God of Battles (Jahweh) and well-tuned cymbals – all repeated by the huge congregation in full earnestness and as though reciting a magic formula – I found this most curious as a form of thanks-giving for a mid-20th century people after a ghastly war of rockets and Atomic [sic] bombs. Nor did I care for the sight of the Canons and Minor Canons winking, whispering and smiling amongst themselves […]. As I say, extraordinary.

Non-conformity and the role of the artist

While Courage’s network of friends and admirers was composed of several religious men (including vicars and Catholic priests-in-training, many same-sex attracted), Courage showed a declining interest in questions of theology from middle-age. Religious terms and concepts did not simply exit from Courage’s worldview however. While Courage detached himself from conventional faith and religious rituals, spiritual scripts survived, if in slightly different forms. As I will show later, spiritual ideas became increasingly crucial to Courage’s articulation of self nearer
the end of his life. While certainly religiosity provided Courage with a pre-existing set of terminologies to describe the inner-workings of the human psyche, overall established forms of religion too often clashed with Courage's much stronger sense of non-conformity.127

Courage did not however see the church, or even the state, as the sole drivers of social homogeneity. Though friendship fed Courage's sense of place and identity, it could equally be a source of frustration and disappointment. This was particularly the case where personal relationships impinged on one's ability to depart from conventional modes of living. Speaking with obvious aggravation, Courage complained in 1960:

[H]ow often, and with what sickening iteration, have I been admonished 'Why don't you go away for a holiday?', 'Why don't you get married?', 'Why don't you do a daily job or work like other people?' (I tried this and it brought on an anxiety-breakdown), 'Why don't you pull yourself together and stop thinking about your troubles?' and so forth and so on [...].128

Taken collectively, these sorts of admonitions turned on notions of conformity, and drew implicit assumptions between a life lived conventionally and, it is assumed, heteronormatively, and the psychology of mental wellness. In practically every sphere of life – leisure, employment, masculinity and sexual orientation – Courage was found to be lacking.

Despite these assumptions, and, often, in incongruous contrast to them, scripts surrounding the role of the artist demanded that Courage maintain a level of non-conformity. As my discussion of normative masculinity has already hinted, artistic scripts legitimised certain non-normative behaviours and eased the exacting pressures of some social expectations. Masculinity, for example, could be revised in these contexts to allow for the sensitivities and personal eccentricities often presumed to exist in literary men. Artists were licensed with the ability to live beyond conventional (and heteronormative) scripted processes. While the above extract suggests these opportunities were not without limitations, it is clear that
Courage’s non-conformity allowed him access to alternative expressions of selfhood.129

Courage gave voice to these sorts of sentiments in diary entries that conceptualised the role of the artist in life. Tormented by questions of vocation, Courage wondered whether he was ‘destined to become a poet’.130 As he strolled in St. John’s Wood, London, in 1924, Courage anxiously assessed whether he possessed the ‘intrinsic’ inner-qualities of the poet-genius. Artists, Courage considered, possessed ‘abnormal stirring[s]’ of spirit.131 This spiritual essence, though, much like the invert’s own constitution in life, was both distinction and affliction. Poets’ unique perspectives on the world simultaneously resulted in a ‘natural’ separateness from the (non-artistic) masses of society.132 This alienation was only heightened by the poet’s critical insight into an existence that too frequently fell short of the utopian possibilities that art seemed to promise.

While Courage questioned whether his sense of artistic consciousness was ‘tangible’ enough to warrant his devotion to the arts, he was comforted by his ability to at least produce the ‘mode’ in which the most admirable poets had written ‘their greatest lines’.133 Courage’s ability to write verse (he had published several poems in Oxford and London periodicals by this time) seemed to give some substance to his literary ambition. Courage concluded three years later, that, if he were to be an artist then his work must be the very essence of non-conformity. It needed to be ‘good, personal, and individual’, Courage felt.134 While Courage conceded that he had yet to produce anything that fitted this bill, ‘social expectations’ exerted a real constraining force over creative endeavour. Countering this normativity required personal conviction and ‘real guts’.135

Courage drew solace from other individuals he felt confronted, and ultimately surmounted the demands of social and artistic integrity. While Oscar Wilde and other (mostly) British men were central in Courage’s quest for cultural precedent, Courage saw women, too, as important exemplars of successful negotiations in social expectation. Courage did not need to go far to identify congenial models of artistic integrity. Courage’s paternal grandmother Sarah Amelia Courage courted
controversy when she published *Lights and Shadows of Colonial Life* in 1896. The book was based on her diary (now lost) of early life in New Zealand. Her journal had been ‘a confidential friend’. There she described her ‘pleasures and sorrows’, as well her ‘observations on [...] friends and acquaintances’.\(^{136}\) The memoir, which was often critical of her friends and other local figures, raised the considerable ire of some social intimates. Most of the original eighteen copies were later destroyed.\(^{137}\)

Courage’s maternal grandmother, Ida Florence Peache, also fuelled Courage’s drive towards non-conformity. Reading old letters of hers in 1930 Courage noted that her writing ‘perfectly reflect[ed] her – humorous, generous, lonely, tolerant’.\(^{138}\) Ida was more than a source of maternal nurturing, however. She was the source of immense intellectual stimulation for Courage, and her interests covered a myriad of social and moral issues – the nature of love and intimacy included. One evening in New Zealand, in 1934, for example, Courage recorded:

> Great arguments [...] between [Ida] –, and myself on the theme ‘One loves with one’s intellect’ [...] [Ida] took a definitely contrary view, in fancy became somewhat heated, invoking D. H. Lawrence, Freud et cetera in support of love (or at its most primitive, the mating-urge) as instinctive, organic, anything but, intellectual. I held that all romantic love must come from the intellect (and perhaps this is partly true): later she declared that no novelist knew how to write a love scene.\(^{139}\)

Ida was an important figure in Courage’s life, and I will return to her later (she appears in much of Courage’s published fiction). Upon hearing of Ida’s death in 1949 Courage recalled how, ‘as a youth’, his grandmother had been ‘the person he ‘most loved’ and who had possessed the most influence over his then-emerging artistic tastes.\(^{140}\) She was, Courage remembered, a deeply unconventional figure: a constant source of artistic enthusiasm, given to quoting poetry and to singing snatches of songs, and considered the pantheistic verse of Alfred Tennyson ‘her religion’.\(^{141}\) She was, Courage noted, frequently at odds with contemporary social expectations, taking sole charge, as she did, of her Mt. Somers sheep station in the foothills of New Zealand’s Southern Alps after the untimely death of her husband in 1906. Ida was, Courage concluded, the ultimate individualist, cultivating an identity that spoke to
her intellectual and spiritual nature, whatever the social economy of her day demanded.

These sorts of psychological demands, however, were not easy for Courage to emulate. In fact his conception of the artist tended to deepen Courage’s already advanced sense of social alienation. Courage recorded in one entry in 1950 how individuality and a status as outsider – both valuable social positions creatively speaking – ‘should be sufficient’ to stave off emotional dissatisfaction. As I will explore further in Chapter Two and Three, Courage’s sense of separateness frequently generated a distressing sense of otherness. Confronted by a scene of domestic normality while visiting friends one Christmas Eve, for example, Courage wrote with anguish of feeling that he belonged ‘nowhere and to nobody’. It seemed that familial tensions, Christmas rituals, even the exchange of domestic gossip, were beyond Courage’s realm of existence. While the creative process provided a balm of sorts, its successes were uncertain and the act of writing an often arduous one.

The connections between homosexuality and artistic natures certainly had not fallen out of favour with Courage by this time. However, while I show how Courage’s sexual scripts were increasingly reified in medical discourses, this, too, had consequences for explaining Courage’s ‘artistic nature’. Courage had long considered artistic and queer identities to be inextricably intertwined. If Courage felt his homosexuality to be the product of a misdirected sexual urge experienced in childhood, then it seemed to follow that an artistic bent, so often the domain of the invert, could be explained in a similar way. This did not mean that the pursuit of art was a futile or transgressive act. Jungian ideas suggested that the artist was capable of untold psychological insights. ‘He [the artist] was’, Courage noted, ‘touched [by] that salubrious and redeeming psychic depth’: a place from which ‘the sentiment and action of the individual reach[es] out to all humanity’.

In general, however, an artistic nature signalled both the misaligned nature of homosexuals and their history of misidentification. Courage articulated these sorts of ideas in a poem written in 1960 entitled ‘A Certain Writer’. Here Courage’s
‘nonconformity’ is inherited from the damaging conditions of his upbringing. Applying Freudian notions of identity formation, Courage wrote of the situation under which his consciousness came into being. ‘No star-crossed lovers bore him’, Courage wrote, casting his parents as transgressors of natural lore.\textsuperscript{146} His father and mother conceived Courage in ‘witchcraft’ and, using more melodramatic tones, the ‘lawless function of lust enraged’.\textsuperscript{147} His young self, otherwise ‘healthy’, had been corrupted by the malignancy of his parent’s relationship. ‘What went wrong’, Courage held, were episodes of ‘secret rancour’ and ‘spite. These were disputes that, as an infant, left Courage bereft without ‘love’s rewards’.\textsuperscript{148}

Courage was thus driven from conventional sources of nurturing. ‘Carpets grew eyes from voices on the air’, Courage recalled of his domestic setting as a child – ‘the cupboard and the chair menaced or quarrelled’, ‘the curtains raved in red rebuke’.\textsuperscript{149} Courage’s ‘unusual’ sensitivity and his hidden sexual nature prevented any retreat toward alternate zones of emotional sustenance. Courage was marked by an inner quality that made spiritual intercession impossible (‘He hid himself in the Ark, but Noah’s mate/ Rejected boys who cried’) and his path in life all but assured.\textsuperscript{150} Malformed though he might be, however, Courage would fight on. ‘The past’ was ‘a dirty glove’, Courage concluded, but he would ‘write of love’ regardless.\textsuperscript{151}

\textbf{Courage’s sexual scripts}

\textbf{Inversion}

Art stands in for inversion in many of Courage’s earliest narratives. On 22\textsuperscript{nd} of March 1920, for example, Courage wrote expansively of music’s importance to those receptive to it. The ‘mediocrity’, Courage believed, saw music only as a ‘means’ for passing time.\textsuperscript{152} To certain kinds of men, however, music was connected to the ‘deeper’ and ‘more profound’ expression of human creativity.\textsuperscript{153} Like the episode that opened this thesis, the more explicit discussions of sexual identity that followed were later removed (Courage’s last act of self censorship is headed with the term ‘pervixi’ and the admonition that ‘one can be homosexual’ without resorting to
'mawkishness'). However, a number of diary entries quite clearly reference intimacy (one, for example, picks up from the missing section with the words 'but enough of love'). Still others discuss sexual intercourse quite openly.\textsuperscript{155}

Regardless of their apparent neutering, the continual connection between artistic creativity and non-normative sexuality underscored Courage’s persistent connection between these two sets of identities. It is no accident, for example, that Mischa Levitzki, a Russian-born American concert pianist who toured New Zealand in 1921, was, according to Courage, possessed of both artistic and inverted attributes. Courage was impressed by his technical skill as a musician but commented too on his ‘quick, graceful walk’ and a mouth, though expressive, revealed to be ‘a trifle sensual’ upon closer inspection.\textsuperscript{156} As I show later, Chopin was similarly deemed inverted for his vast artistic gift. 'Artistic genius’ operated as a by-word for inversion and signalled how the two sensibilities – sexual and creative – were inextricably connected in practice.\textsuperscript{157}

Courage mobilised inversion with real explicitness from the late 1920s onwards. Inversion, as Claudia Breger suggests, ‘opened up’ new terrain for conceptualising identity – both gendered and sexual.\textsuperscript{158} For the most part the scripted meanings that Courage employed conformed to ideas like those represented in then-contemporary novels like Radclyffe Hall’s \textit{The Unlit Lamp} (1924) and \textit{The Well of Loneliness} (1928). These narratives underscored the invert’s natural conception as part of God’s creation and suggested that suffering was an inevitable outcome of the invert’s emotional and artistic tendencies. Hall and other social advocates argued that inverts were a legitimate, if separate, ‘species’ of sexual beings.\textsuperscript{159} As already demonstrated in my discussion of masculinity more generally, it is clear that Courage made delineations between particular masculine types. Clear distinctions existed between social groups, and the values accorded to these permutations could vary widely.

Courage made several other injunctions about the ‘inverted temperament’ in his private materials. While Courage considered that the ‘nobler faculties of intellect’ were ‘extraordinarily a part of inversion’, he railed against perceived lapses in social
behaviour that he believed so often made the ‘invert’ an object of derision and scorn. The ‘insistence on sexual indulgence’, Courage wrote, not to mention the invert’s ‘frantic forgetfulness of the world’, tended to be at the expense of the ‘higher attributes of friendship’ and intimacy. Such excesses threatened to overwhelm and degrade the finer aspects of inverted identities as Courage perceived them. They reduced men’s sensibilities and acuteness of feeling to ‘sublimation’ and a life lived superficially.

In general though, Courage regarded the invert as a sympathetic, if misunderstood, figure. To ‘society at large’, he wrote in 1928, the ‘individual invert’ was ‘an anathema – an unthinkable anomalous abortion’. Courage was conscious of a civic perception of non-normative sexuality that was less-than-favourable. If the invert was ‘anomalous’ it followed that he or she was without place in the world and, like all anathemas, deserving of persecution. Courage wrote that ‘[t]o himself’, however, the invert was ‘often’ only a ‘collection of half-understood but painful perceptions’. Social authority could have a powerful effect on the invert’s wellbeing. Just as in Hall’s Well of Loneliness, persecution led to profound social isolation. The invert’s ‘separation’ in society, however, was ‘purposeless’; without sanction or any sense of social justice.

Some early diary entries register Courage’s transition from apology to moments of more overt social protest (though it would be some ten years before Courage would write explicitly about homosexuality in any public capacity). Courage’s statements up until that point held little critical fire. He appealed to principles of basic decency rather than repudiate outright the social order’s authority to exclude those members of the community it deemed abhorrent in the first place. Amendments made to one entry in 1929, however, exhibit changes to the tenor of Courage’s musings.

Citing Otto Weininger’s Sex and Character, Courage sought to imbed inversion within the legitimising discourses of science and medicine. The invert was no sexual anathema, Weininger had suggested, but part of a wider spectrum of sexual life from which all men and women emerged. Dipping into pseudo-Freudian ideas for the first
time, Courage noted how the invert belonged to ‘the ego of the genius’ – a ‘centre of infinite space’ from which ‘universal comprehension’ was acquired.\textsuperscript{165} Courage read how ‘the great man’ (inverts included) contained ‘the whole universe within himself’ as a ‘living microcosm’ of self knowledge.\textsuperscript{166} Weininger’s intervention helped offset Courage’s threatened crisis of identity. Society’s exclusion of the non-normative was merely arbitrary, he suggested; one that overlooked the diverse range of human sexualities that made up one’s social milieu.\textsuperscript{167}

Courage gave further insight into his views on inverted sexualities later that year. Writing vociferously against sexual normativity on the 25\textsuperscript{th} of April 1929, Courage wrote of society’s hypocrisy and its unjustifiable social inequalities:

All my life I shall fight against the unwritten, senseless cruel law that brands sexual inverts as degenerates and beasts. I have suffered untold agony from the prevalence of this view even amongst normally intellectual people. Sexual intercourse between males – \textit{where both are inverts} – has every scrap of right to be considered normal as that between man and woman. Owing to the nature of inverts ‘love’ more often plays a part in it than in those cases considered socially excusable – e.g. habitual copulation between male and female, or unblushing prostitution.\textsuperscript{168}

Courage’s defense of inversion is an interesting one. It employs strategies of exclusivity and privilege by suggesting that inverts were blessed with greater ‘ennobling faculties’ than their opposite-sex attracted counterparts. Here the invert’s capacity for love far outstrips the heteronormative – relationships characterised as transactions or unbridled lust (ironically, of course, this view clashes with Courage’s previous assertions about queer men’s inclinations toward promiscuity). Relations between men deserved support since, as Courage implied, both queer and opposite-sex couples could achieve real harmony under ideal circumstances (in environments that supported rather than persecuted individuals, for example). This equanimity, however, occurs in queer contexts only where both partners are inverted, Courage suggests, reinforcing, this time more explicitly, his
feelings about different kinds of masculinities and their relationships to one another.

While it is clear at this time that sex could occur between any two men regardless of their masculine type, it seemed to Courage that more enduring relationships could only function where the sexual outlook was the same (like Ernest, Courage’s casual sexual partners usually were not ‘inverted’ or ‘homosexual’). While I look more closely at Courage’s intimate relations later in this thesis, for the moment, it is sufficient to acknowledge the power of certain scripted processes to facilitate both excluding and including force within social relations. While it is true that Courage felt excluded from mainstream culture for much of his life – as both an invert and an artist – his constitution as a same-sex attracted male provided a point at which community-making and group affiliation became possible.

Courage’s sense of personal connection to the Argentine Frank Fleet – perhaps his most enduring love interest – occurred primarily along these lines of queer identity, for example. Lunching with Frank’s aunt in London in the days after Frank had left for Argentina in 1930, Courage recorded his delight at hearing the ‘outward[ly] visible signs of a deeply rooted Uranian temperament’ unknowingly recounted by Frank’s aunt in her assessments of Courage’s now-absent lover.\textsuperscript{169} What Frank’s aunt picked out as ‘disadvantage[s]’ in personality and prospects – chiefly questions of character, manners and emotion – Courage revelled in as intrinsic to the ‘fraternity’ to which he belonged.\textsuperscript{170} Far from ‘disadvantages’ they were, to Courage, emblematic of a shared bond that heightened his feelings of loss and separation. ‘I felt desperately alone and sad’, Courage wrote, ‘longing for Paco’s [his pet name from Frank and the shortened form for Francisco] presence, even for those little “deficiencies” his good aunt had deplored’.\textsuperscript{171}
Figure 3: Courage's relationship with Fleet lasted across decades and changing personal circumstances. Here the pair poses in front of buildings in Buenos Aires during Courage’s trip to Argentina in 1931. [MS-0999/179, S07-0081, Hocken Collections, Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of Otago]
Transitioning towards homosexuality
Courage’s first recorded use of the term ‘homosexual’ was in 1927.172 He railed against Wyndham Lewis’s ‘dissection of homosexuality’ in the novel Tarr. Courage wrote that he ‘felt a utter worm’ upon reading the British man’s views on same-sex attraction, and labelled the artist an ‘iconoclast’.173 ‘Homosexuality’ did not gain real salience as a descriptor in Courage’s private materials until a decade or more later, when discourses of medicine and psychiatry had began to expand into printed culture and wider public usage. A primarily middle- and upper-class identity to begin with, it had certainly gained ascendancy – if not hegemonic force – in most western contexts by the end of Courage’s life.174 While homosexuality imported quite different meanings than inversion (as I explore below), these did not force the evacuation of previous scripted notions that Courage already had in relation to sexuality and artistic temperaments.

Courage’s views on the constitution of the invert remained especially tenacious, though the attributes of inversion (sensitivity and artistic perceptiveness among them) began to be much more narrowly ascribed. Inversion offered much less a catch-all for same-sex attracted men in Courage’s mind than a term of identity for men with specifically artistic outlooks.

Reading of himself described as ‘the greatest living New Zealand writer’ in the Christchurch Press in 1955, Courage was less-than-thrilled to see his professional ambitions finally acknowledged in his own country. (The Young Have Secrets had, by this time, sold in excess of 100,000 copies in its first print run, making it one of the most successful books published by a New Zealander in living memory.)175 ‘Was this always my ambition?’ Courage wondered, musing on his sudden notoriety. ‘I suppose so. But what a long time it has been in coming, and how much bitterness and pain’.176 Connecting work life and masculinity once again, Courage felt that he would have been ‘happier, by far’ as ‘a simple normally-orientated farmer’ like his brother John.177 Courage’s literary success, however, was wholly attributable to his sexual status. ‘I am a good novelist, I might say, because I am an invert’, Courage asserted, ‘but never’, he suggested, ‘would I have willingly chosen such a fate’.178
Other episodes, like this one from April 1963, continued to connect inversion to notions of theatricality and performance:

F.B. told me about a fancy-dress queer party he’d been to in a Putney house wh. happened to have an R.S.P.C.A. clinic next door, a propinquity wh. had prompted the host to instruct in advance: ‘Don’t any of you dizzy cows go to the wrong door or you’ll be neutered like cats, drag and all.’ Two of the guests had been dressed as nuns, wimple included, and one as Marie Antoinette (trouble with wire hoops). There were also 2 naval ratings – one of them false and one real (‘tubby’) – and a real naval officer (‘holding hands in the corner with something fetching in black leather trousers and a flowered shirt’). All this seemed far away and only momentarily amusing, save for the R.S.P.C.A. touch. A hectic gaiety to cover the segregated despair of the invert: I know it all, as does F.B. 179

Here not only does the artistic bent of inverted men survive into modern usage (though it is more artifice than artistic flair) so too does its dislocating and marginalising capacities. The ‘hectic’ theatricality of Putney can do little but disguise this ‘reality’ from Courage, conceiving of it, not as an individual experience, but as something belonging to the lot of ‘the invert’. 180

Other terms, like ‘queer’ which also appear in Courage’s writing from the 1940s onward, reveal how the hegemonic power of homosexuality was, in reality, undergirded by other terms and concepts. While queer would take on very different meanings (theoretical and political, for example) at the century’s end, for Courage, the ‘queer’ scripts that belonged to the 1940s, ‘50s, and before functioned as a cultural shorthand for signalling homosexual space and experience. Used in this way, ‘queer’ expressed a cultural reality that contrasted with the normativities of the ‘square’ heterosexual world.

Beginning work on a novel (unfortunately never completed) with homosexual themes in 1949, for example, Courage explained how the main character would be both ‘queer’, and an ‘invert’. He would be a pianist and a ‘fine artist’ too, Courage wrote excitedly of this new venture, but in ‘private life “queer” and a complete and absolute swine’. 181 For a time ignoring the supposed ‘ennobling’ qualities of the
‘invert’, Courage was intent on revealing what he considered the less attractive relations between ‘artistic ability and sexual aberration’.182 ‘I shall have no mercy whatsoever on the inverted character’, Courage wrote, seeing ‘seediness’ and opportunism as core traits of this particular kind of deviation. Courage’s character would be the consummate queer archetype: concealing his sexual nature beneath a façade of ‘self-presentation’ that allowed men to pass through square spaces to the ‘queer world’ that existed beyond.183

Homosexuality

Taking stock of Courage’s identity usage thus far we can see the diversity of terms and meanings that help shaped Courage’s perception of experience. Invert, Uranian, queer or homosexual: the first half of Courage’s life was a veritable expanse of terms and scripts pertaining to men’s sexual selves. While keeping these caveats in mind, it is clear that Courage overwhelmingly preferred ‘homosexuality’ as a key term of identity from the late 1930s onwards. This tendency gathered force from the period immediately after 1945.

Although homosexuality emerged into more general usage by the post-war era in both New Zealand and British contexts, Courage’s own use of the term was almost always mobilised in clinical contexts. This was influenced, most probably, by his psychiatric treatment from this period and the preference for this term amongst medical practitioners.184 In recounting his past to Dr. Larkin in 1960, for example, Courage explained how his childhood was ‘made worse by [a] long persecution at a brutal school’ and the ‘growing realisation that [his] homosexuality was reprehensible, a matter of taboo’.185 This, Courage concluded, in part explained his difficulties in achieving relief in therapy, and informed ongoing problems in analysis. With the infrequent inclusion of ‘queer’ on rare occasions, ‘homosexuality’ formed the central script used by Courage in his discussions with Dr. Larkin and other medical professionals.

As Matt Houlbrook suggests, homosexuality, unlike, queer, pout, or, even fag, – all street terms that Courage used upon occasion – signalled respectability and
seriousness.\textsuperscript{186} Courage had voiced a desire to write a homosexual novel for many years. These discussions, however, almost always mobilised homosexuality as the preferred descriptive term, and suggested Courage’s views that such a subject was worthy of social regard.

These scripts mobilised decency and respectability as the key facets of homosexual behaviour and stressed how sexual identity was an essential fixed phenomena for all individuals. In the final stages of preparing \textit{Private History} for its opening night, Courage decided that it was important that the main character be presented ‘on his own ground’ – in other words, shown ‘three or four years’ after the narrative crisis depicted in the play.\textsuperscript{187} Such a strategy would show the character’s sexuality was not ‘situational’ (as is often presumed in literary and scholarly treatments of male boarding schools) but as part of the young man’s fixed psychosexual existence.\textsuperscript{188} In a much later discussion of \textit{A Way of Love}, Courage hoped that the novel would help generate sympathy for the plight of ‘the homosexual’ since, as he felt, ‘homosexuality’ was so frequently a ‘tragedy for the individual’ who ‘cannot change his true inclination, try how he may’.\textsuperscript{189}

Homosexuality was certainly the term relied upon in polite discussion. In dinner conversation, for example, homosexuality was mobilised with comparative decorum without upsetting social niceties:

Kenneth Marshall, manager of the local bookshop (Wilson’s) came to supper. A curious person: had been a friend of ‘Lawrence of Arabia’ and had stayed at his cottage in Dorset (L. insisting that M. was the host during the visit, and L. himself the guest). I asked Marshall point-blank whether Lawrence was – as popularly supposed – homosexual. M. said he thought L. was simply sexually indifferent: in any case not actively homosexual.\textsuperscript{190}

The exchange is an interesting one, since it suggests pre-existing public knowledge may have allowed the discussion to take place in the first place (one senses that Lawrence’s reputation preceded him so to speak). The episode itself, however, reveals little in the way of gossip or titillation. Courage’s enquiry is a genuine one,
and treated thus by his dinner guest – a man, Courage suggests, of some literary standing, and certainly with connections to the commercial hub of the industry. Their discussion is lent still more respectability by homosexuality’s scientific background. Its status as a ‘psychological subject’, Courage believed, made careful discussions of men’s identities a point of civil conversation. 191

It is in this context that Courage continued to keep the question of marriage alive through much of his life-course. As I consider later, evidence exists for there having been some intimate contact between Courage and women, and much of Courage’s later material stresses intimate relationships with female friends (though usually in Freudian contexts as the ‘good mother’ substitute). It is clear that Courage viewed heterosexual relations as laudable, even professing envy for men and women’s abilities to live in tranquil normality. 192

Courage considered marriage to a woman identified only as H. in 1928, writing of being ‘haunted by an idea I should propose to her’, though, he admitted, he did not love her nor hold ‘great desire for either her body or mind’. 193 Later episodes (from the period in which homosexual and heterosexual discourses had taken on greater hegemony, for example) depicted considerations of marriage in less sexualised contexts. Visiting a Mrs. Timmons in 1950, Courage was asked whether he thought he ‘might marry if someone suitable came along’. 194 Courage viewed such a question as an entirely appropriate one, it seems, answering in the affirmative and making private reservations, not on the basis of his attraction toward men, but because of fears that married life, though respectable, might deepen his psychological antipathies. 195 It is clear that Courage’s own views of homosexuality did not preclude the possibility of matrimony – his one condition being, in 1963, that it be a ‘matter of free choice’ and not something ‘driven to […] out of guilt, [or] as a neurotic solution’. 196

Pathologising identities
Of course homosexuality’s constitution, as I have shown already, had profound effects on Courage’s sexual expression. While previously Courage had given little
thought to the origin of his sexual identity, psychoanalysis had at last provided firm clinical understanding of his sexual difference, injecting new terms into Courage’s existing conceptual repertoire – words like ‘narcissism’, ‘masochism’ and ‘regression’ – that expressed linkages between ‘sexual perversion’ and mental wellness. Homosexuality was a retreat, or regression, that, Larkin suggested, indicated Courage’s libido, or sexual orientation, had become fixed and misdirected at an ‘early phase’ of development.\textsuperscript{197} Taken to its ultimate conclusion, Larkin and other psychiatrists held that Courage’s desire for other men was no natural condition. Instead it represented the narcissistic craving for the security of his own penis, the repressed sexual attraction for his father, and, ultimately, the longing for the ‘good breast’ of his mother.\textsuperscript{198}

While clinicians tended to view homosexuality as a ‘disorder’, Dr. Larkin sometimes placated Courage’s sense of guilt. Larkin suggested that homosexuality was, in some ways, Courage’s earliest survival mechanism. These sorts of interventions made careful distinctions between passive and active forms of homosexuality, holding that only the latter had acted as the necessary ‘standby’ for Courage’s ego.\textsuperscript{199} Larkin claimed that any attempt ‘rob’ Courage of this would be a ‘callous cruelty’.\textsuperscript{200} Courage’s ‘passivity’, however, was another issue entirely, and frequently the subject of analysis. ‘When I’m in bed with another man it’s always his cock I find the greatest comfort’, Courage admitted in 1960, ‘[b]ut ... somehow ... it is not his cock I seek and worship ... it’s my own, transferred’.\textsuperscript{201} Courage came to see his passivity as a ‘habit as deep as life’, and one that needed to be ‘corrected, re-aligned’.\textsuperscript{202} “The homosexuality is a narcissism, erotically transferred on to another man’s body’, Larkin argued.\textsuperscript{203} Even Courage’s erotic preference for ‘the strong man’ and ‘later butch types’ (the guardsmen, and athletes), were all regarded as manifestations of Courage’s desire for his father.

Courage struggled to ‘undo’ this so-called ‘malformation’. He found that passivity presented itself not only sexually but in practically every facet of his life. ‘I’m getting old’, Courage confided in his diary six months before his death, ‘and, all the time
now, the pressure of un-lived life behind me adds up, adds up, [sic] as the future shortens’.204

**Conclusion**

Passive though he believed himself to be, Courage was ceaselessly connected to the social world around him, constantly engaged in making sense of the assemblages of ideas and meaning that surrounded personal identity at any one time. A far-ranging assessment of his personal material shows how these scripted processes arrived through various zones of experience, social, textual, medical, and religious. Many pre-dated his birth, while still others, like the medical scripts and meanings that surrounded homosexuality, acquired resonance during the course of Courage’s life.

While change could certainly be a violent and jarring experience, Courage’s narrative displays a great deal of coherence, at least in the sense that certain notions – particularly those of normative masculinity and respectability – emerge with considerable evenness throughout this period. They show, too, that scripts surrounding sexual identity – sexual types, for example – were never hived off from dominant and mainstream processes (from questions of religion or morality, for example) but could manifest in dynamic and interesting ways throughout an individual’s life course.

At all times, however, Courage’s constitution as gendered, classed and ethnically distinct played a part in the formation of individuation and subjectivity. It is unlikely, for example, that Courage would have attended, much less have been able to afford, psychoanalysis if he had been working-class. It is also unlikely (though not impossible) that he would have travelled to Britain if he had been born into a Māori rather than Pākehā (European) family as he had been.

Courage’s life narrative, as rich and fulsome as it is, is therefore a very particular one. It cannot tell ‘the story’ of ‘queer experience’, but only ever hint at the wider potentialities available at a particular time and place.205 My analysis indicates the rich milieu of meaning that Courage drew from the world around him. Far from the monochromatic existence often presumed in some historical and activist accounts of
the past, Courage’s pre-liberation narrative indicates a rich array of cultural forms available to one New Zealand man of his class and situation.

While this analysis certainly supplies firm bedrock from which ensuing investigations can be based, still more can be made of Courage’s engagement with scripted processes. What kinds of sources informed Courage's outlook, for example. How were they accessed, and what sorts of meanings and values did Courage accrue from these tracts?

Although these are intellectual dead ends in many situations, simply because these sorts of then-contemporary observations have not been preserved by the subjects themselves, Courage’s private material provides rich insights into his own assessment of critical literature and cultural iconography. As we will see in the next chapter, Courage's diaries pinpoint particular textual sources as critical to his views on the world and, more often than not, contain lengthy summaries and quotations from these source materials.

Such an analysis affords a highly sophisticated picture of one man’s self-making, and this provides nuance and specificity to the explorative probing engaged in thus far.
Notes

1 James Courage, Journal (‘The Diary of a Neurotic’), 1960-1961, 12 December 1960, MS-0999/089, HC.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
4 Courage, Journal (‘The Diary of a Neurotic’), 1960-1961, 21 December 1960, MS-0999/089, HC.
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
7 Courage, Journal (‘The Diary of a Neurotic’), 1960-1961, 17 December 1960, MS-0999/089, HC.
8 Ibid.
10 Marlene de Laine, Fieldwork, Participation and Practice: Ethics and Dilemmas in Qualitative Research (London: Sage, 2000), p. 38
11 Eve Shapiro, Gender Circuits: Bodies and Identities in a Technological Age (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 179.
13 For an example taken from the New Zealand context see Chris Brickell, ‘Sex, Space and Scripts: Negotiating Homoeroticism in History’, Social and Cultural Geography, 11, 6, (2010), pp. 597-613.
14 Drawing from Kenneth Plummer’s work Arlene Stein has explained the significance of personal agency in making sense of available scripts. Stein writes that ‘[i]ndividuals bring to the process of sexual identity formation a sense of self that is
at least partly formed, and they use the available accounts, or repertoires of meaning, to make sense of this self. Subjects actively ‘select’ images and archetypes to ‘emulate or reject’, and it this that provides men and women with the ability to pass through, and make sense of, different social worlds. See Stein, ‘Shapes of Desire’, in *The Sexual Self: The Construction of Sexual Scripts*, ed., Michael S. Kimmel (Nashville, Tennessee: Vanderbilt University Press, 2007), p. 103.

15 Shapiro, *Gender Circuits*, p. 182.
16 Ibid.
17 Courage’s narrative, for instance, resists easy assumptions about what it ‘means’ to be a queer male at any given moment. As I alluded to in the Introduction to this thesis, Courage’s vantage point from the 1960s may have been deeply influenced by psychology but this did not extinguish previous conceptions of self. Nor, as I will suggest later, did it prevent Courage from resisting those conclusions he found untenable, unbelievable or simply unsatisfying. This assessment is therefore a complicating one, giving support to claims made by some historians, like Marxist scholar Raphael Samuel, who suggest that no life narrative is ‘innocent of ideology or of imaginative complexities’. See Samuel, ‘Myth and History: A First Reading’, *Oral History*, 16 (1988), p. 15.
18 Robert Aldrich writes that the Greek tradition of same-sex relations provided modern homosexuals with a ‘body of art, literature and philosophy which could justify, even exalt, their own sexual desires and behaviours in societies hostile to these passions’. See Aldrich, *The Seduction of the Mediterranean: Writing, Art, and Homosexual Fantasy* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 19.
19 I discuss these ideas at much greater length in the analysis that follows. My intention here is merely to show how Courage’s negotiation of self was not consigned merely to the realm of adulthood but would have informed his sense of place and identity and from the outset.
24 I use ‘heterosexual’ and ‘heteronormative’ in this thesis as a means for signalling the structures of gendered hegemony that Courage encountered in everyday life and reported at length in his diary and elsewhere. Heteronormativity only emerged as a scholarly term in the early 1990s, and it is important to note that the descriptor does not belong to Courage’s own period. Indeed, he seldom, if ever, mobilised the term ‘heterosexual’ in his own private (and published) writings. It is my proposition, however, that these terms best describe the gendered norms and power structures that informed all lives – both queer and otherwise – if to different degrees. For the purposes of my analysis, I follow Michael Warner’s definition of ‘heteronormative’, which he first articulated in Fear of a Queer Planet. Here heterosexuality is taken to be the ‘elemental form of human association [...]’. The heteronormative is the ‘invisible basis of all community’ and the ‘means of production without which society wouldn’t exist’. See Warner, ‘Introduction’, in Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), p. xxi.
25 Ibid.
26 Such analysis has been fleshed out by postcolonial and historians of sexuality alike. For some key examples see George L. Mosse, Nationalism and Sexuality:


31 Chris Brickell, Mates and Lovers, pp. 48-9.


33 Ibid.


35 Sex between men remained a criminal offence in New Zealand until 1986 when the Homosexual Law Reform Act was passed by parliament. Previous provisions (the
Offences Against the Person Act 1867, for example) gave courts far reaching powers – including flogging and hard labour – for those convicted of sodomy. While these penalties eased over time, relatively few convictions were handed down in practice. Enforcement usually occurred only where cases involved public indecency or sexual violation. See Brickell, Mates and Lovers, p. 30.

36 Courage, Journal, 1920-1924, 23 November 1923, MS-0999/078, HC.

37 Without refuting the importance of Oscar Wilde in many scripted experiences, some historians have been careful to assert that Wilde’s own life and literature would not have had a solely determinative effect in and of itself. Matt Cook, for example, notes that Wilde’s trial did not ‘comprehensively stall the circulation of other [queer] ideas and explanatory narratives’. See Cook, London and the Culture of Homosexuality, 1885-1914 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 119.


39 Chris Brickell locates the first recorded use of ‘homosexual’ in New Zealand in 1907, though he notes, too, that the use of this term, at least in print culture, remained sparse well into the 1920s and ‘30s. See Brickell, Mates and Lovers, p. 143.

40 Havelock Ellis, Sexual Inversion (London: Wilson and MacMillan, 1897), p. 1. While meanings sometimes mingled (and, indeed, Ellis used the terms interchangeably in Sexual Inversion), Courage attached precise qualities to inversion in practice. This ultimately augmented his use of the term homosexuality as it came to prominence in his own life narrative from the late 1930s onwards.


42 McKenzie, Scandal in the Colonies, p. 13.

43 McKenzie, Scandal in the Colonies, p. 181.

44 Ibid.


50 Ibid. (original emphasis).


53 Ibid.

54 Ibid.

55 Though, of course, many prominent suffragettes, Kate Sheppard among them, were themselves members of Christian denominations and were active in the life of the church. See Stenhouse, ‘Religion in Society’, p. 344.


57 This instability, particularly in terms of gendered scripts, has been tracked by Mary Poovey in relation to early feminist voices evident in the nineteenth century. Poovey suggests that various discourses – often contradictory ones – have helped to shape the ideologies that came to be experienced by those living in later epochs. For her analysis see Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).


59 Ibid.

60 Ibid.
Interestingly, ‘pagan’ here signals the emptiness of Christian adherence. As we will see elsewhere, ‘paganism’ and nature-worship functioned quite differently in the context of some inverted and artistic identities (signalling non-conformity and a departure from conventional moral codes, for example). Such a reality highlights the importance of being sensitive to the fluid nature of descriptors in everyday discourse, as well as the multiple ways that then-contemporary social actors may have deployed these terms. See Courage, Journal, 1920-1924, 20 March 1920, MS-0999/078, HC.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

It is quite possible that these kinds of articulations reflect what has recently called the ‘historical “impossibility” of same-sex desire’. These are the feelings of abjection of shame that would have formed the so-called ‘damaged subjectivities’ of many queer actors in the past but, until recently, have largely been neglected by historians. For a wider discussion of abjection, especially how it relates to the body, see Chapter Five of this thesis. For her account of this cultural and historical phenomena see Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 3-5.

Courage, Journal, 1929-1931, 19 May 1929, MS-0999/080, HC.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Graham Robb states that that both green and red have long been associated with same-sex attracted men. Whereas pink acquired its connection to male queerness in the 1900s, Robb suggests that ‘green had been a gay colour for centuries’ and that even the sexual interests of ‘effeminate’ youths in Ancient Rome were signalled by their ‘fondness for the color green’. See Robb, *Strangers: Homosexual Love in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Norton, 2004), p. 151.

Courage, Journal, 1929-1931, 19 May 1929, MS-0999/080, HC.
71 Courage, Journal, 1927-1929, 23 March 1928, MS-0999/079, HC.
72 Ibid.
73 Ibid. (original emphasis).
74 Courage, Journal, 1929-1931, 31 July - 2 August 1930, MS-0999/080, HC.
75 Ibid.
76 Ibid.
77 Ibid.
78 Ibid.
79 Courage, Journal, 1937-1940, 22 September 1939, MS-0999/085, HC.
80 Courage, Journal, 1927-1929, 18 September 1927, MS-0999/079, HC.
81 Courage characterised his sexual preference for ‘dark and tough’ men in numerous passages in his journal. At other times, he claimed that intellectual compatibility formed his overriding sexual interest. For Courage’s views on trade and working-class sexual liaisons see Chapter Four and Five of this thesis.
82 Courage, Journal, 1927-1929, 5 December 1927, MS-0999/079, HC. (original emphasis).
83 Courage, Journal, 1937-1940, 20 May 1940, MS-0999/085, HC.
84 Ibid.
85 Ibid.
86 Courage, Journal, 1941-1946, 2 February 1941, MS-0999/086, HC.
87 Courage, Journal, 1937-1940, 4 December 1940, MS-0999/085, HC.
88 Courage, Journal, 1937-1940, 3 July 1940, MS-0999/085, HC.
89 Ibid. (original emphasis).
90 Courage’s adherence to socialism was temporary. He returned to Hampstead at end of the war and appears to have ceased his dealings with socialist organisations in Britain from this period. Socialists’ critical assessment of property ownership and the exploitation of the economically vulnerable, however, profoundly shaped Courage’s ongoing self-conception. It is significant, perhaps, that Courage did not conceive himself as holding the means of production, a traditionally patriarchal
position, and, therefore, conventional in its masculine makeup. Rather, it is Courage’s position as accruing the proceeds of his family’s wider economic success – simply through social expectation and privilege – that deepened the sting of Courage’s perceived inadequacies. See Courage, Journal, 1937-1940, 14 May 1939, MS-0999/085, HC.

91 I am deliberately provisional here. While Courage’s conception as an artist certainly eased some of the pressures surrounding the scripted meanings surrounding masculinity, my analysis of Courage’s professional identity in Chapter Six also shows how Courage’s artistic career generated its own set of ambivalences and tensions. In Chapter Three I also discuss how Courage’s artistic identity may have shaped his experiences of space.

92 Courage, Journal, 1927-1929, 5 December 1927, MS-0999/079, HC.


95 Ibid.


97 Courage, Journal (‘The Diary of a Neurotic’), 1960-1961, 6 June 1960, MS-0999/089, HC.


100 Ibid.

102 Such scripts were multifaceted. Lapses in masculinity factored as explanation for Courage’s mental state. Paradoxically, however, it also stood in as prospective cure. Altering one’s life, Larkin reasoned, could be accomplished ‘by an effort of will’. Courage needed to break out of his confining, and feminine, self-perception and press toward masculine self-realignment. Larkin held that passivity had helped generate Courage’s mental unbalance and ensured that Courage only ever obtained a pale echo (an ‘adaptation’) of masculine wholeness. See Ibid.


106 Alan Sinfield locates this cultural stereotype as crystallising in western contexts from 1895, when the widespread media reportage trial of Oscar Wilde helped transpose a dominant model of male-male sexuality into much broader public discourses: ‘The image of the queer cohered at the moment when the leisured, effeminate, aesthetic dandy was discovered in same-sex practices, underwritten by money, with lower-class boys’. See Sinfield, The Wilde Century: Effeminacy, Oscar Wilde and the Queer Movement (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 121.

107 Courage, Journal, 1920-1924, 28 April 1920, MS-0999/078, HC.

108 Ibid.

109 Ibid.

110 Courage, Journal, 1920-1924, 16 March 1921, MS-0999/078, HC.

111 Courage, Journal, 1927-1929, 11 November 1927, MS-0999/079, HC.

112 Courage, Journal, 1929-1931, 4 January 1931, MS-0999/080, HC.

113 Ibid.

114 Courage, Journal, 1929-1931, 3 June 1929, MS-0999/080, HC.

115 Ibid.


117 Ibid.
118 Ibid.
119 Ibid.
120 Courage, Journal, 1929-1931, 11 January 1930, MS-0999/080, HC.
121 Courage, Journal, 1931-1932, 6 March 1932, MS-0999/082, HC.
122 Ibid. (original emphasis).
123 Ibid.

124 Courage records, for example, having read Ivan Turgenev's *A House of Gentilefolk* (1859) alongside and Clifford Bax's *That Immortal Sea* (1933) in 1933. He suggests that reading Bax retrospectively was to see the extent of 'unnecessary suffering' in contexts where religion had been allowed to 'regulate all questions of marriage, divorce and sexual relations generally'. See Courage, Journal, 1932-1934, 1 April 1933, MS-0999/083, HC.

125 Courage, Journal, 1941-1946, 6 June 1945, MS-0999/086, HC.

126 Letters from one Rosamund Harper suggest that Courage was approached by members of the then-emerging Church of Scientology in 1957. Scientology, she suggested, was more than just a 'speculative' religious philosophy but took the 'universe apart' and had, she claimed, 'universalistic practical application to the problems of the human being'. No reply from Courage survives, and, with the exception of weddings, funerals and other social occasions, Courage appears to have had very little to do with and established religion from this period on. See Rosamund Harper to James Courage, 21 May 1957, MS-0999/104, HC.

127 As we saw earlier, religion's constant call to uniformity impeded more than just Courage's articulation of sexual identity. It went to the very core of what Courage considered to be the role of the artist in life.


129 Courage did not identify particular individuals as levelling these charges against his character. It is fair to assume though that much of this unease was generated by contact with his own family – particularly with his youngest sister Patricia.
Fanshawe, who, by 1960, had moved to nearby Surrey. Courage remained considerably anxious at any prospect of their meeting: ‘I don’t want to be immersed in family talk or be asked questions on my life: revulsion from all of it in prospect. Yet I must go. I must answer questions (insensibly hostile ones) [...]’. See Courage, Journal, 1962-1963, 4 December 1962, MS-0999/091, HC. (original emphasis).

130 Courage, Journal, 1920-1924, 17 February 1924, MS-0999/078, HC.

131 Ibid.

132 Ibid.

133 Ibid.

134 Courage, Journal, 1927-1929, 2 September 1927, MS-0999/079, HC.

135 Ibid.


138 Courage, Journal, 1929-1931, 28 December 1930, MS-0999/080, HC.

139 Courage, Journal, 1934-1936, 10 May 1934, MS-0999/084, HC.

140 Courage, Journal, 1945-1950, 2 December 1949, MS-0999/087, HC.

141 Ibid.


143 Ibid.


147 Ibid.

148 Ibid.

149 Ibid.

150 Ibid.
151 Ibid.

152 Courage, Journal, 1920-1924, 22 March 1920, MS-0999/078, HC.

153 Ibid.

154 Courage, Journal, 1937-1940, 17 July 1939, MS-0999/085, HC.

155 Courage describes meeting long-time lover Frank Fleet in the 1950s and an evening spent at the theatre. Their experience was a romantic one, and one that ended with sexual intercourse. I look more closely at their relationship in subsequent chapters. For this encounter see Courage, Journal, 1920-1924, Undated, MS-0999/078, HC.

156 Courage, Journal, 1920-1924, 19 September 1921, MS-0999/078, HC.

157 Courage, Journal, 1920-1924, 10 June 1921, MS-0999/078, HC.


160 Courage, Journal, 1927-1929, 20 August 1928, MS-0999/079, HC.

161 Ibid.

162 Ibid.

163 Ibid.

164 Ibid.

165 Courage, Journal, 1927-1929, 25 April 1929, MS-0999/079, HC.

166 Ibid.

167 This did not, of course, mean that all sexualities were made equal. Weininger, for example, wrote extensively on the subject of femininity, suggesting that only masculine women deserved full enfranchisement. This was because active masculinity remained superior to the perceived passivity of femininity. See Weininger, Sex and Character: An Investigation Of Fundamental Principles, 1903, trans. Ladislaus Löb (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005).
Courage, Journal, 1927-1929, 25 April 1929, MS-0999/079, HC.

Courage, Journal, 1929-1931, 25 May 1930, MS-0999/080, HC.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Courage, Journal, 1927-1929, 3 November 1927, MS-0999/079, HC.

Ibid.


Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid. (my emphasis).


Ibid.

Courage, Journal, 1945-1950, 6 May 1948, MS-0999/087, HC.

Ibid.

Houlbrook, *Queer London*, p. 150. Other episodes in Courage’s journal show how ‘queer’ carried street meaning, functioning as cultural shorthand for the homosexual sexual economy. This usage crystallises in the camp and ‘amusing conversation[s] about the seduction of “normal” men by queers’, for example, or in aspirations for sexual gratification and affluence. See Courage, Journal, 1945-1950, 1 December 1950, MS-0999/087, HC.


Matt Houlbrook suggests that the ‘broad conception of homosexuality as an “inherent biological characteristic”’ enabled men to ‘define their desires as a privatized condition rather than a social problem’. Medical meanings, like the ones I discuss in this chapter and elsewhere, meshed ‘neatly with the careful mapping of
the public-private boundary through which [self-identified homosexuals] articulated as the discretion that defined the “homosexual’s” respectability. Public queer life was thus thrown into violent relief. Unlike ‘the homosexual’, the ‘queer’ was ‘represented through the tropes of promiscuity and abjection’ and considered ‘dangerous and immoral’ in consequence. See Houlbrook, *Queer London*, pp. 257-8.

187 Courage, Journal, 1937-1940, 6 October 1939, MS-0999/086, HC.

188 Ibid.


190 Courage, Journal, 1937-1940, 29 May 1939, MS-0999/086, HC.

191 Ibid.


195 Ibid.


197 Courage, Journal (‘The Diary of a Neurotic’), 1960-1961, 12 December 1960, MS-0999/089, HC.

198 Ibid.


205 Such a conclusion follows the trajectory established by Judith R. Walkowitz in *City of Dreadful Delight*. There Walkowitz used a range of ‘adjacent’ or ‘parallel’ texts to indicate the plurality of cultural meanings available to women, showing how individual agency was always available, if within ‘certain parameters’. Walkowitz uses these stories to expose the multiplicity of social experience that dominant narratives (the Whitechapel murders of the late-nineteenth century, in this instance) typically render invisible. See Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, p. 9.
Chapter Two

‘I read, I divine and I shudder’: Assessing textual scripts and meaning-making

Introduction: A precedent set?

Courage sat down to read one evening in 1934. His choice of reading, John Middleton Murry’s The Life of Katherine Mansfield, was no passing fancy. Murry’s biography held special interest for the fledgling author. Like so many New Zealanders, Courage turned to Mansfield as a model of colonial artistic success. Mansfield had forged a successful career in Europe, writing, not so much of England or of the continent, but of a life and childhood spent in New Zealand – Wellington in particular. Mansfield did little to disguise her colonial origins. Rather, declaring herself ‘a colonial’, Mansfield’s New Zealand past was, if anything, a substantial boon – giving specific and vital power to much of her work.¹

Courage was already nineteen when Mansfield died unexpectedly in 1923. At turns inspired and intimidated by Mansfield’s legacy, Courage drew continually from her work.² Mansfield thus acquired special iconic status in Courage’s life. Her life provided a valuable and instructive lesson on how to live, not just as an artist, but as a New Zealand artist overseas. While it is unclear whether Courage knew of Mansfield’s queerness, it is evident that Courage believed Katherine embodied qualities he considered praiseworthy in a writer.³ Mansfield was successful, yet ‘humble’ in the face of celebrity.⁴ Her work was original and stimulating, though supported by ‘the whole weight’ of herself.⁵ Professionally speaking, Mansfield seemed the ideal inspiration for a New Zealander just embarking on a creative career in lands far from home.

While Courage was inspired by Mansfield’s literary success he also saw himself reflected in much of her own life experience. ‘How is it that one feels sometimes’, Courage asked, having returned to Murry’s biography some months later: ‘This book was written for me’.⁶ A powerful psychic connection had become apparent for
Courage in reading about Mansfield’s life. Courage divined there a history ‘exactly’ like his own. Finding a means for ‘self expression’ in New Zealand had, after all, been a ‘struggle’ for Mansfield too. Ignoring for a time some of Courage’s more egalitarian portrayals of New Zealand (I explore these in greater detail in subsequent chapters), Mansfield’s story seemed to confirm New Zealand’s inhospitable treatment of the artistically-inclined. ‘I feel for her almost more than I can bear, when I read’, Courage wrote in 1933.

Courage’s reading of Mansfield’s life is perhaps unimpressive when considered at first glance. It hardly seems surprising that Courage might reach back into the recent past to claim Mansfield as an exemplar for artistic life. As Rhoda B. Nathan, Vincent O’Sullivan, and others point out, Mansfield’s influence has been long felt in much of New Zealand’s writing, and, until Frank Sargeson (who famously argued against Mansfield’s iconic status) New Zealanders have had few instances of their own international literary success to celebrate.

Within a much broader context, however, Courage’s writings allow for much more historically nuanced assessments. Situating this material at the centre of scripted analysis, it is clear that Mansfield, and figures like her, formed a nucleus of cultural and literary figures that Courage turned to in constructing his own identity. Widening the ambit still more, we see that textual material – literary, biographical, sexological, and others – functioned for Courage as a library of cultural precedent, self conceptualisation, even recipes for behaviour.

Courage pinpoints in his diary (and in his correspondence and published work, to some extent) many of the key sources of knowledge mobilised in his quest for personal wholeness. Courage took great pains to record what he was reading, whether for pleasure or study. His journal also preserves many transcribed extracts that Courage deemed valuable or instructive, thereby isolating much of the material he believed to be most personally relevant. Combined with often lengthy responses to these assessments (his engagement is an often-critical one) Courage’s personal narrative affords extensive – if mediated – access to the repertoire of scripted material drawn upon during particular historical moments.
Stated plainly, Courage’s narrative indicates how subjects interacted with textual and symbolic material and integrated this information within their own subjectivities. Such an assessment treats issues of representation more than just descriptively. Canadian historian, Steven Maynard suggests that historical monographs address not just questions of representation but pressing ‘epistemological and ontological questions’ as well.\textsuperscript{11} These studies do more than survey historical materials; they look to the ‘status and use of historical evidence’ in people’s lives.\textsuperscript{12} Historians analyse ‘how texts themselves helped to shape reality, social practice, and behaviour’.\textsuperscript{13} As Michel Foucault noted (and is often overlooked in subsequent histories of sexuality) ‘discourses are not free-floating’ but ‘rooted and expressed in concrete practice’.\textsuperscript{14} Framed in this way, Courage’s textual interactions are of considerable value. One sees at once Courage’s own role in arranging and making sense of textual information. Never merely a cog in the machine, Courage is, as we all are, an active participant in the social processes used to construct selves.

This chapter draws from some of the texts key to Courage’s self-conception. Many of these – Plato’s \textit{Symposium}, for example – have been studied at length by scholars of sexuality. Others – the works of Henry James and Jane Austen among them – have appeared much less frequently in studies of homosexuality. Rather than analyse the texts themselves, however, I am particularly interested in the meanings Courage accrued from these narratives. His experience highlights the usefulness of certain texts, ideas and symbols in shaping individual subjectivities. And, wherever possible, I try to keep Courage-as-reader within my frame of analysis. In the process, we see how Courage continually placed himself at the centre of narrative explorations. This material demonstrates how Courage tested and mediated meaning. It also shows how Courage measured the import and relevance of certain ideas as he encountered them.\textsuperscript{15}

My appraisal is split four ways. The first section considers not so much the texts themselves, but the culture of reading and meaning-making that Courage brought to his consideration of narrative. Courage provides hints of this in his diaries and correspondence, showing the significance he attached to these symbolic interactions,
how texts were read and treated, even something of their psychological impact. This consideration is crucial for understanding how Courage used reading as an exercise in meaning-making. It also enhances our understanding of the narratological context in which Courage found himself.

The second section of this chapter looks to the primary literary tracts that Courage engaged with in conceiving of himself and his world. This is the largest section of the chapter. My exploration ranges from classical literature to modern reading material and highlights, wherever possible, the conclusions – or ‘lessons’ – Courage hinted at as advancing self-awareness and personal understanding.

I treat Courage’s growing interest in psychiatry in the third section of this chapter. Courage’s heightened sensitivity to medical views tracked the gradual pathologising of sexual identity that climaxed in the 1950s and ‘60s. For Courage, it is clear that textual material played a key role in this accretion of personal knowledge. It gave security and sureness in Courage’s dealings with medical men. It also empowered him to mobilise or resist certain professional assessments of his own psycho-sexual makeup.

The final section of this chapter takes notions of agency and resistance further. I look at how Courage revised narratives to suit his own needs, injecting his personal preferences, perceptions and prejudices into the frame of individual narratives. Courage’s remodeling of text (Murry’s biography of Mansfield, for example) resulted in the queering of many otherwise conventional (and excluding) narratives. I argue that this process of strategic affiliation was central to Courage’s desire to throw off the disaffection caused by the often-caustic views of dominant society. This allowed him to read beyond the rigid confines of medicine and same-sex attraction to claim a much wider ambit of legitimacy than might otherwise have been possible.

**Reading for reading’s sake**

Cultural historians and sociologists have long underscored the centrality of narrative as a key component in the making of nations and of individuals. Scholars like Kenneth Plummer have shown how stories inform ‘the pathways to understanding culture’, shaping questions of citizenship and notions of belonging.
Others, Hayden White among them, argue convincingly for ‘narrativity’s close relationship’ in generating notions of ‘legitimacy’ and in the production of real moral and social worlds.18 Taken broadly, this scholarship has looked to stories to explain how narratives mediate our perception of reality. These experts suggest that stories are key sites of knowledge production. Far from simple accounts of real or fantastical events, narratives (as expressed in their myriad forms and variations) feed the cultural ‘imaginaries’ of nations and the cultures and subcultures that form them.19

While this is certainly the case for social actors more generally (we are all captured by questions of representation, for example), the primacy of stories, particularly in their textual form, is even more significant for men like Courage. As a literary man, Courage was constantly brought into contact with bodies of narrative in adult life. Courage saw himself as connected to the serious contemporary fiction of his day; stories that, in many respects, owed a genealogical debt to the modernist literary traditions of the early twentieth century.

Familiarity with certain important narratives (with biblical and classical tales, for example) remained a central means for signaling one’s literary and intellectual pedigree. As I will show in Chapter Six of this thesis, Courage’s published work is constantly invested with these critical associations. This relation was, in part, a question of licensing and legitimisation; a means for highlighting intellectual competence through displays of learnedness and scholarly acumen. A constant engagement with literary forms (essentially guiding what a story should look and feel like) would also have ensured that Courage’s narratives conformed to other conventions as well – to questions of tone, theme, even subject matter, for example. Familiarity with past and current literary norms was therefore a crucial aspect of Courage’s self-representation. It gave his stories credibility and helped produce his professional persona as a writer.

Courage had not established his literary career until well into his thirties. Literature, though, had remained a veritable companion since childhood. The Courages, it seemed, were a highly literary family, and Courage identified this appreciation as critical to his receptiveness to art and literature. Exhortations from
his mother and maternal grandmother guided Courage’s view that poetry should serve as a haven for personal and intellectual reflection. As I showed in the previous chapter, it was Courage’s mother who proved receptive to art.\textsuperscript{20} In a much later episode, Courage characterised his mother as a voracious reader. She preferred stories that were not ‘abstruse’, and, like Oscar Wilde’s plays, provided some comprehensible moral message.\textsuperscript{21} Courage’s grandmother, by contrast, was much more enamored of verse, preferring Alfred Tennyson and Robert Browning to the modernist poets of her time.

Here, as one might expect, Courage was encouraged to look to Europe, and Britain especially, for literary inspiration. As historian Peter Gibbons has shown, the ‘habits of mind’ of most Pākehā New Zealanders remained predominantly British from the 1890s. This framework remained in place, Gibbons suggests, well into the middle years of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{22} Discourses of race and imperialism encouraged New Zealanders to identify themselves as British, and the prevailing cultural gaze of most New Zealanders continued to regard Britain as its geographic and intellectual home.\textsuperscript{23} Literature and other cultural productions (histories included) undergirded this ‘hegemonic structure’.\textsuperscript{24} Courage was therefore led to emulate the literary output of his forefathers: an impulse guided as much by class and cultural affiliation as any personal predilection of his parents or grandparents.\textsuperscript{25}

Certainly, class would have mediated Courage’s use of narrative. As Matt Houlbrook has shown in the British context, it was often elite men – or, at least, men of means – who had the greatest access to literary materials.\textsuperscript{26} While New Zealand enjoyed a relatively high level of literacy, it was not until the 1930s and ‘40s that large-scale efforts were made to create a state-wide national library service.\textsuperscript{27} Though class in and of itself was no barrier to literary appreciation, simple economic realities curtailed literary pursuits for many.

Those with more-than-modest means, like Courage, were certainly better equipped with access to literary materials. This included, too, the various ‘deviant’ political and social interventions (sexologies and literary fictions, more often than not) that had begun to circulate from the end of the nineteenth century, and with some rapidity from the 1920s. While I consider this material in greater detail later,
it is worth noting here how this interaction led Courage to perceive his sexuality in
very particular ways. These interventions would have made discernible the kinds of
distinctions that Courage made between sexual types in Chapter One – the distaste
expressed towards the dandy-like protagonist of ‘A Portrait of a Bloody Fool’, for
example. While these texts allowed men like Courage to discover meaning and
justification for their feelings as inverts, they also, as Houlbrook notes, produced
new hierarchies of masculinity and sexual deviance.28

These literary tracts, then, had both an including and excluding force. It was only
the middle-class homosexual, reformists argued, who was worthy of protection. And,
invariably, it was only the middle-class homosexual who displayed the
accoutrements of civilised living that justified such legal recourse.29 Here Courage
would have read a very particular kind of sexual politics. These early radicals -
Richard von Krafft-Ebing, Edward Carpenter and others – mobilised contemporary
medical discourses and deployed a moral politics of space in order to distinguish
‘the respectable “homosexual” from the repugnant queer’.30 It was only the former,
they suggested, who should be guaranteed protection from state persecution, and
only the former who should be allowed to pursue their intimate pleasures with men
in private. In his idealised form, the homosexual male was sexually discreet, learned,
and possessed of a keen moral awareness. An otherwise-ideal citizen, then, the
homosexual was justified in seeking the safeguard of the state.31

While these explicit writings on same-sex attraction may not have been
immediately available in New Zealand, Courage would certainly have found them
within easy reach by the time he reached Oxford, where he took up studies in
English literature in 1923. This transition through space, from New Zealand to the
United Kingdom, highlights how certain textual narratives could be anchored in
particular geographic settings. Certainly, Britain, as the seat of empire and a centre
of global publishing, would have provided greater access to a range of narrative
materials. Major literary works, though – Charles Dickens, Anthony Trollope,
William Makepeace Thackeray, and William Shakespeare, for example – were
available in special colonial editions, and the size of books meant that stories could
be easily moved between spaces.32
This mobility meant that Courage was seldom without reading material. This was because reading was not just a professional necessity; it was also a very real leisure pursuit. His enjoyment of literature, fiction particularly, was a daily ritual, and Courage always travelled with a good number of books in tow. Courage names several books (mostly novels) read onboard the RMS *Alcantara*, on his way to Buenos Aires in 1930, for example. Courage’s reading material included Henry Handel Richardson’s *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* (published in omnibus in 1930). This was a period novel about an emigrant doctor newly arrived to Australia’s gold fields – and one of the first treatments of homosexuality in Australian literature. Courage was also able to augment this collection with other volumes taken from the ship’s library, or bought from local bookshops at various stops along the sea route to Argentina. In doing so, Courage ensured that he had sufficient reading matter to last the voyage.

These episodes reveal much about Courage’s use of textual material. Narrative offered a necessary means of escape, and a valued source of instruction. Added to this, reading offered relief from the often-jarring disturbances of ‘material existence’. Reading, Courage suggested, offered ‘private restoration’ from intellectual ‘aridity’; an antidote to the hedonism (especially omnipresent in Courage’s depictions of ship-board life) that threatened the equanimity needed for creative production (a point I will return to in later chapters).

Courage drew these kinds of connections with considerable consistency. In one early journal extract, for example, Courage recorded his writing prose at Oxford – ‘short stories with a queer twist’. Here Courage was moved to create by an array of artistic materials:

Of course I still read Pater; I get into the Athenaeum Museum and dream for hours before Hermes or the Discobolus-throwers or Myron’s “Satyr”. Then I rush home and put it all into a [musical] prelude. [...] I have been reading Browning. The Heavens [sic] have fallen and stayed with me. At present I merely like him but I know that soon my liking will ‘leap to the dream’ (to have the pleasure of quoting myself) and become love. With Pater it was like that and with Bach. Slow at first then the reward!140
Courage mentions his newfound love for Robert Browning in the same breath as he spoke of his admiration for nineteenth-century English aesthete and classicist Walter Pater and the ancient Greek sculptor Myron of Eleuthereia. In doing so, Courage fused literary, cultural, and musical art forms in short order and showed how reading and writing, along with musical appreciation, were shared pastimes in Courage’s daily routine.41

Courage found consumption of the written word particularly stimulating. Its pursuit, however, was often a profoundly solitary one. Certainly, literary tastes helped forge relationships with other people. Meeting others with similar reading tastes offered a means for testing political or cultural associations. More simply, it gave one something to talk about and could be mobilised as an ‘icebreaker’ in various social situations.42 The act of reading, though, more typically engendered feelings of social isolation that the process of writing only exacerbated.

This process is explicated much later in Courage’s recollection of a conversation with a friend, one Edward L.:

Edward L. came to tea at the flat. He spoke of his feeling apart from other people – most other people, in fact – when in general company, and said that their comments on things (books, plays, peoples) seemed shallow, their judgment childish and their malice universal. Edward: I’d rather be by myself and reading a good book. Myself: In theory, so would I; but my own company appalls and panics me with anxiety. I have no peace. Edward: Do you find peace with others? Myself: More than without them.43

Reading was not, then, always a simple pleasure. And certain narratives and themes could leave Courage agitated and disturbed. Re-reading William Wordsworth’s The Prelude in 1960, for instance, Courage found himself mourning the loss of child-like delight in nature; years, he wrote, that were spent among the ‘sticky manuka flowers’ and ‘black swans’ of Canterbury.44 Courage’s nostalgia was tempered by his belief that Wordsworth was himself a ‘neurotic’. Oxford literary critic Ernest de Sélinkourt had written in 1928 how ‘hypochondriacal feelings’ left Wordsworth ‘silent and self-centred’, prone to malaise, and to ‘fits’ of ‘uncomfortableness’.45
Courage felt that Wordsworth’s own poetry held telltale signs of this mental torment. Wordsworth’s poems described the ‘mysterious misery’ of psychic illness.46 ‘What is strange – though,’ Courage wrote, comparing Wordsworth’s experience to his own, ‘is the fact that he made a fairly good recovery’ without psychiatric intervention. Why, then, Courage wondered, was his own illness so resistant?47

We can see already that Courage’s breadth of reading material was wide-ranging. His reading preference placed strong emphasis on personal relevance and intellectual rigour. Courage tended to bring a self-reflexive approach to reading narrative. Certain stories supplied instructive knowledge or simple artistic and mental stimulation. Other material, as we will explore at greater length at the end of this chapter, afforded Courage the means for ‘detecting’ psychological types akin to his own. Courage would often revisit particular narratives throughout his life (as he did with Wordsworth’s poetry), suggesting that some narratives could have ongoing significance at varying stages of one individual’s life course.

The process of reading was therefore a paradoxical one for Courage. Texted narrative seemed to provide an all-too-important means for gathering self-knowledge, a sense of belonging, even the mental equipoise necessary for creating artistic productions in the first place. On the other hand, however, exploring literature could upset Courage’s often-fragile mental state; a tendency that reading, as a solitary experience, only worsened.

**Exploring sexual scripts**

As we shall see more clearly in Chapter Five, Courage had a frank interest in issues of sex and the human body. Sexual intimacy, so often shrouded in mystery in general society, had a special place on Courage’s intellectual agenda. Sexuality seemed to touch off a number of issues – whether the internal workings of his own psyche and physiology, or the (heterosexual) political regime that exerted itself most profoundly over public and private spaces alike. Whether intellectual or sexual, interactions with others supplied a further zone for scripted knowledge production.
Courage’s journals, though, show the important part textualities played in forming Courage’s notions of sexual identity.

Courage was able to gather a range of written material pertaining to sexual knowledge, seeing as much relevance in reading the tabloid newspapers as he did the Platonic and Sapphic classics. Indeed, Courage’s lifespan bridged an array of different textual treatments on sexuality – his own published work included.

There were sound cultural imperatives behind this impulse. As Michel Foucault wrote in his ‘Introduction’ to the History of Sexuality, ‘nineteenth-century psychiatry, jurisprudence, and literature’ had, by this time, given rise to an array of discourses surrounding ‘perversity’ and its various types. 48 Literary material contained exemplars of an emergent ‘reverse discourse’ whereby ‘homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf’, and often in the ‘same vocabulary’ and categories under which it was ‘medically disqualified’. 49 Jeffrey Weeks has argued that in the nineteenth-century context, it was those ‘with sexual desires which were socially stigmatized’ who turned most to literary and scientific authorities to understand their inner workings. 50 These interventions offered men new methods of self-conception and new ways ofarticulating nonconformity. 51

The fact that Courage ranged so widely implies his personal dissatisfaction, perhaps, with then-contemporary moral codes. Certainly no particular textual tract offered a cure to Courage’s feelings of disaffection. The ‘terrible loneliness’ used by Courage to describe the lot of the invert in the 1920s was equally typified in Courage’s portrayal of homosexuality in the 1930s and beyond. 52 Homosexual men might be endowed by the ‘nobler faculties’ of the human intellect but Courage saw homosexual identities as similarly vulnerable to personal and political attack. 53

British newspapers and magazines continuously exposed men’s private lives for public consumption. These narratives provided titillation, not just for heterosexual audiences, but for queer ones too. Here Courage acted as an informant for men living in New Zealand, providing clippings (and his own views) about events as they unfolded. Courage responded with telltale sympathy and frustration in one letter addressed to writer, friend and editor of New Zealand literary periodical Landfall Charles Brasch (then living in Dunedin) in 1954, for example:
Great scandal and goings-on here about the Montague [sic] case (I don’t know how far the Fathers of Southland Journalism will transcribe this, but I fear very niggardly): it is all most unfortunate, coming at a time when a reform of the laws concerned seemed about to reach debating point in the Commons. Now I suppose the whole wretched question will be shelved again [...] One can only pity Montague [sic] of course, who seems to have got involved with a pair of thorough little R.A.F. tarts. Oh dear and dear.\textsuperscript{54}

Edward Montagu, a member of the House of Lords, along with journalist Peter Wildeblood and RAF serviceman Michael Pitt-Rivers, were imprisoned for ‘homosexual offences’ after a lengthy and very public court trial. The controversy it generated and the ceaseless discussions of homosexuality that occurred in the media (including in New Zealand), however, had some peculiar outcomes. Events surrounding the trial helped galvanise reform efforts and saw a new political will brought to bear on understanding issues of ‘sexual deviance’.\textsuperscript{55}

For Courage, however, Montagu’s story highlighted the precarious nature of homosexual life. As these kinds of stories revealed, same-sex attracted men kept themselves closeted for good reason. As we will see later, other modes of living, Courage’s own less furtive existence included, still necessitated elaborate day-to-day negotiations of space and power. Montagu’s story (and others like it) signalled the omniscience of state authority. It also indicated how these official intrusions manifested in the real world: stripping away the veils of secrecy that proved so necessary in the operation of many queer lives.

Courage perceived Montagu’s story as one of sexual danger. Courage’s moral views were plain in his suggestion that Montagu had made poor sexual choices (though, in court, all five men pleaded their innocence of homosexual relations). Despite this, Courage’s greatest sympathy (and he assumes Brasch’s also) lay with Montagu (‘one can only pity Montague’).\textsuperscript{56} He, after all, had the most to lose, socially speaking. From a class perspective, Montagu was also of greater standing. Despite Courage’s socialist aspirations of the 1940s, he tended to demonstrate solidarity with the gentlemen protagonists of these sagas. Perhaps he saw their treatment as an attack on the cultural hierarchy that underpinned his own sexual and moral
world. Questions of propriety had usually protected elite and middle class men from state intervention in earlier decades. The situation for those men living between the end of World War II and the events of Wolfenden, however, was much less certain.

Many newspapers produced and amplified these tensions. Stories of scandal and indecency, cultural studies expert Richard Hornsey suggests, rendered the homosexual increasingly visible to a predominantly heterosexual gaze. It also fed popular perceptions of the homosexual’s carnal menace. Police actions aimed to rein in the queer urban culture at the centre of Britain’s cultural and economic world. While perhaps not as extreme as the Lavender Scare across the Atlantic, convictions of public figures in Britain helped to both quell and exaggerate popular anxieties regarding homosexuality. The Home Secretary’s ‘new drive against male vice’ highlighted the lengths accorded to efforts to ‘rid’ England of the so-called ‘homosexual plague’. And none were safe from this new and very public prohibition on ‘deviant’ behaviour.

If class was no longer an adequate safeguard against state harassment, it is perhaps curious, then, that Courage was not more distressed in his reading of events. Turning again to his correspondence with Brasch, Courage used his reading of homosexual scandal as more than a source of titillation or as an object study in persecution. Some publications, *The New Statesman* and *Sunday Times* among them, featured more sympathetic views of events, for example. Rather than simply uplift critical self-affirmation from these interventions, though, both Courage and Brash spoke of the divisions it revealed amongst homosexuals. Brasch wrote that E. M. Forster’s article on the subject was ‘old-fashioned and narrow’. Courage agreed, believing these kinds of interventions dealt poorly with an event that threatened to engulf much of the theatre and arts scene in Britain.

Similar readings are available elsewhere. In one revealing episode Courage read of the lurid details of a man’s unlawful connection with a youth in 1963:

B – was killed by a 16 year old boy to whom he’d made homosexual advances. The trial acquitted the boy, even of manslaughter,
‘provocation’ having been assumed on the basis of the post-mortem [...] [T]he court condemned [the man] retrospectively for [his] erotic inclinations. Myself I blame him only for trying to induce so young a boy to perform the act he presumably wanted.63

While it is true that these distinctions (aspects of character and moral behaviour, for the most part) prevented Courage from expressing sympathy, his critique was in reality far more provisional. Courage’s readerly instincts alerted him to the fact that the newspapers adhered to fairly rigid moral codes in their representation of events. Aside from the few interventions mentioned above, reportage in newspapers tended to view homosexual men in highly abject terms. These views of events reduced or excluded details that would humanise the (queer) men they depicted. ‘[W]hy did the boy allow himself to be picked-up in the first place?’ Courage wondered, believing ‘something’ was ‘off’ or ‘fishy’ about the article.64

These kinds of narratives confirmed Courage’s belief that public reportage on homosexuality was sensationalised and highly exploitative. In isolation, these articles made for depressing reading. Read together, however, they spelled out a much larger conspiracy of power. This complicity embraced the police, the print media, even the judiciary itself. Cases like the one outlined above were ‘just one more means of discrediting the homosexual, publicly’, Courage felt, and explained, in part, why some homosexual men turned to fiction and other artistic means to tell their stories.65 Certainly, newspapers were enmeshed within heteronormative paradigms that reduced homosexual men’s ability to be heard. Most reporters were unable to distinguish between sexual types, even ‘modes of perversion’, and the nature of these stories invariably drew attention to the most disagreeable forms of indecency.

Courage’s reading of history, however, showed that social attitudes were not always hostile to same-sex attracted peoples. Courage held special respect for the poet Sappho, for example. Sappho’s status as a ‘lesbian’ writer (in his eyes at least) made little difference to Courage’s sense of relatedness. It is important to stress Courage’s own role in facilitating this cultural contingency. If indeed the past was a foreign country, this did not mean that the men and women who populated it were
at once alien in character or in temperament. It is interesting that, though Courage acknowledged differences in sexual types amongst same-attracted men living in the present, he projected relatively uniform assumptions of sexual appetite and behaviour onto those living in the past. For Courage, these men and women possessed strong ties with inverted and homosexuals living in the twentieth century. It followed that modern homosexuals enjoyed the same qualities of body and mind as their ‘ancestral’ counterparts, embodying an erotic and psychological experience wholly analogous to those who lived centuries before.

For Courage, Sappho’s poetry captured a queer mentalité that surpassed any contemporary poet in quality and range. Courage insisted that ‘Sappho’s poetry would be meaningless’ to ‘mechanical’ or ‘conventional’ men.66 Saying little of women, Courage wrote in 1927 that only men of ‘special sensitivity’ (inverts, he means) could appreciate Sappho’s views on life and intimacy. For men like Courage it went without saying that Sappho was ‘the supreme poet of love’.67 According to Courage Sappho possessed a quality of self-perception that was missing from much modern verse. Contemporary poets embraced artifice too willingly, and the restrictive moral codes of the day greatly reduced the poet’s palette. Courage commented on the ‘[t]he remote sorrow’ evident in Sappho’s work when he was invited by a friend in 1928 to borrow an anthology that contained Sapphic fragments.68 Courage was preoccupied by Sappho’s poetry for the next two days. In his journal he wrote how he had ‘almost forgotten the intense intellect [necessary for poetry] – the excitement of it’.69 His final product – an untitled poem that remains unpublished – made these connections between modern and classical mindsets most explicitly:

All night long I too the incessant waters
Hear as seas that break on the coasts of Lesbos;
Calling birds and voices of lonely passion
Deeper than Sappho’s.70

Courage believed he shared much with figures like Sappho. Despite their difference in erotic preference both occupied the same interior conditions of life: a space of psychological despair always at a remove from the rest of humanity.71
Courage’s treatment of Lesbos as a site anchored to queer existence acknowledges a much wider tradition. Courage was not alone in connecting Lesbos, and, more specifically, Greek culture, with modern-day homosexual communities. Its inclusion of same-sex intimacies as a cornerstone of mainstream and everyday life, as well as a vibrant cultural legacy that exalted love between men especially, meant that Greek culture factored centrally in many men’s scripted worlds. Robert Aldrich explains that discourses surrounding Greek culture were mobilised as a central defense in most later (post-classical) ‘apologies’ for homosexuality.72 Greek art, literature and philosophy provided a legitimising source of sexual morality that justified, or even gloried in, men’s sexual desire for one another.73 David Halperin suggests that this material became an ‘ideological weapon’ for some homosexuals; a means for deflecting ‘condemnatory reflexes’ prevalent within heteronormative culture.74

These sorts of readings allowed men like Courage to reconceptualise cultural values surrounding homosexuality. Such texts described same-sex intimacies as socially useful and morally praiseworthy.75 Moreover, they also provided a model of behaviour and established alternative spaces to perceive sexual relations between men.

Courage had the classical philosopher Plato in mind, for example, when Frank Fleet left for Argentina in March 1930. Talking with English playwright Clifford Bax against this backdrop, Courage reflected on Plato’s ‘very beautiful’ views on ‘[l]ove in life’.76 In doing so Courage betrayed an intimate knowledge of classical narrative. Courage noted that Bax’s play (Socrates) was ‘subtly different’ from that of the classical tradition. Its ‘modern’ turn, however, was far from sacrilegious. According to Courage, Bax’s work contained all the necessary ‘condensation’ of Platonic ideas.77 To Courage, Bax’s play was well-served by its serious engagement with classical scholarship. Indeed, it drew from academic treatises that Courage was himself familiar with – Benjamin Jowett’s nineteenth-century translation of The Dialogues of Plato included.78

As with so many of his class and generation, Courage’s grasp of classical narrative was ‘foundational’ to his self-conception.79 Ancient Greek culture, though, seemed to
offer – if anything – an idealised form of homosexuality. Much like Courage’s representations of martial masculinity explored in Chapter One, this standard of manliness frequently proved elusive. Such realisations worsened his sense of abjection:

[I went] this afternoon [to] the British Museum and made a point of gazing – for the hundredth time – on the countenance of Queen Nefret-iti [sic] [...] Purposely avoided going into the room containing Greek statues of young men. Perfection like that humiliates me, and the physical side of it wakes up a state of sensual libido that tortures me.\(^80\)

Overall, however, classical ideals held mostly positive sway over Courage’s conception of self. Courage heard how the classical Greeks had thrived in a time where culture was ordered according to a wholly different moral code. Norman Douglas, for instance, suggested it was only with the rise of Christianity that ‘sin’ and ‘duty’ were brought into uneasy orbits – reformulating in the process the constellations of meaning surrounding intimacy and the human body. In Douglas’s \textit{Fountains in the Sand} (a copy of which Courage gave to Brasch in the 1930s) Courage read how the Greek sensibility for beauty encompassed an appreciation for all things pleasing to the human psyche.
Figure 4: One of several images of Greek male youths that Courage kept in his scrapbook of newspaper and magazine clippings. [MS-0999/141, S12-505e, Hocken Collections, Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of Otago]
Figure 5: Courage travelled with friends to Greece in 1926, having completed his studies at Oxford University at the end of that year. Here is a small marble flake he took from the Parthenon. This trip, and Greek culture more generally, continued to exert a profound influence over Courage’s imagination throughout his life. [MS-0999/189, S12-505f, Hocken Collections, Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of Otago]
This Epicurean spirit combined the best of the nineteenth-century aesthete and the careful sensitivities of the modern invert. As the archetype for these later cultural forms, ‘the Greek’ was a man possessed of ‘pleasurable inspiration’ for the natural and sensual world, a ‘connoisseur’ of both ‘love and expression’.

Other texts seemed to confirm these views. Courage was strongly in favour of Aldous Huxley’s humanist perspectives on the so-called ‘Greek temperament’. Courage read and carefully transcribed Huxley’s views on the ‘harmonious Greek man’ his 1928 novel *Point Counter Point* – a figure who shared the male invert’s privileged understanding of the world. Like the invert, the Greek man struck ‘a balance’ between rationalism and the passions. For Huxley, the ‘Greek man’ was ‘not such a fool as to want to kill part of himself’, even if the ‘forces to be reconciled’ – those male and female aspects of self – appeared to be ‘intrinsically hostile’. Both aspects informed the ‘instinctive part of the whole being’, and thus formed humanity’s greatest chance for achieving self-understanding.

Courage signalled the power of literary works in both of these episodes. Here fictional narratives operated as more than mere fantasy-simulations of the real world. Courage’s use of sexologies appears far less frequently, however. Certainly, Courage had a more-than-passing understanding of sexology (as I have already suggested). His reading of Otto Weininger suggests that he was both aware of this body of literature, and read it on occasion. In other episodes, Courage indicated his conversance with the works of Havelock Ellis:

Last night I dropped in to see Carter. He usually has a mistress floating around his studio, but I found him laid up with mild dysentery [sic] and no mistress about. He tossed me across a brown book. ‘Have you read that?’ It was *Vol IV: Sex in Relation to Society*. By Havelock Ellis. ‘No’, I said, ‘I haven’t; but of course Ellis – ...’

It seems that Courage drew back from a critique of Ellis at the last minute. And his admission only serves to suggest that he hadn’t read that particular volume. Overall, however, any evidence of widespread consumption of these sexologies is sparse to say the least. It is possible that Courage did not record these reading experiences.
Equally, Courage may have gained this information in other-than-textual means – through interactions with men like Carter, for example, who had, themselves gained first-hand insight from these texts.

One senses Courage’s knowledge in less explicit ways, perhaps – through turns of phrases, the deployment of meaning, and the application of specific terminologies, for example. Terms like ‘phallus-worship’, ‘narcissism’ (later adopted by Freud) and ‘inversion’ itself could well have arrived through Courage’s exposure to Ellis. Courage’s accounts betray, too, the tone and vocabulary endemic to scholarly accounts of sexuality. Courage used these scientific ideas of sexuality to deflect pejorative meanings of ‘deviance’ at several instances throughout the 1920s and ‘30s.

Sexological ideas coloured Courage’s portrayal of human sexuality in 1928, for example, when he railed against the inability of ‘man’s law’ to acknowledge the ‘thousand ramifications of sex’ in everyday life.86 Courage borrowed from the language of science (and nascent psychology too) to describe same-sex attracted men not as ‘perverted’, but as ‘inverted’.87 Courage paralleled much then-contemporary sexological work in his view that male inverts had a ‘detached view of women’ and an ‘intimate’ appreciation ‘of men’.88

Following Weininger, Courage wrote, too, how ‘sex reside[d]’ to a greater degree ‘in the male’.89 This presumption dismissed women as stable objects of sexual life since they were excluded biologically from ‘phallus power’; a quality generated ‘most plainly’ in men, irrespective of their psycho-sexual makeup.90 Such statements indicate the sorts of tracts that Courage would have read in order to perceive sexuality within these emerging scientific paradigms. Here the language of science gave rational reinforcement to social distinctions based on sexual preference. The privileging of sex over gender meant that Courage could not be divested completely of patriarchy.

While other social scientists, like Hermann Graff Keyserling, wrote of the hereditary ‘repression’ of the ‘manly traits’ in most male inverts, Courage’s reading of sexology seems far more nuanced and idiosyncratic.91 Courage’s responses illustrate his intervention in forging a much more congenial picture of sexuality than
might otherwise have been possible. This did not mean that Courage rigidly tailored his views to each sexual theory as he encountered it. Significant disparities existed between schools of thought; and Courage’s own life progression, much like our own, did not always follow a linear trajectory. Overall, however, and judging from the extent of Courage's references, it is fair to say that literary narratives, rather than sexological ones, were never far from Courage's frame of reference.

This could perhaps be explained by the very different value given to literary materials in Courage's time. As we have already established, Courage's status as a literary man meant these sources held a special position in Courage's cultural iconography. Added to this, cultural commentators like Julie Abraham point to literature's 'cultural authority' in the decades before Stonewall. Narratives during this period held more than fictive relevance, and were consumed in profoundly different ways. This salience, Abraham suggests, waned only at the latter part of the twentieth century – well after Courage's death in 1963.

Letters from Ronnie Peter (who lived in Anama, a town near the Mt. Somers home of Courage's grandmother Ida Peache) hint at the kinds of texts read by Courage and the men of his class and generation. As I show in later chapters, Ronnie and James were intimately involved during Courage's time in New Zealand (before Courage's initial migration to England in 1923), and it is likely that Ronnie may have been the lover referred to in the verse vignette that opened this thesis. Peter appears in a number of Courage's published stories, often under the name Peter Fitzgerald (the short story 'Guest at the Wedding', and Courage's 1956 novel The Call Home being two key examples I refer to later). Courage's 1952 novel Fires In the Distance is dedicated to Peter and his sister Rosamond (along with the London writers Lettice and Barbara Cooper). It is likely that the protagonist's romantic interest in the explicitly homosexual Leo Donovan of that story is it at least partly based on Courage's experience with Peter.

Aside from being intimately attached and Courage's creative muse, the pair shared many authors in common, and most of the books Peter referred to existed in Courage's collection as well. Peter was reading Laurance Lyon's The Pomp of Power when he wrote to Courage in June of 1923. Lyon's monograph about the signing of
the Treaty of Versailles in France (only five years earlier) was augmented by a
‘number of novels’ and the autobiography of well-known libertine (and mother of
the future British prime minister) Lady Randolph Churchill. One of the most
glamorous figures of her day, Lady Churchill was personally acquainted with many
of the literary sensations that men like Courage and Peters most admired (Peters
was particularly taken with Churchill’s ‘paint[ing] [of] a very charming letter from
Oscar Wilde’).96

Courage’s confidant was even more fulsome in his identification of literary
material in a letter written to Courage two years later:

I read mostly modern stuff. A change from of old, you will agree, and
the authors I like best at this moment are Aldous Huxley and Beverley
Nichols. His ‘lude’ [sic] is simply delightful. Philip Gibbs is another
whom I read all I can of, and I am still hoping shortly to read ‘In a
Garden of the Unforgotten’ or some such picturesque title by J. F.
Courage.97

Beverley Nichols was a British homosexual, and his 1920 Prelude contained ‘subtle
gay undertones’.98 Combined with Courage’s own identification – with Rupert
Brooke (who visited New Zealand in 1913), Katherine Mansfield, Oscar Wilde,
Walter Pater, William Shakespeare, André Gide and Charles Baudelaire, to name but
a few – his earliest reading material held an array of cultural representations that
touched on themes of sex and sexuality.

Courage was particularly enamoured of the work of French writer Marcel Proust.
Like Mansfield, Proust advocated for the use of real life in writing fiction. While
Mansfield’s past required little in the way of subterfuge, Proust was a much more
productive go-between for Courage. Proust’s work indicated, for example, how to
overcome the editorial realities of narratives coloured by the male homoerotic. In
1930 Courage recorded beginning work on ‘a sort of fictional autobiography’ in the
‘manner of Proust’.99 ‘I find that many things that I have stored in [my] memory
have now become profoundly interesting and significant to me’, Courage wrote one
afternoon in May.100 Entitling his story The Promising Years, the narrative was in
many ways a failure in managing the process of cultural negotiation. (Indeed, The
Promising Years was the first of several such failures. Reader for Cape T. S. Eliot suggested too that the publication of a homosexual novel in Britain was not possible at the time. I look more closely at these complexities in Chapter Six of this thesis.)

Other journal entries highlight how Proustian narrative filtered Courage’s perspectives of the world. A manservant boiling lobsters in a kitchen, for example, was likened to ‘Françoise in Proust’s book’ – a figure who kills a chicken with shrill, almost pagan-like bloodlust. Elsewhere Courage wrote effusively on Proust’s Time Regained (the final volume of his semi-autobiographical In Search of Lost Time, or Remembrance of Things Past). Courage trembled ‘with pleasure’ upon reading the book’s chapter-headings when the novel arrived by post on the 17th of May 1931. Proust’s ability to ‘dislodge the morally didactic’ with claims of ‘life as art and spectacle’ garnered Courage’s considerable respect and helped to bolster, too, Courage’s views on nonconforming and artistic sensibilities. Proust’s inverts were sexually whole and organically sensitive; figures valued for their ‘own kind of beauty’. 

Judging from the extent of Courage’s engagement one senses that Proust offered Courage some of the most sustained views on same-sex love and attraction. Proust’s ideas on sexuality were remarkably holistic, taking into account contemporary and historical perspectives, including borrowings from classical narrative and mythology. As I will explore later in this thesis, Proust formed – along with other same-sex attracted literary men like Wilde and Gide – a sustained and very particular revisioning of the past in Courage’s narratives.

Proust’s invocation in A Way of Love (1959) – Courage’s explicitly homosexual novel – added a deliberately legitimising force to the narrative. Proust and other men were mobilised in the story to indicate the central protagonist Bruce’s much wider cultural heritage. Bruce is merely the latest incarnation in a much older genealogy of respectable literary and artistically-inclined homosexuals. In Courage’s own private world, Proust’s ideas on sexual identity – as well as his own life narrative – held considerable sway. Proust’s views of same-sex love in Sodom and Gomorrah, for example, offered Courage comfort while he recovered from his separation from Fleet. He read how the pressures of external society meant that
inverts found real love only rarely. Courage's relationship with Fleet was therefore of considerable consolation. 'Mutual love' was 'rare' and 'nigh impossible', Proust wrote. It was 'something extraordinary, selective and 'profoundly necessary'.

It is interesting that Courage did not draw more from the explicitly queer literature of his time. Historian George Chauncey identifies a number of homosexual novels in the early 1930s. This includes Blair Niles's *Strange Barber* (1931), André Tellier's *Twilight Men* (1931), and Charles Henri Ford and Parker Tyler's *The Young and Evil*, amongst others. Courage's silence may be a condemnation of sorts – reflecting disinterest, perhaps, in the kinds of narratives that were produced during this era. While literary expert John Loughery notes that the 1930s saw an outpouring of 'lesbian' representations in print and onstage, men who wished to see similar male-male productions were much less fortunate. By and large, Loughery suggests, the 'new literature [of the 1930s] inevitably reflected the crassness of the fashionable interest in deviance' and the 'hatred of homosexuals felt by society at large'. These texts distressed and angered many homosexual readers, and were written largely for heterosexual audiences. It was not until the 1940s that Courage mentions any 'authentically' queer productions of note. And it is likely that these sorts of stories guided Courage's own ideas about what a 'homosexual novel' should look and feel like.

While a sizeable pulp industry had emerged in America and Great Britain by the 1950s, Courage showed greater interest in serious narratives that shed 'sympathetic' light on legitimising 'homosexual experience'. Stories like Gore Vidal's 1948 novel *The City and the Pillar* showed homosexual figures in far more ennobling contexts than many of its predecessors. Vidal depicted homosexuals as resilient in the face of prejudice and stereotype (interestingly, homosexual figures here operate as conventionally-masculine, not the inverted-feminine types of earlier narratives). Other novels, like Christopher Isherwood's so-called Berlin stories (reprinted in 1953) carefully eschewed questions of homosexuality's psychological or social dysfunction, and Isherwood also played down attempts to sensationalise depictions of homosexuality in contemporary culture.
Courage was most taken by narratives that spoke of homosexuality in tones of dignity and self-restraint. Writers hoped that these sorts of stories would produce sympathetic understanding of the ‘homosexual’s plight’ and the novels’ protagonists. These sorts of reactions were apparent in a letter to Brasch in 1947, and formed, for both men, part of an ongoing discussion about homosexuality that lasted the course of many years (their exchange included views on various homosexual reform efforts, and Courage’s coverage of homosexual scandals like those mentioned above). Novels like Charles R. Jackson’s Fall of Valor (1946) held special revelatory power. These postwar narratives rendered visible homosexual ‘realities’ for the first time and, as historian John D’Emilio suggests, helped generate group cohesion amongst homosexual men who took these depictions of homosexuality as truthful.\textsuperscript{115} Courage wrote glowingly of the novel:

\begin{quote}
Jackson’s story is well written and [the subject] well handled; a tragic theme – about a college professor who falls in love with a soldier in Maine, during the war. Both the professor and the soldier are married, which adds complications of the most appalling sort. The book, which could so easily be revolting, isn’t anything of the kind.\textsuperscript{116}
\end{quote}

Jackson’s narrative resonated with Courage because of its restrained candour. It did not feature the crass or sexually explicit material of the less ‘literary’ mass-produced gay pulps, and it walked a fine line between sexual frankness and respectability. Like Vidal’s City and the Pillar, Fall of Valor depicted a middle class world that Courage could relate to. And Jackson painted the kind of sympathetic (or ‘tragic’) figure that Courage expected to see in prose.\textsuperscript{117} Courage’s suggestion that the same story might easily be told in much less restrained tones reflected his own distaste of sexual intimacy – that most private of issues – discussed publicly (see my more detailed discussion of this in Chapter Five).

Indeed, and as we will see in the following sections, Courage was much more interested in narratives that explored the often-harrowing experience of being sexually other, and the deeper, psychological ramifications that flowed from this condition. These narratives give valuable insight into the manifestations of
homosexuality-in-practice and shed light on the deeper psychiatric fault-lines that  
‘explained’ how men came to become homosexual in the first place.

**Psychiatric narratives**

Chapter One touched on the effects of pathologising discourses on Courage’s  
identity. It showed how scripted ideas surrounding medicine – the treatment of  
same-sex intimacies as a ‘disorder’ especially – had emerged in Courage’s sphere of  
understanding from the late 1940s, and followed on from the aftermath of his  
mental breakdown in 1950.¹¹⁸ Medical experts viewed homosexuality as a symptom  
of wider psychological dysfunction and saw same-sex intimacies as the  
manifestation of repressed sexual development in childhood. It was this psycho-  
sexual reality, clinicians suggested, that invariably led many such men to seek out  
‘masochistic’ sexual gratification with members of their own sex. It also inhibited  
their efforts to achieve fulfilling lives – and would do so until the underlying  
childhood trauma could be addressed in psychotherapy.

I will return to these notions in greater detail in my exploration of the body and  
intimacy in Chapters Four and Five respectively. Some of these themes, though, can  
be foregrounded by a consideration of text. Courage’s reliance on certain key  
narratives illustrates the role literature played in informing his sense of bodily  
experience. It shows, too, that pathologising ideas of the self were not simply gained  
through interactions with Dr. Larkin and other medical men (although, of course,  
these meetings helped Courage acquire and modify his notions of psycho-sexual  
development).

Courage’s use of medical narrative shows how, in reality, homosexual men were  
ever reliant on a single vector of knowledge in constructing their own self-  
conception. In fact, men were active agents in their own destinies and could not be  
fully divested of their ability to acquire and experiment with knowledge from a  
range of cultural materials. Courage’s own responses indicate how texted narrative  
could be mobilised in personal study to confirm the efficacy of Larkin’s medical  
interventions. At other times, Courage shows how the same source of knowledge
could be used to contest the authority of the psychiatrist. Here objections could be raised and the psychiatrist’s very professional integrity brought into disrepute.

Aside from a brief professional dalliance with another medical man soon after Courage’s initial breakdown, Larkin remained Courage’s chief psychiatric physician from the early 1950s onwards. Judging from Courage’s own representations of the man, Larkin was essentially a classic Freudian. He employed both talking therapy and psychoanalysis in combating Courage’s perceived defects, and made occasional forays into Jungian philosophy as well. Courage was invited to verbalise his thoughts on a range of matters. This included the act of making free associations in therapy, the discussion of dreams and fantasies, and, always, as stated in Chapter One, to express aggression towards Larkin as the so-called parent-substitute.¹¹⁹

Courage had long been aware of psychology’s growing place in the world, and his decision to pursue psychoanalysis would have been a well-informed one. Many of his friends, for example, were adherents of various psychiatric paradigms, and many were also engaged in psychoanalysis. As I show below, Courage was also well-versed in much Freudian psychology from his own study of the written material. His journal and correspondence make frequent asides to Freudian ideas and philosophies, and we can see that Courage had a sophisticated understanding of both Freud and Jung well before 1950.

Courage turned to Freud in 1941, for example. Amid the turmoil of war, Courage read Freud partly for his intellectual rigour, but also an antidote to his growing malaise:

I always thank Heaven when I can be so busy [working in the bookshop] that I simply haven’t time to think about myself – for when I do, my private life – to be quite frank – seems a lonely and rather arid business, worsened by a wartime winter. According to the Gospel of St. Freud (whose ‘Civilization and its Discontents’ I have been reading lately) the only three things that reconcile mankind to the stark misery of existence are work, love (more particularly genital love, but also in a wider sense philanthropy and emotional politics) and intoxicants (the love of art coming, by the way, as a side-issue of love, not of opium or brandy!). I must say that I am inclined to agree
with the old bird. Anyway, he makes stimulating reading for an evening by the gas-fire, with a November fog outside.\textsuperscript{120}

Freud provided insight and support in ways that Courage found stimulating and applicable to his own experience. It is difficult to surmise just how much of this information Courage assimilated into his own daily scripted behaviour, although the painting of ‘psychologically convincing’ characters in many of his published stories point to the influence of Freudian ideas in fairly profound ways. As we will see later, this guided Courage’s depictions of family life, his portrayal of infantile psychologies (as repressive and disfiguring, for example), even the use of men’s fractured mental states to signal the presence of homosexuality in adults. Examples include the homicidal Adam of 1945’s\textit{ Uncle Adam Shot A Stag}, or the deeply traumatised Lewis Kendal in 1950’s\textit{ Desire Without Content} – to name a few.

In practice Courage saw Freudian knowledge as personally and socially enabling. Courage wrote strenuously in 1960, for example, that Freud’s ‘greatest contributions to humanist knowledge’ had been to ‘ma[ke] legitimate’ the ‘suffering’ of the ‘neurotic person’.\textsuperscript{121} The act of speaking about one’s problems was suddenly transformed into something much more socially acceptable – even if these confessions were confined to the psychiatrist’s couch.

These developments had a profound impact upon middle-class individuals who could afford these kinds of interventions. As Chris White has suggested, the language of science offered new means for divesting the more disfiguring aspects of the heteronormative.\textsuperscript{122} Even if homosexuality was a condition ‘to be corrected’, the stance of medical men was still a progressive one.\textsuperscript{123} Medical discourses alleviated questions of men’s culpability since claims of ‘affliction’ and ‘personal suffering’ (all associations Courage made from this period) recast homosexuals not as monsters but as social unfortunates.

Courage’s reading mobilised the heroic qualities of medical men, both as advocates of social change but also as scientific experts who offered crucial insight to those men who lacked, it seemed, the ability to perceive their own inner-workings. In doing so, Courage connected ideas of interior consciousness with
religious or spiritual scripts. Courage’s reading of the spiritually effusive work of romantic poets, even some biblical tracts, continually traced the mysterious complexities of man’s internal makeup. Courage inscribed in his ‘Diary of a Neurotic’ (the title he gave to his journal for the period 1960 to 1961) an epigraph taken from George Bryon’s ‘Manfred’, for example. This accentuated these connections between the psychological and the spiritual by suggesting that ‘each is his own origin of ill and end, his own time and place’.124

As far as Courage was concerned the psychiatrist was imbued with quasi-divine associations. Courage mentions, for example, how his past stood between him and psychological ‘deliverance’. He considered the psychiatrist to be the source of providence and personal reconciliation. That vast father-figure, so disapproving, rises between me and salvation’, Courage suggested. This is ‘a black cloud’, Courage wrote, one that weighed him down with ‘impotence and inertia’.125 In other places Courage spoke hopefully of Dr. Larkin’s ‘salvation love’ but lamented the ‘[s]trange fluctuations of trust, despair, [and] apprehension’ that so often plagued questions of faith. He closed the entry with words taken from Psalm 130: ‘[d]e profundis clamavi’, or, ‘from the depths I cried’.126

Such formulations suggested Courage’s belief in the power of medical men to reform the internal breakages of their patients. Much like in a divine intervention both ‘makers’ uncovered an individual’s secret inner workings, absolving, if necessary, various failings and transgressions and, at least in Freudian treatment as well as in Christian humanist contexts, paved the way to wholeness through personal forgiveness and self-understanding.

Religious ideas bled elsewhere into Courage’s narratives of the mid-twentieth century. Notions of pain, for example, functioned in much the same way as in some Christian philosophies that posited suffering as necessary and Christ-like (in the Dark Night of the Soul, for example).127 Courage reflected the texted narratives he had been reading by suggesting that ‘perspective’ and some sense of ‘cause and effect’ could be gained only through ‘sweat and desperation’ upon the cruciform image of ‘the couch’.128
For the most part, though, Courage maintained his own role – both on the couch and in his journals – in ordering and making sense of scripted associations offered by psychiatry. Courage’s journal testifies to the fact that his encounters with Larkin were frequently heated interactions. Courage’s view of the psychiatrist did not absolve Larkin of the responsibility of explaining medical precepts and insights. In fact, Courage’s own reading of medical texts meant that he could contest these views far more effectively than many of his peers. Courage challenged Larkin’s professional assessments on several occasions by drawing from notable psychological texts and ideas. Such strategies were potent since this was where Larkin drew much of his clinical authority and professional scripted behaviour.

Of course, Larkin could dismiss Courage’s objections as ‘non-rational’, or reframe them as the product of ‘self-analysis’ – a sign that Courage refused to yield control to his therapist:

After a week-end of considerable suffering I went to Dr. L. this morning at ten for my Monday session. ‘I’m getting worse, not better,’ I told him at once. I had taken off my jacket because of the heat (Dr. L. wore an oatmeal-coloured coat). ‘All this process is useless,’ I said and began to weep on the couch. ‘I don’t get any love, anywhere, least of all here ... Your attitude is simply hostile to me – it’s anti-love.’ [...] And I went on: ‘I’ve been reading Suttie’s “Origins of Love and Hate.”’ I thought I’d catch Dr. L. out. ‘Yes,’ he said. ‘I used to know Suttie, a very kind man. But he wrote his book a long time ago, in 1935.’ ‘It’s valid, all the same. I mean about the analytical relationship being a disguised love-relationship. The analyst provides love.’ ‘Yes,’ Dr. L. agreed, after a second’s pause. ‘Well, I don’t feel the love – only a great anxiety at its absence. The situation defeats itself, with you.’\[129\]

Courage mobilised Suttie’s *Origins of Love and Hate* with some deliberation. Suttie’s views contrasted with Freud’s psychoanalytical approach to identity and emphasised the neurotic nature of maternally derived separation-anxiety. Suttie, by contrast, gave primacy to love and sociability – and he saw psychology as potentially independent from the human sex drive. Courage’s dissent therefore carefully spoke to these divergences in professional opinion. It gave robust reinforcement to his
determined opposition to treatment, focusing on the nature of transference and the emotional tenor of the doctor-patient relationship.

Elsewhere medical texts gave Courage respite from the disaffecting impact of clinical intervention. While Courage derived some relief in psychoanalysis, in practice he found his sessions with Larkin distressing, and a lasting ‘cure’ was forever elusive. Courage wrote in 1960 that his reading of Freud was a necessary aspect of self-administered therapy. Here he located renewed insight into his ‘own situation’. Courage held ‘re-reading Freud’ and other theorists to be an antidote to the ‘extremities of despair’. Delving into Freud’s The Ego and the Id Courage recognised his ‘own case’ in Freud’s discussion of ‘obsession states and melancholia’:

Yes! And I see now (I’d lost sight of it this week) just what Dr. L. is trying to do: to reverse the forces (affects) that built-up this raging ego-ideal: to re-direct the forces, rather, onto the original object (the mother, but by transference-projection Dr. L. himself). Hence this constant adjuration that I should attack him, fight him (‘when in doubt, shout’ – ‘make the rafters ring’ – ‘the more you assail me the more I’ll love you’, and so forth, in a hundred ways). From the clinical point of view he is perfectly right, and is following Freud to the letter. It all sounds, in theory and on paper, so simple.

Courage is reminded by Freud of his tendency toward ‘narcissistic inaccessibility’, converting his ‘need for love’ into an ‘evasive mechanism’ of the superego. Rather than displace Larkin’s approach, though, this particular reading of Freud confirmed Larkin’s course of treatment as correct. Larkin’s approach conformed to the ‘clinical point of view’ – even if, as Courage suggested, this left much unsaid about the patient’s ‘morbid state’ of anxiety at the close of each session.

Reforming narratives

‘I counsel myself, having sucked sense from Freud, the source’, Courage wrote of his personal reading of psychology. In doing so, Courage performed those intellectual manoeuvres necessary to insert himself within Freud’s field of reference – mobilising the sensitivities and emotional dysfunctions that ‘signalled’ his mental incapacity. Having located his condition in Freud’s diagnostic for neurotic identity
Courage wrote of feeling ‘much better’.\textsuperscript{135} Reading once again supplied the ever-elusive equanimity that Courage sought in the therapy. In reading Freud first hand Courage felt he could better ‘reason’ and draw ‘narcissistic satisfaction’ from what seemed, in Freud’s words, a ‘gained and valuable insight’.\textsuperscript{136}

As we have already seen, Courage’s ability to exploit his own life conditions within various literary frames formed a major aspect of his approach to consuming narrative. It also informed his ability to take personal meaning from texted sources and to locate meaningful cultural archetypes. Courage’s literary leanings, as I have argued, clearly had relevance beyond the purely recreational. Their application, though, could be invoked in surprising ways.

Responding to a request for a biographical note in a forthcoming British anthology of fiction in 1951, for example, Courage wrote of his ‘new interest’ in the ‘psychological side of the human character’.\textsuperscript{137} His singling out of Ernest Hemingway, D. H. Lawrence and Proust as central influences – alongside the work of psychologists (Freud and others) – was more than mere serendipity.\textsuperscript{138}

Courage’s reading of these men’s narratives (both literary and biographical) continually re-worked associations between his own experience and those of his literary heroes. His reading of life narrative, in particular, nourished his belief that artistic, non-conforming, and even homosexual identities were connected by an interior life much like his own. Courage expounded this idea to Larkin one afternoon in 1960, expressing his conviction that he and Proust shared a common psychological make-up. Reading a biography of Proust’s life, Courage reasoned that Proust, like himself, had the ‘same dependency on his mother’ and the ‘same kinds of neuroses’.\textsuperscript{139} Larkin was quick to point out Proust’s much deeper repression, conceding only that their experiences were ‘similar’.\textsuperscript{140} Courage, though, pressed on. Courage wanted his mother ‘as much’ as Proust wanted his. And both continually needed ‘love all the time’ or were ‘only ever half alive’.\textsuperscript{141}

Courage detected comparable qualities in D. H. Lawrence’s psychology as well. Courage stated quite emphatically that he knew ‘Lawrence was a homosexual’ after reading Middleton Murry’s \textit{Son of Woman} (1931) in 1934.\textsuperscript{142} In doing so, Courage supplied the missing rubric for detecting Lawrence’s sexual preferences. Courage
writes that Murry ‘nearly let the cat out of the bag’ but had shied away from an explicit declaration of Lawrence’s sexuality. Though many biographers spoke of Lawrence’s ‘asexuality’ Courage saw queerness writ large in Lawrence’s ‘appalling struggles’ and disdain for women. As I discussed in Chapter One, Courage also saw Lawrence as a source of interest for his deviation from dominant scripts of masculinity. Like Courage, Lawrence was haunted by a desire for normative masculinity frequently beyond his reach. Lawrence also possessed the ‘genius’ of the invert: that creative impulse that was located only in artists of great repute.

He detected Lawrence’s queer sensibilities elsewhere too. Courage considered Lawrence’s The Plumed Serpent almost ‘repulsive’ for its sensual depictions of male sexuality, for example:

The book reeks of sweat and blood and semen, and the heat of a generative sun seems to burn into the brain. But I enjoy immensely some of his phrases. For instance […] he cries out against ‘The morbid fanaticism of the non-integrate,’ and he mentions a dark red flower as being ‘velvety, the colour of half-dried blood.’

While discussions of Lawrence’s ‘genius’ left Courage with a self-described ‘inferiority-feeling’, his sense for Lawrence as an individual was one of absolute familiarity. Reading Richard Aldington’s 1950 treatise D. H. Lawrence: Portrait of a Genius, But … Courage concluded that Lawrence was a kindred spirit. This familiarity was one based not only on a shared sexual persuasion but on a much broader psychological scale. Courage wrote of experiencing profound empathy for the ‘persecuted writer’. Like Mansfield before him, he believed he and Lawrence shared a special ‘inner-quality’. Courage wrote of his nagging conviction (experienced whenever he read of Lawrence’s experience) that Lawrence ‘alone could have understood him’.

Although Lawrence’s ‘homosexual credentials’ were perhaps less solid than Proust’s, in reality both held a fairly strong homosexual readership, and both had been read as sexually ‘other’. The positions of other figures important to Courage’s cultural register were much less clear-cut. Courage’s material is veritably saturated
with praise for the Polish composer Frederic Chopin, for example. Courage considered Chopin ‘the poet of the piano’.\textsuperscript{150} He expressed the same ‘inexpressible delicacy’ as men like Shelley and an almost superhuman ability to ‘convert words into music’.\textsuperscript{151} Having arrived in England in 1923 without a piano, Courage frequently rented instruments (before buying his own Bösendorfer in 1927) in order to indulge ‘a rapturous time playing Chopin and Scriabin’.\textsuperscript{152} The piano was his ‘confidant’, and Chopin his greatest muse and companion. Marking the anniversary of Chopin’s death, Courage placed the composer alongside several other closely admired artists, expressing a relatedness that went beyond mere musical rapport:

The anniversary of Chopin’s death. I have thought of him constantly all day, and played a dozen of the best mazurkas to his memory. To think that old Queen Victoria had the unbelievable luck to hear him play in London in 1848 makes me exasperated with jealousy. Dear Chopin, how we would have got on together. You, Shelley, Charles Lamb, Tchekov, and Rupert Brooke I should have enjoyed meeting in the flesh – and I have not forgotten Katherine Mansfield. She also.\textsuperscript{153}

Chopin was clearly more than a cultural icon for Courage. As with Lawrence, Courage felt certain that his artistic genius signalled an inevitably inverted constitution. ‘I think Chopin has the most interesting biography I have ever read’, Courage wrote in a self-censored entry in 1921, stating in a paragraph immediately before the excision that ‘his whole life’ breathed a ‘strange romance’.\textsuperscript{154} Several years later Courage conceived of himself as a young girl ‘whose spiritual lover’ was ‘always Chopin’.\textsuperscript{155} Here the eroticised figure of Chopin emerged ‘pensively through the divine mist of a Scherzo’, or spoke prophet-like in the ‘heart-soothing phrases of the F major Nocturne’.\textsuperscript{156}

Courage’s re-reading of the musician’s life reinterpreted Chopin’s history in strategically significant ways. Courage’s view of Chopin invariably conformed to the more familiar outline of artistic and inverted genius. These manoeuvres excluded any conception of Chopin’s intimate relationships with women – most notably with the French writer George Sand, for example – and, indeed, deliberately marginalised
the romantic capacity of women in Chopin’s life. In one final entry Courage wrote explicitly of Chopin’s probable homosexuality:

The plain fact is that Chopin would have been impotent with a woman. His whole character and his every act show him [thus] … His deepest feelings went out to Titus Woyciechowski, in youth. Chopin loved Titus as a woman loves a man – his letters to him are real love-letters […] Why has no biographer, with every psychological clue under his hand, never understood the salience […] All his love for smart and pretty women was just another sign of it: he could mix with them with heart untouched. ¹⁵⁷

It is of course possible that this strategy spoke more of Courage’s admiration than any intention of queering Chopin’s past for his personal benefit. Since Courage’s reading of inversion gave privileged status to the creative capacities of the invert it may be that Courage sought to accentuate Chopin’s ‘specialness’ by proposing his homosexual constitution.

While neither interpretation is self-excluding, a reading of Courage’s view of Chopin does seem to underscore his desire to affiliate (politically, and perhaps erotically) more closely with Chopin. Misunderstood and maligned in his own time, Courage again detected a profound and individuated likeness in a cultural forebear. Chopin’s sexual identity was quite clearly bound up in his psychological makeup: his ‘character and every act’, Courage suggested, encapsulated the psychic essence of a man who, Courage believed, loved the young Woyciechowski as a ‘woman loves a man’. ¹⁵⁸ Courage’s views were more than supposition, however. They were irreducible realities – ‘plain fact[s]’ that Chopin’s biographers had either overlooked or ignored outright. ¹⁵⁹

Courage perceived certain literary worlds through a personal lens too. In Jane Austen’s Emma, for example, Courage detected in Austen’s nineteenth-century Highbury the same ‘frigid moralists’ that peopled his own world.¹⁶⁰ Re-reading Northanger Abbey in 1962, Courage mused on the probable erotic tension between General Tilney and his son Henry. Such a reading took seriously the Freudian notions of sexual repression, and looked past the fact that Austen’s story predated
Freudian concepts by almost a century.\textsuperscript{161} Courage believed it ‘quite credible’ that Tilney was an ‘obsessional neurotic’. Read from this very idiosyncratic perspective Tilney ‘rationalised’ his dislike for Austen’s female protagonist on the basis of ‘money, position, [and] rank’.\textsuperscript{162} In reality, Tilney was ‘unconsciously in love’ with Henry.\textsuperscript{163}

It seemed that homosexuality manifested itself in a whole range of symptoms and behaviour. Literary narrative became an interesting space from which these psychological tensions played out under Courage’s carefully informed gaze. Of course, this did not mean that Courage could endlessly ‘invent’ scenarios to suit his needs or fantasies. There were limits to his narrative interventions. While Courage’s role as a classed, gendered and sexed reader mediated an expanse of possible meanings, these personal insights were never infinite.

In Henry James, for example, Courage saw a brilliant mind and wit. His painting of cultural landscapes, though, left much to be desired. James’s stories were entertaining, Courage suggested, but largely devoid of depth, and far from socially convincing. It seemed that James’s stories lacked Mansfield’s capacity for extracting life’s ‘hidden treasure’. ‘I read, I divine and I shudder’, Courage wrote of Henry James’s life.\textsuperscript{164} ‘Tragic, unbalanced, [and] sterile’: Courage was not able to say the same for James’s creative exploits.\textsuperscript{165} It seemed that the American (later British) writer suffered under the sexual norms of his time. ‘Even Jane Austen’s restricted scenery is better than this’, Courage wrote of James’s \textit{Portrait of a Lady}. ‘These people have brains (of a kind) and tongues’, Courage said, exasperated, ‘but what – oh what – has become of their genitals?’\textsuperscript{166}

\textbf{Conclusion}

In turns frustrated or inspired, Courage’s responses to narrative tell us much about the ways textual information was consumed and mobilised by individuals. To borrow from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Courage’s approach to textualities illustrates not so much whether ‘a particular piece of knowledge is true’ but how this knowledge functioned in particular times and contexts.\textsuperscript{167} Indeed, in Courage’s case we see how textual narrative often held absolute primacy. It supplied information
critical to his sense of place and identity. In real terms, texted sources acted as a compendium of knowledge. As collections of signs and symbols, texts became cultural repositories – sources from which meaning was both collected and produced.

In compelling and inescapable ways, narratives made knowable and accessible for Courage social ideas key to personal identification. Moreover, this same material allowed men to mediate for themselves the process of meaning-making – indicating how questions of agency manifested in the process of constructing conceptions of the self from seemingly innocuous – though pervasive – cultural sources. This chapter has shown that other aspects of consumption – the act of reading and the relationship between reader and text, for example – were just as crucial to understanding the process of self-identity as the individual narratives themselves.

We see, that, in one man’s eyes at least, all stories were not made alike. Individuals were highly selective in the kinds of narratives they chose to consume. And questions of subjectivity meant that individual narratives could be read from many perspectives. Such a process could be highly complicated. Just as identities change over time, so, too, do our approaches to understanding narratives. This meant that readers like Courage could, and did, return to particular texts – reconfirming particular meanings, or reconstructing new ones. This process was mediated by a raft of cultural paradigms and social norms, and always by the individual’s own subjectivity.

By expanding the scope of analysis to its widest limits we see that newspapers, poetry, biographies and prose were just as important as the more serious scientific treatises on homosexuality that emerged from the 1890s. My reading of Courage’s life so far illustrates how he travelled with specific texts in tow. It shows, too, that Courage knew where and how to access these materials while travelling. In doing so, Courage was never without reading material, and his interaction with literary worlds was practically ceaseless.

We can sense here something of the malleability of these social materials. The infinite variety of use and interpretation meant that storied sources functioned in remarkably multiple ways. On the one hand, literature (in the broadest sense) gave
Courage pleasure and a means of escape. On the other, these materials also cut across a swathe of social and cultural experience. By reading, Courage tracked specific phenomena – the treatment of homosexuals by the media, for example, or the complicated underpinnings of the human psyche. And here, too, Courage found new models for living. In doing so, Courage turned to predominantly literary sources. There he found archetypes for literary success (Mansfield) as well as culturally meaningful ways to perceive life, society and the sexual landscape (Wordsworth, Proust and others). In both recreational and instructive contexts, then, these materials formed a fundamental source of Courage’s ongoing self-conception.

As hinted here and elsewhere, Courage’s perspective onto the world was measured by particular social realities. Courage so often saw himself separate (or at least excluded) from the world around him. In reality, he could not have been more a part of it. Questions of space and traversal, for example, were just as central to Courage’s life experience as the imagined world of narrative. And physical space guided and amplified notions of citizenship and identity.

This chapter has already showed how spaces produced particular narrative possibilities. Specific cultural landscapes effectively mediated what could and could not be said, and Courage’s experience of space was located in these material contexts. As we shall see in the following chapter, Courage’s movement through various cultural zones provided access to new experiences, ideas and modes of understanding.

Just as Courage’s journals track his reaction to and use of scripted material, so too does he implicate the processes through which he negotiated and mediated life within these changing cultural contexts. These assessments were themselves unstable and subject to change, highlighting the volatility of experience, memory and representation in Courage’s own account of life. Courage’s experience of space – as well as the people who populated it – thus had a central bearing on his sense of self. As we shall see in Chapter Three, such a process indicates the complicated work involved in composing meaning from cultural relationships and specific zones of experience – national, international; domestic and professional.
Notes

1 Courage's journal entry for the 24th of April 1934 is appended with an excerpt from Katherine Mansfield's letters. Mansfield's views on writing confirmed his conviction that true artistic integrity lay in exhuming personal experience whatever the cost to the author. ‘The only way to live as a writer’, Mansfield asserted to South African novelist Sarah Gertrude Millin in 1922, was to ‘draw upon real familiar life – to find the treasure’. Mansfield had found that using the ‘intensely personal’ in writing promoted a special intimacy between author and audience. Courage agreed. Exposing what Mansfield called the author’s ‘secret life’ provided the means through which readers took experience ‘to themselves’ and ‘unders[tood] it as if it were their own’. See James Courage, Journal, 1932-1934, 24 April 1934, MS-0999/083, HC.

2 While her distinction as one of New Zealand’s most significant writers gave Katherine Mansfield special prestige at home, it is clear from Courage’s own material that the New Zealand writer remained a figure of unwavering admiration. Indeed, Courage’s earliest published novel, One House (1933), is in many ways a simulation of Mansfield’s style.

3 Scholars have described Katherine Mansfield as both bisexual and lesbian. Whichever the descriptor, it is clear than Mansfield had intimate relations with other women, many of whom she held in considerable esteem. See Sydney Janet Kaplan, Katherine Mansfield and the Origins of Modernist Fiction (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 25-6, 36-7, 88.

4 Courage, Journal, 1927-1929, 22 November 1927, MS-0999/079, HC.

5 Ibid.

6 Courage, Journal, 1932-1934, 19 November 1933, MS-0999/083, HC. (original emphasis).

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.


12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 Maynard, “‘Respect Your Elders, Know Your Past’”, p. 63.

15 While Courage’s understandings are at times fairly conventional (in his reading of inversion, for example) other responses reveal a high degree of personal investment, even (by modern standards, at least) considerable eccentricity in establishing views that were incongruous with accepted cultural interpretation. The interplay between text and reader, and the deployment of meaning and symbol in everyday life, is therefore an interesting and complex space from which to consider the process of Courage’s identity construction. By isolating key moments in time we can pinpoint not just the sources Courage used to conceive of his sense of self but also how these scripts were deployed as he moved through time and space.


19 David M. Halperin argues that historians ‘[m]ust direct [...] attention to the inescapable historicity of even the most innocent, unassuming, and seemingly objective of cultural representations’. Stories and story-telling would seem one of the most innocuous of cultural processes. It is also, as I have already suggested, entirely central to way in which human societies operate. See Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality And Other Essays* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 21.
While, in this excerpt, Courage is at pains to separate his parents along essentialising gendered lines (emplotting his father Frank Courage as being much more interested in hard, physical labour, for example), it is clear from personal letters that his father was also well-read and interested in literary fiction. This would have been in keeping with his social station as a farmer of more gentrified means, but could well have reflected the broader culture of the family too. Read in this light, Courage’s comments could be less a straightforward reflection of his family as he saw it, but rather an attempt to understand his own identity as a sexual invert.


Ibid.

This is particularly evident in Peache’s correspondence with Courage. Even after the publication of his first novel, Peache continued to express her wish that Courage emulate the lyric poetry made famous by Alfred Tennyson in works like ‘The Lady of Shallot’ and ‘The Highway Man’. Peache drew (by inference) a specific cultural hierarchy, elevating these cultural forms far above the modernist prose form that Courage largely produced. See Ida Florence Peache to James Courage, 21 March 1943, MS-0999/109, HC.


29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
33 Courage, Journal, 1929-1931, 18 December 1930, MS-0999/080, HC.
34 For her discussion of Richardson’s work see Catherine Pratt, Resisting Fiction: the Novels of Henry Handel Richardson (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1999).
35 Courage, Journal, 1929-1931, 21 December 1930, MS-0999/080, HC.
36 Courage spent large swathes of time studying literary and biographical materials and used various manuals to hone his grasp of Spanish before landing in South America. See Courage, Journal, 1929-1931, 28 December 1930, MS-0999/080, HC.
37 Courage, Journal, 1929-1931, 24 December 1930, MS-0999/080, HC.
38 Ibid.
40 Ibid.
41 For Courage, Browning was a discovery shaded with an ecstasy that bordered on the erotic. Here Courage quotes from his own poem. ‘Leap to the dream’ appeared in one of his earliest serious experiments with verse, probably written while studying at Oxford. It is not clear whether the full text survives. See Courage, Journal, 1920-1924, 20 November 1923, MS-0999/078, HC.
43 Courage, Journal, 1950-1959, HC, 7 January 1951, MS-0999/087, HC.
44 Courage, Journal (‘The Diary of a Neurotic’), 1960-1961, 12 September 1960, MS-0999/089, HC.
45 Ibid.
46 Courage fixated on two lines taken from William Wordsworth’s *Resolution and Independence*: ‘Fears and fancies thick upon me came;/ Dim sadness – and blind thoughts, I knew not,/ nor could name’. The lines themselves describe the social dislocation experienced by poets in their pursuit of literary vocations. For Courage, it characterised the very essense of neurotic experience and could easily be traced back to Wordsworth’s own childhood in North West England. See Ibid.

47 Ibid.


49 Ibid.


51 Here I concern myself with the mostly literary and non-medical texts that informed Courage’s scripted world; though, of course, knowledge does not always remain so neatly within pre-assigned categories. The breadth of material means that this assessment cannot be an exhaustive one. Instead I pinpoint some of the central sources drawn from Courage’s life traces.

52 Courage, Journal, 1927-1929, 20 August 1928, MS-0999/079, HC.

53 Ibid.

54 James Courage to Charles Brasch, 16 March 1954, MS-0996-003/042, HC.

55 Many historians suggest that such outcomes were integral to the creation of the Wolfenden Committee and the eventual decriminalisation of sexual intercourse between men in Britain in 1959. See Mary Abbott, *Family Affairs: A History of the Family in 20th Century England* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 92.

56 James Courage to Charles Brasch, 16 March 1954, MS-0996-003/042, HC.

57 Houlbrook, *Queer London*, p. 130.


‘Lord Montagu on the court case which ended the legal persecution of homosexuals’, *The Evening Standard* [online], 2 August 2010, available URL: 

Charles Brasch to James Courage, 22 November 1953, MS-0996-003/042, HC.


Ibid.

Ibid.

Courage, Journal, 1927-1929, 21 October 1927, MS-0999/079, HC.

Ibid.


Courage, Journal, 1927-1929, 13 September 1928, MS-0999/079, HC.

Ibid.

Courage’s personal desire here is mapped upon a landscape that only amplifies queer dislocation. Signs of human habitation remain spectral in quality. Other figures are distant, their connection to his world always tenuous at best. ‘[V]oices of lonely passion’ exist, but these other figures are continually beyond Courage’s field of perception – marooned in spaces of ceaseless and private self-isolation.


Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*, pp. 1, 47.


Courage, Journal, 1929-1931, 12 March 1930, MS-0999/080, HC.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Literary critic David M. Robinson has argued that certain narratives (Plato’s works included) acquired especially-fixed meaning in the construction of

80 Courage, Journal, 1927-1929, 18 September 1927, MS-0999/079, HC.
81 Courage, Journal, 1927-1929, 28 January 1928, MS-0999/079, HC.
82 Courage, Journal, 1927-1929, 23 December 1928, MS-0999/079, HC.
83 Ibid.
84 Courage appended his transcription with a quote from the seventeenth-century play, *Mustapha*, by Fulke Greville. The lines seemed to bear out for Courage Huxley’s much more recent views on the human condition: ‘What meaneth nature by these diverse laws?/ Passion and reason, self-division’s cause’. See Ibid.
86 Courage, Journal, 1927-1929, 31 May 1928, MS-0999/079, HC.
87 Ibid.
88 Ibid.
89 Ibid.
90 Ibid.
91 Courage records how some of Keyserling’s views – particularly that related to the inherited aspects of inversion – influenced his writing of *One House* (where the Wanklin sisters display inverted traits inherited from their sensitive and artistically-inclined father). For my detailed analysis of this novel and its hidden queer subtexts, refer to my discussion in Chapter Seven of this thesis. For Courage’s reading of Keyserling see Courage, Journal, 1920-1924, 23 March 1928, MS-0999/078, HC.
93 Indeed, as Julie Abraham points out, many sexologists were themselves interested in literary narrative. Havelock Ellis, for example, wrote on Shakespeare and Whitman. John Addington Symonds wrote poetry and literary criticism. Symonds’s privately published *A Problem in Greek Ethics* (1883) and *A Problem in Modern Ethics* (1891) both drew from literary analysis, while Edward Carpenter wrote

94 For a more detailed discussion of these texts see Chapter Seven of this thesis.

95 Ronnie Peter to James Courage, 10 June 1923, MS-0999/110, HC.

96 Ibid.

97 Ronnie Peter to James Courage, 27 May 1925, MS-0999/110, HC.


99 Courage, Journal, 1929-1931, 27 May 1930, MS-0999/080, HC.

100 Ibid.

101 Perhaps envisaging these problems, Courage wrote that the act of writing would be reward itself, and that recording an account of his childhood would at any rate be ‘good practice in composition’. See Ibid.

102 Courage, Journal, 1929-1931, 28 April 1930, MS-0999/080, HC.

103 Courage, Journal, 1931, 7 May 1931, MS-0999/081, HC.


109 Ibid.
112 Ibid.
116 James Courage to Charles Brasch, 29 December 1947, MS-0996-003/042, HC.
118 Courage does not provide a precise date for his mental collapse, only mentioning in late November 1950 that he had been a voluntary patient at Napsbury for the past six months. He also records his gratitude toward his friends and housekeeper for their ongoing material support. (He was temporarily living with local New Zealand writers Basil and Margaret Dowling. I look more closely at this relationship in Chapter Five.) It is from this period that Courage’s personal narrative becomes marked by depression, anxiety and abjection more generally. See Courage, Journal, 1950-1959, 25 November 1950, MS-0999/088, HC; Journal, 1950-1959, 28 November 1950, MS-0999/088, HC.
119 Larkin also supplied Courage with ongoing prescriptions for sodium amytal – a barbiturate derivative that was first synthesised in Germany in 1923. Sodium amytal was a common prescription drug used to combat depressive and nervous conditions, though it has since been discontinued in Britain as extended use can lead to long-term drug dependency. Courage was also invited to try an extended course

120 Courage, Journal, 1941-1946, 23 November 1941, MS-0999/086, HC.


122 White, Nineteenth-century Writings on Homosexuality, p. 3.


126 One of the so-called penitential psalms, Psalm 130 gives further force to Courage’s notions of personal deliverance through the workings of psychology and the psychiatrist. In deep sorrow, the speaker cries to God for mercy, asks forgiveness for his sins, and is delivered from extreme disaffection.


128 ‘Truth’ and ‘perspective’, though, were almost always suspended as some future reward, seldom gained in the here-and-now of Courage’s then-contemporary
experience, and usually dependant on the successful intersession of the psychiatrist. Courage wrote that, more often than not, ‘only the tiniest hew of salvation [was] visible’ during his sessions with Larkin. Courage, Journal, 1962-1963, 12 March 1963, MS-0999/091, HC.

129 Courage transposed events using ‘real world’ dialogue in most of these later episodes. See Courage, Journal (‘The Diary of a Neurotic’), 1960-1961, 8 August 1960, MS-0999/089, HC.

130 Courage, Journal (‘The Diary of a Neurotic’), 1960-1961, 10 September 1960, MS-0999/089, HC.

131 Ibid.

132 Ibid.

133 Ibid.

134 Ibid.

135 Ibid.

136 Ibid.

137 James Courage to Dan Davin, 28 August 1951, MS-5079-074, TL.

138 Ibid.

139 Courage, Journal (‘The Diary of a Neurotic’), 1960-1961, 14 November 1960, MS-0999/089, HC.

140 Ibid.

141 Courage, Journal (‘The Diary of a Neurotic’), 1960-1961, 14 November 1960, MS-0999/089, HC.

142 Courage, Journal, 1932-1934, 28 February 1934, MS-0999/083, HC.

143 Ibid.

144 Ibid.

145 Ibid.

146 Courage, Journal, 1927-1929, 27 April 1928, MS-0999/079, HC.

147 Ibid.

148 James Courage to Charles Brasch, 26 March 1950, MS-0996-003/042, HC.

149 Ibid.
Reading Texts

150 Courage, Journal, 1920-1924, 10 June 1920, MS-0999/078, HC.
151 Courage, Journal, 1920-1924, 19 June 1920, MS-0999/078, HC.
152 Courage, Journal, 1927-1929, 29 September 1927, MS-0999/079, HC.
154 Courage, Journal, 1920-1924, 10 June 1921, MS-0999/078, HC.
155 Courage, Journal, 1927-1929, 28 October 1928, MS-0999/079, HC.
156 Ibid.
158 Ibid.
159 Ibid.
160 Courage, Journal, 1927-1929, 5 January 1929, MS-0999/079, HC.
162 Ibid.
163 Ibid.
165 Ibid.
166 Ibid.
Chapter Three

‘All that Englishness has gone now, liquidated by New Zealandness’: Space, place and memory

Introduction: Lighted signs

James Courage arrived in London near the end of the European summer in 1923. His delight was palpable. Courage took up a Bachelor of Arts in English at St. John’s College at Oxford University, and completed a migration to the British centre that, as a nineteen year old, would have seemed fitting for a man of his class, age and temperament. Courage’s father Frank agreed only begrudgingly that he would not go on to manage the family sheep farm as James’s brother John would later do. His decision to send Courage ‘home’ to Britain reflected the popular perception of England as the centre of colonial life. London in particular was the seat of British governance; it was equally the centre of culture par excellence.¹

Courage made this northern sojourn to complete his education in the humanities. He already knew he wanted to be a creative writer, and had been writing stories in New Zealand long before his departure to London. These remained unpublished, but were shared sometimes with friends and confidants. Frank Courage probably did not envisage, however, how irrevocably his son would be affected by his overseas experience. This was a critical transformation but one that was not entirely attributable to Courage’s studies at the prestigious British college (where he’d eventually graduate with a second-class honours in 1927). Rather, Courage’s migration to London offered the young New Zealander an entirely unique set of social, sexual and professional opportunities.

Courage’s immediate assessment of the imperial centre contrasted starkly with the comparative quiet of provincial life in New Zealand. ‘Can’t you imagine the London streets at dusk’ Courage wrote in his journal on the 23rd September 1923, just days after his arrival.² The streets, ‘full of lights and hurrying people and men in the gutters’ suggested a frenetic energy that was uniquely metropolitan.³ Here were ‘the lighted signs of Piccadilly Circus’, the ‘glowing
theatres’ of the West End, and a scene of bustling cultural life.\textsuperscript{4} It seemed both overwhelming and somehow life-affirming: ‘imagine [...] somebody flying past in an opera hat and just around the corner coming on a beggar, one side of his face a great red scar, drawing with coloured chalks on the pavement the illuminated words “To Live” ...’.\textsuperscript{5}

Writing some years afterward, Courage reflected on 1930’s London as an ideal civilised world. Quoting British travel writer Robert Byron (who was himself homosexual) Courage considered the city to epitomise a uniquely English cultural prowess. At the centre there existed ‘a condition of life’ whose ‘end [was] freedom, the freedom of every man to be true to the light within him’.\textsuperscript{6} As the ultimate expression of an enabling and British ethos, London existed as a site of distinctly personal liberties. Here ‘a man [was] freer to consult his reason, or his prejudices’ than at ‘any other time in the world’s history’.\textsuperscript{7} Courage considered himself to be at the heart of this social order: ‘[Byron] expresses very well what I myself believe’.\textsuperscript{8} This was a society that saw the apparatus of the state as a ‘convenience’ (‘not an end’), where the ‘public will, fairly expressed’ was paramount, and the ‘freedom of body, thought and speech’ was sacrosanct unless ‘shown to contravene the law’.\textsuperscript{9}

These views of metropolitan life raise some interesting complications. They seem to reinforce – rather than contradict – the kinds of liberationist views this thesis seeks to upset. In my Introduction I explained how ‘liberationist discourses’ had led some New Zealand historians to equate London with a particular set of sexual freedoms, while simultaneously (and in my view, not always accurately) regarding New Zealand as a site of fierce and unremitting repression. Often without considering the experience of the men themselves, liberationist histories have tended to cast New Zealand as an inherently marginalising and disfiguring space. These representations incorporated most accounts of provincial and colonial life, and contrasted with the supposedly ‘enlightened’ attitudes of a more worldly metropolitan elite.

Courage’s characterisation of London undeniably renders metropolitan experience in favourable terms. Metropolitan vitality is immediately apparent in Courage’s initial view of the city as a space of light, glamour and cultural spectacle. In his later treatment London is superior not only to her smaller
colonial satellites but in implicit comparison to any other metropolitan centre as well (Paris and New York are some of the key contenders sidelined in Courage’s views here). Taken together, these depictions of the metropolis present London as an urban landscape from which a very particular kind of cultural citizenship becomes possible. In this zone of intellectual and sexual freedom, Courage inhabits a space far removed from New Zealand’s reputed puritanism. (He never returned to New Zealand after his final convalescence there from tuberculosis from 1933 to 1935.)

While Courage’s views of metropolitan life could quite easily support conventional assertions about New Zealand’s preliberation experience (as narrow, disfiguring and ultimately untenable, for example), Courage’s characterisation of space was, in reality, far more nuanced and unstable than any singular event (or events) can portray. By looking across Courage’s life narrative, it is evident that his experience of space was never so simple. Even in the examples drawn above, a certain equivocation persists. We see this in the density of persons, the maddening haste of its inhabitants, or the ceaseless mechanisations of commerce, for example. At other times Courage’s provisionality can be seen in his own ‘contravention’ of the law that prohibited intimacies between men, regardless of consent, in the years before the decriminalisation of homosexuality in Britain.

These kinds of ambiguities highlight Courage’s own ambivalences in conceptualising space, both metropolitan and peripheral. By looking at narratives of belonging and displacement we can see how Courage saw himself as both alien and citizen, empowered and disempowered by various social forces and spatialities. While questioning the monolithic representations common to the depictions of existence in both centre and periphery, Courage’s narrative is useful for indicating the potential incoherence evident in one man’s negotiation of space more generally.

Such an analysis involves more than a simple interrogation of Courage’s material life. As I will show in this chapter, certain spaces exerted an ongoing and powerful hold over Courage’s imagination. While Courage did not return to New Zealand after 1935, he revisited these spaces regularly in imagined scenarios and in memories of scenes he considered key to both his identity and sense of place.
Just as the meaning Courage gave to contemporary experience could itself be subject to acts of revision and realignment, so too could associations that had for the most part been consigned to the past.13

As I have hinted previously, Courage was remarkably well travelled, having spent considerable time in New Zealand, the United Kingdom, continental Europe (France and Switzerland in particular), South America and various places in between. Shipboard life was an interesting space in and of itself. Rather than trace each of these cultural trajectories in turn, however, I want to pay particular attention to the treatment of ‘national’ and ‘cosmopolitan’ space in Courage’s narrative register.

Such an analysis suggests a two-pronged approach. On the one hand, Courage’s careful appreciation of the minutiae of life traces the specifics of then-contemporary experience. Courage’s personal narrative indicates where and how he lived, how considerations of space and sociability intersected, and the complex negotiations of one man’s travel through an ever-changing set of cultural landscapes. At the same time, Courage’s own life narrative throws into relief the role of memory in sustaining meaning over time, indicating how ‘experience’ was continually revisited and re-evaluated in the course of a lifetime. Courage’s later narrative exhibits a distinct sea-change in terms of his treatment of national space. Setting aside fruitless questions regarding which is the ‘most truthful’, I will show how Courage’s more recent interrogation radically reformulated his relation to New Zealand and, through this, his notion of self.

I begin by looking specifically at Courage’s views of London as a zone of metropolitan life, and carefully uncover Courage’s treatment of the city as a space of refined pleasure and leisure pursuits. A civic architecture supported an impressive array of artistic and queer interactions that, at least in terms of their sheer volume and diversity, must have dwarfed anything then available in New Zealand. Whilst exploring these key sites of identity formation and interaction, and the importance of the domestic space in Courage’s ambit of experience, I also show how London could just as frequently manifest in less agreeable contexts. These kinds of narratives indicate that space is always a phenomena mediated by contingencies that included (amongst others) age, class and geography.
I explore national spaces in the third section of this chapter. While national experience is more conventionally considered anchored to precise national boundaries, my analysis shows how London could itself manifest as a New Zealand space. Some London communities were effectively re-colonised by waves of expatriate New Zealanders. This section also indicates how New Zealand associations were not always connected by Courage to repressive moral regimes. These episodes identify liberating capacities in the very provinciality that liberationist histories typically presume to be hostile to queer subjectivities. Rather, more cerebral expressions of cultural citizenship appear in both Courage’s private and published materials, and indicate a degree of personal liberty not always available in the more stratified (and policed) metropolitan spaces.

Finally, I examine the reversal of these associations in Courage’s life narrative and assess the changing meanings of national space evident in his later views of New Zealand. These representations demonstrate how Courage revisited past experiences in his memory. Courage’s recollections mediated and revised key aspects of his life narrative. I suggest how this revision was drawn from the same set of pathologies that challenged Courage’s sense of sexual selfhood from the 1940s. I showed in Chapter Two how Courage was able to resist some of the more disfiguring aspects of psychoanalysis as they pertained to sexuality. These same narrative forms, however, forced a revision of Courage’s sense of national identity that was, in reality, much more thoroughgoing. These interventions utterly reshaped Courage’s sense of personhood. Under Freudian psychoanalysis Courage was urged to revise both his childhood domestic space but also the regional and national context from which Courage’s psychiatrist considered his precise psychological predicament to have emerged.

**Courage’s London**

As Matt Cook has argued, London was never experienced as a monolith.\(^ {14} \) Rather, the city manifested as a diverse range of mediated forms for those who experienced it: as a ‘modern, imperial capital, a cosmopolitan and frivolous metropolis [...] a degraded and degenerate city, blighted by poverty and immorality’.\(^ {15} \) For Courage, the reputation of London as a site of modernity and
cultural delight was the city’s greatest draw card.\textsuperscript{16} London was animated by a sense of social spectacle not evident in his representations of New Zealand’s own cultural landscape. While Courage lived at Oxford for the period of his university training, the landscape of London figured most strongly in his recollections of daily life. Courage’s journal contains little if any reference to the courses of study or the intellectual ferment of his first days at St. John’s College. These pages are instead filled with lists of galleries visited, museums frequented, and plays taken in.\textsuperscript{17}

Courage seems to have felt immediately at ease in these surroundings. As I show below, he found these spaces (‘the glowing theatres’ of London’s West End, for example) open to solitary use and important zones of social interaction.\textsuperscript{18} These spaces yielded much greater opportunities for meeting people (usually men) with similar interests and values in common than he had experienced in New Zealand. As Anama-based Ronnie Peter confided in a letter to Courage in 1923: ‘I am afraid I do not behold as much glamour, in so called colonial society’.\textsuperscript{19} Peter hinted at the social (and possibly queer) shortcomings of peripheral life.\textsuperscript{20} It was to England that Peter and Courage turned to find men of like temperament and type. A space where people understood ‘strangeness and beauty’, the ‘clever and [the] cynical’, London was far removed from the ‘small towns’ and narrow mindsets of the Canterbury Plains of New Zealand.\textsuperscript{21}
Figure 6: Courage remained anchored to Hampstead for much of his life. Friends lived nearby, and many of his social and sexual encounters took place here. ['Map of London', The Internet Map Archive [online], 2 August 2010, available URL: http://www.probertencyclopaedia.com/MapofLondon1950.htm]
Courage regularly visited the British Museum. He drew cultural inspiration (and a rather disturbed sexual excitement) from the sights of Hellenistic art and other material remnants of the ancient world.\(^{22}\) Courage considered the ‘countenance’ of Queen Nefertiti to be in ‘some inexplicable way an argument for an elegant paganism’.\(^{23}\) Elsewhere, Courage enumerated the range of theatre productions and gallery exhibits that formed his core interest during his earliest years in England. In 1929, after seeing the Moscow Art Theatre's production of Anton Chekov's *The Cherry Orchard*, Courage exclaimed his enthusiasm for ‘what acting can be’ when performed at the height of excellence: ‘for, although I only followed cursorily what the characters were talking about, the movements and co-operation of the whole company were like visual music’.\(^{24}\) While New Zealand was an artistic and cultural centre of sorts (attracting musicians of Mischa Levitzki’s calibre, for instance) the metropolis provided a diversity of world-standard productions not available elsewhere in the British world.\(^{25}\)

Courage presented London as a space of unrivalled intellectual and social stimulus. An array of sociabilities were available through the consumption of the cultural art forms Courage considered notable (literary, dramatic, musical, to name but a few). The distinctiveness of this urban landscape – and particularly its superiority in providing cultural and sexual pleasures – was plain in many of Courage’s accounts. Writing in his journal some eight years after first arriving in London, Courage drew a picture of metropolitan life that contrasted with his time with his lover, Frank Fleet, in Argentina in 1931. At the end of his three month stay in Buenos Aires Courage drew clear cultural distinctions between the two spaces:

I shall miss – The almost perpetual sunshine; the sight of the smartest women in the world; the sight of men with perfect teeth, hair and eyes; the taste of S. American peaches; the company of my beloved F.; the comfortable, open taxis; the shade of the gardens. I shall look forward to – English tea; English papers; London Streets; the obliqueness of English servants; London theatres; a good circulating library; intellectual conversation; being able to make myself understood in my own language.\(^{26}\)

Courage spoke of a British geographic and cultural familiarity that was more than simply linguistic (Courage’s own admissions suggest that he had at least a
passing grasp of basic Spanish).27 English – and specifically metropolitan – space is exemplified by its civic and cultural institutions; in the rituals of tea-making, domestic routine, and the artistic and cultural spaces that invested conversation with its intellectual rigour. Clearly London’s conveniences and the cultural life it afforded could not, in Courage’s view, be replicated elsewhere.

Courage was more than just a spectator. He often actively participated in the social networks that made up these spaces. He wrote and directed his own plays at Oxford, and remained active in the artistic life of the university as well. He had a piano in his rooms, and made regular contributions to student periodicals.28 References to stage and screen actors also appear in Courage’s accounts of life. Of these, his friendship with actor Francis James (formerly Frank Jacobs), set designer Leslie Hurry, dramatist and actor Emlyn Williams and writer Clifford Bax were most prominent. Williams (who had also studied with Courage at Oxford) and Hurry, in particular, became great friends.29 These male friendships amplified Courage’s access to artistic (and queer) space, and acknowledged Courage’s own pedigree as a cultural sophisticate. He provided these men with his views on stories, assisted with reading lines and also provided advice on a range of other technical issues.

Courage’s personal intimacy with these men afforded a special connection to theatrical space. When he attended Williams’s Full Moon in 1929, for example, Courage’s relationship with the playwright led him to ponder how Williams’s own life had been translated into the dramatic action of the story. Full Moon was the expression, Courage suspected, of the playwright’s own ‘disappointment’ in love and family difficulties.30 Later, in 1936, Courage mentioned attending Williams’s He Was Born Gay, at the Queen’s Theatre, London. Attending at the writer’s request, Courage recorded his dismay at the press’s lukewarm reaction to the play printed the following day. Courage was dismayed to note that reviews of the play in the ‘morning papers’ were ‘not altogether enthusiastic’.31 ‘I sent Emlyn a telegram in the afternoon’, Courage wrote, ““Best wishes and affection.”’32 One senses how Courage’s own artistic identity enhanced these spatial interactions, transforming artistic spaces into both zones of leisure and key nodes of friendship and intimacy.
These associations granted Courage access to the backstage and other protected professional zones normally off limits to the general public. In one such episode Courage wrote of going to the Old Vic Theatre, in Waterloo, to see Williams act in William Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* in 1937. ‘A good performance’ in the part of Angelo, Courage wrote, even if he secretly believed Emlyn to be ‘too sensual and fleshy’ to play part of the ‘sex-tormented ascetic’,33 ‘After the show I went round to [Emlyn’s] dressing-room and we talked’, Courage continued. Courage was allowed to participate in the gossip of the theatre. He learnt how Emlyn had been sent a doll dressed in ‘his Angelo-costume’ by ‘unknown admirers’. He also heard Williams’s views on other events in the theatre world, particularly Henrik Ibsen’s *Ghosts*, which was then being performed at Buxton.34 Attending another play, this time to see Francis James, Courage wrote again of attaining special privileges:

[Went] to see [Theodore] Komisarjevsky’s production of Shakespeare’s ‘Comedy of Errors’ [...]. A matinée of ‘Romeo and Juliet’ just over, with an old acquaintance of mine (néé Frank Jacobs) in the part of Romeo. Sent up my name and was welcomed in the dressing-room: being subsequently invited to dine at F.’s hotel ... Found F. much the same as when he played in my own act ‘New Country’ at Oxford in 1926. But, Lord, the conceit of these actors! (‘My Romeo’, ‘my part’, ‘my Buckingham’). Almost as self-centred as authors ... As Romeo’s partner at dinner in the hotel, I was the cynosure of half the female, middle-aged clientele: extremely embarrassing.35

It is possible that Courage’s success as a dramatist (*Private History* ran just before the outbreak of World War II) enhanced his ability to negotiate these spaces. Similarly, Oxford ‘old boy’ allegiances, like the one above, were frequently present in many metropolitan interactions. These reinforced a connection between certain elite spaces. Throughout Courage remained aware of the theatre (and artistic spaces, more generally) as important public meeting places and points of contact for same-sex attracted men. Courage would often attend these spaces in the company of men with whom he was intimately involved. These kinds of interactions signaled theatrical space as important zones of companionability, courtship and social exchange.36 Courage and Fleet had attended an ‘unforgettable’ performance of Gaetano Donizetti’s *Don Pasquale* in
1937, for example. Similarly, it was at a Schubert Symphony in London that Courage depicted the romantic meeting of his two homosexual love interests Bruce Quantock and Philip Dill in *A Way of Love*.38

In Chapters One and Two I showed respectability to be a core aspect of Courage’s scripted behaviour. These meanings coalesced around considerations of class, status and Courage’s colonial upbringing. Respectability was also further amplified in scripts pertaining to homosexuality (and to inversion, to a slightly lesser extent). Courage positioned homosexuality, I have suggested, as distinct to the much baser alternatives of the ‘queer’, quean or pouf. These other sexual types were accorded much stronger approbation by homosexuals and heterosexuals alike. Such persons were presumed to engage in public acts of indecency, and tended to conduct themselves in ways that called attention to their ‘sexual perversion’.39 Many historians have shown how London’s urban environment afforded numerous opportunities for public sex. Men found sex by cruising London’s streets, parks, and public urinals, while negotiating at the same time the ‘pervasive networks of formal and informal surveillance’ that often dogged these interactions.40

Courage’s aversion to public sex (usually captured by catchalls like ‘vice’, ‘carnality’ and ‘promiscuity’) characterised his perception of a very particular urban masculinity: these were men of dubious sexual and moral natures (in the case of queans), or men of working class backgrounds (though, of course, men of all classes met for sex in such spaces).

I look at this personal distinction much more closely in the chapter that follows, since Courage frequently found himself sexually attracted to these figures. For the moment it is instructive to consider these tensions in the context of what we already know about Courage’s views of homosexuality: an identity that turned on ideas of male gentility, learning and civilised decorum. While Courage was sometimes excited by the sight of the men he encountered in public, and he sometimes brought sailors or guardsmen home for sex, his use of theatrical space underscored his preference for sociability, rather than sex, within congenial public space. Certainly, as Bruce’s encounter with Philip at the London Festival Hall in *A Way of Love* shows, these spaces were open to the chance meeting of sexual partners. Yet even here, the space of the concert hall
operates less as a landscape of sexual opportunity than as a romantic backdrop or an indicator of the protagonist’s moral superiority. An appreciation of classical music indicated refined tastes and morality.

In all of Courage’s private or published representations sex remains a deeply private matter to be pursued by two (or more) consenting adults in the confines of interior space. Courage’s sexual interactions usually occurred at his home or in some other private accommodation, such as in a hotel or boarding house. Courage’s views seldom acknowledged the possibility for arrest or personal assault (though Courage’s awareness of the Gielgud affair and other scandals acknowledged his awareness of sexual danger within the metropolis). Rather, Courage’s confinement of sex to the private sphere reinforced middle-class homosexual articulations of respectability, and the view that one deserved to feel personally autonomous within their own home. This was a view that Courage saw reflected in Robert Bryon’s opinion of the state and personal liberty that opened this chapter, for example.41

Events that challenged the construction of these boundaries tell us much about Courage’s views on these spatial references. Courage was moved to comment on the interior of one public restroom in 1940, for example, after viewing the ‘drawings and scribbles’ on a urinal wall that had been badly defaced. Courage saw represented there the sum-total of perversity: ‘Cries of unsatisfied lust, physical fantasies, everything-but lyrical outbursts of desire, masturbation-images, crude solicitations, graphic gratifications!’42 These spaces expressed a public sexuality that Courage found repellant, even painful to behold. Finding the ‘queer variety’ to be ‘particularly blatant’, he saw this kind of graffiti as evidence of reverse evolution: ‘outbursts’ of ‘hidden libido written down’ that, while not ‘sinful’, suggested an ‘animality’ best left concealed.43 While Courage considered this very ‘animality’ to exist in everyone, at least subconsciously, the act of embracing this carnality in transgressive and public forums most excited his sensibilities.44

These sensibilities were similarly disturbed by Courage’s relationship with another New Zealander, the writer D’Arcy Cresswell. Courage and Cresswell had much in common. They were of a similar age, self-identifying homosexuals, New Zealanders (Cresswell was also from Canterbury), and both now living in London
in the pursuit of literary vocations. Upon meeting Cresswell in 1938, however, Courage’s immediate reaction was one of implicit contempt. While Cresswell had been embroiled in scandal in 1920, Courage recorded no disapproval regarding the man’s involvement in the so-called Wanganui Affair.\textsuperscript{45} His disdain was instead generated by other factors. Courage had written to Cresswell, briefly, four years earlier. Having fallen out of correspondence, however, Cresswell had simply ‘turned up’ one winter’s evening in London.\textsuperscript{46} As he would many times in the future, Cresswell prevailed on Courage’s hospitality. He also shocked Courage with a degree of flamboyance to which he was unaccustomed:

After tea, at about 6.30, we started out (on my part most unwillingly) on a pub-crawl round the Swiss Cottage district. This ended at 11 o’clock. [...] A dreary and wasted evening. D’Arcy became obstreperous, maudlin and morose by turns. His capacity for hard-drinking is, to me at any rate, not endearing [...] He attempted to borrow money from me. Also suggested that we should pick up a sailor or guardsman and spend the night in mutual fornication à trois’.\textsuperscript{47}

Cresswell’s behaviour continually challenged Courage’s notions of both decorum and the proper use of space. In particular, Cresswell threatened the respectability Courage believed men of their class were expected to observe in public life. Cresswell’s conduct represented a departure from this moral and physical code, and is clear that Courage considered this personally anathematic. However, simply viewing this exchange as moral conservatism versus a kind of unbridled urban hedonism risks effacing some of the deeper complexities of Courage’s character. Rather, it was Cresswell’s boorish conduct that generated Courage’s private censure. He displayed ingratitude, emotional volatility, and an inclination to excess of all kinds. As I have suggested, Courage was not adverse to picking up trade himself and, as I show in the succeeding chapter, these masculine types (usually tough, working class men) were particular favourites. This scenario, however, is entirely comic, serving to undergird Courage’s view of Cresswell as uncouth and essentially defined by his sexuality (‘[m]y impression is that [his] talent proceeds, so to speak, almost entirely from a revolt against society due to his homosexuality’).\textsuperscript{48}
Courage’s own domestic space played a key role in mediating his metropolitan experience. The city was a changeable landscape, even, at times, an excluding space. Courage’s domestic arrangements, on the other hand, remained largely unchanged throughout his decades-long stay in London. Courage moved no more than four times during this period, remaining for the most part in the affluent suburb of Hampstead, northwest of Charing Cross. Bordering on the green spaces of Hampstead Heath (reputed to be a space for meeting men), Courage remained a short distance from many of the various cultural zones of the city.49 He was also easy walking distance from many local conveniences and friends. A number of New Zealanders lived in the area at various times, as did Courage’s close friends and writers the sisters Lettice and Barbara Cooper – women known for their ‘hospitable flat’ and generous parties.50 These women provided Courage with unfailing support, in both professional and personal contexts, and the friends frequently reciprocated visits between their respective homes. Lettice was herself an advocate of psychoanalysis and both sisters took active interests in Courage’s physical and mental welfare.

Courage’s small Hampstead flat operated as a private sanctuary. Here, he lived mostly as a bachelor, relying on an off-site housekeeper for the day-to-day care of the home. Her responsibilities including preparing meals, cleaning, collecting shopping and running other errands as Courage required them. While he wrote about the availability of ‘haughty little pansies’ who made ‘extremely good servants and a great many passable ones’, Courage usually employed women (though he kept a working class man-servant during one extended stay in St. Ives in 1933, before his trip home to New Zealand).51 These women had full access to Courage’s private space – they were usually equipped with their own keys – and had at least an implicit understanding of Courage’s sexual make-up.52 Writing from home, Courage’s space was both private retreat and an essential work space, and he relied on these women for the smooth running of his household. Sometimes he prevailed on them even further in the event of illness or convalescence, in which case he would normally provide an informal cash bonus.53

Along with those of select friends and acquaintances, Courage’s home formed part of a series of connected domestic spheres in which queer (and often
literary) associates met to socialise. Courage does not list attending any of the many cafes, bars or cabarets in the city known to have been frequented by queer men. Instead he relied on domestic get-togethers as a primary means of queer social interaction. At one particularly flamboyant dinner party Courage took pains to describe the ‘great bowls of salmon-coloured antirrhinums’ set below ‘yellow-shaded’ candles (‘I half-closed my eyes and swam away into a sensuous salmon-coloured sea of light’).\textsuperscript{54} Such occasions tended to be fairly respectable events, particularly those that were held at Courage’s own address. While well lubricated (‘beer, as well as whisky, gin, vermouth, sherry and lime juice’ were served at one bash), Courage’s parties tended more toward ‘happy bonhomie’ than the hectic gaiety seen in other accounts of London’s social scene.\textsuperscript{55} 

This restraint tended to be most prominent in parties where queer and non-queer groups mingled, usually in artistic or theatrical contexts. At one such event held by the English composer Roger Quilter, homosexual but Courage’s senior by many years, there was little space for flamboyance or transgression of any kind. Attended by 35 people at Quilter’s new house (‘charming’ but ‘old-fashioned’) on Acacia Road, Courage recorded an evening spent in emphatically artistic revelry:

\[
\text{[...] everything, down to the smallest bits of jade on the occasional tables, in the most perfect [...] taste. [...] Almost 35 people present, including singers. After supper, a few performances of [Quilter’s] smaller songs, himself accompanying. Music delightful and elegant: the perfect ‘escapist’ art, so to speak.}
\]

Exclusively queer male events, to which women were either not invited or seldom attended, provided greater leeway for self-expression – yet it was only during a mixed New Year’s Party onboard the Argentinean-bound Alcantara that Courage mentions dressing in costume.\textsuperscript{56} These events to which Courage recorded his attendance at tended to be small in magnitude, but provided a degree of intimacy probably not possible on a larger scale:

\[
\text{After a depressed day yesterday I went out to a small party given by B. and R., a ‘queer’ [sic] gathering of seven or eight. I lost some of my depression simply by talking, and was helped by an attitude of respect on the part of the younger guests towards me as a writer. One young man (Nicholas by name) praised two of my}
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books, particularly [*A Way of Love*], which he had recommended to his friends with gratifying results (‘they were impressed’). [...] For a time I became human, even warm: I could feel at ease, my muscles relaxed, I talked naturally ...\textsuperscript{57}

**Alienation and displacement in the city**

I have written of Courage’s experience of metropolitan life in fairly liberating terms so far. A space of unrivalled cultural opportunity, relative sexual freedom, and congenial social interaction, London is reproduced in these journal entries as a site of artistic and personal equanimity. Arriving from provincial anonymity, Courage found himself within the city’s enabling queer and creative networks. Dipping in and out of these public spaces, these episodes show Courage’s ability to locate further physical and psychic security within the private domain of his own home. This was a space arranged according to his professional, personal and sexual preferences. Courage was self-assured of his place in the city, and able to negotiate the various social and cultural zones that characterised the metropolis.

These episodes of metropolitan ‘liberation’ can be juxtaposed, however, against moments of unease evident elsewhere in Courage’s narrative register. Such vignettes demonstrate the sometimes ambivalent experience of bodies and their relation to space and communities (and I will return to a discussion of bodies in the chapter that follows). I have already shown the excluding force of social hierarchies in Courage’s life. Questions of masculinity, national identity, even the performance of sexuality informed the constitutive elements of personal identity; they also touched off questions of affiliation, social intercourse and cultural citizenship. These kinds of parameters were not erased by Courage’s urban experience. In fact, the unique diversity of peoples and spaces available at the centre may simply have multiplied these sometimes painful interactions.

Questions of age or generational difference, for example, sometimes manifested themselves with disaffecting consequence. Writing in 1950, at the age of forty-seven, Courage recorded an evening spent in the company of his friends Donald and Duncan – an intergenerational couple who also resided in London. Arriving in the late afternoon, he and Duncan (the older of the pair) settled into an evening of refined sobriety that Courage characterised as tranquil but distinctly middle-aged: ‘Donald and I had some gramophone records, then
listened to a talk on the wireless about [James] Boswell’s *London Journal*, recently published’.58 David, by contrast, was ‘on the point [of] leaving for a party in Holland Park’.59 The older men watched as David (who was twenty-five) took ‘pains to make up his face before the mirror’ using ‘astringent and then skin-cream’.60 He told the men how he planned to attend two parties, both ‘queer’. The first was thrown by a working-class man who worked at London department store, Fortnum and Mason’s, plucking geese; the other a ‘drag party’ given by a man – ‘one of the sluts in Bayswater’, as David put it – near Soho.61

Courage was not excluded from these events simply by virtue of his age. This encounter, however, impressed on Courage the sense of these spaces as social meeting-points for the young, or, at the very least, those who had reserves of youthful energy: ‘I would give a good deal myself to be as young and as full of gusto as David’.62 This sense of abjection was reproduced strongly as Courage aged further. Just months before his death at the age of sixty, Courage recorded two separate encounters with other younger men that greatly unsettled his composure within the city.

In the first, Courage recorded seeing Stuart Hurrell, his lover of many years and some years his junior, in the company of a number of young men. Stuart worked as a broker for Lancashire Insurance and lived at nearby Parliament Hill. The pair met some time in the mid-1950s, and they enjoyed a romantic relationship that lasted until Courage’s death in 1963.63 Courage’s narrative shows that this was a special intimacy and one that was only ever rivaled by his much longer attachment to Fleet. Despite this, Courage often characterised Stuart’s friends as ‘second-rate youths’ of dubious background and considerable coarseness.64 On this occasion Courage avoided their meeting by crossing the street, all the while reassuring himself that ‘S. was with them but not of them’.65 ‘I let him stay as he is’, Courage continued, ‘with mediocre chums for the weekend at the pub. I am not married to him’.66

In the second episode, Courage was this time forced to engage with these men on his way to complete errands in Hampstead:

Left at 10.30 and walked home, encountering four local lads almost on the home-doorstep: a whole bevy of handsome queer faces wh. embarrassed me. I’m too old for such young pub-society, and feel
awkward in its presence. One, a stranger, was beautiful, I had time
to notice; I envied his lover who was with him. Yet what can I do
about it? All that has gone. In any case I doubt whether the
handsome faces hid happy dispositions: in fact I'm damn sure they
didn't. Their owners shook hands with me with respect and we
parted. So much for that.  

Here space is quite consciously stratified by Courage in terms of age and
sociability. The street offers space for the interaction of youthful bodies that
linger without apparent purpose. Courage is dubious of this new morality (these
are 'second-rate' youths after all) but nonetheless actively negotiates this terrain
to reduce his own exposure to it. Similarly, Courage's belonging to the social
drinking culture of the city, characterised here as 'young pub-society', is
categorically erased – a privilege that Courage considered withdrawn with the
onset of old age ('[a]ll that is gone'). Courage's very interaction with these men
seemed to underscore these new relations in symbolic terms. Their meeting is
caracterised as an interchange between an elder and his younger charges. Not
one of the 'lads', Courage is addressed respectfully but not, he suggests, allowed
to participate in the same cultural mode as they likely enjoyed with one another.

At other moments, the so-called liberating qualities of the metropolis could
instill a similar sense of disaffection in Courage. The athletic and muscular men
that began to appear in the city from the 1950s (gym-built bodies, rather than
those built from menial labour) provided Courage with ample sexual stimuli,
though in this case psychic only: 'fantasies of beautiful young lovers with hairy
balls and arses – a smell of sweat, semen and ordure'. In reality, Courage
suspected these men to be far from ideal partners. Instead they would be
'[n]arcissistic, illiterate, predatory, selfish, [and] moody'. Their male allure,
however, embodied the metropolitan 'climate of sexual gratification' which
Courage considered 'simply unsustainable' in the long term. A 'tropic of hell',
the metropolis, with its spaces of sexual excess signified a zone of dangerous
sublimation; a level of carnal immoderation that, if overindulged in, threatened
one's psychic and moral equilibrium.

Courage's distaste for the perceived intemperance of metropolitan life
sometimes led him to take short trips to England's country- or sea-side
settlements. These spaces maintained many of the conveniences of city life
(retail, artistic and sexual) but presented greater possibilities for seclusion and balanced life:

My first entry [...] in Brighton (Sussex). Am staying at the Old Ship Hotel, having temporarily – and for a very good reason – shut up the flat in Hampstead. I have been here a fortnight to-morrow, staying alone. Solitude by no means as depressing as I had feared, though I [miss] having someone to talk to in the evenings. That, I suppose, is the penalty of living out of London – at least for [an] intellectual. However, for the moment it can't be helped; and at least I've taken to writing letters again, a habit of which the telephone in London had almost robbed me.73

Spaces like Brighton and St. Ives (where Courage stayed far more frequently) provided a middle ground between metropolitan and countrified living. This allowed Courage to recover from what he saw as the degradations of a busy metropolitan experience. Courage chose these spaces quite consciously. Both Brighton and St. Ives retained a sizeable artistic and Bohemian community, blending a range of urban conveniences but reducing the frequency and extent of social intrusions. ‘If I had enough gumption I’d go and live for a bit somewhere completely away from towns’, Courage wrote in 1937, consciously drawing back from the thought of further retreat into the hinterland of the ‘Sussex Weald’,74 Brighton was already a well-known meeting place for queer men (‘Brighton pier’ was Cockney rhyming slang for homosexuality at the time).75 Here leisure and pleasure seemed to find its happy medium: ‘[...] if the opportunity arises, I can at least fornicate urbanely and in good company – to judge by the mien of most of the couples who populate the hotels’.76

Courage’s ability to transition between these spaces was greatly reduced by the increasing impact of his mental illness. Courage’s depression made traveling an ordeal, and even a weekend to his sister Patricia’s at nearby Surrey was taxing. While Brighton was often a space for solitary retreat, in the sense that Courage would travel there alone, St. Ives tended to act either as a professional sanctuary (he would write from a rented cottage) or as a space to be enjoyed with a close friend, lover, or both.

Courage and the neo-romantic artist Christopher Wood, for example, had spent some days there together before the end of their respective university
careers and Christopher’s untimely death in 1930 (for which Courage would forever harbour a kind of guilt). Both worked in the idyllic Cornish sunshine, James studying English literature, Christopher (or Kit, as Courage affectionately called him) painting on a small easel nearby.\textsuperscript{77} Some decades later, he and a captain of the R.A.F., an Ivon Alderson, journeyed to St. Ives for respite from wartime London. Alderson, who would eventually die by suicide in late 1943, wrote immediately after their trip and thanked Courage for what seemed to have been a pleasurable holiday:

I am more grateful than I can find words to express, for all your kindness and patience towards me. I am as you already know, not a very fine example of a friend, but James I do heed what you say and I am determined to try to save myself from any further troubles. Upon entering London I found it very hard to feel as calm about life as I had during our few days at St. Ives. [...] London is hot and exhausting and I long to return to the peace of St. Ives [...] the civilised cliffs and all the other pleasures I enjoyed [...] I shall forever remain grateful for all you did towards giving me such a pleasant time and for being so understanding [...]. I look forward to your return, until then enjoy yourself now the pest has gone.\textsuperscript{78}

While, as I have indicated, age and cultural alienation continually mediated his experience of the city, it was during World War II that Courage found metropolitan life most trying. London’s cultural wheels remained turning to some extent during this time, but blackout regulations, fluctuations in the workforce and the demography of the city, and especially the bombing of London itself, greatly reduced the scope of Courage’s cultural landscape. Added to this, wartime privations disrupted Courage’s long-enjoyed domestic privacy; an imposition that disrupted equally his ability (or desire) to work.\textsuperscript{79}

Even as early as 1939 Courage had noted the serious alteration to the physical and cultural landscape of the city:

Returned to London with Sam Ainley [son of Shakespearean actor Henry Ainley] who gave me a lift in his car. London a strange city. Sandbags, barricaded shops, barrage-balloons, the helmets, gas-masks. After sundown the streets are complete darkness. From my windows the whole metropolis looks like one vast dark plain with a few humps here and there. Have spent the whole afternoon
attempting to mask my windows with dark-paper, cardboard and double curtains. Not an easy job.\textsuperscript{80}

Writing of the night-rafts that began in 1940, Courage recorded how he donned his ‘pyjamas every evening at 7.30’ in readiness for the ‘nightly descent to [his building’s] basement’.\textsuperscript{81} Here Courage and the other residents of his Hillfield Court address (an art deco mansion block on Belsize Avenue) sheltered from German attack. Courage was frustrated and claustrophobic in these surroundings. ‘About 40 of us are now sleeping [in the basement] as a matter of course’, Courage wrote. Remaining there until daybreak became ‘routine’, their sleep fitful at best.\textsuperscript{82} The ‘constant [air] raids’, however, were ‘upsetting’ for Courage ‘in other ways’.\textsuperscript{83} ‘My mind is too jumpy and nervous to continue creative work’, he complained. ‘I [...] feel discontented, depressed and useless’.\textsuperscript{84}

Motivated by these circumstances, and his wider crisis of faith in capitalism (see Chapter One), Courage moved from his Hillfield flat to a boarding house located on nearby Common Place.\textsuperscript{85} His relocation necessitated the consignment of his precious Austrian-built Bösendorfer piano to storage, as well as most of his furniture and other larger belongings.\textsuperscript{86} Courage struggled to make do in these new surroundings, describing his room upon arrival as a ‘pied-à-terre in upper Hampstead [...] a small top-room, cramped and smelling vaguely of damp and dust’.\textsuperscript{87} Courage continued to have male friends stay (one, an army officer by the name of Henry arrived two months into his relocation and stayed for three days).\textsuperscript{88} Overall, however, Courage found the experience oppressive and depressingly heteronormative:

This blacked-out, bourgeois, boarding-house life – God in Heaven, how I really loathe it! The smell of evening cooking in the passages, the businessmen’s faces, the church clock chiming the polite quarters down the street – the whole [...] incessante mise en scène. Am I alive or dead? [...] What I want is to get drunk, to lie in the hot and generous sun, to sleep with wild boys – yes, that is more like it.\textsuperscript{89}

New Zealand, by contrast, seemed to exist in splendid isolation from the events that were so disrupting Courage’s enjoyment of metropolitan space. Safe from the worst ravages of armed conflict, he received continual support from his
New Zealand family and friends (Frank Sargeson and Charles Brasch included). Courage’s father had wired immediately at the declaration of hostilities, agreeing to send money ‘directly if Government permits’.\textsuperscript{90} Meanwhile various other New Zealand supporters, most notably his mother Zoë, sent care packages filled with provisions of food and clothing: ‘A tin parcel of food from Mother, who imagines wartime England is a desert island, to be provisioned out of mercy, bless her’.\textsuperscript{91} ‘I am lucky, surely,’ Courage wrote of this generosity, ‘at the age of 41, to have both parents alive and still in a present-standing state of mind’.\textsuperscript{92}

**Courage’s New Zealand**

Courage’s connections to home were an irony of sorts. Barring the question of his allowance from his father, which sustained Courage’s material existence in London, Courage had remained resolutely independent of New Zealand for some time. Influenced perhaps by his reading of Sigmund Freud, Courage began to consider his national upbringing a cruel and puritan imposition. These meanings displaced many of his earlier characterisations of New Zealand (which I consider below). Yet, as I show, Courage’s own metropolitan experience could be far from positive. Even a cursory evaluation shows how Courage’s material experience of the city was riven by external exigencies (factors like age), while the landscape itself could shift between congenial and alienating with astonishing speed. This was exemplified by Courage’s experience of war, or his experience of the urban sexual economy.

My intention is not to exchange one liberationist view for another, by recasting New Zealand as ‘more’ liberating than London, for example. Instead, Courage’s narrative is useful for reminding us of the ambivalence of experience, time and space. As cultural geographers Lynda Johnston and Robyn Longhurst have suggested, national and global spaces are ‘mutually constitutive in uneven ways’ and ‘rarely reiterated uniformly’.\textsuperscript{93} Likewise, Matt Cook has argued that the ‘complex intersection’ of discourses of identity, desire and space prevent historians from ‘discerning either a unitary urban type or a coherent culture of homosexuality’.\textsuperscript{94} Narrowing our focus still further, we see how this degree of ambivalence exists even at the smallest possible scale, indicating how ‘competing
and overlapping frameworks’ might inform meanings that one man gives to space over time.95

Courage certainly had reason to view New Zealand as a site of painful rejection. He had maintained only the barest of relationships with his parents after his final trip to New Zealand in the mid-1930s. Younger family members, his niece among them, have suggested that Courage ‘came out’ to his parents during this trip.96 The effect of this revelation was disastrous and this explains, they suggest, why Courage never returned to New Zealand afterward (‘when his father discovered [Courage’s sexuality] all hell broke loose and he never set foot in this country again’).97 While Courage failed to record any such incident in his journal, it is clear that negotiating even the simplest of family encounters was no easy matter:

A lapse of sympathy with [mother] which depressed me. She declared that, since I had come home I had told her nothing of my life of the last ten years – in London, Oxford, Cornwall, etc – nor what kind of people I knew or what houses I’d lived in. I suspect this to be true – in fact, know it to be – and yet I find it impossible to tell her adequately. Facts mean nothing, without an aura of personality, atmosphere … I felt angry and intensely sad: the real tears of things.98

Courage drew parallels here between his own situation and that of Aeneas in Virgil’s *The Aeneid* (Aeneas had cried ‘Sunt lacrimae rerum et mentem mortalia tangunt’, or ‘The world is a world of tears, and the burdens of mortality touch the heart’ upon seeing a Carthaginian mural depicting the fall of Troy). Courage’s inability (at this point at least) to reveal anything more than the most basic of facts about his life – where he had lived, how he had spent his time, for example – touched off the profoundest melancholia.

However, Zoë and Frank’s continued correspondence and provision for Courage’s welfare highlight how he remained connected to New Zealand in fairly profound ways. Courage’s friendship with numerous other New Zealanders in London and the greater United Kingdom, also show how claims of national affiliation operated beyond the bounded spaces of national geography. As I show more closely in Chapter Five, these friendships formed a major nexus of
sociability – effectively linking two worlds that would otherwise have remained separated by distance and growing cultural difference.

In one notable episode during the war, for example, Courage wrote of spending one New Year's Eve with a party of New Zealand servicemen then stationed in London:

[...] my saints! – could those lads drink! By eleven o'clock they were singing unison-songs in Maori (very well, too) – love-songs to Mrs Spiers [Courage’s friend and hostess]. By midnight they were all three appallingly tight and were chasing the waitresses and kissing them under the mistletoe, and generally kicking up a shindy. In fact, they had definitely become A Problem [sic] ... 99

When the evening descended into raucousness and possible moral indiscretion (the drunkest of men had been ‘discovered in one hysterical girl's room’) Courage was compelled to assist his countrymen in facilitating their escape from the hotel.100 'It took the entire night-staff of the hotel, aided by the girl in question, and ourselves, to get him down to the lounge', Courage wrote.101 There, Courage and the man’s two companions, now a ‘trifle sobered’, ‘bundled him together and out into the night’.102 In doing so, Courage seemed to recognise and, if not participate in himself, at least defend the men’s hijinks. Their actions embodied the telltale New Zealand 'larrikinism', a certain social irreverence that, for Courage, underpinned the psychology of most New Zealanders: 'I will say that all three came and apologised quite charmingly, next day, but perhaps – for [the British] – the best motto is – let sober New Zealanders alone'.103

It is clear that Courage saw New Zealand and metropolitan identities as unique and divergent. In the years before his psychoanalysis, these assessments were frequently critical but not ungenerous of life in the Antipodes. Writing in his journal in 1935, for example, Courage wrote of a 'new idea' for a novel. Composed around ‘two [New Zealand] brothers' and an ‘English girl visitor’, the story (never completed) would be a vehicle for exploring ‘the two [cultural] outlooks': offsetting considerations of unsophisticated 'N.Z. farm life' with views of 'European (English) culture'.104 In another episode, Courage transcribed, and seemed to concur with, one English author’s view of colonial practicality and self-assurance. Recording the words of novelist and social critic Rebecca West,
Courage seemed to take heart from her view that New Zealanders consisted of raw unaffectedness and an Edenic primitivism. ‘So far as natural equipment is concerned’, West had written, ‘anyone would choose to be a Colonial [sic] rather than one of the English-born’. Drawing on the archetype of the ‘noble savage’, West concluded that there was ‘no happier fate than to be born again a New Zealander with a touch of the Maori to make one golden’.

This cultural celebration seemed to underscore some of Courage's own views of New Zealand identity at this time. Courage believed that colonial life necessitated a particular kind of mentality and a particularly close relationship with the natural environment. Although Courage frequently considered himself inadequate in this regard (in the contexts of normative masculinity that I considered in Chapters One and Two, for example), he did not see himself as entirely devoid of these tropes of male capability. In the face of the particularly harsh British winter of 1963, for instance, Courage wrote of his ‘self-congratulation’ at being able to weather a season of bursts pipes, power outages and hauling cold water for washing. Unlike his British counterparts, Courage saw himself as ‘practical’ and not altogether unprepared in such a crisis; in possession of a level-headed and everyday competence that flowed, he suggested, from his ‘colonial training’.

While these qualities were always praiseworthy in Courage’s estimation, these episodes elide considerations of that other breed of New Zealander that haunted his writing, both private and published: the puritan (I explore the complexities of Courage’s views on this subject in Chapter Seven). Courage had considerable empathy for his friend Malcolm, who was also queer and a New Zealander residing in London, and his views of the Antipodes, for example. ‘I sometimes dream of N.Z.’, Malcolm wrote in one letter (which Courage transcribed), ‘but they are always rather frightening dreams – strange faces and my people old [...] ghostly and pathetic’. Unnourished and under-stimulated, Malcolm’s remembered views of New Zealand filled Courage with dread as he prepared for his trip home on board the RMS Rangitata in late 1933: ‘I feel frightened’, Courage wrote privately, feeling trepidation ‘in advance’ and already an ‘inverted nostalgia for Europe’ and its more congenial social spaces.
These associations, though, were not innate to New Zealand space. Nor was it, as I suggest above, Courage’s dominant characterisation of New Zealand’s national culture. Malcolm had spoken of the selfless and ‘kind’ attitudes of most New Zealanders, writing ultimately of his gladness at being of ‘two worlds’ instead of one.¹¹⁰ Twelve months into his New Zealand stay, Courage also reflected on the particular composure that New Zealand provided as he recovered from tuberculosis. ‘A year since I left England’, Courage wrote in his journal on the 18th of November 1934. ‘What a change in outlook, in serenity, in welfare, since then’.¹¹¹ Writing in 1941, and amid the German blitz of London, Courage similarly referred to the ‘lyrical’ quality of his past and of his ‘beloved New Zealand’ as a site of nurturing that metropolitan life had ultimately extinguished (‘I have lost the lyrical feeling of those years’).¹¹²

While these kinds of views shed a much more flattering light on the social conditions of New Zealand than those remembered later, they also mobilise New Zealand’s unique natural environment as being especially vitality-giving (‘lyrical’ being a quality associated with romantic evocations of nature). These seemed to provide a relatively happy base of memory for Courage writing in the middle-part of the twentieth century, and some years into his decades-long stay in Europe.

Writing from St. Ives in 1927, for example, Courage returned in his mind to childhood scenes in New Zealand as he walked the hills of Cornwall. The smell of ‘burning gorse-bushes [...] brought back old New Zealand days! John [his brother] in a bright Holland [sic] coat, very sunburnt, looking a positive little larrikin’.¹¹³ Just three years later, Courage related a similar incident, this time on his way to Oxford Street in West London: ‘A strange reaction to-day – I was walking through Cavendish Square when a smell of rich, rotten wood, wafted from heaven knows where, took me back in a flash to a bush-stream in the mountains of New Zealand. A damp, cool, primeval whiff.¹¹⁴ Far from disfiguring or disaffecting in any way, these kinds of episodes betrayed Courage's desire to capture a remembered New Zealand landscape that spoke of personal freedom and social egalitarianism. He wanted to ‘capture in words’ full sensory experience of summers spent in the ‘cow-shed at home’; spaces where Courage
‘used to sit [...] and read and listen to the cocks crowing’, unmolested by worldly worries.115

While these kinds of tracts seem to offset some of the more ruthless aspects of New Zealand’s perceived puritanism, it would be wrong to presume that Courage’s experience of congenial national space was always solitary or snatchèd as social pressures allowed. Courage’s testimony records a number of incidents that confirm the ability of same-sex attracted men to forge meaningful identities and relationships within national spaces. Courage’s school experience was not an altogether happy one. Even here, however, intimate relations were possible between boys. Courage once recalled how one boy at school (who would later become his brother-in-law) ‘would get into my bed in the school-dormitory [...] and wanted a comfortable breast – amongst other things’.116 Here, another boy, a prefect ‘with good, rather Viking-like features’ also took Courage’s fancy; though this relationship may not have been as consensual:

As a small boy I simply thought Boulois [the boy in question] a funny name, without questioning it. Nor did I ever hear anyone else remark on it. The youth was, as I say, tall, and had rather a small head for his height [...] The only thing I remember him saying to me, though I was allotted to him as a fag, was ‘I can see you’re going to be one of the boys’ – a sort of jocular compliment. I was, in actual fact, anything but ‘one of the boys’, ever.117

Interestingly, urban life seldom factored in Courage’s representation of queer space in New Zealand. Rather, it was the open landscapes of Otago, Canterbury and Southland (the provinces where Courage spent most of his time) that were characterised as being most open to queer appropriation. Symbolically, perhaps, Courage confided to Cresswell his view of these spaces as ‘Grecian’: ‘the same hills, inland mountains and nearness to the sea [...] the same clear air’.118 Letters from Ronnie Peter at Anama paint a particularly Bohemian picture of that part of Canterbury. Here social and artistic engagement intersected with what seems a relatively ebullient youth culture. One ‘wild party’ consisted of cocktails, hide and seek and considerable gaiety (one friend ‘never ceased’ laughing ‘from 8-30 p.m. until 3-a.m.’).119

Ronnie Peter bears a remarkable similarity to one childhood friend, Peter Fitzgerald, who appeared alongside a Courage-like figure in the semi-
autobiographical ‘Guest at the Wedding’ (a queer-themed short story that appeared at Charles Brasch’s insistence in Landfall in 1953):

At school, by the way, we had, both of us been oddities; an interest in jazzy music had brought us together. I would bang out foxtrots and waltzes on the commonroom piano, in what I imagined was a hot style and as a means for making myself popular in the house, while Fitzgerald scraped away at the melody line on his fiddle. We were in turn, more than a friendship. To be candid I had not many friends, yet I longed for friendship, warmth, love.\(^{120}\)

The story followed one man’s interest in an apparently heterosexual man about to marry a mutual friend. Interestingly, the Peter character is aware of this attraction but is less than supportive. In one homoeroticized scene he is depicted in cool judgment (and thinly veiled resentment) of the emerging sexual tension evident as the two men wrestle on a beach on Stewart Island. Fitzgerald merely ‘squatted, naked, at the top of the beach like a little hairy house-fly, scraping at his violin’, suggesting that the men were like ‘a couple of ancient Greeks […] [h]ot in the wrong way’.\(^{121}\)

Like Fitzgerald, Peter appears as a fairly flamboyant figure in Courage’s private writings. These episodes usefully suggest the kind of Bohemian identities Courage and Peter might have adhered to while living in close proximity to one another in New Zealand (Peter appears to have migrated to London sometime after 1927). In one romantic letter to Courage Peter wrote of reveling in the disruption of (apparently urban) space. ‘I am selfish, callous, […] and insecure, and so are you my dear old friend’.\(^{122}\) It ‘amuses me to see men stare at my Oxford trousers’, Peter continued but stated wryly how ‘I am almost on the verge of tears when they commence to discuss George Eliot’s’.\(^{123}\) Courage again seemed to signal a similar kind of embodied queerness in the short story that memorialised their relationship:

I [the Courage-like protagonist] had lately left school myself and was at a brash age, unwilling to settle down to farming (my father was a sheepfarmer in Marlborough, to the north), and given to over-dressing myself in a grey Stetson hat, tight flannel trousers, a school blazer and yellow brogue shoes. I had always let my hair droop over my forehead at school: now, in freedom, I brushed it
straight back and subdued its oat-colour with Vaseline. When
people looked twice at me on the street I was obscurely pleased
and a little defensive.\textsuperscript{124}

The protagonist is ‘pleased’ if the ‘lookers were girls’ but not, significantly,
‘particularly’ interested in introducing himself to them.\textsuperscript{125} The recipient of his
erotic interest is quite clearly male, though at the beginning of the narrative this
is only implicit in renderings of latent narcissism (‘I was in love with myself, I
suppose, and showed it’).\textsuperscript{126}

These episodes underscore Courage’s feelings for New Zealand as a largely
congenial space in experiences and memories he recorded in the years before his
psychiatric treatment. He shows that provinciality did not necessarily equate to
repression and subterfuge for all men with queer sexualities. Indeed, the
landscape itself – largely free of surveilling forces – was open to queer and
Bohemian pursuits that spoke very particularly to Courage’s own cultural and
sexual sensibilities.\textsuperscript{127} Courage's national identity was not confined to these
gеographic boundaries, however, and his own reportage shows how his status as
a New Zealander guided ongoing questions of sociability and cultural citizenship
(I will pick up on this theme in later chapters). These episodes show that
Courage sometimes struggled to reconcile his home and metropolitan lives. This
was particularly so in interactions with family members. Even so, the spectre of
puritanism was largely absent in these writings, and Courage shows how his
experiences of New Zealand were frequently far from unhappy.

\textbf{New Zealand and the tensions of memory}

Courage’s published and private writings indicate a diversity of congenial spaces
open to both queer and mainstream enjoyment in New Zealand. These spaces
were available across a range of provincial zones (not just Canterbury) and at
various times in Courage’s New Zealand experience. Courage wrote one
tantalising letter to Brasch in 1953, for example, in which he discussed how he
and a ‘crazy absconding clergyman’ had spent a summer’s afternoon exploring
the countryside surrounding the ‘Druidic’ Māori cave drawings near Duntroon in
North Otago.\textsuperscript{128} As I have shown, however, Courage’s praise for New Zealand was
not without its limits. Nor were his views of the traits that tended, in his
consideration, to define the New Zealand character and temperament always laudable.

As I have already suggested, Courage tended to be relatively even-handed in his consideration of New Zealand in the years before his psychoanalysis. He oscillated between the liberating and oppressive aspects of national space in much of his musing. This balance, however, disappeared when Courage came under pressure to reassess the tenor of his domestic background in Freudian reassessments of his past.

Under Dr. Larkin’s treatment, Courage was urged to search for the hidden infantile trauma that his psychiatrist suggested must have befallen him at the earliest point of his development. During one session in 1960, for example, Courage recorded how Larkin pressed him to ‘go back in memory, to try to fix on anything that might have induced anxiety’.129 Courage initially resisted Larkin’s suggestions of an unhappy home: he found he could not recall any calamity, though he was open to the suggestion that such an incident may have occurred. Under Larkin’s careful guidance, however, Courage came to perceive his life in New Zealand as wholly negative. ‘I’d had broken chilblains every winter’, Courage wrote of his youth. He conceded that ‘all memories’ of New Zealand were ‘unpleasantly-toned: especially the childhood ones’.130 In therapy Courage characterised this New Zealand upbringing as a ‘black box’: a space of puritan confinement that excluded light of both the literal and figurative kinds.131

As I have already suggested, these kinds of reassessments effectively ‘explained’ Courage’s constitution as an adult and a homosexual. ‘I wanted my mother desperately’, Courage eventually recalled under Larkin’s supervision; ‘the more she frustrated me – and had frustrated me in the past – the more I identified with her’.132 This, Courage was told, was the ‘basis’ of his ‘homosexuality’ and the ‘immense reservoirs of guilt’ that persisted into adulthood; a malignancy that eventually manifested as ‘psychic masochism, frustration guilt, moral guilt [and] a depressive mental illness’.133

Courage eventually reappraised his domestic environment in this light. He agreed, for example, that his home in New Zealand had been particularly beset by puritan (and feminine) ideals of cleanliness and moral hygiene. These had both literal and psychic dimensions. On the one hand, Courage was aware of his
mother’s aversion to any manifestation of bodily transgression. ‘I think she was unduly harsh about anything to do with excretion’, Courage confided in his psychiatrist: ‘Shit was just filth to her – she used to burn paper to dispel the smells’.\textsuperscript{134} On the other hand, these same qualities seemed to inform and connect to a much wider and more vigourous rejection of Courage as a person: ‘She made me feel dirty, wrong […] My mother would say goodnight to me in the drawing-room before dinner […] then the nurse would whisk me upstairs and into what was a perpetual evening nightmare […] lying alone […] my mother out of reach’.\textsuperscript{135}

These sorts of personal memories were eventually extended to a wider characterisation of national spaces. These interventions saw Courage’s domestic environment firmly placed in its colonial context: a site of perverse conservatisms and human antipathies.

In this way, Courage’s home environment represented the fulfillment of rigid colonial ideologies and moral regimes. In much the same way that Courage believed Frank and Zoë represented archetypes of normative masculinity and femininity in the 1920s (see Chapter One), Courage also came to see his parents as embodying the very colonial ideologies that had converted New Zealand into the conservative cultural space he now perceived it. ‘Your father (through your superego) is eternally saying to you “Identify yourself with me, not your mother. She has unmanned you – made you a sissy”’, Larkin was supposed to have said to Courage during one heated session in 1960.\textsuperscript{136} ‘He did say that’, Courage recalled. Inspired by Larkin’s views, Courage wrote that Frank ‘accused’ James’s mother of making him ‘a milksoap’, often arguing about his suitability for colonial life in front of him.\textsuperscript{137} Courage had ‘no wish to be a farmer’, to ‘ride round smelling of sweat and sheep as [his father] did all day, in the sun’.\textsuperscript{138} This experience, though, filled as it was with ‘pain and hatefulness’, was more than an innocent family disagreement.\textsuperscript{139} It reflected, Larkin suggested, the whole of Courage’s cultural ‘education’; the ‘hearty manly imperative of New Zealand society’ that Frank continually embodied.\textsuperscript{140}

In other episodes Courage wrote how his being a New Zealander meant he had ‘no right’ to the life he had made for himself in Britain. Memories of New Zealand spaces continually reframed and degraded his sense of professional and
personal selfhood. Much like Frank’s assertion that his son was a ‘milksop’, New Zealand’s cultural purview rendered Courage ‘a mollycoddled sissy’.\textsuperscript{141} Inefffectual and emasculated, Courage characterised his national identity in explicitly Freudian terms: New Zealand stood-in as the ‘superego’ that continually threatened any veneer of equanimity – real or imaginary.\textsuperscript{142} Sometimes referring to it as the ‘N.Z. superego’, Courage considered this force to be the ghostly manifestation of New Zealand’s rigid and puritanical ethos: a space opposed to artistic expression and diversity of any kind. New Zealand is conjured in these episodes from the 1960s as a site of ‘moral prejudice’. Here ‘dislikes and fears’ of difference (expressed as ‘abnormal states’) become ‘strictures’ that prevented the departure from conventional life.\textsuperscript{143}

Certainly, the criticism and eventual repression of \textit{A Way of Love} in New Zealand seemed to confirm this state of affairs. Courage was greatly agitated by one 1962 review of his work by Joan Stevens, a New Zealand academic who worked at Victoria University, in Wellington, for example. Courage resented her criticisms of technique and style. Stevens labeled his work ‘nostalgic falsity’, ‘unsatisfactory’ and ‘amateurish’.\textsuperscript{144} Courage felt her assessment of his works’ sexual themes ultimately expressed the sensibilities of New Zealanders at their most puritanical:

The implied or explicit attack on my work upset me deeply – stirred up the unconscious in fact. First, the attack came from my home country, \textit{with all that implies}: the source of my rejection, deprivation, the action of the tyrannical superego. It all came alive in the denigration [...] My novels are the greatest effort I’ve been capable of making to win reward, to defeat my paralysing despair in life [...] to find them [...] unappreciated or harshly criticised induces a quite disproportionate sense of failure (comparable to impotence, sexual failure). I went down and down into black dejection.\textsuperscript{145}

As I explore later, Courage would like to have written more explicitly about homosexuality in New Zealand. Courage brooded over his feeling that, other than the few exceptions, like ‘Guest at the Wedding’, he had not been ‘allowed’ to do so.\textsuperscript{146} ‘Only when I’m writing of homosexual love am I truly home – [but] how could I fit that into the N.Z. background I knew?’\textsuperscript{147} Publication of New Zealand-
themed stories had been ‘difficult enough’ in Britain, Courage wrote. ‘Depict[ing] perversion’ in New Zealand, however, was almost unimaginable.148

Courage’s revision of his past greatly coloured his sense for the New Zealand landscape. While a degree of liberation was ascribed in earlier excerpts, the gradual erosion of his regard for New Zealand’s cultural makeup eventually reshaped his associations. Many of Courage’s responses from this time reveal a kind of alienation. These reimagined the natural world in explicitly Freudian terms:

It’s good of you, Charles, to send me the New History of Canterbury, bless you. I enjoyed the description of Amberley beach in your letter: most vivid, though I can never think of that country without some strange pain in the psyche connected with childhood – guilt or fear – going of course straight back to good old Freudian Oedipal trauma of the profoundest kind which has queered my life in more senses than one for fifty years. How much do you understand of these things? Intuitively quite a lot, I fancy, having neurotic reactions of your own to some things or events.149

Courage had a similar experience in 1962, writing in his diary of the ‘guilt by association’ that arose from the ‘coloured photographs of N.Z. scenes’ in a calendar sent to him by his mother.150 Courage struggled to ‘explain the depths’ of his ‘alienation’ – an estrangement that was as much from his family as it was from New Zealand: a space now ‘drenched in angst’ and the ‘monstrous rejecting dragon of the past’.151 Courage used this material (as well as books on New Zealand, and Canterbury in particular) to ‘test’ his ‘reconciliation with the past’.152 These spaces, however, were now characterised as wholly ‘hostile and critical’,153 ‘I should have loved it’, Courage wrote of the landscape of his youth, ‘but it didn’t love me’.154 These final juxtapositions showed how New Zealand’s cultural ethos eradicated the ‘humanisation’ that English place names had afforded. New Zealand ‘implied something rejective’, Courage wrote, ‘some standard by which I totally failed’. Courage considered this landscape now extinguished of its human sympathies. ‘All that Englishness has gone now, liquidated by New Zealandness’.155
Conclusion
Throughout this chapter I have tried to emphasise the incoherence and instability of Courage’s experience of space. Certainly, space fed Courage’s sense of place and identity. In particular, his experience of national and metropolitan spaces show the considerable work expended in transitioning as an outsider between multiple social and cultural worlds.

Courage’s diaries and letters reveal how he made his home in these spaces. They elucidate patterns of living, preferred modes of social interaction, and the arrangement of his most intimate and private concerns (in matters pertaining to sexual relations, for example). Courage’s narratives indicate the degree of liberating influences available in the city. It is quite probable that London supplied a degree of artistic and queer sociability that peripheral spaces like New Zealand simply could not replicate. As Matt Houlbrook has suggested, the sheer scale of the metropolis provided a degree of anonymity, numerous spaces for leisure, and a ‘constant marketplace of sexual opportunity’.156

Courage certainly partook in the full cultural life of the city. Elite spaces, particularly the theatrical ones of the West End, provided a range of cultural uses, both queer and mainstream. Even so, Courage’s negotiation of metropolitan space was always guided by a set of personal tastes and inclinations. His narratives highlight, for example, how notions of respectability and sexual difference continually informed his use of space. In particular, public spaces remained zones of sexual indiscretion that Courage continued to see as degrading throughout his time in London. Clearly, he was aware of these public geographies as queer sexual meeting points. If anything, however, this knowledge served to harden Courage’s views about sexual types and sexual relations. Such a view fed Courage’s spatial orientation within the metropolis; one that divided the city along sexual as well as social lines, and helped to determine his own preferences regarding sociability and sexual expression.

Yet, even while Courage considered aspects of his urban experience to be emancipating, he also saw London in a much less congenial light: as a site of distress, alienation and abjection. The very obverse of ‘liberation’, these experiences call attention to the way in that Courage’s experience of space was always a highly mediated one. Questions of age, the conditions of life, even the
sexual landscape itself could trouble Courage’s relationship to the metropolis. Courage’s World War II experience perhaps dramatises this most successfully. The innate volatility of metropolitan life, however, can be found throughout Courage’s narrative register. Such experiences informed Courage’s sense of affiliation, community, even questions of access (whether real or imaginary).

Even though Courage had not lived in New Zealand since 1935, a similar complexity attended Courage’s characterisation of national space. While New Zealand frequently appeared in Courage’s narrative to be puritanical, other narratives, particularly those that evoked memories of the natural landscape, spoke of affirming experiences that were far from unhappy. His own reminiscences (as well as letters from friends) also remind us of New Zealand’s queer sociabilities.

In this way, Courage’s experience of national space frequently defied the depiction of queerness raised in much activist and liberationist histories of New Zealand (narratives that have tended, I have suggested, to view New Zealand before liberation as wholly oppressive). I do not wish to replace one liberationist discourse with another. Indeed, Courage’s storied sources usefully highlight the importance of looking to the specificity of personal experience in assessing historical conditions and the precise meanings constructed by those persons who lived through them. It is clear that Freudian psychoanalysis touched on more than Courage’s sense of sexual selfhood. Medical intervention fundamentally transformed Courage’s sense of national space. Here New Zealand’s liberating capacities were fundamentally lost in reassessments of the past that called for the evocation of the child’s hidden infantile trauma.

Yet, even then, one continues to detect certain ambivalences in Courage’s materials. Writing to Brasch in 1955, for example, Courage confided, half in jest, perhaps, a peculiar but ongoing fantasy he had about returning to New Zealand: ‘I see myself crawling ashore in Wellington – London meanwhile having been atom-bombed – and imploring the [Literary] Fund to support me in some shack on one of N.Z.’s remoter beaches [...] while, crazy as a cat, I write my memoirs of the Old World for [Christchurch-based] Caxton Press’. Certainly, Courage’s connection to New Zealand was tenacious. New Zealand continued to operate as the source of his material welfare and was the home to a considerable number of
dear friends (Brasch among them). For Courage, who wished to have his remains returned to New Zealand after death, New Zealand also remained his literal and spiritual homeland (his ashes were scattered on Seadown, near the banks of the Waipara River).158

Numerous scholars have argued that the history of space must also be a history of the body. While the relationship between the two is often inextricably intertwined, a focus on the body rarely emerges in many historical treatments of the past. We have seen already the role played by the body in a range of different circumstances: as a locus of experience, pleasure, and political agency, for example. Courage’s narratives regarding space supply insight into the subjectivity of bodily experience. As I will indicate in the following chapter, the body is invoked in other discussions – in matters pertaining to identity, citizenship and mobility, amongst others. They indicate, too, how ‘meanings and power relations’ were not inert, but mapped onto the ‘bodies and experiences of men’ as they traversed through space.159 Such a discussion links both culture and subjectivity to a broader analysis of space. As we narrow the focus from the macro to the micro, we see how Courage conceived experience on the smallest and most intimate of scale; through and in relation to his own person.
Notes

3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
6 Courage, Journal, 1937-1940, 5 April 1938, MS-0999/085, HC.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
10 Courage writes, for example, of Paris as a site of sexual and moral turpitude: ‘I buy a French paper and read in it the amazing story of the government official who was found dead in Paris hanging by the neck in front of a large mirror: he was dressed in woman’s clothes and was wearing a blonde wig. Too incredible for fiction’. At other times, Paris is evoked as an idealised space, but one that is always at a remove from reality and practical everyday concerns. Paris is the site of one of Courage’s mostly fondly remembered holidays, for example (‘one of the pleasantest holidays I’ve ever spent’), but never operated as a site of serious work or enterprise. Indeed, Courage only ever seems to have viewed Paris as landscape of leisure – sexual and otherwise. See Courage, Journal, 1929-1931, ‘Journal of My Trip Back From Greece’, 9 January 1927, MS-0999/080, HC; 1937-1940, 23 May – 21 June 1939, MS-0999/085, HC.
12 As I have already alluded, these impulses were not exclusive to Courage’s private narration. For my analysis of the role memory and experience played in Courage’s creative output refer to Chapters Six and Seven of this thesis.
13 In Chapters One and Two I showed that while the discursive directly informed Courage’s sense of self – in scripts pertaining to masculinity, national identity, or
sexual expression, for example – at no time was Courage absent from the process used to construct sense and meaning. In much the same way, it is Courage we see ultimately order and make sense of the world around him. The city offered an open set of definitions that could be understood and rearranged in multiple ways, just as the spaces themselves were never held in suspension or remained static overtime.

14 I follow Matt Cook’s argument against histories that seek a ‘representative’ account of urban spatiality. Cook writes that individual accounts of urban spaces are instead productive for their subjective capacities. Cook suggests that such histories are effective because they ‘show us some of the possibilities and restrictions associated with [...] competing and overlapping frameworks [of life] – and the difficulty of achieving subjective composure within them’. See Cook, *London and the Culture of Homosexuality*, p. 150.

15 Cook, *London and the Culture of Homosexuality*, p. 3.

16 Courage, Journal, 1920-1924, 21 September 1923, MS-0999/078, HC.

17 One senses here the degree of excitement that overwhelmed Courage’s record of academic experience. While this creates difficulties in assessing his time at Oxford, we have a fairly comprehensive picture of his enjoyment of civic and urban space within the metropolis.

18 Courage, Journal, 1920-1924, 21 September 1923, MS-0999/078, HC.

19 Ronnie Peter to James Courage, 3 September 1923, MS-0999/110, HC.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

22 Courage, Journal, 1927-1929, 18 September 1927, MS-0999/079, HC.

23 Ibid.


25 Courage, Journal, 1920-1924, 19 September 1921, MS-0999/079, HC.

26 Courage, Journal, 1931, 10 March 1931, MS-0999/081, HC.

27 Courage, Journal, 1929-1931, 18 December 1930, MS-0999/080, HC.

28 Courage’s sister Constance Gray wrote to Charles Brasch of having visited Courage during his time at Oxford. She hints at how Courage’s piano was a
centerpiece for elite homosocial gatherings: ‘The Baby [sic] grand [...] was a prominent piece of furniture in St. John’s College and I remember Robert Addinsell coming to play his first success “How Now Brown Cow” on it!! This had just been accepted for a musical comedy in London’. Rather interestingly, Constance wrote that the ‘aesthetes of Oxford’ comprised ‘many of Jim’s friends’. Along with the British composer Addinsell, Constance also mentioned Harold Acton and the novelist and biographer Ronald McNair Scott as among Courage’s closest companions. See Constance Gray to Charles Brasch, undated, MS-0996-003/043, HC.

29 Courage and Emlyn Williams enjoyed a particularly close friendship as undergraduates at Oxford. This is evidenced in Williams’s own autobiography, which attests to a fairly active and shared social life. Williams mentions one particularly memorable party in 1925: ‘Vigil [a play] went better than any of us dared hope; I savoured the satisfaction of holding an audience, and heard in the air the faint unmistakable crackle of success. On the 26th [of November] I gave a rowdy birthday party luncheon, my twentieth – Reggie Colby, Charles [Garvenal], John Fernald, John Aldridge, Jim Courage – with dancing on the table to the borrowed gramophone, after emptying a bottle of kümmel brought by Norman Cameron’. See Williams, George: An Early Autobiography (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1961), p. 387.

30 Courage, Journal, 1929-1931, 1 February 1929, MS-0999/080, HC.


32 Ibid.

33 Ibid

34 Ibid.

35 Courage, Journal, 1937-1940, 30 April 1939, MS-0999/085, HC. (original emphasis).

36 Courage, Journal, 1937-1940, 9 July 1937, MS-0999/085, HC.

37 Ibid.

38 This was a human ‘contact’ that was described by Courage as a ‘kind of detonation’. See James Courage, A Way of Love (London: Jonathan Cape, 1959), p. 11.
41 Courage, Journal, 1937-1940, 5 April 1938, MS-0999/085, HC.
42 Courage, Journal, 1937-1940, 21 September 1940, MS-0999/085, HC.
43 Courage, Journal, 1937-1940, 29 September 1940, MS-0999/085, HC. (original emphasis).
45 A degree of intrigue persists about the precise details of Wanganui Affair. Scholars suggest that D'Arcy Cresswell had attempted to blackmail Wanganui mayor Charles Mackay (married but homosexual). The encounter became violent and Cresswell was shot by Mackay. For a more fulsome description see John Newton, ‘D’Arcy Creswell, 1896-1960’, Kōtare, 7, 3 (2008), pp. 129-30.
46 Courage, Journal, 1937-1940, 2 December 1938, MS-0999/085, HC
47 Ibid.
48 Ibid. (emphasis added).
49 Houlbrook, *Queer London*, pp. 52, 55.
51 Courage, Journal, 1932-1934, 9 July 1933, MS-0999/083, HC.
52 This intimacy is also reflected in Courage’s fiction. This is especially the case in *A Way of Love* where the protagonist’s female housekeeper Rose is shown to have a robust and worldly insight into her employer’s private affairs. Rather interestingly, the pair display a great deal of mutual trust and affection, and Rose,
while a servant, becomes in many ways part of the protagonist’s urban (and queer) family: ‘Such few doubts as I first had about Rose’s acceptance of Philip as a person, or of the presence of so young a lodger in the house, had been quickly dispelled. From the very beginning she not only tolerated Philip, she gloried in him. [...] His socks, he found, were darned almost before the holes became visible, his underclothes were washed and mended weekly, loose shirt-buttons were anchored with a stronger thread, his hairbrushes were rinsed and dried [...] Both Rose and Philip, in fact, put one another on their best behaviour; the result was a common deference that did not include fear’. See Courage, *A Way of Love*, p. 129.

53 Courage notes how one housekeeper – a Mrs G. Timmons – offered continual emotional and material support in the months after his mental collapse in 1950. Courage gave the woman a copy of his then recently released novel *Desire Without Content*, inscribing on the fly-cover (as he recorded in his journal): ‘To Mrs. Timmons, to whose help and comfort I owe more than she can possibly know’. Courage wrote how Mrs Timmons had been a ‘mother-substitute’ for the past twelve years, and that the relationship had been one of reciprocal warmth and trust. Courage recalled how Timmons made the journey to Napsbury Mental Hospital once a week for the six months he resided there as a voluntary patient. Courage records how the pair would ‘sit in that awful long gallery, surrounded by patients and other visitors’ and talk every Wednesday afternoon. Timmons always brought him ‘clean clothes, fruit and cake’. See Courage, 1950-1959, 25 November 1950, MS-0999/088, HC.

54 Courage, Journal, 1927-1929, 21 September 1927, MS-0999/079, HC.

55 Courage, Journal, 1937-1940, 19 November 1939, MS-0999/085, HC.

56 Courage, Journal, 1931, 24 March 1931, MS-0999/081, HC.


59 Ibid.

60 Ibid.

61 Ibid.
Stuart was some twelve years younger than Courage and, while Courage’s journal is peppered with numerous and affectionate references to the man, it is clear that their age difference was sometimes a cause of discomfort, at least for the latter. For a more detailed discussion of this important relationship, see my references to Stuart in Chapters Four and Five on this thesis.


Ibid. (original emphasis).

Ibid.


Ibid.


Ibid.

Courage, Journal, 1937-1940, 13 May 1937, MS-0999/085, HC.

Ibid.


Courage, Journal, 1937-1940, 13 May 1937, MS-0999/085, HC.

Courage, Journal, 1937-1940, 3 March 1938, MS-0999/085, HC.

Ivon Alderson to James Courage, 27 July 1943, MS-0999/105, HC.

Rather interestingly, however, war did not disrupt Courage’s sex life. Indeed, as I show in later chapters, Courage, like many queer men at the time, found the city sexually transformed with, if anything, the increased availability of prospective sexual partners. See Hornsey, *The Spiv and the Architect*, p. 9; Houlbrook, *Queer London*, p. 270; Matt Cook, ‘Queer Conflicts’, pp. 148-50.

Courage, Journal, 1937-1940, 14 September 1939, MS-0999/085, HC.

Courage, Journal, 1937-1940, 21 September 1940, MS-0999/085, HC.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.
85 Courage, Journal, 1937-1940, 30 December 1940, MS-0999/085, HC. Courage’s decision to move may also have been informed by disruptions caused at Hillfield Court by Britain’s own counter-defensive strategy. A large barrage balloon was housed on the property’s lawn, and Royal Air Force personnel were permanently stationed on site. See C. R. Elrington, ed., ‘Hampstead: Belsize’, British History Online [online], 07 March 2011, available URL: http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=22638.
86 Courage, Journal, 1937-1940, 11 October 1940, MS-0999/085, HC.
87 Courage, Journal, 1937-1940, 15 October 1940, MS-0999/085, HC.
88 Courage, Journal, 1937-1940, 1 December 1940, MS-0999/085, HC.
89 Courage, Journal, 1941-1946, 24 January 1941, MS-0999/086, HC.
90 Courage, Journal, 1937-1940, 21 September 1939, MS-0999/085, HC.
91 Courage, Journal, 1941-1946, 9 May 1944, MS-0999/086, HC.
92 Ibid.
93 Lynda Johnston and Robyn Longhurst, Space, Place and Sex: Geographies of Sexualities (Plymouth, UK: Rowen & Littlefield, 2010), p. 159.
94 Cook, London and the Culture of Homosexuality, p. 150.
97 Ibid.
100 Ibid.
101 Ibid.
102 Ibid.
103 Ibid.
106 Ibid.
108 Courage, Journal, 1932-1934, 5 November 1933, MS-0999/082, HC.
109 Ibid.
110 Ibid.
111 Courage, Journal, 1932-1934, 18 November 1934, MS-0999/082, HC.
112 Courage, Journal, 1941-1946, 20 April 1941, MS-0999/086, HC.
113 Courage, Journal, 1927-1929, 27 October 1927, MS-0999/079, HC.
115 Courage, Journal, 1941-1946, 14 June 1941, MS-0999/086, HC.
118 Courage, Journal, 1937-1940, 23 February 1939, MS-0999/085, HC.
119 Ronnie Peter to James Courage, 27 May 1925, MS-0999/110, HC.
121 Ibid.
122 Ronnie Peter to James Courage, 27 May 1925, MS-0999/110, HC.
123 Ibid.
124 Courage, ‘Guest at the Wedding’, p. 73.
125 Ibid.
126 Ibid.
127 Indeed, Courage and Peter’s relationship can be resituated within the wider context of the homosexual pastoral that had pervaded the British tradition of same-sex love for some time. Edward Carpenter, for example, wrote in Towards Democracy of the countryside as a space for personal transformation and the site
for masculine comradeship. For his discussion on this see Cook, *London and the Culture of Homosexuality*, p. 135.

128 James Courage to Charles Brasch, 15 July 1953, MS-0996-003/042, HC.

129 Courage, Journal ('The Diary of a Neurotic'), 1960-1961, 4 October 1960, MS-0999/089, HC.


133 Ibid

134 Ibid.

135 Ibid. (original emphasis).


137 Ibid. (original emphasis).

138 Ibid.

139 Ibid.

140 Ibid.

141 Courage, Journal ('The Diary of a Neurotic'), 1960-1961, 28 December 1960, MS-0999/089, HC.

142 Ibid.


145 Ibid. (emphasis added).

146 Ibid.

147 Ibid.

148 Courage had been partly comforted by Brasch’s defense of *A Way of Love* in *Landfall*, but ultimately drew back from protest himself. Courage believed that the social watchdogs of New Zealand were already sufficiently ‘inflamed’. See Ibid.
Spaces

149 James Courage to Charles Brasch, 5 November 1958, MS-0996-003/042, HC.
151 Ibid.
153 Ibid.
154 Ibid.
155 Ibid.
157 James Courage to Charles Brasch, 1 October 1955, MS-0996-003/042, HC.
158 Patricia Fanshawe to Charles Brasch, 22 September 1969, MS-0996-003/043, HC.
Chapter Four

‘How damnably sex colours everything’: Bodily experience, class and the articulation of desire

Introduction: Stupid bodies

‘Do not pay too much attention to the stupid old body’, British socialist and homosexual activist Edward Carpenter wrote in 1883.¹ Carpenter wrote two decades before James Courage’s birth, but his views of the body resonated with Courage’s own. Courage read Carpenter’s Towards Democracy at the age of twenty-six, in 1929.² Carpenter’s treatise was an ambitious manifesto for political and social change. But it was Carpenter’s views on sexuality and personhood that garnered Courage’s considerable respect.³ In Towards Democracy Carpenter unblushingly emphasised the importance of human (and queer) sexualities. Sexual expression, however, had to be balanced by a necessary exercise in restraint. ‘When you have trained it, made it healthy, beautiful, and your willing servant’, Carpenter wrote of the human body, ‘[w]hy, do not then reverse the order and become its slave and attendant’.⁴

The body, Carpenter contended, was the vehicle for human pleasure and its means for encountering worldly experience. Wholesale indulgence in worldly pleasures, however, risked more than impropriety and scandal. Unfettered carnality ‘reversed’ man’s assumed preeminence over the natural world. Carpenter wrote that immoderation – whether for food or sex – left the individual ‘[i]ncredibly stupid and unformed’.⁵ If left unchecked, the body’s ‘hungrers and sleeps, and funny little needs and vanities’ threatened humanity’s ‘path of evolution’.⁶ Carpenter suggested that those who dedicated themselves to the whims of the ‘mouth’, ‘belly’ and ‘sex-wants’ of the body became debased.⁷ ‘Imprisoned’ by their ‘own [sexual] members’, these people were not human, but animal: ‘fish’, ‘toad’, or ‘ape-like’ in conception.⁸

Courage read and agreed with Carpenter’s views that the body must be carefully subordinated by the intellect. Bodily demands (‘pleasures and satisfactions’) were potentially addictive, and reduced individuals to mindless
automatons.9 Rather, the body (‘the dog’) was to be held in check by the mind (‘its master’).10 Such a state of being ensured a necessary moral and spiritual equilibrium and in turn improved one’s physical and intellectual quality of life.11

Courage was impressed by Carpenter’s advocacy for a sexual culture that would be free of puritanical constraints (Carpenter stressed the importance of ‘sex-converse’ and of the ‘renewal’ possible ‘in and from the bodies of others’, for example).12 But his regard for the paramount role played by the mind in fashioning a meaningful social world was perhaps the more potent aspect of his philosophy. It was here, after all, that one was freed to explore the limits of life. One was not ‘fossilised into one set form’ (which is ‘death’, Carpenter suggests) but capable of exercising both bodily and intellectual control as an ‘indivisible, indefeasible’ whole.13

Courage expended significant energy in reflecting on the role of the body as a mediator of experience. These kinds of discussions peppered Courage’s private narrative, and they indicate how central the body was in his conceptions of self-identity. Indeed, they defined (as they do for us all) aspects of personhood in fundamental ways.

I will show how Courage considered the body to be a zone of uniquely personal expression: in dress, muscularity and appearance, for example. It was also the site of sexual fulfillment, and the means through which sexual and social interaction was possible. At the same time, Courage’s writings also show that the body was far from a benign social construct. Even while affirming aspects of what Courage considered to be key qualities of his character and temperament (his sexuality or profession, for example), the body could just as easily manifest as a site of anxiety, abjection or dangerous sublimation.

These meanings mediated Courage’s intimate and social relations. They also informed his sense of mental wellness in fairly critical ways. As I have already suggested, a degree of complexity attended Courage’s views of bodily and sexual experience. As I indicated in Chapter Three, Courage displayed a keen social awareness of cultural space and the uses of public space as zones of sexual interaction. While the metropolis was a site of cultural and professional stimulation, the social and sexual architecture of the city often brought Courage’s intellectual beliefs and sexual practices into violent conflict. Stated simply, even

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while Courage advocated for respectable and decorous behaviour, his own testimony reveals his participation within the very sexual economy he frequently condemned.

This chapter looks more closely at the complex meanings Courage ascribed to the body and bodily relations. It builds, too, on my discussion of bodies and space in Chapter Three. Such an analysis exposes more fully Courage’s conception of identity in practice, as well as the tensions and ambivalences – like those mentioned above – that often underlined attempts to define and regulate matters pertaining to bodily experience. These could be state-derived or, like Courage’s views of carnality, a matter of personal preference.

Bodies and spaces are often inextricably linked and mutually constitutive. As Roy Porter has pointed out, the body sits at the ‘crossroads between self and society’.14 Porter’s approach places bodies in their material contexts and asks how changing cultural systems inform everyday experiences.15 Such analysis is a useful extension of our assessment of Courage’s social worlds in Chapter Three. Historian Sean Brady emphasises that the ‘agency of individuals’ be stressed in assessing the embodied practices of the past.16 Such perspectives favour nuanced accounts of bodily knowledge and practices, and recognise the broader ‘historical and social context’ of people’s lives.17 While bodies have a fleshy reality, in as much as they are all made of flesh and bone, Jon Binnie, Robyn Longhurst and Robin Peace point out that histories of the body show that particular ‘capacities and desires’ are structured by hegemonic and normative practices.18 What is more, diverse ‘specificities’ (race, culture, and class among them) help shape the subjective experiences of individuals.19

This chapter opens with a discussion of the body as a site of experiential otherness. Courage’s diaries, letters and photographs highlight how he presented his body in particular contexts and spaces. It also indicates the degree to which he configured his bodily appearance within changing landscapes and circumstances. Even so, and as I have suggested elsewhere, Courage’s bodily experience was frequently an unhappy one that left him feeling disaffected and mentally insecure. Courage’s letters and diaries highlight a bodily unease that impinged on his sense of identity and self-worth at the highest levels. This abjection highlights Courage’s struggle – and often, his failure – to integrate
himself within the material and discursive normativities of his particular time and place.²⁰

The body is also a zone of physical pleasure and a means for relating intimately to others. I use the second section of this chapter to explore Courage’s views of the body as a vector of erotic interest. As I have already suggested, the recipients of Courage’s romantic and filial feelings were typically men of like-temperament and class. Courage’s greatest erotic attraction, though, was often reserved for working-class and military men – guardsmen and sailors, particularly. These episodes show how Courage’s sexual distinctions were classed (and sometimes raced). These material traces also yield insights into the sociabilities, spaces and bodies that informed his erotic register.

I examine the changing meanings of sex and intimacy in the final section of this chapter. Here I look more closely at the distinctions Courage placed on romantic and physical attachment. This was an ideological framework that Courage shared with others, among them Carpenter and other middle-class homosexuals. Equally, however, Courage struggled to enact this construct in practice. These episodes bring into relief irreconcilable tensions that sometimes persisted between meaning and practice. They also suggest the value Courage placed on certain relationship forms.

It was only later (roughly after 1950) that Courage attached increased importance to specific sexual acts. In Chapter Three I showed how Freudian psychiatry significantly altered Courage’s conceptualisation of space, New Zealand spaces in particular. Here, too, Freudian intervention is perceptible. As I suggested in Chapter One, Freudian sexual critique focused particularly on Courage’s receptive (or ‘passive’) role in lovemaking. In reality, these Freudian views touched on most aspects of sexual intimacy – and even Courage’s wider social context as well.

Here we see moments of Courage’s critical resistance to clinical discourse and we notice that his prevailing views on intimacy did not simply collapse under these pressures. Overall, however, psychoanalysis reframed Courage’s views of bodies and intimacy, and introduced new categories of ‘deviance’ and ‘perversity’. Under professional intervention, same-sex intimacies became acts of masochistic debasement, encounters that were devoid of any emotional
integrity. Courage's psychiatrists viewed male eroticism as purely carnal: the physical fulfillment of diverse psychosexual dysfunctions and little else.

**Abjection, difference and bodily otherness**

Courage’s personal record reveals a long history of abjection. As I will suggest, this sense of bodily and lived inferiority was expressed throughout Courage’s narrative register. It intensified with the passing of time and the onset of illness – both mental and physical. Even so, it would be wrong to presume that Courage’s bodily experience was wholly negative; certainly, he enjoyed an active sex life. Nor was he rendered entirely passive by normative regimes, normative masculinity among them, that tended to view queer male bodies and their embodied practices as culturally suspect.

Courage did not consider himself athletic. Yet, frequent references to exercise, which appear mostly during his twenties and thirties, point to a degree of care taken in constructing a body that was desirable by conventional standards of masculinity. Courage wrote, for example, about the routine of performing ‘jerks’ (probably push-ups) before breakfast.\(^{21}\) This stimulated the respiratory system and allowed the release of pent-up energy. In photographs taken during his time in Argentina, Courage reveals a body that was trim and fit well into his mid-to-late twenties (he was twenty-seven at the time). One image (see Figure 7) shows Courage on a beach – presumably in Argentina – with Frank Fleet. Courage shows a body that, while not brawny, is modestly muscular, with lightly toned arms and a flat belly. These tangible signs of bodily improvement suggest a conscious effort to maintain and improve bodily appearance. These physical interventions enhanced and reconfigured the body in ways deemed socially praiseworthy.

Other archival sources, his journal particularly, draw attention to Courage’s use of clothing as a further means to configure and reconfigure the body. Courage maintained a fairly formal set of clothing for daily use. With the exception of leisure-specific clothes (swimwear, for example), tailored suits formed the basis of his day-to-day wear and were worn in most social contexts – even at home. Certainly, the suit formed the basis of most men’s wardrobes of the period. This is particularly so for men of Courage’s class and position.\(^{22}\) For
Courage, however, the suited body was more than a social convenience. It was a tangible expression of class and profession, and spoke very specifically to his subjectivity. Clothed thus, Courage presented himself to the world as man of taste and refinement. He also showed himself to be a man of learning and respectability. Courage therefore configured himself as man of writing, but with a very precise cultural pedigree.

Courage gave special attention to this attire: he maintained no than five or six suits at a time (deeming it an unparalleled extravagance to keep more), and made allowances in his budget for their upkeep and replacement as circumstances dictated. In visual terms, Courage’s suited body was an assertion of masculine normativity and emblematised a very particular aesthetic. A style of clothing normally worn without adornment (Courage did not, for example, wear a carnation or any other marker of sexual preference) the suit encoded the body as conventionally masculine and capable. Constructed from a choice of fairly uniform colours, style and fabrics, the suit operated as a multi-occasion garment, but one that allowed Courage to pass through an array of elite spaces – in and outside of the metropolis. This included spaces encoded queer and square, personal and professional.

Courage’s bodily presentation was therefore consciously cultivated and designed to be read in particular ways. The muscular and fit male body offered a picture of masculine harmony and (possibly) its erotic allure. On the other hand, the clothed body simultaneously empowered Courage’s social and professional performances. The suit licensed the body for its traversal through social space and encoded its wearer with masculine and cultural authority.
Figure 7: Courage and Fleet in matching beach outfits during one seaside excursion in Argentina in 1931. [MS-0999/179, S10-580a, Hocken Collections, Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of Otago]
Outside of these contexts, the clothed body could be read in other ways too: as a site of contestation and play, for instance. Photographs taken on Courage’s excursion to Peel Forest with friends in 1920, for example, show a quite different bodily presentation to the one Courage usually presented to the world. Rather than a suit or other formal attire, Courage is shown in a costume reminiscent of 1920s glamour (see Figure 8). His normal masculine composure (evident say, in his passport photograph) is replaced by a display of the flamboyantly feminine. One image shows Courage in sheer stockings. He wears a flimsy shawl, and a skirt drawn back by a sunflower and ribbon. Elsewhere Courage poses elegantly in front of a large totara tree, holding opera glasses, and bedecked in a headdress made of feathers and patterned cloth.

Courage records other events where conventional garb was displaced for costume and play. On board ship, for example, Courage recalled preparations for a fancy dress party during his passage to Argentina:

I wearily search for the remains of a Greek tunic I once wore, and discover it at the bottom of the [travel] trunk, somewhat creased. Attempt to construct a fillet or tiara from very prickly artificial laurel-leaves: but creation is not a success. Decide to solicit help from a young married woman traveling alone. She asks me if I am intending to appear as a nymph: I testily negative any such suggestion and explain. She promises aid of needle and elastic.26

Courage had clearly used this costume at some time prior to his boarding the Alcantara in England (and it is possible he did so at a party or gathering with other queer men).27 Unlike the glamorous flapper costume of Peel Forest, however, Courage was quite adamant that this time his body should be read as conventionally masculine. This is evidenced by his rather taciturn reply at being mistaken for a nymph.
Figure 8: Courage poses in front of a totara tree in Peel Forest (South Canterbury, New Zealand) in 1920. This front view shows the elaborate work that went into Courage's bodily reconfiguration. [MS-0999/117, S06-508a, Hocken Collections, Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of Otago]
Bodies

It is possible that Courage dressed in Greek style to attract prospective sexual partners. ‘Greek Love’ was code for homosexuality, after all. It is equally plausible that Courage selected Greek attire out of simple convenience – it was already in his trunk – or to fit within the milieu of the shipboard community. Certainly, Courage notes others in similar costume.28 Whichever Courage’s motives, these episodes illustrate the remarkable sophistication at his disposal in configuring the body for a range of different settings and circumstances, both queer and ‘mainstream’. They indicate, too, the centrality of the body, and knowledge of how it could be read, as a means for skillfully navigating diverse social spaces.

Even so, Courage’s agency was not without limit, and episodes of bodily anxiety far outweighed sequences of a more affirming nature. In Courage’s recollection of the party given aboard the Alcantara, for instance, there were certain anxieties about bodies evident. Courage records, for example, how his Greek tunic was ‘much admired’: particularly, he was dismayed to note, by the ship’s women passengers.29 Courage fretted, however, over whether he looked ‘passable’ without correct footwear or adornments (the laurel wreath for the head was his chief concern). Other anxieties fixated much more strongly over his ‘exposed body’.30 ‘[L]arge stretches of limb are without covering’, Courage recorded with chagrin. Courage’s ‘bare calves’ were left vulnerable to appraisal, and several women took special interest in Courage’s undergarments (‘[they] keep on asking me what I have underneath’).31

As I explored earlier, Courage singled out Ancient Greek and Roman bodies as symbols of special masculine perfection. The muscular youths memorialised in sculpture at the British Museum celebrated this male form.32 As I wrote in Chapter One, this was a masculine form that threw into relief Courage’s own sense of bodily difference. These bodies were athletic, muscular and hairless.33 Courage’s body, by contrast, fell well short of this ideal. Courage wondered how Greek men achieved such a physical ideal of form, deeming his own efforts ‘rather a nightmare’.34 ‘I am dismayed anew by the hairiness of [my] legs’, Courage wrote with obvious exasperation before retiring to bed the night before the party on the Alcantara. These encounters unsettled Courage’s bodily (and masculine) composure. Erotically desirable though they were, the bodies of the
ancient world marked a superlative masculinity that served only to expose Courage’s own bodily failings.

Some of Courage’s earliest narrative episodes strongly underscore this state of lived abjection. Courage’s assessment of himself as a teenager, for example, was often less than affirming:

I was extraordinarily conceited and I still now put down my character as I see it. I am fickle [several words excised]. I am not particularly generous, my spending of money proves that, but in some matters I am peculiarly indulgent. I am effeminate, yes, it hurts me to write it but I am, for I love clothes and pretty things, and have great opinions on art. I am sensual, I am self-centred, I am a snob. I try to think I am good looking but I have a hideous nose [...] [following section excised].

Chris Brickell suggests that effeminacy was more a question of gender performance than of sexuality at this time. It was only later – in the 1940s – that effeminacy came to be attributed to homosexuality. Certainly, Courage’s effeminacy was drawn more from gendered self-conception than any sense of sexual otherness. Courage believed that this compromised masculinity was evident in the cultural topography of the body. Here his body is vitiated by the sensual – in his ‘love of clothes’ and finery, for example. He suggests, too, some of the cultural tensions that persisted for a man concerned with his appearance (perhaps excessively so by the standards of the day). Courage’s testimony shows how abjection was generated through the body and its presentation. Here Courage’s effort to gain self-affirmation through his body was ultimately confounded. In the body he locates a ‘fickleness’ suspect in men, and a nose too ungainly to be considered ‘good looking’.

Other expositions pinpoint the domestic space – and especially Courage’s mother – as sources of negativity about the body. In one vignette Courage recalled how his mother had assessed his body ‘in a fit of frankness’ when he had been ‘about 14-15 years of age’. Zoë was not without praise for Courage’s person, suggesting, for example, that his hands were ‘very nice’. Overall, however, she considered that Courage’s appearance left much to be desired: ‘you are very ugly, you’re knocked-kneed, [and] you’ll be quite bald by the time you’re thirty’. Decades later, in 1938, Courage noted that his knees had ‘ceased to
knock’, and that he still had a ‘plentiful supply’ of hair.\textsuperscript{41} Even so, Courage deemed that his mother’s assessment was on the whole correct. ‘I am still ugly’, Courage privately concluded.\textsuperscript{42}

An assessment of Courage’s journals show how age exacerbated his sense of bodily abjection. Owing to his mother’s sentiment, perhaps – which Courage noted had been supported by informal medical opinion – Courage remained especially sensitive about his hair.\textsuperscript{43} In one early episode, for example, Courage recorded how a chance glance of the ‘flat-top’ of his head in a mirror could mar congenial sociabilities (he was ‘instantly deflated’ during one such occasion at tea with a friend, for example).\textsuperscript{44} This self-consciousness deepened in successive years as Courage’s hair noticeably receded.\textsuperscript{45} Just a few years after Courage had noted the ‘plentiful supply’ of hair in the extract above, he was dejected to find its sudden thinning.\textsuperscript{46} Courage concluded at thirty-five years of age that he was no longer youthful.

This conclusion had repercussions beyond simple aesthetics:

> Thinking of [Frank Fleet], and trying to comb my hair into a ‘good’ parting – depressed at how bald I’ve become and how ugly my skull is. Real narcissism here: I’m not worthy of love, I’m deformed, I’m off, I’m an outcast. Deep despondency. How can even [Stuart] like me when I look as I do? The barber yesterday cut my hair too short at the back, as he sometimes does, wh[ich] makes me ugly, hideous, not right.\textsuperscript{47}

Courage was especially conscious of short-cropped haircuts, believing that these made his head appear small, square and (accordingly) less masculine. With his ‘thatch of hair’ significantly diminished by the mid-1940s, Courage described his appearance as ‘duppy’ in one entry recorded in 1944. This is a word borrowed from the West Indies and connoted ghost or spirit.\textsuperscript{48} Such expressions conceptualise how Courage perceived the impact of hair-loss and aging: a process that robbed one of human character and vitality. Courage felt that his thinning hair signaled a reduced sexual virility.\textsuperscript{49} From the 1940s he regularly inspected the volume and condition of his hair. Though Courage consoled himself with the knowledge that his hair was ‘never abundant’, these exercises in bodily monitoring were often exhausting and mentally painful (Courage wrote of feeling
‘depressed for a couple of hours in consequence’ after one such afternoon, for example).\textsuperscript{50}

In the previous chapter I suggested that age mediated Courage’s sense of space. It informed his traversal of the metropolis. It also limited his ability to relate and interact with others; his social connections with young men were particularly difficult. Courage’s self-consciousness over his bodily appearance partly informed this new inhibition; a process that increasingly alienated Courage from those around him. Courage wrote that his bodily presentation had become a ‘physical disfigurement’ by his late forties. This perception ‘engulfed’ practically every aspect of his social world, and made withdrawal a foremost imperative.\textsuperscript{51}

On the 4\textsuperscript{th} of February 1944, Courage characterised middle age as a catalogue of physical debilities and dysfunctions:

Signs of the approach of middle-age – slight dullness of hearing on one ear (and sometimes both), varicose veins on [sic] both legs, slowly thinning hair (though this has been going on for 20 years) on the temples and crown, occasional slight rheumatism in the knees, a more stubborn beard (bristly at the end of the day, despite a close morning shave), slight fleshy thickening of the knuckles on both hands, a noticeable deviation towards longsightedness on [sic] the eyes (already, however, shortsighted). Finally, absolute necessity of at least eight hours full sleep a night. A melancholy enough catalogue.\textsuperscript{52}

Courage was relieved, at least, to note no visibly ‘increasing belly’.\textsuperscript{53} Even so, Courage was all too aware of how his growing physical unease increasingly beset his intimate and professional relations. ‘I am frightened by my own fear’, Courage wrote at the age of forty-seven.\textsuperscript{54} Courage continued to see Stuart, his main love interest from the mid-1950s, on a fairly regular basis. The pair met at least weekly, but usually at Courage’s home, where Stuart might stay for sometimes a few days at a time. For the most part, however, Courage recorded how his strategies of avoidance (which were fueled at least partly by bodily abjection) deepened an already existing ‘detachment and loneliness’.\textsuperscript{55}

Courage feared (and perhaps rightly so) that this social withdrawal worsened an already fragile mental state.\textsuperscript{56} Certainly, he considered his own depression
and bodily abjection to be mutually constitutive: physical manifestations that signaled his hidden psychic malformation. And his narration of public avoidance usually underscored the neurotic impulse that he believed lay behind such practices:

In the afternoon Ralph Arnold rang me up from Constables to ask if I had a photograph of myself which [British weekly] The Sketch could use. He said that Rupert Croft-Cooke, who reviews for The Sketch, wanted to pick out my novel [Desire Without Content] for distinction. [...] One of my phobias is the sight of my own ugliness, and being photographed is a torture to me. Consequently I haven't had a picture ‘taken’ for at least 20 years, and even the copies I have of that caricature I burnt about a year ago. I didn’t tell all this to Ralph Arnold, naturally; but he was very understanding and said the Sketch would have to use a photograph of the book’s cover instead.57

In other episodes Courage believed the compounding effects of age and ‘mental trouble’ caused ‘physical disease’.58 The fact he considered this link to be ‘psychosomatic’ merely strengthened his belief that the psychic and the physical were connected. It followed that the body exhibited the symptoms of the mind; and many of these physical ailments Courage believed to be manifestations attributable to neurotic (or and even erotic) misalignment.

On one such occasion Courage reported both ‘inflammation of the scrotum’ and ‘tooth-ache’ as manifestations of his disordered psyche.59 Seen in isolation, Courage considered that these ailments were ‘mild and could normally be coped with’.60 When placed alongside a deepening mental crisis though, the combined effects were anything but easily managed: ‘Now they seem like last straws’.61 Surveying the accrued effects of this experience, Courage wrote how bodily illness produced uncontrollable ‘panic’ and ‘hopeless questions’ regarding his identity.62 These questions went beyond the physical, tending only to touch off great ‘fears’ Courage had about his own ‘worthiness’ and moral integrity.63

Courage’s psychiatrist was at least partly to blame for these associations. Dr. Larkin suggested, for example, that physical pain usually represented the internalisation of the body's dimly-remembered infantile traumas.64 Courage, though, was actively complicit in maintaining this perception. Upon discovering that ongoing toothache had a physical cause, for example, and not, as Larkin had
surmised, a purely psychic origin, Courage continued to perceive mental and physical ailments as at least partially intermeshed:

I tried to compose an analogy between an abscess and a neurosis: a physical phenomenon and a mental. ‘This has been going on a long time’ – yes, of course I knew that; the hidden trouble. [...] I had similarly not been aware of the root of my life-long mental pain either: neurosis is, so to speak, a suppuration of old poison in the unconscious tissue of the psyche. The many doctors I had consulted, over the years, had not perceived the radical cause or causes of such anguish. They had ascribed it to this or that [...] They had been looking – as it might be – at imperfect X-ray photographs, showing only symptoms of pain, not the abscess itself.65

Physical pain, Courage continued, was a memory of the ‘child’s panic against annihilation’.66 It produced the same ‘sense of fear’, and the same ‘desolation’ of spirit.67 Pain was an ‘assault’ on both mind and body; one that produced an overwhelming sense of one’s vulnerability. ‘I’m completely alone in the face of something menacing in the highest degree’, Courage suggested of his physical ailments. ‘I feel there’s no hope, no hope in the entire world’.68

These later experiences were quite clearly influenced by Freudian thinking, and are most prominent in Courage’s personal narratives from the late 1950s. Courage’s earlier entries, however, underscore a close relationship between bodily and mental wellness that predated this medical intervention. Courage’s bout with tuberculosis in the 1930s, for example, produced a similar excess of feeling, and was echoed in tones similar to those above – if without the specific medical terminologies afforded by Freudian psychoanalysis.

Writing from Mundesley, a private sanatorium in Gimingham, Norfolk, Courage recorded how regular ‘devilish’ pains in his lungs left him wanting to ‘lie in bed and die’.69 Courage was provided with immediate ‘rest and pampering’ at the private institution, paid for by his father.70 His mental health, though, remained fragile after years of ‘nervous excitability’ in London and abroad. (Courage’s physician believed that Courage’s body had been irreparably degraded by Spanish Influenza in Argentina, where he most likely contracted pulmonary tuberculosis as well).71 Courage’s account of his convalescence with
consumption transitioned between moments of remarkable cheerfulness and rather crashing and extreme lows.

Arriving at Mundesley, Courage had reflected on his condition in relatively ebullient tones. He noted that he made ‘good progress’ practically immediately, and that he was ‘far stronger’ than he had been in ‘town’ (London).72 Referencing the connection between mind and body, Courage emphasised that his nervous condition (‘excitability’) had been ‘a strong sign of tubercular trouble’ that he now recognised in hindsight.73 As his condition worsened, though, Courage recorded an ‘appalling depression’ that manifested alongside his physical symptoms. ‘I haven’t been so upset since Dec. 27th, 1930, on the way to S[outh] America’, Courage wrote in July 1932, believing that, without the intervention of one concerned friend, he would have taken his own life. ‘[I’m] really rock-bottom – everything in the world is black [...] so profoundly de profundis’.74

Much like the degradations of age, Courage considered physical illness to be a reduction of one’s normal reserves of masculinity. Commenting on the condition of other male patients at the sanatorium, Courage noted their physical deterioration (‘[a] ghastly experience’) and reflected on his own: ‘Everybody looked so pale and downright ugly that I instantly imagined that I must look the same’75 Though Courage made a full recovery (and from New Zealand rather than England), Courage wrote that his condition was still ‘still-threatening’, though ‘quiescent’ well into the latter part of the 1930s.76

Courage was considered fit for only noncombatant duties during World War II. While his tuberculosis seems to have been a contributing factor, other medical conditions also affected the decision to exempt him from active service. Much like Courage’s earlier illness (and as I intimated in Chapter One), this bodily condition also impinged on his mental health and conception of self:

> On recommendation of Dr. [James] Cyriax [a medical friend and noted orthopedic surgeon], I consulted Harley St. (Mr. R. Boggon, 40 Harley St.) on the varicose veins in my leg, which, despite the fact that I wear an elastic stocking, have been a nuisance lately. Boggon’s opinion was that I can either spend a fortnight in a nursing-home now and have a series of small operations [...] or leave them as they are and continue to wear the stocking. [...] B[oggon] said the veins would disqualify me for active service in the Army. This opinion however, did not by any means please me: I
dislike feeling a crock, whether it exempts me from military service or not.77

Bodies, class and the articulation of desire
A very particular set of meanings emerge in the narratives above. They show that Courage was able to exert significant agency in configuring and reconfiguring the body: in clothing the physical form, for example, or in conditioning it through exercise. These configurations offered versatile means for navigating social space and cultural interactions. They also gave opportunities to present the body as a symbol to be read by others in ways advantageous to Courage both personally and professionally.

Overall, however, Courage's narratives stress the body as a source of almost continual anxiety for him. This was a state that worsened over time and a succession of illnesses (whether real or 'psychosomatic'), and these narratives implicate the body as a site of significant physical (and psychic) dysfunction. As a source of anxiety, or as an expression of internal aberration, these bodily manifestations frequently delimited – or even inhibited – Courage's experiences. These aspects of bodily experience were expressed in the most abject terms, and are key to understanding Courage's wider psychological crisis.

Somewhat surprisingly however, a wider analysis of Courage's materials shows little impact of this lived-reality on sexual experience, or intimate encounters more generally. Rather Courage's historical traces document a sexual life that was active and largely protected from the wider concerns explored above. While bodily and mental illness inhibited sexual performance on occasion (particularly the ability to achieve sexual climax, for example), there is little to indicate ongoing problems outside of these brief (and necessary) episodes of physical convalescence. Indeed, Courage's usual pattern of sexual interactions were seldom interrupted regardless of his state of health.

Courage's sexual narratives tend to position the body as a site of pleasure and personal fulfillment, even at times serving to counter some of the more disfiguring meanings given to physical experience raised above. Anxieties about the body persisted only occasionally; in worries about sexual attractiveness (including his views with respect to Frank Fleet in 1932), or in questions that touched on issues of sexual health. Courage wrote very briefly, for example,
about his fear of syphilis and – more so – of gonorrhea, but in 1940 attested to only a brief bout of ‘married man’s clap’ after ‘an extremely enjoyable romp’ with a young friend in London. Courage privately resolved to ‘wash more carefully after pleasure’, but was relatively relaxed about the matter.\textsuperscript{78}

I will consider the complex meanings Courage gave to intimate relationships and sexual intercourse in the final section of this chapter. I also build on this analysis in the chapter that follows on friendship. Certainly, the remarkable frankness of Courage’s private materials affords rich opportunities for the close study of one man’s erotic inclinations in his wider social context. Even a cursory evaluation of these encounters points to class as a key aspect of Courage’s erotic dealings. Courage described a sexual preference for a male ‘type’ that was ‘dark and tough’\textsuperscript{79}. This category included working-class youths, sailors and guardsmen as compatible sexual partners. Along with his journal, Courage also kept a series of newspaper clippings – usually only images with little text – that provide a visual counterpoint to his written narrative (see Figures 9 to 11). Here Courage’s sexual desire existed within a broader sexual climate that regarded ‘the strong and healthy’ body of the working-class male to be the ‘physical incarnation’ of a homosexual (and middle-class) ideal.\textsuperscript{80}
Figure 9: One of several images of brawny and athletic men that Courage kept in his scrapbook. This musculature suggested a particularly alluring source of sexual potency and normative masculinity. [MS-0999/141, S12-505a, Hocken Collections, Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of Otago]
**Voicing his success**

Here is success for a young American — 26-year-old Theodor Upman, who sings the title role in Benjamin Britten’s new opera “Billy Budd,” which opens at Covent Garden on Saturday.

David Webster, Opera House administrator, and the composer heard 20 European baritones without finding one whose youth, looks and voice matched their requirements for the young sailor who is unjustly hanged at the yardarm in the old indomitable just after the Nore mutiny.

In New York, Mr. Webster heard Theodor Upman, whose last job was in a Broadway musical show, get the part.

In the opera also are four boys from Kingsland Secondary School, Hackney, London, Brian Etheridge (13), Colin Waller (14), Kenneth Nash (14) and Peter Spencer (15) are the singing midshipmen in “Billy Budd.”

Children from the school have been singing juvenile parts at Covent Garden for some time, following an invitation from Sir Stuart Wilson, the deputy administrator.

They are old hands at opera; yesterday they were singing excerpts from “La Traviata” (in Italian) and “Les Contes d’Hoffman” (in French) at the L.G.C., 1951 Exhibition of Education at County Hall.

News Chronicle picture

Figure 10: Images of young men also pepper Courage’s private archive. Several pictures suggest uneven power relations and the allure of age-stratified authority. [MS-0999/141, S12-505c, Hocken Collections, Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of Otago]
Figure 11: Sailors were another of Courage’s perennial favourites. World War II made the bodies of military men increasingly visible in the metropolis, and Courage was attracted by their usually robust physiques and temperaments. He also found their association with masculine valour sexually appealing. [MS-0999/141, S12-505d, Hocken Collections, Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of Otago]
Different values regarding sexual relations amongst working-class men provided numerous opportunities for cross-class intimacies with a variety of masculine types, and Courage’s clippings also hint at a wider erotic enjoyment purely at the level of the imagination.81 An extensive architecture of sexual interactions meant that Courage’s inclinations for trade were easily satisfied within the city and its surrounding spaces. St. Ives and Brighton, as seaside towns, were particularly well provisioned with sailors. Cross-class relationships were of a particular type and quality and, as Matt Cook shows, have an extensive history within the metropolis.82 With few exceptions, Courage’s cross-class encounters were erotic episodes with the express purpose of physical gratification. They seldom continued for more than a few days at a time, and most - though not all, as I suggest below - featured little of the conventional romantic feeling Courage ascribed to intimate relations with men of his own class.

In some ways, Courage’s intimate distinctions followed established patterns of relations that already existed between working- and middle-class men. Reading Aldous Huxley’s *Point Counterpoint* in 1928, for example, Courage agreed that his own attraction for ‘guardsmen’, like that of other middle-class homosexuals, was informed at least in part by his own background and vocation. Courage’s sexual encounters were fairly conventional in nature, in so far as they were not the sadomasochist encounters that Huxley seems to presume.83 Courage agreed with the British author, however, that ‘intellectual and aesthetic refinement’ could make conventional ‘physical excitement’ at times ‘insipid’.84 In this context, Courage suggests that ‘[s]exual association’ with ‘the lower classes’ was a very necessary – and revitalising – relief.85

This did not mean, of course, that Courage’s casual liaisons were devoid of all feeling, or that sexual episodes were simply ‘bestial’ and anonymous ‘couplings with strangers’ (as Huxley and other moralists argued).86 Indeed, a certain emotional tenor was evident in many of Courage’s sexual meetings. Writing in 1931, for example, Courage recorded an encounter with a sailor that was expressed in wholly romantic terms. Writing some several days afterwards, Courage’s feelings were implicit in descriptions that were redolent of a rare and special intimacy:
It is difficult to set down the facts without sentimentality. – The H. M. S. Patrol 40 was in St. Ives yesterday: the sailors came ashore in the evening. I was returning from C.’s at 11:30, and met a young sailor who had just missed the last launch back to the ship. I offered to let him share my bed for the night in the hotel [...] In bed, we became lovers. He was charming; I completely lost my heart. He had to leave at six in the morning to get back to the ship. I saw him again the same evening, and we talked. The ship left the bay yesterday.\(^87\)

While it is Courage’s only example of cross-class interaction described in romantic terms, the experience demonstrates the emotional dimensions of at least some of these encounters.\(^88\) Indeed, Courage suggests an arrangement here which was relatively organic, and worked out as much on practical and compassionate grounds as sexual ones. Courage later recorded being unable to ‘sleep or eat’ and suggested that the ‘emotional shades’ of the encounter would linger for days to come.\(^89\)

Other episodes also enhance our views of the emotional valences that could exist in these encounters – albeit without the kind of romantic articulation evident in the above extract. In 1950, for example, Courage wrote of one encounter he had with a ‘homosexual manservant’ sometime prior, probably in the 1930s. (This was one of only two cross-class encounters Courage records that did not involve men in the military or trades.) Courage wrote that he and Rupert, another man his own age and class, had ‘both liked’ the young man, and both, it seems, fought for his attentions. ‘[The man] left Rupert and became available to me’, Courage recalled, noting how the event, filled as it was with repudiation on both sides, became a significant impediment between the two friends: ‘Rupert has never liked me since that incident’.\(^90\)

In another episode (and the second that did not involve military or blue-collar workers), Courage recorded his encounter with a young man whom he described in 1940 as a ‘male prostitute’.\(^91\) Courage wrote of taking the man ‘out to dinner’ before they both retired to Courage’s flat at Hillfield Court.\(^92\) While Courage’s motives may have been sexual, he continued to express a fondness for the man, and an abiding interest in his physical welfare:
The boy lost his job on the outbreak of [World War II] and is now unable to get another until he is called up for the Army (being 24, he is due to register next month); accordingly, rather than succumb to complete destitution and having no home to retire to, he is forced to sell the only commodity left to him [...] Most likeable lad, I found, and not the insensitive ‘pouf’ one would imagine. C. – had introduced him to me, having himself at present reserved the boy from his Piccadilly-haunting by providing him with bed and board. I have promised to do what I can, hence the dinner this evening, for which my protégé was almost embarrassingly grateful.93

Excepting the two previous examples, Courage wrote far more frequently (and explicitly) about his interest in military men – sailors in particular. While he recorded frequent sexual encounters with various military men (particularly during the war years, which I explore more fully below), Courage also recorded fairly explicit accounts about the particular sexual allure these men seemed to possess. In 1930 Courage wrote, for example, of watching ‘sailors dance together’ onboard the *Alcantara*. Here Courage enjoyed the mingling of bodies (and classes) of men, but did not pursue any sexually: ‘Somehow get entangled with several engineer officers, drink in their cabins, and at midnight join sticky hands and sing “Auld Lang Syne” in a corridor smelling of oil and whiskey [sic]’.94

Courage’s erotic regard for nautical men was particularly plain in one journal entry recorded three years earlier:

Passed two sailors today on the street. One was young and jaunty and beautiful. He was dressed in a bright jersey and a pair of close-fitting washed-blue trousers, showing me (back view) one of the most perfect figures I have ever seen. I devoured the narrow, strong hips and loins with my eyes, so minutely that they fevered my consciousness for hours.95

As I explore more fully below, Courage did not simply revel in these erotic encounters, and his pursuit of casual sexual relations sometimes left him unsettled for long periods after (‘an outburst of unrestrained debauchery’ to be ‘followed by days of Hell’).96 Putting aside some of these issues for a moment, however, it is clear that working-class bodies exerted a significant hold over Courage’s erotic imaginary. Excerpts like this one trace a physicality considered particular to this range of persons. This perfection, I suggested in Chapter One,
could lead to moments of ‘soul-destroying desiderium’. It also continually reinforced Courage’s disaffection over his own physical form.

Cultural discourses at the time in Britain (and her Empire) viewed the bodies of military and working-class men as potent, noble and even erotically desirable for their physical ideality. Courage reflected these values in accounts like those above where male potency could be found in a man’s ‘perfect figure’ or in their ‘strong hips and loins’. However, Courage gave special meaning to men’s uniformed bodies, and reserved the greatest erotic value for men clothed in military fashion. Visiting the Caledonian Market (now the Bermondsey Market) in South London with his friend and playwright Emlyn Williams, Courage wrote of finding ‘an album of snapshots’ that prominently featured men’s uniformed bodies. Courage remembered the event as a comic one. ‘Seeing [him] inspecting the groups’, Courage recalled how the ‘stall-woman’ had ‘called out “Only tuppence, them photos. Amuse yer for hours, they would.”’ Williams and Courage ‘passed on’ without comment, ‘chuckling’ at the woman’s rather unfortunate (and unexpectedly adroit) observations.

Other uniformed bodies held erotic attraction too. Uniforms made working-class bodies visible to the queer middle-class gaze. For Courage it also signaled a peculiar (and sometimes depraved) appetite for the carnal:

Meant to tell [Dr. Larkin] (but didn’t) of the two busmen (‘my mate and l’) who’d written to N.T., television announcer, to say they masturbated in front of the screen when N.T.’s image appeared: ‘When you come we come. Wear a white handkerchief on Saturday evening if you’re with us when you’re announcing.’ Little H.L. told me of this on Saturday. He lives with N., who was embarrassed by the letter and didn’t wear a handkerchief at all for weeks afterwards. But this story seemed a pointless one to tell Dr. L., except that I could have added that the vision of the queer busmen – in uniform of course – flogging themselves excited my orality. A waste of good semen, to the hungry [...].

Interestingly, the detail of the busmen’s uniformed state is not conveyed by the original speaker (H. L.) but imported by Courage; an erotic enhancement that is signaled by his own admission (‘of course’) and closely associated with a brutish authority (‘flogging’) that could be presumed across a wide range of official personages: policemen were another erotic favourite of Courage’s.
Despite the clearly seductive power of these masculine types, Courage remained relatively self-critical of the 'homosexual propensity' for the uniformed male body. Even while Courage harboured a deep-seated fascination (and attraction) for these men, he was suspicious of the uniform's power to 'bestow' a potency that was not always reflected in the form it concealed:

Talking to a woman who told me that she, in company with a female friend, were very taken with a couple of ship's officers on [a voyage] out East. At Tientsin [near Shanghai] the four went ashore for a gay dinner together, at which repast, it being a sweltering night, the officers removed their tunics and ate in vests (or nude to waist?). Both women experienced intense disillusionment. 'I suppose we were attracted by the glamour of the smart uniforms', admitted my narrator. 'Because, my word, when they took them off – oh, they seemed such common fellows!'\footnote{106}

Courage reported a similar sentiment given privately to him, this time by a homosexual male friend some years earlier: “I've had dozens of [sailors], but, God, they're all the same without the uniform!”\footnote{107} Such episodes reinforced Courage's awareness of the ways clothing configured bodies as symbols to be read by others. The fact that Courage was aware of the uniformed body's illusory power ('glamour') but remained vulnerable to its allure, speaks perhaps to the pervasive cultural value that surrounded this form of masculinity in both queer and mainstream contexts.

Of course not all sailors were working-class. Nor, as Courage noted, did they all embody the characteristics of heroic manhood reputed to belong to that brand of masculinity.\footnote{108} Even so, Courage noted how military uniforms, especially naval ones, configured otherwise civilian bodies with largely congenial effect during World War II. As I suggested in the previous chapter, Courage found an abundance of sexual and intimate partners within the wartime spaces of the metropolis.\footnote{109} Courage also detected changes in both community formation and men's bodies, as I suggest below.

Courage's prevailing love interests during the 1940s were men involved in the military service. I have already mentioned his relationship with Ivon Alderson in Chapter Three. Alderson was a pilot with the R. A. F., and a man Courage spent romantic interludes with at St. Ives, in Cornwall, as the German offensive on
London intensified. Courage’s other romantic partner (he cultivated both simultaneously) was a seaman known only as Chris.

Both relationships were passionate liaisons that Courage pursued over a period of some months. His relationship with Chris lasted almost four years from 1939 to 1943, and he and Courage met before the outbreak of hostilities in Europe. Though both encounters terminated with their untimely deaths (Ivon by suicide, Chris, when his ship was torpedoed off the coast of Algiers), Courage was keen to cultivate an intimacy that was both erotically and culturally enriching:

Chris came to tea with me. We talked of music, military, conscription, sex, Chris’s ancestors. While he talked, I watched him ... Am I still in love with him? Yes, but not with that unremitting and murderous passion of two years ago. We are on safer ground: a sort of warm (almost domestic) sympathy envelopes us ... Still, on parting, we kissed with real and authentic physical desire. I hadn’t forgotten that beautiful mouth, that warm and almost Italian skin ... no, by no means forgotten them.¹¹¹

‘There is an extraordinary peace and understanding between us’, Courage recalled later, ‘and is not’, he stated emphatically, ‘merely [...] a result of sexual desire and union’.¹¹²

Both Chris and Ivon were in their twenties when they met Courage, then approaching his forties. Both shared fairly prominent middle-class backgrounds; Chris’s father worked as a G.P., with a ‘country practice’ in Devon.¹¹³ Courage records, however, how military uniforms transformed these men’s bodies in new and invigorating ways. On the 17th of January 1941, Courage wrote of seeing Chris in his naval uniform for the first time. The two men had not seen each other for the previous ten months on account of Chris’s training. Courage found Chris mentally changed (‘[he was] well and happier’).¹¹⁴ Equally impressive was Chris’s physical alteration. ‘The sailor’s uniform – he is an Ord[inary] Seaman training for commission – suited him’, Courage reported, ‘making him more handsome, and certainly more desirable, than I’d remembered’.¹¹⁵
Courage built on these associations in a vignette just weeks later:

Chris here to lunch (Sunday) in his ord[inary]/seaman’s uniform. As I had nothing here to drink I sent him off to the local for beer, etc ... Looked out of my window ten minutes later, to see him returning down the street, his arms full of bottles, his sailor’s cap on the back of his head, a real nautical roll in his walk – a Chris I’d never seen before: a real lad of the Lower Deck. – And don’t forget the wave of black hair on the forehead, supporting the backward-tilted cap with H.M.S on it. An authentic bit of naval panache, that forelock.116

Both episodes located increased erotic power in military dress. They suggest how naval uniforms reconstructed the male body and leant Chris, in this case, increased masculine composure. Terms like ‘handsome’ expressed an erotic magnetism evident in form and figure. Equally it was a soldiery and embodied masculinity that connoted heroism and bravery.117 Courage connected Chris to modes of masculine performance usually attributable to only working-class or career military men. We can see how the war interrupted the expected cultural trajectories of bodies and communities. While these men did not cease to be middle-class, their clothed forms and social practices connected them to masculine associations normally outside their ambit of experience.

This process remapped bodies and their cultural meanings, usually to erotic good effect. These impressions carried significant weight with Courage. These were more than surface performances. Courage stressed that Chris had become bona fide nautical over time. Chris’s ‘naval panache’ is ‘authentic’, Courage suggests, and reinforced by other (and visible) signs of masculine flair: the body’s gait, a certain irreverence for social rules (his hat is turned backwards) and, especially, the material symbols of his station (the seaman’s uniform, replete with cap and the monogrammed prefix H.M.S.).118 Courage suggests that Chris was a ‘real lad of the lower deck’, and possessed of all the masculine – and erotic – values carried therein.119

Of course, Courage noted other transformations in friends and intimates – Courage wrote of one friend who lost a considerable amount of weight in the army, for example – but these encounters were seldom expressed with quite the same erotic vigour (‘his army hair-cut, I noted, brought out a commonness in his
face that I had not observed before’). Rather, and in spite of his reservations about it being a ‘homosexual weakness’, Courage retained special value for the heroic (and active) capacities indicative in uniformed bodies. Years after the war, Courage’s abiding erotic image continued to be that of the military man. Such figures (as I suggest below) held lingering erotic power well into Courage’s final years, and could be mobilised as psychic material to ‘relieve’ even the most desperate moments.

**Defining sex, defining bodies**

I have suggested that James Courage’s erotic preferences were attuned to a raft of cultural and personal contingencies. Courage recorded sexual encounters with a range of different types of men. Class played a particularly significant role in determining distinctions about relationships and kinds of intimacies. These boundaries were not set in stone, and emotional intimacy was not solely confined to passionate encounters with middle-class men.

For Courage, these distinctions spoke to a very particular part of his identity and temperament. They could also reveal tensions that were sometimes evident between social relations and Courage’s sexual appetite. These were apparent in Courage’s intimate encounter with another military man in the 1940s, this one of much more modest background than Chris or Ivon:

Harry left yesterday, after spending a week of his Army-leave here (at Common Place) with me. It was pleasant to have somebody to alleviate my loneliness (sexually and otherwise), though the conversation [was] a trifle thin towards the end. We have such different natures, the two of us. He is mentally a child in many ways, and I have always to make an effort (though God knows, I am childish and naif in some respects myself) to accommodate myself to his level. Everything in me of the artist – if I must call it that – is quite foreign and utterly un-understandable [sic] to him (art of any sort that appeals to him is what I mentally call kitsch).

Frustrated though he was, Courage was careful to note that Harry, with his apparent lack of sophistication (and probable working-class background) was not ‘without his attraction’. In fact, Courage saw in Harry the appeal of pursuing cross-class encounters in the first place, and also their necessary confinement to moments of brief gratification. ‘His simplicity and very lack of
sophistication appeal to me, at moments, enormously: they are what attract me in all ordinary people [...] But – to live with indefinitely? – no, I am afraid not.\textsuperscript{124}

Courage’s use of ‘ordinary’ may imply that Harry was not himself homosexual. What this episode elucidates most strongly, though, are the very precise distinctions that Courage made in regard to class. Courage’s working-class relationships were primarily of a sexual nature. They were not designed to be companionate, or romantically gratifying: this Courage reserved for his intimacies with men of his own class. Courage’s narration of intimate encounters also highlights a broader tension between divergent kinds of intimacies. In practice, ‘romantic’ and ‘physical love’, as he designated them, bled into each other, and Courage sometimes struggled to maintain the separateness of carnal and romantic relations. Intellectually, however, Courage saw romantic and physical love as expressing quite different realms of sexuality, each with their own meanings and values. These kinds of tensions are particularly evident in pre-Freudian experience, and tended to mediate much of Courage’s sexual experience up until at least the late 1940s, when medical discourses began to be felt strongly in lives of many middle-class homosexuals.

As historians like Charles Upchurch, Sean Brady, George Mosse and others have suggested, ‘same-sex desire’ had long been considered ‘antithetical to the qualities that defined good character among both middle- and upper-class Englishmen’.\textsuperscript{125} Interactions that favoured carnal relations over the more restrained (and sometimes even sexless) intimacies of companions therefore confronted middle- and upper-class definitions of respectability quite differently. Commenting on the New Zealand experience, Chris Brickell has written of the ‘acceptability of romantic friendship’ and the ‘looseness’ of social categories at the turn of the last century.\textsuperscript{126} The ‘ambiguity of male friendship’, Brickell suggests, provided ‘camouflage’ for men’s erotic entanglements.\textsuperscript{127}

For Courage, this kind of intimacy also afforded a cache of language (and other literary devices) that asserted the respectable (even ennobling) capacities of homosocial intimacies:

The two months [Frank Fleet] and I lived together [in Buenos Aires], two years ago, were the happiest period of my life. The intolerable burden of my loneliness was eased. My need of him and
his love for me brought me an extraordinary peace and pride. Everything was, as it were, vindicated. The liaisons I have had since have been purely physical and have given me unhappiness and disgust – real anguish of spirit.\(^{128}\)

Here Courage emphasises the legitimising and spiritually affirming aspects of an intimacy that was shared between equals. The physical aspects of Courage’s relationship with Fleet (which were certainly of a sexual nature) are elided by descriptions of companionability and personal equilibrium. Romantic love supplies equanimity and emotional consolation (‘extraordinary peace and pride’); carnal relations its psychic obverse (‘unhappiness and disgust’).\(^{129}\)

As I indicated in Chapter Three, Courage found some aspects of metropolitan life particularly disaffecting. Even while he made full use of the concentrations of queer sociability and sex in London, Courage railed against the purported excesses of metropolitan life (both sexual and otherwise). Writing around the same period as the excerpt above, for example, Courage looked over his European experience from the vantage point of his twenty-ninth birthday. ‘I have spent so much of the last nine years in the company of fools, vagabonds, [and] sex maniacs’, Courage wrote.\(^{130}\) Courage characterised his male liaisons as moral transgressors and social miscreants. Courage had managed to escape any ill effects physically (‘I’ve at least escaped syphilis’), but not, it seems, an underlying crisis of respectability.\(^{131}\) This he believed to be an inescapable part of a ‘debauched’ lifestyle.\(^{132}\)

While Courage’s more serious encounter with Fleet had been emotionally (and spiritually) fulfilling, Courage sometimes wrote that purely carnal relations imperiled the individual’s spiritual and moral character – perhaps even permanently so (a ‘debauchery’ that was bought at the ‘expense of the spirit’, Courage suggested).\(^{133}\) Without sexual contact Courage wrote that he felt ‘miserable’ and unloved.\(^{134}\) Having fulfilled his sexual urges though, Courage noted a raft of anti-social behaviours that flowed from casual sexual encounters: ‘I am often detached, rude, scornful, satiated, beastly, bored or merely uninterested’.\(^{135}\)

These qualities signaled Courage’s belief that carnal relations reduced one’s moral integrity in profound and (potentially) harmful ways. These encounters
resulted in a reduction of one’s capacity for social niceties, Courage suggested. Manners and social etiquette were a necessary means for traversing cultural space. Since his sexual involvements made Courage ‘bored’ and ‘uninterested’, they also threatened his professional equilibrium as well. It was therefore the ‘duty’ of ‘the artist’ and the individual, Courage wrote, to ‘sublimate [his] desire for prostitution’ at all costs, presumably with artistic or other respectable pursuits. In tones that echoed the words of Carpenter that opens this chapter, Courage believed that carnal relations could engulf the individual in a stultifying and potentially addictive pattern of bodily indulgence, one more ‘bestial’ than human.

Carnal sexuality was a regression of a very necessary decorum that Courage believed maintained society’s social order, without which artistic and creative endeavour would not be possible. While sex was important for Courage, its overindulgence threatened the normative regimes that undergirded civilised social relations. Further, it exchanged refinement and sophistication – Courage’s preferred tropes for artistic sensitivities – for something barbaric, and culturally harmful.

Somewhat ironically, Courage wondered in 1929 whether he ‘intellectualised’ ‘too much’ over questions of ‘passion’ and ‘sex’. Continuing regardless with a discussion of carnal relations with a friend (identified only as E.), both men invoked the tropes of regression and animality to condemn base physicalities:

[...] agreed that there is no fulfillment of self in passion – physical passion, at least. However greatly one adores the object of desire, his beauty, his bearing, his apart-ness, his fascinating unique-ness [sic] of body and soul – all these qualities one wants to absorb as though the infusion were necessary to one’s very life – the ultimate merging, the repose of passionate unity, always escapes like quicksilver from the palm of the hand. Even in the sharpest moments of physical ecstasy one is only cheated into a belief in fulfillment because the body is urgent. One’s mind should not be occupied by its physical pleasure, which momentarily depends on another person. [...] An animal triste.

Courage’s sexual liaisons often brought to bear significant levels of anxiety and guilt. ‘How damnably sex colours everything’, Courage wrote with force one day in 1928. Days after an encounter with a man identified only as C., Courage
wrote of feeling ‘sad’ and ‘hopeless’ in consequence.\textsuperscript{142} Unable to work, and pursued by a violent melancholy, Courage’s sexual encounter left him visibly upset and professionally unsettled.

Here tensions regarding sex and intimacy come to a head. On the one hand, as we see in the examples above, sex threatened the very coherence and constitution of the individual. On the other hand, Courage felt that sexual relations informed a very necessary part of physical experience. Certainly sexual intercourse seemed to supplement Courage’s sometimes-beleaguered supply of self-regard. ‘Time passes [and] middle age approaches’, Courage wrote in 1942, for example.\textsuperscript{143} ‘I am well aware’, Courage continued […] that I am lucky in one thing though […] I have as “mistress” a young man of twenty-two’.\textsuperscript{144} Even here, Courage was careful to assert the extra-sexual aspects of this encounter. He emphasised the positive psychic aspects of his arrangement with his ‘mistress’ (‘I care [for him] and [he] in turn cares for and cherishes me’).\textsuperscript{145} Courage also rejected sex as a purely compulsive or animalistic impulse. ‘Sex’ by ‘itself’, he wrote, becomes an ‘obsession, feverish, distracting, morbid’.\textsuperscript{146}

With these caveats in mind though, Courage wrote of the ‘powerful phallic element in life’, and its ‘natural place in existence and the mind’.\textsuperscript{147} He spoke of men’s justification in seeking sexual satiation ‘[w]hatsoever the world may say about this’.\textsuperscript{148} It ‘makes an immense difference to life’, Courage wrote with conviction, suggesting that, though sex ‘cease[d] to nag’ him ‘so much’ as he got older, that physical relations with men remained a very real human vitality.\textsuperscript{149} Sexual intimacy is life-giving, and a means for grounding one’s self in the here and now of present life. Courage believed this was a quality worth protecting and should not be taken lightly: ‘Had I not [this] pleasure […] to be frank, I should feel not forty but a misanthropic fifty’.\textsuperscript{150}

Courage’s distinction between passionate and physical love remained a fixture of his personal narrative well into his late-40s. In one entry from 1950, for example, Courage wrote with exasperation of the ‘constant equation of sex (physical) with love (of any kind)’.\textsuperscript{151} Candid and ‘amusing conversations about the seduction of “normal” men by queers’, made Courage ‘priggish and silent’.\textsuperscript{152} Courage resented the joking implication that homosexuals were sexual predators or in any way sexually aberrant. He considered the matter to be a serious topic,
and not an object of fun. And throughout his life narrative, Courage gave priority to romantic and intellectual closeness over carnal intimacies (which, in even the above extract about sex, were never wholly separated from the ‘fulfillment’ of true ‘passionate unity’). Romantic love signaled the supreme ideal, and ‘something special’, as Courage told one young man who, at a party, had privately confided to have ‘never been in love’:

‘Man,’ I told him, ‘you’re not alive! [...] You don’t understand what you’re telling me [...] You’re exposing the lack of something vital in yourself’. He blushed and looked away. ‘Yes’, he whispered after a moment, ‘Must try to fall in love, mustn’t I.’ ‘Certainly,’ I replied softly, ‘you must.’

These distinctions between physical and romantic love are much less apparent in narratives from after 1950. Courage did not abandon his interest in, and concern for, bodies and sexual intercourse. His focus, however, was informed by the clinical views of his Freudian and psychiatric intervention.

Courage had begun rigorous psychotherapy at the start of that decade. While the influence of his psychological intervention was immediately evident in his narrations of material experience, these excerpts show a declining interest in passionate and romantic intimacy. Courage was instead increasingly preoccupied by the perceived ‘perverse’ or ‘neurotic’ aspects of his own erotic register:

A Christmas card from [Frank Fleet] in Buenos Aires. I was flattered and pleased to get this, as it must be 20 years since I met him [...]. [...] F. B. [Courage’s first psychiatrist] was asking me this morning about fellatio, but that was a minor pleasure to my experiences with F[rank] (in which I usually took the passive role). Oddly enough, Jack Harris mentioned the star, Uranus – planet, rather – after dinner to-night: the phonetic associations of the word took me back to F[rank], his letter, and S[outh] America. As psychiatrists reiterate, no association – indeed, nothing that enters one’s mind – is ever entirely fortuitous, meaningless or without some significance.

As I said in Chapter One, Dr. Larkin (Courage’s main psychiatric physician) did not view homosexuality as a ‘perversity’ per se. He viewed sexual deviance as a ‘disorder’ that could not be cured without ‘robbing’ the subject of his or her
necessary ego ‘standby’.\textsuperscript{156} As I suggested in Chapter One, it was Courage’s passivity in anal intercourse that became the chief erotic preoccupation of his clinician in analysis.

While this passive quality applied chiefly to sex, Courage’s ‘passivity’ showed itself in other life experiences as well, including his profession as an artist (I will return to this point in Chapter Six). Indeed, as Courage suggests above, all social experience, including personal fantasies, were suddenly given increased meaning in clinical (and pathologising) contexts. Courage continued his treatment with F. B. before transferring to Dr. Larkin in 1957.\textsuperscript{157} Though Courage at times resisted their attempts to ‘draw conclusions’ from ‘isolated’ instances (both real and psychic), his clinicians pressed Courage to consider his sexual appetite as a rubric for understanding much of his interior functioning.\textsuperscript{158}

Courage’s working-class liaisons, for example, signaled more than a simple ‘desire for prostitution’ or ‘simplicity’ of temperament in others – as Courage had earlier characterised them.\textsuperscript{159} Indeed, both physicians considered Courage’s attraction for cross-class and military liaisons to be manifestations of his (misdirected) sexual regard for his father. These medical men suggested that the ‘active army sergeant’ and ‘later butch types’ (sailors, policemen, even boxers) transposed Courage’s deeper (and illicit) paternal longing.\textsuperscript{160} As I wrote in Chapter One, Courage’s own representations had cast Frank Courage as normatively masculine even before his psychoanalytic treatment in the 1950s. Under analysis, however, Courage’s physicians stressed Frank’s authoritarianism and active masculinity.

Both men held that Frank was a ‘robust manly man’, ‘a successful farmer’, a ‘condemning father’.\textsuperscript{161} According to Freudian principles, it followed that Courage’s sexual liaisons were connected to a desire for abasement (‘being-mastered’) and discipline (‘condemned’) by the ‘punishing cock’ of his father.\textsuperscript{162} Even while Courage sought to ‘protect [himself] against’ the condemnatory reflexes of his father (who, as I suggested in Chapter Three, had viewed him as a ‘milk-sop’ and a ‘sissy’ as a child), Courage’s sexual predilections were said to play out a deep-seated longing for the ‘tough extrovert’ his father had been.\textsuperscript{163} Frank was the archetypal ‘Strong Man’, Dr. Larkin suggested; the guardsmen,
sailors and other working-class men that Courage slept with mere simulated ‘images’ of the original.\textsuperscript{164}

These interactions stressed a very particular (and pathologising) view of male same-sex intimacy. Fellatio, for example, signaled Courage's unnatural 'phallic obsession' (invariably a narcissism for his own penis, or the penis of his father).\textsuperscript{165} Anal sex (or 'sodomy') connoted only masochistic violation (a punishment for past transgressions, or Courage's failure to live up to conventional ‘manly’ standards, for example).\textsuperscript{166} Clinical meanings elided questions of emotional intimacy between men. They also presumed uneven power relations to be endemic in homosexual relationships, whether that be with long term or casual partners. In one especially sex-focused session with Larkin in 1960, for example, Courage had shared his desire for an ‘American sailor’ he had ‘seen on the street’ that day.\textsuperscript{167} While Courage's psychiatrist did not condemn this sexual impulse outright, he suggested that Courage's feelings were an ‘oral erotic desire projected on to [sic] the tough father’ (Courage had wanted to perform fellatio on the man).\textsuperscript{168} Regardless of their sexual compatibilities or emotional sensitivities, Larkin also believed that ‘such an encounter’ would invariably lack ‘tenderness’ and warmth.\textsuperscript{169}

Freudian impositions did not terminate Courage’s romantic feelings toward Stuart, which remained resilient, but they do seem to have shaped Courage’s views on intimacy and intimate male bodies more broadly. These scripts invested, amongst other things, a new quotient of self reproach in sexual intercourse, for example:

\begin{quote}
I am ashamed to write here of this [anal] abasement of mine [...] yet it repeats itself again and again in my sessions with Dr. L[arkin]. (And in erotic acts elsewhere, if I must be franker still.) It is an important symptom of this wretched illness: a masochism so deep that it has infected or conditioned my sexuality from my fourteenth year and later (my relationship with tougher boys at College, for instance). All of which is of course no secret to Dr. L[arkin], though I continue to feel the greatest resistance in telling him of these sexual performances [...].\textsuperscript{170}
\end{quote}

In these episodes, Courage's anal intercourse – both with Stuart, and in casual sexual encounters with other men – is attached to acts of physical and psychic
degradation ('abasement', 'masochism'). Such vignettes speak little of the 'vitalities' of male-male sexuality (though there were moments of resistance, as I note below and in Chapter Two). Courage's masochistic desire for paternal authority 'explains', at least in part, his preference for the same sex, especially those who embodied 'active' masculinities (sailors and the like). This propensity was learnt ('conditioned'); not, it seems, part of a 'natural' constitution.

Courage's preference for receptivity in anal intercourse was read as perverse. Courage's preference to be penetrated by his sexual partners was said to express a wider 'instinctual manifestation' that went beyond simple intimacy. It was this passivity, Larkin suggested, that made Courage 'ineffective [for] practical living':

A sense of self-created inability has in consequence enormously accumulated for me. Realising this, I'm at last led to something else of equal importance – the reason why the super-ego allows me no pleasure in or sanction for, my writing, my music, my aesthetic pursuits. They are guilt-ridden precisely because they arise from my homosexual, passive, narcissistic components of psyche, deeply disapproved of as valid by the father image. They are no excuses for living, but are pathological and puny manifestations of something already steeped in a shame which must be concealed (my instinctive sexual role). Hence a sense of continual conflict, unendurable self-division.

As I have suggested elsewhere, Courage was not entirely divested of his critical agency in these scenarios. Certainly, Courage's narration of sexuality was not always beset with guilt. And Courage continued to revel in the bodies of working-class and military men (the American sailor he mentioned above, for example).

By the 1960s, Courage had begun to notice other bodies in the city. Increasing waves of migration from various non-European locales were beginning to transform the cultural fabric of the city. The bodies of men Courage identified as 'West Indian' and 'negro' were increasingly visible, and closely associated with archetypal and working-class masculinities. Indeed, most were tradesmen of varying kinds. While tapping into his existing predilections for this kind of masculinity, Courage's expression of sexual regard for men of colour was clearly raced (as 'natural' and base), and interlaced with Freudian ideas and imagery. These accounts possess little of the guilt evidenced elsewhere in Courage's
sexual narratives of the period. Instead Courage revels in the spectacle of the
active masculinity he thought these men possessed.

One ‘Jamaican tradesman’, for instance, was said to have ‘white teeth, [a] flat
cat-like face, black eyes’ and a ‘singsong lazy accent’.\textsuperscript{176} Courage wrote of
watching one man ‘tinkering’ with screws and wires (‘the white man’s toys’) as
he repaired a ‘block terminal’ at his Hampstead flat.\textsuperscript{177} Courage ‘envied his
animality’ and wondered at this ‘unknown being with a black hide’.\textsuperscript{178} In one
other episode, Courage wrote of his fascination with ‘a young negro, coming on
[to] the tube’.\textsuperscript{179} In a quick succession of jarring and heavily Freudian images,
Courage recorded a fantasised encounter with the young man:

\begin{quote}
The mauve glans, the colour of the inside of his fingers – sucking
this – the negro smell – a ‘bit of dinge’ [...] black men as wild and
potent, more than whites – the smell of his arse – the black cock
poised above my mouth, like the bad black nipple [...].\textsuperscript{180}
\end{quote}

While this excerpt evoked Freudian analyses of repressed sexual desire for
domination and punishment, Courage resisted Freudian interventions in other
moments. Courage wrote, for example, that ‘active sex’ was possible ‘in the
passive role’ and that such acts gratified the (physical) ‘needs’ of many.\textsuperscript{181} ‘Social
disapprobation’, even Larkin’s more restrained critique of ‘passivity’, was really
‘arrant hypocrisy’, Courage wrote.\textsuperscript{182} In 1963, and at the age of 60, Courage wrote
fondly of his ‘potency of 30 years ago’.\textsuperscript{183} He sought a ‘polymorphous perversity’
without the ‘pathogenic guilt’ that Larkin and others saw as ‘symptomatic’ in
men of Courage’s nature.\textsuperscript{184} In doing so, Courage was emphatic that he did not
seek to exorcise himself of sexual capacities. His abiding urge to act on sexual
desire was no source of shame he reasoned, but an ‘insatiable wish’ native in all
people.\textsuperscript{185}

While Larkin and other medical professionals spoke of men’s ‘perversity’ in
their desire for other men, Courage continued to reflect on the undeniable reality
of the body and its sexual potential. Travelling by train a week after his 60\textsuperscript{th}
birthday, for example, Courage was ‘preoccupied’ by thoughts of the young men
he glimpsed in the compartment with him. Their clothed bodies concealed their
physical forms, and the space of the train was an emphatically public one.
Despite this, Courage noted with careful precision the number of ‘bodies, faces, [and] lips’ with him in the carriage. He paused, too, to consider ‘the unseen genitals’ of these masculine forms. The young men are there’, Courage wrote of the youthful and attractive bodies he admired as he traversed London, but ‘beneath the clothes’ are the ‘nipples, the balls, the hidden anus, the voluptuous attributes of the body’.

**Conclusion**

A degree of complexity attended Courage’s notions of bodily experience. Far from inert, the body is shown to be complex and multifarious: a nexus for pleasure or of anxiety; a zone of sublime of the abject; a site of performance or of necessary containment.

Such analysis is important for uncovering the subjective experience of individuals. As Porter suggests, a history of the body must upset suggestions that the body ‘has timelessly existed’ as ‘unproblematic’ and ‘natural’. Courage’s narratives reveal some of the key meanings evident in one man’s bodily trajectory. They indicate how ‘meanings and power relations’ are mapped onto the ‘bodies and experiences of men’ by external pressures (by Freudian medical men, for example). Equally, they remind the historian of the subject’s own role in assembling meanings.

My analysis shows Courage’s ability to configure and reconfigure his body in ways that recognised various social contingencies (how spaces are classed, gendered, or ordered by various hierarchies of meaning, for example). Courage mobilised his clothed body to suit changing cultural landscapes. He also sensed how other clothed bodies – those of military men, for example – were bestowed special value by prevailing discourses and social meanings, both queer and mainstream. Throughout, Courage reveals a remarkable critical engagement regarding how bodies were read (by queer and mainstream subjects), and the role of the body in conferring identity and cultural citizenship within the metropolis and elsewhere.

Even so, Courage was frequently powerless to resist social impositions that read his own body as inferior, and Courage’s own bodily experience was often expressed in the most abject terms. Chapter One highlighted Courage’s anguish
in regarding superlative masculinities. While socially and sexually desirable, these identities and bodily forms were outside of Courage’s own ability to perform and emulate. Here this experience is given greater clarity by focusing closely on one man’s meaning of the body. This enhances our knowledge of the social pressure exerted upon individuals: a dynamic that scholars suggest is always innately subjective and experienced differently from person to person.\textsuperscript{190} Courage identifies a much broader history of personal disaffection before and after the imposition of Freudian narratives. He also indicates how these perceptions changed and deepened over time. Age and progressive physical illness played a key role in this regard.

Courage’s narratives of sexual intimacy are also rich stores of subjective insight. They indicate the importance of class (and later, race) as a mediator of erotic relations, and his particular preference for ‘tough’ working-class and military men. Various journal entries stress the divergences between working- and middle-class interactions. They indicate that Courage’s working-class relations functioned primarily as means for sexual gratification, while middle-class men were far more often the recipients of an erotic interest normally described in conventionally romantic tones. These narratives reveal how Courage regarded different bodies, giving close erotic regard to the physicality of working-class men, even where that form was shown to be at least partly illusory (in the ‘glamour’ bestowed by uniform or official station, for example).

After 1950 Freudian psychoanalysis made itself felt in Courage’s intimate experience. While Larkin and others did not seek to eradicate Courage’s ‘homosexual constitution’, their tendency to view Courage’s sexuality as a ‘disorder’ led to new explanations of his attraction for working-class bodies (among others) and a reductive view of sexual intercourse between men (especially as it pertained to anal play). Courage’s desire for trade was attributed to his repressed erotic feelings for his father (an ‘archetype’ of normative masculinity), and a state of ‘passivity’ that presented itself primarily (though not exclusively) as erotic.

However, and as I have shown here and in earlier chapters, Courage was not powerless in these official exchanges. Nor was it possible to upset Courage’s
ongoing passionate regard for Stuart (which, if anything, had deepened to a pleasant erotic and emotional interdependence by the end of Courage’s life).

This chapter has shown the particular regard Courage gave to intimate bonds. ‘Romantic’ and ‘carnal’ intimacies raise themselves with relative clarity here, even if these boundaries were in reality far from impermeable. These distinctions were not, however, the entirety of Courage’s intimate experience. Nor is it possible – or even historically advisable, as many scholars suggest – to define intimacy in quite so narrow a fashion.191

Chapter Five deepens our understanding of Courage’s intimate bonds. There I look more closely at friendship and its function in Courage’s material life. Friendship is more than a mere standby for the ‘preferred’ or supposedly more ‘fulfilling’ realities of sexual or passionate relations. My analysis shows the remarkable elasticity (and ambivalence) that Courage gave to these social relationships.

Friendships were not simply sexless and platonic liaisons. Nor were they purely homosocial (as I already intimated in Chapter Three). Instead, friendship functioned multiply, and with surprising dynamism across Courage’s life course. A source of emotional and intellectual support, and a means for ongoing identity formation, friendship linked social worlds (national and international) and was sustained in some instances across decades. My analysis posits the social values and uses that Courage gave to these relationships, suggesting how concepts like ‘friendship’ and ‘intimacy’ were, in reality, invested with both subjective meaning and practical consolations.
Notes


4 Carpenter, ‘The Stupid Old Body’, ll. 2-5.


11 Of course, such views were not necessarily exceptional; they were also to be found in other treatises on sexual deviance. Courage would have read a very similar perspective on sexuality and its moral ideal in the works of Richard von Krafft-Ebing, for example. Krafft-Ebing followed a similar moral trajectory to Carpenter in *Psychopathia Sexualis*. He suggests how life is a composed of a ‘never-ceasing duel between the animal instinct and morality’. The psychiatrist concluded that only ‘will-power and a strong character’ could ‘emancipate man from the meanness of his corrupt nature’. In doing so, he could be taught to ‘enjoy the pleasures of love and pluck the noble fruits of earthly existence’. See Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 1903, trans. F. J. Rebman (London: Rebman, 1906), p. 4.


13 Carpenter, ‘Believe Yourself a Whole’, l. 32.
19 Ibid.
20 I follow Julia Kristeva’s assessment of abjection as a state of alienation and lived-exclusion. Following Jacques Lacan, Kristeva writes that abjection manifests first in childhood, at the point that the child enters symbolic realm, and is generated by the rejection of the maternal (a threat to the development of normative subjectivities). For the purposes of this thesis I understand abjection to be a state of psychological antipathy generated from the subject’s discursive social and symbolic interactions. I doing so, I see this as conceptualising Courage’s prevailing mental state, particularly in the later years of his life. For her original articulation of abjection see Kristeva, Powers of Horror: An Essay On Abjection (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), pp. 1-5. For wider discussions on Kristeva and the application of her ideas see: Noëlle McAfee, Julia Kristeva (New York: Routledge, 2004); Anne-Marie Smith, Julia Kristeva: Speaking the Unspeakable (London: Pluto, 1998).
21 Courage, Journal, 1929-1931, 29 December 1930, MS-0999/080, HC.
23 Courage, Journal, 1932-1934, 14 May 1933, MS-0999/083, HC.
24 Jennifer Craik suggests that these associations had been established much earlier, as conventions surrounding suits and formalwear as we know them

25 A sketch of Courage by a R. de Bonneville that adorned the inside cover of his diary for 1927 to 1929 shows Courage in precisely this light: a masculine and artistic identity that was emblematised by his suit, hat and spectacles. See R. de Bonneville, cover illustration, in James Courage, Journal, 1927-1929, undated, MS-0999/079, HC.

26 Courage, Journal, 1931, 23 March 1931, MS-0999/081, HC.

27 Greek attire was a popular costume at queer balls thrown in London, though, as I said Chapter Three, there is little evidence to suggest that Courage attended such events. For his discussion of these sorts of parties around this period see Matt Houlbrook, *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918-1957* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2005), pp. 266-7.

28 Courage, Journal, 1931, 23 March 1931, MS-0999/081, HC.

29 Courage, Journal, 1931, 24 March 1931, MS-0999/081, HC.

30 Courage, Journal, 1931, 23 March 1931, MS-0999/081, HC.

31 Ibid.

32 Courage, Journal, 1927-1929, 16 September 1927, MS-0999/079, HC.

33 British classicists Ian Jenkins and Victoria Turner suggest that these sculptures have long ‘been admired’ as ‘exemplars’ of male beauty. Myron’s diskobolos (or discus) thrower has been particularly revered for its expression of balance, symmetry, and harmony; an articulation that these authors contend was as much an expression of masculine ‘virtue’ as a positing of a ‘physical’ and athletic ideal. See Jenkins and Turner, *The Greek Body* (Los Angeles: Getty, 2010), p. 31.

34 Courage, Journal, 1931, 23 March 1931, MS-0999/081, HC.

35 Courage, Journal, 1920-1924, 12 March 1921, MS-0999/078, HC.


37 Courage, Journal, 1920-1924, 12 March 1921, MS-0999/078, HC.

38 Courage, Journal, 1937-1940, 3 August 1938, MS-0999/085, HC.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.
41 Ibid.
42 Ibid.
43 Courage, Journal, 1941-1946, 30 September 1944, MS-0999/086, HC.
44 Courage, Journal, 1927-1929, 11 September 1927, MS-0999/079, HC.
45 Courage, Journal, 1941-1946, 13 November 1942, MS-0999/086, HC.
46 Courage, Journal, 1937-1940, 3 August 1938, MS-0999/085, HC.
48 Courage, Journal, 1941-1946, 4 May 1944, MS-0999/086, HC.
49 Ibid.
50 Courage, Journal, 1941-1946, 13 November 1942, MS-0999/086, HC.
52 Courage, Journal, 1941-1946, 4 April 1945, MS-0999/087, HC.
53 Ibid.
54 Ibid.
56 Ibid.
59 Ibid.
60 Ibid.
61 Ibid. (original emphasis).
62 Ibid.
63 Ibid.
64 Ibid.
66 Ibid.
67 Ibid.
68 Ibid.
Ibid.

Ibid.


Ibid.

Courage, Journal, 1932-1934, 13 July 1932, MS-0999/083, HC. (original emphasis).

Courage, Journal, 1931-1932, 7 April 1932, MS-0999/082, HC. (original emphasis).

Courage, Journal, 1934-1936, 13 March 1936, MS-0999/084, HC.

Courage, Journal, 1937-1940, 4 December 1940, MS-0999/085, HC.

Courage, Journal, 1937-1940, 31 December 1940, MS-0999/085, HC.

Courage, Journal, 1937-1940, 20 December 1940, MS-0999/085, HC.


Charles Upchurch acknowledges that ‘working-class men’ also had ‘a code of masculine honor that condemned sex between men’ but that sex between men did not ‘undercut their social power’ in quite the same way as it did for their middle- and upper-class counterparts. See Upchurch, *Before Wilde: Sex Between Men In Britain’s Age of Reform* (Los Angeles and London: California University Press, 2009), p. 47.


Courage, Journal, 1927-1929, 28 October 1928, MS-0999/079, HC.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Courage, Journal, 1931-1932, 20 June 1931, MS-0999/082, HC.

Courage does, however, provide further ambivalence in form of an explicitly homosexual short story, ‘Scusi’. This was printed in both New Zealand (in *Landfall*) and the United States and – along with the New Zealand-set ‘Guest at the Wedding’ – predates *A Way of Love* by some years. ‘Scusi’ features an (ultimately confounded) romantic encounter between a middle-aged retired
Bodies


89 Courage, Journal, 1931-1932, 20 June 1931, MS-0999/082, HC.


91 Courage, Journal, 1937-1940, 22 February 1940, MS-0999/085, HC.

92 Ibid.

93 Ibid.

94 Courage, Journal, 1929-1931, 31 December 1930, MS-0999/080, HC.

95 Courage, Journal, 1927-1929, 8 December 1927, MS-0999/079, HC.

96 Ibid.

97 Courage, Journal, 1927-1929, 5 December 1927, MS-0999/079, HC. (original emphasis).

98 Courage, Journal, 1927-1929, 8 December 1927, MS-0999/079, HC.


100 Ibid.

101 Courage, Journal, 1927-1929, 28 November 1928, MS-0999/079, HC.

102 Ibid.

103 Ibid.


106 Courage, Journal, 1929-1931, 28 October 1929, MS-0999/080, HC.

107 Ibid.


109 Indeed, historians such as Canadian Paul Jackson argue that even while wartime conditions saw an increase in the policing of sexual mores (and the fear of being publicly labeled deviant was a real fear for many) homosocial conditions within the military provided ideal ‘psychic and physical environments’ conducive to ‘homosexual experimentation’. Others, such as Matt Cook, note how ‘blackouts in major cities’ (London particularly) provided ‘cover for casual sex’ and

110 Courage, Journal, 1941-1946, 14 May 1943, MS-0999/086, HC.
111 Courage, Journal, 1937-1940, 22 March 1940, MS-0999/085, HC.
112 Courage, Journal, 1941-1946, 17 January 1941, MS-0999/086, HC.
113 Courage, Journal, 1937-1940, 22 March 1940, MS-0999/085, HC.
114 Courage, Journal, 1941-1946, 17 January 1941, MS-0999/086, HC.
115 Ibid.
116 Ibid.
118 Courage, Journal, 1941-1946, 17 January 1941, MS-0999/086, HC.
119 Ibid.
120 Courage, Journal, 1941-1946, 1 December 1941, MS-0999/086, HC.
121 Courage, Journal (‘The Diary of a Neurotic’), 1960-1961, 7 October 1960, MS-0999/089, HC.
122 Courage, Journal, 1941-1946, 16 March 1941, MS-0999/086, HC. (original emphasis).
123 Ibid.
124 Here Courage wrote of the ‘humiliating detachment’ of the middle-class and artistic lifestyles. Men’s cultural (and class) differences made working-class men exciting sexual partners. The gulf of intellect and refinement evident between the two grounds though could not, in Courage’s estimation, be bridged long-term. See Ibid. (original emphasis).
125 Upchurch, Before Wilde, p. 47.
126 Chris Brickell, Mates and Lovers, p. 75.
127 Brickell, Mates and Lovers, p. 76.
129 Ibid.
130 Courage, Journal, 1931-1932, 11 February 1932, MS-0999/082, HC.
131 Ibid.
132 Ibid.
133 Courage, Journal, 1927-1929, 5 December 1927, MS-0999/079, HC.
134 Courage, Journal, 1941-1946, 6 December 1944, MS-0999/086, HC.
135 Ibid.
136 Ibid.
137 Ibid.
138 Ibid.
139 Courage, Journal, 1929-1931, 21 March 1929, MS-0999/080, HC.
140 Ibid.
141 Courage, Journal, 1927-1929, 18 February 1928, MS-0999/079, HC.
142 Ibid.
143 Courage, Journal, 1941-1946, 13 November 1942, MS-0999/086, HC.
144 Ibid. (original emphasis).
145 Ibid.
146 Ibid.
147 Ibid.
148 Ibid.
149 Ibid.
150 Ibid. (original emphasis).
152 Ibid.
153 Ibid.
154 Courage, Journal, 1929-1931, 21 March 1929, MS-0999/080, HC.
155 Courage, Journal, 1927-1929, 3 November 1928, MS-0999/080, HC.
Courage, Journal, 1927-1929, 8 December 1927, MS-0999/080, HC; Journal, 1941-1946, 16 March 1941, MS-0999/086, HC.


Ibid.


Courage, Journal ('The Diary of a Neurotic'), 1960-1961, 7 October 1960, MS-0999/089, HC.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Courage, Journal ('The Diary of a Neurotic'), 1960-1961, 16 August 1960, MS-0999/089, HC.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.


177 Ibid.

178 Ibid.

179 Ibid.

180 Ibid.


182 Ibid.

183 Ibid.

184 Ibid.

185 Ibid.


187 Ibid.


190 Duncan, ‘Out of the Closet and into the Gym’, pp. 331-346

191 Houllbrook, Queer London, p. 41.
Chapter Five

'It is that odd thing, real life, which fills all humanity': Friendship, intimacy and communities of belonging

Introduction: Some other beings
James Courage had been greatly animated by thoughts for a new novel in 1934. His first, One House, had been published to modest acclaim the previous year. One House told of three sisters who lived in genteel isolation in the English countryside. A tale of domestic tension, its publication with London-based Gollancz had been a major achievement for Courage. While One House laid the foundations for his literary career in Britain, Courage's arrival on the scene there had gone largely unnoticed in New Zealand. Three years after his trip to Argentina, and several months into his convalescence with tuberculosis, Courage turned to his New Zealand past for creative inspiration. This new literary endeavour, entitled Some Other Being (never published and later destroyed), would be set in Canterbury and draw from his own experience.

Its protagonist Eric Bentham, artist and invert, returns to New Zealand after an eleven-year absence. The story places Courage's own adolescent past alongside his contemporary present; and Courage notes in his journal (which contains extensive notes on the novel) how both segments – historical and contemporary – were to mobilise friendship in key ways. Eric's school life, like Courage's, was a largely unhappy one. Courage planned to depict this as a landscape dominated by 'loneliness' and a hostility for those who deviated from the masculine norm. Returning to New Zealand as a man in his early thirties, Bentham, like Courage, retreats homeward having experienced disappointment in love. His 'collapse' is due to illness (also like Courage, Bentham has tuberculosis) but also the 'despair' and anguish that Courage himself ascribed to life in the metropolis.

In Some Other Being, friendship supplies the necessary standby for the beleaguered resources of the psyche. Traveling to Mount April, the fictive resimulation of Mount Somers, the younger Bentham finds empathy and warmth in
Tom Sealby – a boy his own age, probably based on Anama-based Ronnie Peter. Bentham and Sealby’s association is explicitly stated as one of friendship. Even so, their relationship involves a nascent attraction (the ‘first expression of sexual feeling’). Bentham is also said to share a ‘perfect sympathy’ with his grandmother – a character clearly modeled on Courage’s own maternal grandmother, Ida Florence Peache.

In both the past and present-day sections of Some Other Being, Bentham’s reformation was to be wrought by the influence of close social intimates. These relationships are unique and divergent: one is a ‘sexless’ but ‘renewed partnership’ with a woman much his elder, the other a companion his own age and gender, and someone of potential erotic interest. Both relationships have a resonance that is more than simply fictive. But these intimacies are also more than autobiographical simulations of people Courage knew. Rather, Courage’s characterisations signal some of the key relationship types that informed part of his own social register.

As we saw in the previous chapter, and as I shall explain further here, intimate friendships with other queer men informed much of Courage’s social experience; but so too did his relationships with women. This chapter looks more closely at Courage’s social networks. I demonstrate how friendship formed a central means for negotiating national, professional and gendered experience. This sheds light on the transnational and literary networks that Courage belonged to, in both metropole and periphery. This chapter also underscores the key roles played by geography and class – contingencies that continually informed Courage’s own very precise set of subjectivities.

In Chapter Four I indicated the usefulness of romantic friendship as a category of analysis for exploring queer spaces and interactions. Often these networks of interaction and support oscillated between platonic and erotic relations. At other times, men’s relationships remained untroubled by social definitions – a font from which ‘friendship’ flowed and became a ‘catch-all’ for all manner of relationships.

Chris Brickell has written how this ambivalence between mates and lovers offers a nexus at which historians might investigate the cultural ‘in between’ of men’s social and romantic worlds. Others, like Martha Vicinus, see the
treatment of friendship and intimacy as part of the ‘more interesting and difficult questions’ that remain to be explored by historians. These questions, Julian Carter adds, are best fleshed out by asking how individuals understood their intimate connections with one another and ‘how they imagined and performed’ these relations. In doing so, historians move away from tendencies to generalise about sexual types, and observe the Foucauldian injunction that historians defuse sex of its illusory power to ‘explain’ all of life’s complexities.

I begin this chapter by looking more closely at Courage’s ongoing affiliation with New Zealanders. Courage actively sought out connections with New Zealanders who resided in London or visited that metropolis. Having established himself within the queer and literary strata of the city, Courage also played an integral role in facilitating other New Zealanders’ entrance into London’s wider artistic and queer networks.

Letter-writing and telegrams afforded useful opportunities for maintaining long-distance relationships with those who returned to the South Pacific. They even cemented linkages with key personalities, the writer Frank Sargeson among them, whom Courage never met in real life. These flows of support were not one-sided, however. While Courage acted as a social lynchpin for many New Zealanders (I will show how Courage occupied a central role in several social networks), a large proportion of his own countrypeople numbered among his closest supporters and sources of emotional welfare.

My consideration of friendship further builds on the picture of intimate relations considered in Chapter Four. There I spoke of how the ideas and terminology of romantic friendship fed Courage’s ability to construct outwardly respectable relationships with other men. These men were typically of the same class and background, and their intimate relations with one another contrasted greatly (at least in Courage’s eyes) with the much less savoury carnal relations Courage sometimes pursued with blue-collar and military men.

In the second section of this chapter, I look more closely at Courage’s relationship with Frank Fleet. I also explore Courage’s intimate bonds with younger men in later life. Both experiences provide opportunities for a closer examination of the particularities and social utilities evident in these relationship types. Here I explore Courage’s experience of romantic friendship in much
greater depth. These relationships were not simply a strategy for exploiting the ambivalences of heteronormative culture. For Courage and, indeed, for many middle-class men, romantic friendship was a major vector of homosociality and interaction.

Of course, Courage’s relationships were not all homosocial. Many of his most important relationships were with women. With the exception of Peache, most bore no biological or kin relation to Courage. While women seldom factor in historical treatments of male homosexuality, Courage’s own life narrative highlights the important contributions that many women made to his material experience of the world. These women were not simply maternal caregivers, however. Nor were all women entirely devoid of erotic attraction for Courage. Even while Courage maintained an implacable and largely unceasing sexual attraction for men, some of his interactions with women record a sexual undercurrent that would be unthinkable in most contemporary accounts of gay experience today.

Considered in this light, these episodes do much to highlight Courage’s own queer subjectivity. At the same time they also highlight the necessity for vigilance in studying the intricacies of all relational types, homosocial and otherwise.

**International connections**

Courage’s move to Europe did not extinguish his ties to New Zealand. While residing in London, Courage continually came into contact with other New Zealanders. Arriving in England to take up his studies at Oxford University in 1923, Courage stayed briefly with distant relations in Dorchester. Some weeks later he travelled to Oxford and reported being one of several colonials – New Zealanders included – studying at the British university. Courage did not identify these men, or explicate the nature of their intimacies at the time. In reminiscences recorded later, however, it is clear that Courage’s time at Oxford was a relatively pleasant one. Courage found academic and artistic success there. He also discovered a spirit of (mostly male) camaraderie that stood in marked contrast to the ‘horrors’ of his education in New Zealand.

In some ways, Courage’s network of friends may have been at its most heterogeneous during his time at Oxford. Most of his friends, if not all of them,
were either native Britons, or from a host of other (mostly) Commonwealth nations. It was only after moving to London in the late 1920s that Courage finally connected with the New Zealand expatriate community that already resided in the city. While for the most part Courage’s compatriots were artists, or at least of an artistic persuasion, an analysis of his journals and written correspondence shows that this network was composed of both men and women, queer and, at least as far as Courage could tell, non-queer. This pattern of relations points to nationality – alongside sexuality and profession – as a primary point of social relation; and one (as I suggest below) that existed with surprising uniformity throughout his time in the Northern Hemisphere.

Courage records his attendance at several events with other New Zealand artists. In one letter written to New Zealand academic and pianist Frederick Page in 1940, Courage mentioned his presence at a ‘general N.Z. concert’ with poet and playwright D’Arcy Cresswell.\(^{21}\) This event was organised by New Zealanders, and attracted a large expatriate audience. Courage explained how a number of his New Zealand friends – Sir Hugh Walpole (English but born in New Zealand), Hector Bolitho, Shale Gardiner, Ormond Wilson and others – had ‘been roped in’ for the occasion.\(^{22}\) The evening opened with an impressive ‘overture’ written ‘specially’ by composer Douglas Lilburn; this was followed by a speech by Walpole.\(^{23}\) Courage described the rest of the evening as being of ‘mixed fare’: a ‘quite inaudible speech’ by dramatist Merton Hodge, four ‘good’ cartoons drawn by political satirist David Low, and ‘a couple of Chopin Etudes’ performed by a young unnamed New Zealand pianist with a ‘truly amazing’ technique.\(^{24}\)

The evening ended in comic disarray, however, when a cohort of older New Zealanders took control of the proceedings:

[S]everal very odd things began to happen: the old brigade began to take over. Rosina Buckman appeared in a sort of nightgown and panted a few words of apology for not being able to sing; Shaye Gardner appeared looking grave, and fired off Othello’s defence at us: Stella Murry appeared in a crimson dress, carrying a bouquet of roses that looked as though they had died of fright and sang some wildly-inappropriate religious song […] But the real climax of embarrassment was reached when a troop of (presumably) soldiers, in Maori undress, gave a haka: their leader […] sprang about the stage with such vim that the grass-skirt that he was
wearing suddenly slipped completely off [...]. God alone knows what the Duchess of Kent, who was sitting in a box quite close to us, thought of it all!25

Comic (and painful) though it was – Courage records how he and D’Arcy were in a ‘state of coma with suppressed laughter’ for much of the proceedings – Courage usefully indicates how such events brought together a large swathe of New Zealanders who lived in London. National identity (and profession) was quite clearly the primary affiliation of those assembled. Certainly, the presence of the Duchess of Kent, the type of entertainment (classical music especially), even the venue (His Majesty’s Theatre in Haymarket) signal a wider British ethos.26 Overall, however, such occasions provided a means for renewing national affiliation for New Zealanders who, like Courage, were removed from the geographic spaces of home. Such events cemented connections between social intimates and, in this case at least, helped offset some the more deleterious effects of war.

The metropolis provided an array of spaces for such gatherings. Along with cultural exhibitions, New Zealand films and other civic events, Courage found numerous opportunities to participate in various rituals of nationhood that occurred within the metropolis.27 Of course, these events were held only occasionally, and the ability to converse at length in these spaces must have been constrained by social etiquette and other conventions of spectatorship. Intimate gatherings held at the homes of various friends, however, provided opportunities for far more regular (and informal) interaction. Along with their families (if indeed they had any), these occasions were almost exclusively composed of New Zealanders with literary leanings. Invitations were seldom extended to those of other communities, further exemplifying the importance of profession and nationality as a shared vector of community formation and personhood within the metropolis.

After one such New Zealand gathering Courage wrote to Charles Brasch (then residing in Dunedin) about an exceptionally enjoyable afternoon spent in the company of New Zealanders Bill Pearson, Maurice Duggan and poet and close friend Basil Dowling.28 The gathering had garnered Courage’s comment because of the notable inclusion of an outsider, the Australian playwright Florence
James. A ‘good-looking pink-faced woman of about 45’, Courage was clearly taken with her. He wrote that he had been ‘quite delighted’ by her charm and hospitality.

The wider narration of this event, and the many others that Courage recorded, point to the ways these episodes functioned as bastions of professional intimacy. This does not mean to say that these gatherings were not of a personal nature, or solely literary in their focus. Courage explained to Brasch how he and Florence had spoken at length about music. He also reveals intimate knowledge about Florence’s domestic affairs which Florence herself had shared with Courage (the pair spent considerable time talking about their respective families). Besides (typically) good cheer and conviviality though, these gatherings were necessary outlets of professional exchange. Courage mentioned how this particular get-together provided an opportunity to hear the latest news from home, for example. He was also able to glance over the most recent edition of New Zealand literary periodical Landfall.

Such interactions were not necessarily anchored to particular spaces. Courage’s personal narrative suggests how he also met with individual members of this literary circle outside of these gatherings. In one letter to Brasch, for example, Courage mentioned how he had talked with Bill Pearson and Basil Dowling ‘over iced beers’ a few nights before; he also wrote of having spent apparently congenial time in the company of short fiction writer Maurice Duggan. For the most part, however, larger meetings of New Zealanders held special and enduring significance for Courage and other expatriate artists. They performed a key role in maintaining group cohesion and professional affiliation in particular. Courage’s encounter with Florence shows how these spaces provided expansive opportunities for contemporaries to meet, exchange news and familiarise themselves with literary developments in New Zealand.

Aside from two periods when he left London – one in Argentina in 1931, the other in New Zealand from 1933 to 1935 – Courage’s insertion within this group was practically unbroken from the moment he established himself in the metropolis. Of course, networks and connections overlapped, and Courage belonged to other literary (and artistic) sets as well. His theatrical connections, as I indicated in Chapter Three, provided special privileges and unparalleled
access to dramatic and queer spaces within the metropolis. Even so, an analysis of Courage's private material indicates an intensification of national affiliation over time. More than this, however, these forums also facilitated the entry of new members into the cohort, and through this, the wider networks of interaction and exchange that already existed in the city.35

Courage was a social lynchpin for many New Zealanders visiting London – short and long-term migrants alike.36 He occupied a key position in multiple networks – queer and artistic, national and international. This made him a powerful acquaintance. This was particularly the case for Courage’s younger and New Zealand-born acquaintances who were typically less socially connected (at least in the centre), or who sought access to social networks that would otherwise have been outside of their normal everyday purview. Courage took interest in the young composer Douglas Lilburn when he arrived in London to study at the Royal College of Music in 1937, for example. Courage found Lilburn (who was famously reserved) to be a ‘nice reticent lad’, but possessed of rare artistic taste and refinement.37 Writing to Page on the 14th of April 1940, Courage described Lilburn as a ‘very shy, rather inhibited person’, but ‘most charming’ upon ‘closer acquaintance’.38

Through Courage, Lilburn had the opportunity to meet the men and women that frequented the New Zealand writer’s residence, including professionals at the British Broadcasting Company. Lilburn would eventually have several works played by the British network.39 Having maintained his connections to New Zealand, Courage also encouraged Lilburn to correspond with various other New Zealand friends. Writing to Brasch, for example, Courage explained that Lilburn had been ‘deeply interested in all the N.Z. musical news’ he provided in one recent letter.40 Given their respective interests (Brasch was himself an avid musical buff) Courage believed both would benefit from a closer acquaintance. He encouraged Lilburn to write to the New Zealand poet at once.41

In 1952, Courage exclaimed to Brasch over the sheer number of ‘N.Z. writers’ he knew personally in London and saw on a regular basis.42 Certainly, the 1950s marked the high point of Courage’s literary career (see my analysis in Chapter Six and Seven for a wider discussion in the context of Courage’s professional identity). This was also when Courage was at his most active in assisting many

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New Zealanders – younger men especially – with their entry into the urban spaces and rhythms of the cultural centre. This was particularly so as Courage aged, and suggests the tangible ways that his contributions to expatriate networks may have shifted and deepened over time.

Courage wrote to Rodney Kennedy in early 1956, for example, having heard from another New Zealander – the historian Eric McCormick – of Kennedy’s purported unease with London:

I have just had a letter from Eric McCormick in which he mentions that you are still in London, gives me your address and remarks that you are finding London pretty grim and cold after New Zealand. I must explain – before I go further – that I am a friend of Charles Brasch (you may have heard him mention me by name) and that I am living more or less permanently in Hampstead. The point is – would you care to come here and look me up some time?43

Queer and artistic credentials were mobilised to remarkably good effect. Courage consciously situated himself within the network of queer intellectuals that Kennedy (himself homosexual) was already intimate with – historian Eric McCormick and poet, arts patron, and (then) editor of *Landfall* Charles Brasch. Courage’s overture is carefully constructed, and further premised on Kennedy and Courage’s joint allegiance to a shared national culture and set of interests: ‘I don’t know how long you mean to remain in England […] but I should be glad to see you and to talk about New Zealand – not to mention the theatre, in which I believe you are interested’.44

It is clear that Courage drew a great deal of personal satisfaction from these associations. As I have noted, this was particularly so in Courage’s later years.45 Courage’s New Zealand friends formed an indispensable part of his social world – and not solely in professional terms. Basil Dowling and Charles Brasch, especially, were particular sources of confidence and emotional support. Dowling and Courage never lived far from one another from the time the former had moved to London with his family in the early 1930s. Both, however, maintained a robust written correspondence that augmented their (usually at least weekly) meetings; and Courage dedicated his fifth and most successful
novel *The Young Have Secrets* to Basil in 1954 (‘To Basil Dowling/ poet and friend/ for recollections in common’).46

This was no ordinary relationship. Courage stayed with the Dowlings after one severe mental breakdown in the mid-1950s, and again after Courage suffered the first of two heart attacks that would end his life in 1963. A ‘warm and tender’ people, Courage wrote of Basil and his family (he had a particular fondness for Basil’s wife Margaret) with considerable affection.47 These episodes reveal much about Courage’s material welfare; they also suggest how some New Zealand intimacies were not simply outlets for professional and personal pleasure. Rather, they were very necessary sources of physical and psychological care that at times verged on the familial.

Courage’s sister Patricia Fanshawe resided in nearby Surrey, and he was not without other family connections in England. Courage’s father, after all, was British-born.48 Even so, Courage preferred to spend most Christmases with the Dowlings (as well as the sisters Lettice and Barbara Cooper, who I look at more closely below). Courage felt as though he was one of the family, and wrote that he was never shielded from domestic tensions in the Dowling household simply because he was a guest. Courage recorded one Christmas where ‘a few underlying feuds started seeping through’ once the ‘harmonious’ effects of wine wore thin, for example.49

Other get-togethers, like those Courage recorded one summer in 1961, provided a very necessary respite from Courage’s mental anguish:

I went over to Highgate yesterday (Whit Monday) to see Basil and Margaret. The afternoon was England’s brightest and freshest, so we had tea on the daisied [sic] grass in the garden, among poppies and lupins. Basil looked pale and tired, poor man, but Margaret was brown after a week in Cornwall (Newlyn). We all sat on deck chairs and ate chocolate cake and sandwiches; like a N.Z. picnic rather (I hoped the tea would taste of manuka-smoke, but alas the flavour was Highgate Grocer instead). I had been in one of my very worst depressions – my bane – but I managed to cheer up and talk. We spoke of you [Brasch], wishing you were with us in the hot weather (Dunedin’s harbour must be full of pack-ice at the moment) [...]50
National identity is quite clearly the focus of social interactions and intimacies here. Courage recalls how these occasions were given their New Zealand flavour by their leisurely and outdoor informality. The careful etiquette of the dining table is replaced by an ease Courage associated with New Zealand; and it was common for conversation to turn to matters pertaining to home. Courage wrote to Page in 1955 how at the Dowlings he enjoyed ‘enormous bouts and tipples of New Zealand news and recollections’.51 These encounters were important events in the routine of Courage’s domestic life and, when he felt able to face social interaction, one that frequently left him pleasantly ‘mute from exhaustion’.52

Along with Dowling, Courage was frequently in contact with Brasch, whom Courage had first met while visiting New Zealand in 1933. The pair saw each other regularly when Brasch was in England (particularly during World War II) and, as I stated earlier, both men remained in near constant contact by letter, as well the occasional postcard or telegram. Along with Frank Sargeson, Brasch was one of Courage’s most prolific long distance correspondents and a figure whose intimacy once again blended the personal and the professional. Like the Dowlings, both Brasch and Sargeson took an active interest in Courage’s welfare. Writing to Sargeson, Brasch wrote of his constant concern for the English-based writer, stating in 1955 that there seemed a ‘great deal of pain and uncertainty in [Courage’s] letters’.53 While Courage had survived his most recent bout of mental anxiety, Brasch (rightly) suspected that his friend’s recovery would be temporary only: ‘I wouldn’t be so sure that he’s out of the woods yet’.54

Sargeson greatly admired Courage’s work (though he had reservations regarding Courage’s final two novels), and both men regularly exchanged missives as each acquired and then consumed their respective works. Despite their regard for one another, however, Brasch’s correspondence with Sargeson reveals the very special tenor of intimacy that must have persisted between Brasch and Courage. Much like the letter quoted above, Brasch shared his views about Courage’s well being with Sargeson, usually at the latter’s request. While Sargeson’s own correspondence with Courage was often unguarded – even frequently playful – it did not possess quite the same level of frankness as that of Courage and Brasch’s.55 Brasch, for example, was one of the first to hear of Courage’s intention to write a homosexual novel (he had already published
'Guest at the Wedding' and another homosexual story, 'Scusi', in *Landfall* in 1954 and 1953 respectively). It was also Brasch that kept Sargeson – who apparently deemed it too delicate to enquire himself – abreast of matters as the story (*A Way of Love*) moved towards completion and, eventually, publication in 1959.56

Brasch’s correspondence with Sargeson underscores the degree of confidence that Courage held for the Dunedin-based writer. Writing to Sargeson in March 1958 Brasch confirmed that Courage’s latest project (‘a homo one’) had been accepted by Jonathan Cape (now an imprint of Random House) and that, while Cape was ‘prepared for a hostile reception’, they meant to secure a publisher in the United States.57 Somewhat ominously, Brasch wrote that Courage was ‘alarmed’ by thoughts of public scandal, and explained how he worried for his friend’s psychological well-being.58 Writing again to Sargeson in December (with *A Way of Love* due to be published in Britain at any moment), Brasch spoke with considerable empathy of Courage’s fragility:

No, Courage’s book is to come out under his own name. He sounds very down, poor man; even last year I felt he was making a great effort in seeing me, even though he wanted to talk, wanted news, wanted friends to remember him; and I went away sad and somewhat frustrated each time, and felt that he shut the door behind me with immense if uneasy relief. I know the feeling so well though I never suffer it to that extent.59

Courage’s mental troubles worsened with age, and this tended to inhibit his social interactions. Certainly, as time passed, Courage saw his social intimates – literary or otherwise – much less frequently. Even so, Courage continued to view his New Zealand literary friends as indispensable parts of his social and professional landscape, and he wrote with considerable anguish when mental and (sometimes) physical impositions meant he was unable to maintain these links as he would have liked.60

Brasch and Dowling remained the significant exceptions, and judging from Courage’s own admissions, two of the few people allowed to understand the full context of his predicament. ‘I don’t love life any longer; it’s too cruel and one is altogether too lonely in it’, Courage wrote to Brasch in one pain-filled letter on the 12th of July 1956.61 Courage stated his situation in the plainest and most
abject of terms: he was ‘terribly neurotic’, suffered from a condition that was a part of his ‘artistic gift’, and hovered above the imminent collapse (the ‘surface of chaos’) only by virtue of psychiatric intervention.\(^{62}\) Courage gave still further detail later, adding in 1961 that he suffered from ‘a form of melancholic’ psychoneurosis’ that was in part ‘narcissistic’.\(^{63}\) He admitted to Brasch that he ‘suffered almost all the time’ since, and even with the ‘ruinous expense’ of three weekly trips to the psychoanalyst, his condition still proved ‘comparatively resistant to therapy’.\(^{64}\)

Much of my analysis so far underscores the ongoing significance of Courage’s New Zealand associations. Clearly, these were durable relations. They were sustained across decades and a range of changing historical exigencies. Even so, these relationships were never static. An analysis of this material – as I suggest above (and in Chapter Three in queer contexts) – indicates Courage’s increased intensification (at least as his mental health allowed) within New Zealand networks. This occurred as Courage grew older and his place within the metropolis solidified. The 1950s also show Courage at his most active within New Zealand’s expatriate community. There may be both historical and personal explanations behind this shift. I will suggest in Chapter Six, for example, that literary nationalism in the Antipodes motivated Courage’s production of a consciously ‘New Zealand’ literature from London.

Courage’s social connections clearly had more than professional significance, however. It is evident that Courage accrued a degree of satisfaction from his New Zealand associations (and his role as a lynchpin certainly would have afforded much social capital). In addition, these associations spoke very clearly to Courage’s own precise psychic needs. Courage’s New Zealand friends played an increasingly integral part in his day-to-day and material welfare. Professional collegiality – not to mention shared class aspirations – would have made these relationships particularly viable. Even so, a number of these social intimacies exceeded mere professional self-interest. Some – Brasch and the Dowlings especially – verged on the familial. ‘I seem, as so often when I write to you, to talk only of myself’, Courage wrote to Brasch one afternoon in 1956, for example. ‘Your own voice comes through your letters strongly and confidently. You give me faith [...]’.\(^{65}\)
**Homosociality and romantic friendship**

Queer and cosmopolitan though he was, Courage’s New Zealand ties remained a major aspect of his long-term cultural experience. Indeed, these connections were a lifelong and sustained practice that linked multiple social worlds; personal and professional, national and international. I have indicated already how a number of these friendships were with men that were also known by Courage to be queer – Charles Brasch, Frank Sargeson, Douglas Lilburn and D’Arcy Cresswell especially. These intimate connections hint at the importance of homosociality within Courage’s cultural repertoire. They indicate, too, how such relationships are not easily contained (or explained) by singular categories (descriptors like nationality or class, for example). Indeed, as many historians of sexuality emphasise, pre-liberation friendships were remarkably flexible, and encompassed a far wider range of intimacies than is normally presumed in contemporary usage today.⁶⁶

Echoing the work of theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, scholars like David M. Robinson have written of the ‘eroticism’ evident in many homosocial relationships.⁶⁷ Sedgwick wrote how male homosocial desire was ‘marked by discriminations and paradoxes’ and expressed social bonds between members of the same sex that were always at least ‘potentially erotic’.⁶⁸ These ambivalences could be found in the established literary forms of the nineteenth century (in the works of Walt Whitman, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Herman Melville, for example). Hellenic texts similarly offered queer men ‘discursive space to argue and validate the existence of same-sex desire’ within the confines of male friendship (see Chapter Two).⁶⁹ For middle-class homosexuals like Courage, friendship offered the possibility for respectable attachments to men comparatively free of social stigma.⁷⁰ Indeed, as I suggested in Chapter Four, friendship offered a largely shared language and set of meanings with which to assert the ennobling capacities of homosocial intimacies.

It is clear that some of Courage’s male friendships were of an erotic nature and that these intimacies could sometimes oscillate unproblematically between sexual and platonic experience. As I indicated in Chapter Four, Courage’s intimate relations tended to fluctuate between casual sexual encounters with working-class men and more complicated arrangements of intimacy,
companionship and support with those of the middle-class. This sexual world was almost an entirely male one, and was celebrated in *A Way of Love* as a ‘kind of freemasonry’ of intimacies and allegiances. At other times, intimate relationships could be described in conventional terms but segue towards other, less definable forms of intimacy.

Courage’s careful recording of his relationship with Frank Fleet paints perhaps the most fulsome picture of Courage’s intimate attachments. Spanning much of his adult life, Courage’s relationship with Fleet evokes the remarkable complexity and fluctuation that sometimes attended pre-liberation friendships. When the pair first met in England, for example, Courage did not immediately invoke the language of friendship to articulate their relationship. Instead Courage wrote, somewhat effusively, of a ‘lover’ who embodied an aesthetic and intellectual ideal:

A new lover; and such a gentle, beautiful, affectionate creature! Name, Frank; colour, dark; age, 25; height, 6 ft, 1 in; weight (I asked him this) 182 lbs – 13 stone; nationality – father Argentine, mother Cornish. An athlete, and handsome; one of the sweetest creatures I’ve ever known, with something so touchingly lonely and child-like in him that it makes tears of gentleness start to the eye. A very passionate lover: he calls me in soft Spanish: ‘Blanco y oro’ – white and gold – being amazed at the whiteness of my body, and my general fairness (he asked me ‘was I a Swede?’). We are both devoted to music; it seems to move us equally. Discussed the love-duet of Tristan and Isolde – *O sink hernieder, Nacht der Liebe* – which, he said, made him ‘shiver with exaltation’.

Courage’s initial estimation of Frank is expressed in relatively conventional romantic terms. While photographs from this period tell a rather different story – Fleet appears to be anything but athletic in these images – Courage is enthusiastic for a lover of rather impressive (and normatively) masculine dimensions. As I suggested in Chapter One, Frank self-identified as a Uranian at this time. Quite notably, however, Courage detected in Frank no distinguishing deviation of temperament or character. Indeed, Fleet is the ideal specimen of male physicality. A man of language, art and culture (signaled here by Fleet’s appreciation of music), Courage also considered Fleet to be his intellectual equal.
Courage and Fleet had met quite by chance, on board the Cornish Riviera Express, which ran between London and Penzance – either late in 1929 or in early 1930.\textsuperscript{74} Frank was just two years younger, and while these men had profoundly different national backgrounds, it is clear that Courage considered Fleet a kindred spirit. This is evident by the language of mutuality (‘both devoted’, ‘move us equally’) used to describe Courage’s attraction.\textsuperscript{75}

Much like the excerpt above, Courage continued to narrate their relationship in conventionally romantic terms. When Fleet left for Argentina on the 13\textsuperscript{th} of March 1930, for example, Courage wrote simply that ‘Paco left. I love him’.\textsuperscript{76} He did not immediately elaborate further on their separation. One month later, however, Courage was greatly disturbed by memories of their parting in a dream that he found to be particularly evocative: ‘[...] a small room with fruit on the table – Himself in a grey suit – Atmosphere of jealousy, frustration – Kisses of paralysing sweetness – Sadness – The overwhelming tender embraces of last farewells – Kisses salted with tears – The old anguish – Adiós. I woke longing desperately to see him again’.\textsuperscript{77}

It is difficult to trace exactly what happened when Courage arrived in Buenos Aires in 1931 – Courage wrote in his journal only very infrequently during this time. It is clear, however, that Courage departed London under a romantic compulsion to be reunited with Fleet: ‘For once I am letting my heart rule my head. I pray for the best. But it is impossible for me to be parted any longer from [Frank]. I love him’.\textsuperscript{78} Arriving at Buenos Aires early on the morning of the 6\textsuperscript{th} of January 1931, Courage wrote of ‘rapturous’ greetings and the happiness of ending their ten-month separation: ‘I am with [Frank] again – Journey’s End’.\textsuperscript{79}

Those fragments of Courage’s time in Argentina that do survive suggest this was not the romantic reunion he had hoped for. Writing in 1950, Courage believed his relationship with Fleet to be the ‘most passionate love-affair’ of his life.\textsuperscript{80} Having journeyed to be with Frank in Argentina, however, Courage wrote that the ‘whole thing [had] collapsed’.\textsuperscript{81} The ‘first months in London’ were ‘idyllic’, Courage recalled; their time together in Argentina, however, evidently much less so.\textsuperscript{82} The few journal passages that exist from around that time show their meeting to be a rather passionate and erotic encounter. However, their relationship foundered when Fleet became much more emotionally reserved,
and as it became clear to Courage that their reunion could only ever be short-lived (‘Le rêve de rester ensemble sans dessein’, or ‘the dream to be together without any outcome’).83

Leaving Argentina, and resuming his routine of daily journal writing, Courage reported feeling ‘home-sick for Buenos Aires’.84 Though Frank did not himself see Courage to his ship, Courage took the opportunity to deposit ‘one last note for [Frank]’ with a mutual friend before his departure.85 It is unclear whether Courage left as a friend or lover; indeed given the erotic ambivalence of male-male relationships such a question would seem a rather unproductive one. What one certainly notes in these excerpts, however, is an ongoing intimacy that is perhaps surprising given Courage’s ambivalent experience while in Argentina. Courage and Fleet maintained a fairly prolific correspondence, though the pair were not to meet again for another nine years. While only the later correspondence still exists, there is plenty to suggest that this correspondence must have been of a passionate nature.86

Writing in his journal in 1932, for example, Courage wrote of a particularly ‘loving’ letter just received from Fleet. Courage had ‘only just’ posted Fleet a letter of his own: ‘an indignant one’, accusing Fleet of having neglected Courage ‘for a month’ because he was ‘entangled with a HUSY’.87 Courage wondered whether Fleet still ‘loved’ him ‘just a little’, even though he conceded that it had been two years since they had last seen each other.88 Certainly, these years were rather difficult for Courage, who continued to write fairly passionately of his longing for Frank. Dining with the Dowlings on 21st of June 1932, for example, Courage wrote of one particularly painful evening that left him reeling from a passion that was at least potent in its remembered significance:

Yes, that Spanish Dance [sic] by [Enrique] Granados, in a minor key, particularly. That evening when I was suffering, when my heart was aching, when I was in love with him, I could not listen to it. Its sweetness and wildness were too much for my oversensitised heart. It was a dreadful, subtle torture to listen to the sounds and hear them intensify my passion. An impotent sadness. His image kept recurring to me. I made some excuse and said goodbye to the kindly [Dowlings]. I couldn’t sit in the room, listening to music that went through my heart. I felt better outside, in the cold air.89
Elsewhere, Courage records reading *Marius The Epicurean* and Walter Pater’s views on the ‘sensations and ideas’ of life.\textsuperscript{90} Having experienced love, Courage considered that he belonged to the ‘somewhat exclusive world of vivid personal apprehension’. With this relationship now collapsed, however, Courage was forced to reside alone, in the ‘unimproved, unenlightened [...] outer world of other people’.\textsuperscript{91} From around this time – some two years after their first meeting – Courage ceased to use a purely romantic vocabulary to describe his relationship with Fleet. Both men continued to correspond fairly regularly, but utilised the language of romantic friendship to articulate their feelings instead.

Courage was deeply disturbed to hear that Fleet was engaged to be married to a young woman in 1934, for example. Hearing of this from Frank directly, Courage wrote that he spent ‘a very bad ten minutes’ upon reading the news.\textsuperscript{92} This revelation ‘brought back’ memories of ‘being in love’ with Fleet; a painful experience that left Courage exasperated and confused.\textsuperscript{93} The episode, however, indicated the curious passion still evident between the two. In the same breath that Courage condemned Fleet’s decision as ‘foolish’ and an act of ‘hypocrisy’, he wrote that ‘remembering’ their affair had ‘meant a lot [...] [these] past years’.\textsuperscript{94} Courage believed the experience had been a sustaining one for them both, but feared that Fleet’s marriage would ‘mean the end of his ambition’, the ‘end of him’.\textsuperscript{95}

Fleet seemed to be aware that this sudden revelation might extinguish their now four-year intimacy. He wrote that he considered Courage to be his ‘dearest friend’, but hoped that the New Zealander would not wish to ‘sever that friendship’.\textsuperscript{96} (These lines survive because Courage transcribed them from Fleet’s original letter.)\textsuperscript{97} Courage privately conceded that he and Fleet were ‘not likely’ to have rekindled their former romance.\textsuperscript{98} Even here, though, there existed a subtle ambivalence: Courage hinted at a continuum of erotic possibilities, suggesting only that he and Fleet were ‘not likely to have become lovers, *in the full sense, again*.\textsuperscript{99} Certainly, when Fleet and Courage did meet in London in 1939, their former intimacy, which had continued from letter and telephone, had not been extinguished. The pair met as ‘friends’, but the experience was not without warmth: ‘[...] it was quite blissful to sit together again and talk quietly [...] [p]erhaps that was the greatest pleasure of our re-meeting – [a] quiet
understanding, only heightened (like an evening) by a sort of afterglow of passion’.

During this and other trips to England, of which there were several, Fleet continued to pursue a passionate affair with Courage. This was not, however, of a sexually exclusive nature. As I indicated in Chapters Three and Four, Courage continued to seek sexual and emotional gratification with other men – both middle- and working-class. Still, Courage did not record intimacies with any other men beside Fleet between 1930 and 1932 (the years of their greatest romantic intensity). Frank found intimate and erotic attachments of his own with at least two male friends in Argentina. One was a mutual friend, William Thompson (but known to both as Billy), and the other was identified in Courage’s journal only as Roger. Roger had accompanied Fleet to England on at least one occasion, and may have taken up a diplomatic post in London in the 1950s.

At no time after 1932 did Courage take up the romantic language formerly used to describe his and Fleet’s relationship. But neither was their relationship purely carnal in nature. Indeed, Fleet took a very active interest in Courage’s life, and wrote with considerable sympathy when Courage found himself embattled by depressive illness:

With all this good news about your work, you really must get over your problem. I sympathise deeply, as I have had the same and have passed many unhappy and also happy days. However, life provides its compensations sometimes. In my case Mildred [his wife] and I are very happy [...] and Patsy [his daughter] is very happily married and has her dear little girl. I have my memories, and sometimes my longings. And often I sincerely wish we had had more time together to know each other more intimately, which is, I find, what really matters.

Courage and Fleet’s relationship coalesced over the course of some three decades, transitioning from a fairly conventional romantic attachment to a passionate friendship. Courage’s relationship with Fleet was unique, particularly in terms of its length and duration. Courage’s intergenerational intimacies further underscore the degree of erotic ambivalence evident in many of his male friendships. While these intimate dimensions exist in a number of Courage’s
relationships (I consider his relationship with women below, for example), Courage’s intergenerational intimacies were governed by a quite different set of complexities.

Cross-generational friendships had been an ongoing part of Courage’s erotic experience from the 1940s onwards. Unlike his relationship with Fleet, Courage’s encounters with younger men were typically of shorter duration; most were no longer than a year. These relationships were seldom imbued with the kind of romantic idealism evident in the early years of Courage’s affair with Fleet. Yet, Courage’s romantic connections with younger men were not – as I suggest below – of a simply carnal nature either.

In Chapter Four I mentioned two key relationships Courage had with younger men during War World II. While both relationships had ended in tragedy, these intimacies were of a significant emotional and erotic nature. Courage’s relationship with the naval rating Chris was particularly important. Courage probably found the conditions of war ideal for the pursuit of homosocial relationships. As I indicated in Chapter Four, the movement of men through the metropolis meant that London – and its surrounding space – abounded with sexual and intimate opportunities. Allan Bérubé notes that World War II introduced new social actors (American GIs, for example) to the sexual landscape and saw increased public cruising in the metropolis. Richard Hornsey similarly argues that this period saw an increased ‘plurality of queer male behaviors’ and that the city sustained ‘distinct and contrasting understandings of self’.

Certainly, Courage enjoyed a number of intimate encounters during wartime. However, Courage’s intergenerational intimacies certainly do not fit existing definitions of either casual sex or platonic friendship as they might be ascribed in the twenty-first century. Courage’s sexual encounters with younger men were normally premised on friendship. Certainly, they were not invested with the same kind of sexual meanings as Courage's working class liaisons (see Chapter Four). As I suggested in Chapter Three, however, Courage’s relationships with younger men – Chris and R. A. F. pilot Ivon Anderson – also frequently overlapped (Courage was seeing at least three young men at the same time at one stage) and these relationships were most definitely of a sexual nature.
These relations were also usually class-specific. Courage's younger lovers normally came from fairly affluent backgrounds, and most of these friendships were formed through a shared appreciation for the arts or some other field of joint interest. Certainly, most of these men appear to have been middle-class themselves, and most, like the young protagonist in *A Way of Love*, were relative novices to the metropolitan culture of London. Here Courage implied a kind of genealogical connection between younger provincial men and their more experienced metropolitan counterparts:

What could I say about the plight and the sadness of provincial boys who come to London and inhabit each his furnished room like a temporary cell? I had once been one of them. I too had known the unfriendly furniture, the merciless ceiling above the single bed, the pangs of solitude unalleviated by the worn carpet and the ghastly wallpaper ... I felt a shrinking in my soul, a sympathy for this lad [Philip Dill] beside me who might be as I had been.\textsuperscript{105}

There is nothing to indicate that Courage drew from classical scripts like those I considered in Chapter One (and above) in composing these relationships, but it remains a possibility. Whatever the case, many of these encounters indicate Courage's role in inducting younger men into important social networks – queer and otherwise.

Along with Chris and Ivon, Courage had also been taken with another young man in the 1940s: an artist by the name of Nigel Bryant. Like Courage's two other young acquaintances at this time, Bryant spent a significant amount of time in Courage's company at St. Ives, and, like Chris, he enjoyed a lively interest the arts:

We have taken Helen Seddon's [a local water colour artist] house (No. 17, The Warren, St Ives) for 3 weeks at a rental of 10/- per week. Nigel is a young artist [...] who attends an Art School in Wimbledon. He wrote to me about a year ago (having been introduced at some tea-party) to ask if he might call 'to see my Christopher Woods' (pictures). It subsequently transpired that I was the first frankly overt homosexual whom he had met and that he regarded me with a mixture of fascination and Puritan horror [...] The friendship ripened: in fact, it was he himself who suggested this Cornish trip (the equivalent in his young mind, evidently, of sharing a studio in Paris).\textsuperscript{106}
As he did elsewhere, here Courage emphasised the mutuality of feeling and temperament evident between himself and his young companion (Courage was 37 years of age to Bryant’s 19).107 Their encounter is motivated – at least in part – by their shared interest in art and culture, and possibly Courage’s status as an established artist. Bryant was aware of Courage’s artistic connections to other well-known personalities, after all. Courage was touched by Bryant’s ‘idealism and lack of compromise’ – and motivated perhaps by a wider altruism; ‘God help me, I was a dozen times more priggish and frightened, at his age’.108 Five days into their three-week working holiday Courage wrote that their friendship had become erotic.109 Despite Bryant’s apparent ‘Puritan horror’ of homosexuality, Courage recalled ‘moments of real passion’, and that their holiday had been a ‘success’ in more ways than one.110

Here, and in other episodes, Courage’s narrative shows a bleeding of erotic and altruistic regard. Writing at 57 years of age, for example, Courage wrote of A. C., another young man he had befriended. A. C. was homosexual, then 27 years of age, and like Courage, intent on an aggressive course of psychotherapy.111 Courage wrote of his desire to help the young man, though his journal also signals his further erotic regard for the boy: ‘I knew this neurotic need [the desire to escape homosexual guilt], and told him so. He brightened under my eyes: a good-looking, thin, attractive boy (less than half my age), with a helm of black hair springing beautifully from a good forehead, rather pale, and with a wide mouth’.112 Courage wrote about his wish to ‘spare’ A. C. from the pain he believed was generated by his psychological problems, and Courage appears to have been integral in encouraging the young man to pursue psychoanalysis. Courage reflected that he had been ‘deeply frightened, unhappy and bewildered’ at A. C.’s age, and entirely unable to see a way through his growing malaise.113 Courage sought to assist A. C. in any way he could:

[I had] no notion what was wrong with me [at A. C.’s age] save that I blamed my homosexuality for most of it. And I was very much alone, having withdrawn myself and being unable to talk to anyone about my emotional troubles. [...] So I began to get lost. A. C. has at least done something to help himself, and done it reasonably early too, thanks perhaps to some advice from me [...] He cannot lose by [psychoanalysis], and his gain may be great. With all my heart and
compassion I wish him well. May life not be the nightmare it has been for me, these past twenty-five or thirty years.\textsuperscript{114}

There is an interesting tension here. As I reiterated earlier, Courage withdrew from much social contact in his later years. In Chapter Three, I wrote that Courage found his interaction with younger men particularly trying. He sought to limit this contact whenever possible, particularly from those ‘disreputable’ types that he considered to be part of Stuart’s social milieu.\textsuperscript{115}

However, Courage performed his connection to this younger generation of queers very much on his own terms. He seldom saw these men in groups, and preferred instead to spend time with them alone. These men were largely dependent on Courage’s hospitality – at either his home, or at lodgings Courage sometimes secured during their periodic trips to the English coast. Moreover, these friendships were far from an imposition, but, like Courage’s New Zealand associations, seemed to help alleviate some of Courage’s more severe symptoms of melancholia. Courage wrote how his ties to younger men were a valued source of ‘human contact’.\textsuperscript{116} They provided a ‘delicate air of security’, and one for which Courage was uniquely grateful.\textsuperscript{117}

\textbf{Women and female sociabilities}

By extending the conceptualisation of intimacy, I have so far shown a number of relationships that factored centrally in Courage’s material experience. National identity continually mediated Courage’s sense of space, even though he had not resided in New Zealand since 1935. We see more clearly both how these ties operated in London, and Courage’s role as a social lynchpin within this wider community of expatriates. Alongside these sometimes overlapping worlds, Courage was further embedded in a world of queer intimacies. For Courage, romantic friendship acted as a central mode for interaction and a means for articulating his affective relationships with men. This was very much a culture of homosociality, but one where erotic and platonic feelings sometimes comingled.

However, it is clear that Courage’s national and same-sex interactions did not inform his entire intimate experience. His relationship with women was also particularly significant. In Chapter Three I signaled the importance of one friendship – that with sisters and fellow Hampstead-based writers Lettice and
Barbara Cooper. This was one of Courage's more significant and enduring London connections. The pair had much to recommend them: Lettice had been at Oxford just years before Courage (between 1916 and 1918), she had fostered a close relationship with at least one other well known homosexual (radio broadcaster Lionel Fielden), and both sisters were proponents of Freudian psychoanalysis. Lettice corresponded with Brasch in 1969. Brasch was then compiling an edited collection of Courage's short stories to be published posthumously as *Such Separate Creatures* in 1973. Lettice wrote of her and her sister's own regard for the New Zealand writer. 'Saturday afternoons were our time for tea with James! He often visited us and always spent part of Christmas with us. We both miss him constantly'.

Courage's relationship with the Coopers signals the kinds of intimacies that Courage actively sought from his large number of female associates. Like the Dowlings, who were fellow writers and neighbours, these intimacies sometimes overlapped with other spheres of interaction (Lettice wrote in 1969 that the trio had long lived in 'easy walking distance' of one another). On the surface, these associations appear to jar with a certain ambivalence that Courage voiced regarding women in much of his private material (and sometimes in his correspondence as well). In 1929 Courage spoke of the necessity of 'dipping' women in 'sanity' before writing about them creatively, for example. It seemed that some women, 'denuded of their sexual glamour', were particularly vacuous. Most were creatures given to shallowness and frivolity, and 'few', Courage claimed, could 'stand alone' as 'beings moved by a conscious philosophy'.

Not all women in Courage's private materials bear this condescension, however. Courage singled out certain types of women – or modes of femininity, to be more specific – as figures of considered derision. These were women who embraced artifice, and lacked a deeper, and more critical perspective ('a conscious philosophy') on the world. In this respect, Courage was rather evenhanded in his critique of the sexes. After all, as I indicated in Chapter One, Courage was equally vociferous in his attack on men – usually inverts – who embraced lives of artifice. Much like the effeminate protagonist of 'The Portrait of a Bloody Fool', Courage derided those women who acquiesced too easily to a life of sensuality:
I am not so sure now that I am so fond of Betsy. I sometimes think she is vulgar and a little coarse, but always the essential woman, the flirt. What woman does not like to be clasped in a man's arms? To be kissed by him. They can't help liking it, it was born in them, it was in Eve and has probably ever since existed. But I make one stipulation – it must be the right man who does it. There is no such thing as platonic friendship. No man can be a constant friend with an eligible woman without Love entering into the question – it isn't possible.124

Elsewhere Courage complained of male 'sexual inverts' in the same breath as he railed against women made 'sterile' through 'anemia, or Lesbianism': 'Osbert Sitwell, Lady [Hazel] Lavery and Nellie Wallace [...] A codfish, a henna'ed orchid and a convalescent parrot'.125 Certainly Courage did not share the views of some of his other social contemporaries who, like D'Arcy Cresswell, advocated for the eradication of women's so-called 'public influence' over society. (Cresswell believed the world had turned its back on the 'natural superiority of men', and had become an instrument for the 'puffing of women, to the ruination of the masculine spirit'.)126

Courage frequently socialised with women he identified to be lesbian. Along with Lettice's sister Barbara, he accorded special feeling for at least one other queer woman, a writer identified only as K. F.127 Their interactions do not appear to be vastly different from those Courage records between himself and many of his male associates. However, as I noted in Chapter Three, Courage's queer interactions outside his home tended to be in spaces noted to be emphatically and exclusively male. I have found mention of just one gathering – a party – noted to be queer but with women clearly in attendance; and that comparatively late in Courage's life.128 Certainly, this was no isolated episode, and other sources – Courage's fiction particularly – signal his increasing regard for women in his later years.

Queer women appear in many of Courage's published narratives of the 1950s and '60s. Courage singles out one lesbian – an Elizabeth Jessop – as a figure of tremendous sensitivity in his 1956 novel A Call Home, for example.129 Jessop exerts an aura of self assurance that merges with a maternal care of others:
Elizabeth Jessop was older [...] a woman of intelligence and some wit, a writer of poetry which she casually undervalued. Unmarried, she kept house for a father who, seldom encountered and never heard, was understood to be an accountant. So much Norman remembered. [Norman] remembered also that Elizabeth, for no reason save for an ebullient kindness towards younger people, had shown a fostering interest in himself at a time when [as a young man] he was awaiting his passage to London.130

Courage also accords special respect for one woman identified as queer (though not ‘lesbian’) in A Way of Love. A client, and later friend to the homosexual protagonist, architect Bruce Quantock, Helen Vincent is a woman of ‘charm’ and (much like Barbara Cooper) a figure of tremendous perceptive powers (Vincent is said to be a ‘woman of no mean perspicacity’).131 Vincent echoes Courage’s own views in her opinion that ‘much in life’ was ‘needlessly cruel’, particularly for those who discovered themselves to be queer.132 Vincent expresses a certain solidarity with both homosexual men in the narrative; she suggests that male intimacies are no less honourable than heterosexual arrangements. Vincent goes to considerable length to deepen Bruce’s intimacy with the younger Philip Dill. She invites both to a weekend at her home in the English countryside, just outside of London; a party that is made up of both queer men and women.133

Quantock is explicitly shown to be homosexual in A Way of Love. His relationships with women, however, show a sometimes erotic ambivalence. Some homosexuals, Quantock suggests, are wholly consumed by their erotic and social regard for other men. Others, however, even while they describe themselves as homosexual, also display ‘some desire’ or ‘yearning’ for ‘an extension [...] towards women’.134 Courage’s own private materials betray a similar resonance. In his views of sexual inversion in the 1920s, for example, he related that while men were ‘privileged’ (through their erotic connection to the phallus), he considered that inverts had a ‘detached’ – but not disinterested – ‘view of women’.135 Around the same time Courage wrote rather tantalising of taking ‘strawberries and tea with a woman’ who ‘pleased’ him excessively but ‘was old enough to be [his] mother’.136

One year later, Courage was captivated by another woman, this time a mysterious figure, glimpsed from an open window:
Friendship

As I sit at my desk, trying to induce the moment of bien-être [...] a woman with a bright scarf round her neck, mother-of-pearl earrings in her ears and a great straw Leghorn hat on her head passes up the street, selling lavender. I am drawn to the window by her deep contralto voice singing ‘Sweet Lavender’. For a long time I watch her strange, gypsy figure amongst the cars and bicycles, until at last her voice is a faint echo, past the next block. But she has kindled my mind [...].137

My intention here is not to prove conclusively – one way or other – whether Courage maintained an interest in women that was ‘authentically’ erotic, or even whether these intimate feelings were ever acted upon, as if sex-object choice is somehow emblematic of an individual’s ‘authentic’ sexual identity. Rather, I wish to call attention to some of the tensions and ambivalences that punctuate Courage’s register of intimacies. In the process we further emphasise the unique subjectivity that Courage brought to his social encounters more generally.

Certainly, Courage spoke somewhat enigmatically on more than one occasion of having had relationships with women in the past. Courage does not record these episodes with the same elaborate detail as his male intimacies; indeed, they remain for the most part rather fragmentary. Speaking retrospectively, in 1960, Courage wrote that, in sexual terms at least, these encounters had been largely unsatisfying. Talking to one intimate female friend, a Margaret Bassett, who Courage normally referred to as Mrs B., Courage had related that his relationships with women had ‘never worked’ and that the ‘sexual side’ was particularly ‘difficult’.138 Of Bassett, however, Courage paints a rather intriguing picture of mutual support, companionability, even a certain erotic ambivalence.

Margaret was a housewife and a widow, and roughly equal to Courage in age and class. Courage states that she was about one or two years younger than him, and clearly of a refined temperament and taste.139 The pair frequently met for meals, and when Bassett’s son – also named James – was not visiting, the pair normally dined together on a near-weekly basis. Courage appears to have regarded Margaret with more than a casual interest. Along with a select few others (Charles Brasch, Basil Dowling and the sisters Cooper, who I have already written of) Bassett completed an inner circle of social intimates that Courage interacted with on a fairly regular basis near the end of his life.

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Despite this, Courage’s interactions with Bassett were relatively unique. They reveal certain rituals of intimacy, for example – episodes of chivalry and courtship, especially – that signal an intriguing (and rather heteronormative) performance on Courage’s part. Courage wrote of taking her ‘a bunch of violets’ on one dinner excursion, for example.\textsuperscript{140} Courage wrote of Margaret’s congeniality, stating that he was ‘withdrawn’ but ‘gradually thawed’ under her affectionate attentions.\textsuperscript{141} Having escorted his female friend home, Courage reported a tellingly intimate end to the evening: ‘My heart sank, however, when she told me her son (aged 26) was due to arrive for coffee. I had not met him before and was vaguely jealous and apprehensive. [...] “You’ve got a big son of your own,” I said teasingly when I kissed her a foster-son’s good night on the cheek. The soft skin made me think I was kissing my mother – yet there was a faint stirring of sexual feeling also, unless I deceive myself’.\textsuperscript{142}

The influence of Courage’s Freudian psychoanalysis is seen rather plainly in these episodes. Indeed, Courage’s psychiatrist Dr. Larkin encouraged him to view Bassett as the healing substitute for the ‘bad breast’ of Courage’s real mother.\textsuperscript{143} It is possible that these new psychological scripts transformed Courage’s perception of his intimacies with women. Courage wrote, for example, how his desire for Margaret was far from natural, but represented the ‘very measure’ of his ‘regression’.\textsuperscript{144} On one occasion Courage retreated to Bassett’s home having suffered a ‘dreadful day’ of depression; he wrote that he feared his own ‘isolation and insecurity’.\textsuperscript{145} Visiting Margaret was a ‘coming-home, of a kind’.\textsuperscript{146} There Courage found an outlet for intimacy, but one that was formed out of a desire to return to the vulnerability he considered infantile in origin: ‘She was very kind, let me clasp her against me, stroked my skin and shoulder, kissed me on the forehead. [...] She comforted me, my tears falling on her dress and wrists. It was a great relief to me to give way, to feel I was a child again, to be soothed maternally’.\textsuperscript{147}

Other episodes indicate how Courage actively resisted medical interventions that characterised his relationship with Bassett (and other female intimates) in solely psychoanalytical terms. Courage stated on the 9\textsuperscript{th} of December 1960, for example, of having spent all of one Monday with Margaret in fairly intimate surrounds. ‘Nothing happened’, he suggested, only ‘because her son was
Courage added that he ‘did not explain’ the full context to Larkin, as he believed that the psychiatrist did not fully understand the nature of his relationship with Bassett. Their intimacy was plainly erotic, but it had a wider and vital function that was beyond the carnal. ‘I wanted to say’, Courage complained of one session with Larkin, ‘what a comfort Mrs B. gave me when she said on the telephone last night. “I’m always here. I’ll be thinking of you.”’

These interventions raise themselves only in Courage’s later narratives, and show how Courage’s intimate connections with women transformed over time. Of course, psychoanalysis cannot fully explain Courage’s intimacies and ambivalences with women (even if they forced Courage to retrench his views in light of psychiatric assessments of his life). As I have emphasised already, it is clear that Courage’s intimate attachment to women pre-dated his psychiatric treatment.

Marital considerations complicate this picture even more so. As I noted several times, Courage had considered marriage to various women at a number of points in his life. He had sought medical advice from a Dr. R., presumably in London, regarding the ‘right’ age to marry, in 1927, for example (Courage records only Dr. R.’s views on the optimal age of a wife: ‘half the husband’s age, plus 7’). One month later the then twenty-four year-old complained of being ‘haunted’ by an ‘idea’ that he should propose to one female friend, a woman identified only as H. Courage ultimately rejected this notion, but not out of any wholesale disinterest in women: ‘I don’t love the girl: I have no great desire for either her body or her mind […] and my sense of humour refuses to picture her parents sanctioning such a liaison’.

Rather tellingly, perhaps, Courage invokes the language of compulsion (‘haunted’) to explain this impulse. In this sense, Courage’s desire to marry could well have been an imposition that was imported from normative scripts derived from the archetypal ideas of masculinity and respectability I considered in Chapter One. These tensions were not isolated. After all, I have shown already how Courage viewed Fleet’s marriage in 1933 in rather fatalistic terms (the ‘end of him’). Courage believed it to be ‘hypocrisy’ on Fleet’s part – a threat to more than just his material ‘ambition’.

Speaking to the Irish writer Sean O’Casey in Regent’s Park, three years earlier, both men had agreed that marriage had
ongoing relevance. Marriage appeared alongside work and reproduction as part of a normative – and laudable – way of life. Interestingly, however, their conversation recorded a rather telltale ambivalence: namely that ‘every normal man should marry’.

Whether Courage’s desire (and repulsion) for marriage was the result of cultural imposition, matrimony remained a live option throughout his life, and not one Courage acknowledged merely as an acquiescence to the ‘respectable’ conventions of the nuclear family:

A long talk with [his housekeeper] Mrs. Timmons at my flat, as she was doing the chores. I do believe that she gives me more human comfort than anyone else, though, as a faithful servant (at least 12 years with me), she calls me ‘sir’ and is always respectful. She is, I believe, sixty-two, and looks about fifty. The thought has often entered my mind that I might ask her to marry me – fantastic though such a union sounds (I am 47). At any rate she can have few illusions about me, after all these years ... She chats to me about her family and relations – tells me that her maiden name was Keen – that she was ‘in service’ and only 16 when she met her husband [...] ('such a handsome man he was') [...]. I derive a sort of comfort from all this – it is that odd thing, real life, which fills all humanity [...].

Conclusion

By situating friendship within a wider discussion of intimacy we can appreciate much more fully Courage’s own subjectivity. Courage’s life narrative usefully alerts scholars to the range of values, tensions and contingencies evident in one man’s very particular negotiation of the world from the late 1920s until 1960. Friendship and intimacy can be found at the heart of Courage’s personal and professional experience. Indeed, as this chapter has indicated, these intimate bounds provided emotional and intellectual succour, a mode for ongoing identity formation, even a means for connecting disparate geographies and groups of people.

Friendship was no mere standby to the supposedly more durable linkages of kin and family, nor, as I suggest, can friendship be so easily separated from erotic and passionate encounter. These nuances can be very easily conflated and lost within wider discussions of identity and belonging, particularly those meanings
(the ‘platonic’ status of friendship especially) that belong more to our own time than to that of our ‘preliberation’ forebears. Courage’s experiences of friendship, however, highlights a diversity of spaces and relational categories that featured in his particular social and historical moment.

National identity, for instance, remained a central vector of sociability and interaction throughout Courage’s lifecourse, one that was continually revitalised by London’s imperial and cultural connectedness. Far from ‘exile’, Courage’s location at the very centre of the British world provided rich opportunities for his immersion in the community of expatriate New Zealanders that resided in the imperial capital. For many artists – of whom Courage was but a singular example – the city provided public and civic space to meet, interact, and partake in cultural rituals. Courage clearly understood these spaces and moments as emphatically New Zealand in association.

Courage also belonged to a smaller enclave of literary-minded New Zealanders, many of whom lived in close proximity to his Hampstead home. These more intimate (and exclusive) gatherings had a central bearing on Courage’s professional and cultural affiliations, both as a New Zealander and a New Zealand writer. My focus upon Courage’s place within this smaller, and much more exclusive literary community unveils a remarkably integrated system of interaction. These intimate gatherings provided a forum of sociability, but also a space in which resources (such as literary periodicals like *Landfall*), and local literary news could be exchanged and consumed by its most geographically distant adherents.

These interactions show a surprising flow of support that went in more than one direction. As I have shown, members within this network numbered as some of Courage’s staunchest allies and supporters, and a good few – Basil Dowling and Charles Brasch in particular – were bearers of both a professional and personal attachment.

Courage was well connected to a number of relational networks within the city – queer and otherwise. The writer became a valuable reference point for those who sought entry within these worlds; and Courage’s narrative highlights how his spatial and professional locatedness must have materially benefited more than one New Zealand artist newly arrived to London. The breadth of his
correspondence shows that this network was by no means bounded by
geography, nor did its nourishment require constant interaction in 'real time'.

Courage’s narrative on friendship also further underscores the centrality of
the homosocial. I have signaled the importance of Courage’s male relations in
previous chapters. In Chapter Four, for example, I discussed how romantic
friendship provided men with a socially laudable framework that justified men’s
attachments in spiritually and intellectually affirming contexts. I also
foregrounded the importance of intergenerational relationships as Courage
entered middle age and beyond. In this chapter I returned to Courage’s
connection to younger men, and one of his most significant and durable
connections – with the Argentine Frank Fleet – as a means for exploring the
complexity and nuance of these attachments in greater detail.

In his Introduction to The History of Sexuality, Michel Foucault wrote of the
need to consider ‘discourse’ as part of a ‘multiplicity’ of ‘discursive elements’ and
‘strategies’ whose function is ‘neither uniform nor stable’. Certainly, romantic
friendship provided more than simply a means for evading social approbation. In
fact, Courage’s own narrative shows that no amount of strategising could entirely
replace some of the more deleterious effects of heteronormativity.

These friendships were frequently of an intimate nature. Courage’s
relationship with Fleet highlights how romantic friendship could be mobilised
across time, and a raft of changeable social circumstances. It also highlights the
curious erotic ambivalences that sometimes exerted themselves amongst close
male intimates. On the other hand, Courage’s relationships with younger men
were often much less durable, but no less nuanced. Here Courage once again
played the part of a cultural lynchpin – this time for queer newcomers who
sometimes arrived in London without detailed knowledge about the queer male
subcultures that existed there. These interactions may have appeared casual and
ephemeral to outside eyes. In reality, however, Courage accrued a great deal of
enjoyment from these intimacies; and it is clear that they had more than simply
an erotic dimension.

Even while Courage wrote quite strenuously of his dislike for certain kinds of
femininity, other episodes trace Courage’s intimate attachment to more than one
female companion. Key figures like Lettice and Barbara Cooper provided
Courage with invaluable psychological and material support. Along with Charles Brasch, the Dowlings, and Courage’s other intimate woman friend, Margaret, the Coopers completed an inner circle of loyal supporters that Courage relied upon without reservation. Many of these female relationships betray an erotic ambivalence and are an apt reminder of the importance of considering intimacies within the context of an individual’s subjectivity. Certainly, later Freudian narratives implicate psychiatry’s intervention in these intimacies. They cannot explain, however, the curious erotic intimacy that punctuated some of Courage’s relationships with women throughout his life.

Courage’s fictive output usefully fleshes out many of the values and ambivalences detected in his personal narrative. In excerpts that opened this chapter, for example, we see the importance of both romantic friendship and relationships with women. Later, in A Way of Love, we encounter a metropolitan and sexual experience much like Courage’s, one that included intimacies with men. We detect even the curious desire for female intimacies that Courage believed informed the reality for some (though not all) homosexual men.

Having considered narratives of varying kinds throughout this thesis, I look much more closely at Courage’s fictional output in the following chapter. There I explore how Courage transposed his own narrative into a literary context, and what, if anything, this might add to our understanding of his life. I also ask how fiction and literature functioned as spaces for exploring issues of various kinds. Many of these issues impinged on Courage’s wider social world. They also informed considerations of his personal and professional identity in profoundly inescapable ways.
Notes

1 In fact Courage was delighted with the attention from the British press, and believed the reviews to be ‘on the whole, much better’ than he expected. He noted favourable reviews in the *Daily Mail*, but was most gratified with the notice published in the *New Statesman*: ‘One of V. S. Pritchett’s sentences [...] has given me a deal of pleasure. He writes: “Against the monotony of the quiet house the sisters sit, in a soundless electric air, straining against the design which has caught them.” That is creative criticism’. See James Courage, Journal, 1932-1934, 13 February 1933, MS-0999/083, HC.

2 The only mention in New Zealand of Courage’s achievement is a snippet (one paragraph) in Wellington’s *Evening Post* on the 6th of May 1933 – some months after the novel’s publication in London. See ‘Literary Notes’, *Evening Post*, 6 May 1933, p. 19.

3 Emboldened by his success with *One House*, Courage was inspired by the writings of André Gide, Marcel Proust and other homosexual writers. As I suggest in Chapter Two, these authors successfully exploited fiction as a means for exploring queer subjectivities. Courage’s own story would not primarily be a narrative of erotic awakening though. Nor, as Courage suggests in his journal, would he explicitly spell out Eric’s sexual deviation. Instead Courage hoped to write a story of inverted ‘longing’ and ‘arrival’. This was designed to appeal to others who shared Courage’s values of respectability and good conduct. See Courage, Journal, 1934-1936, 4 June 1934, MS-0999/084, HC.

4 Friendship was one of Courage’s chief literary foci from the outset of his literary career. In both *Episode in Early Life* and *The Promising Years* (two earlier unpublished novels of which only the latter manuscript survives) Courage had already replicated his own life trajectory as a young man. *The Promising Years*, for example, sees the central protagonist set out having migrated to England from the Antipodes. Like *Some Other Being*, both novels – *Episode in Early Life* and *The Promising Years* – featured a similar emphasis on personal relationships and look to social intimacies as an important source of self formation. See Chapter Seven for a more involved discussion of Courage’s early literary output.

5 Courage, Journal, 1934-1936, 4 June 1934, MS-0999/084, HC.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
9 A woman of unique compassion and feeling, Bentham’s grandmother is explicitly modeled on Courage’s own (see Chapter One). Like Courage’s relationship with his grandmother, Bentham’s equivalent attachment spans decades, and like Ida Florence Peache she is identified as a figure of tremendous sensitivity. It is at Mount April, and through his relationship with his Grandmother as an adult, that Courage suggests Bentham is ultimately restored to life: ‘at the end of his visit, [Bentham] has found himself again, his health is regained, he can go forth renewed’. See Courage, Journal, 1934-1936, 4 June 1934, MS-0999/084, HC.
10 Ibid.
11 Here, and in other of Courage’s creative writings (the homosexual-themed A Way of Love included), friendship is given special prominence in the unfolding of one queer man’s life. Indeed, friendship is valorised in Some Other Being. In his journal Courage wrote how the world was otherwise ‘all beauty and all sadness’; a space of isolation and ‘apartness’. Symbolically it is not physicians in Some Other Being who bring relief for Eric. Rather, Courage wrote of his intention to show how Eric’s gradual ‘climb back to sanity’ was afforded by the ‘people [Eric] remembered at [Mount] April’ from his childhood. See Ibid.
17 Courage, Journal, 1937-1940, 26 December 1940, MS-0999/085, HC.
Some clarity can be found elsewhere, however. In letters written to family members in New Zealand D'ArCY Cresswell (speaking of his own relationship with Courage) mentions two New Zealanders by name said to have attended Oxford with Courage. These are John Harris and the writer Ormond Wilson. See D'ArCY Cresswell to Walter Cresswell, 19 July 1934, MS-0170-005, ATL.

Ephemera held at Hocken Collections, Dunedin, include a large amount of assorted material from Courage’s years at Oxford. These show a relatively active social life that included his participation with the dramatic society. Courage contributed at least two of his own plays. In addition, he was also an editor and frequent contributor to student magazine *Isis*.

**Courage, Journal, 1937-1940, 24 December 1940, MS-0999/085, HC.**

**James Courage to Frederick Page, 17 April 1940, MS-3903-01/1/8, ATL.**

**Ibid.**

**Ibid.**

**Ibid.**

**Ibid.**


**James Courage to Charles Brasch, 18 August 1952, MS-0996-003/042, HC.**

Interestingly, with few exceptions, Courage never seems to have affiliated with Australians, despite the cultural and historical connections between the two countries.

**James Courage to Charles Brasch, 18 August 1952, MS-0996-003/042, HC.**

**Ibid.**

**Ibid.**

Courage was particularly miffed on this occasion, however, Bill Pearson having ‘seized’ the only copy of *Landfall* available at this gathering for the duration of that afternoon. See *Ibid.*

**James Courage to Charles Brasch, 12 August 1952, MS-0996-003/042, HC.**
Friendship

35 Courage mentions meeting writer Phillip Wilson in this context. A ‘long lanky chap with [a] faint American accent’ (though he was New Zealand-born), Courage made the acquaintance with considerable enthusiasm, and subsequently followed his career with much evident interest. See James Courage to Charles Brasch, 18 August 1952, MS-0996-003/042, HC.

36 I borrow this terminology and set of ideas from social network theory in sociology. These scholars suggest that social networks are structures that consist of individuals who constitute ‘nodes’ (individual actors) and ‘ties’ (links and connections between social actors). They suggest how social actors may belong to multiple social networks and acquire significant positions within these vectors of interaction and exchange. I argue that Courage acquired increasing primacy in both expatriate and queer communities. For a more detailed explanation of social network theory see Stephen D. Berkowitz, An Introduction to Structural Analysis: The Network Approach to Social Research (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1982); Mark Newman and Jason Watts, The Structure and Dynamics of Networks (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

37 James Courage to Frederick Page, 17 April 1940, MS-3903-01/1/8, ATL.

38 Douglas Lilburn had already become a fixture in Courage’s life by this time. Writing in his journal just months earlier, Courage recorded how he had made a special point of attending Lilburn’s Phantasy Quartet at the Royal College of Music earlier that year. (Here he noted some ‘fine and delicate string-writing’, but privately stated the performance to be somewhat ‘lacking in vitality’.) Lilburn had also been to the older man’s flat several times. The pair exchanged pleasantry, and Lilburn took the opportunity to play Courage’s Bösendorfer. See Ibid.


40 James Courage to Frederick Page, 14 April 1940, MS-3903-01/1/8, ATL.

41 Ibid.

42 James Courage to Charles Brasch, 12 August 1952, MS-0996-003/042, HC.

43 James Courage to Rodney Kennedy, 22 February 1956, Misc-MS-1284, HC.

44 Ibid.
Both Courage and Lilburn keenly felt their separation when the younger man left for New Zealand during the middle part of 1940, for example. The pair had acquired a special intimacy during Lilburn's stay in London and, upon Lilburn's leaving England Courage wrote with considerable dejection that '[o]ne hasn’t all that number of friends that the absence of one makes no odds'. See Courage, Journal, 1937-1940, 29 May 1940, MS-0999/085, HC.


James Courage to Charles Brasch, 22 August 1963, MS-0996-003/042, HC.


James Courage to Charles Brasch, 23 May 1961, MS-0996-003/042, HC.

James Courage to Frederick Page, 19 April 1955, MS-3903-01/1/8, ATL.

Ibid.

Charles Brasch to Frank Sargeson, 24 September 1951, MS-0432-147, ATL.

Ibid.

Indeed, when Courage's personal archive was deposited with the Hocken Collection, Dunedin, it seems that Brasch may have removed a number of his more revealing letters. Several that do remain contain notable incisions (the only of Courage's letters to bear any sign of censorship), and others are referred to by Courage in his own correspondence and journal-writing but do not appear to have survived him.

Charles Brasch to Frank Sargeson, 8 March 1958, MS-0432-147, ATL.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Brasch to Sargeson, 15 December 1958, MS-0432-147, ATL.

Speaking of Keith Sinclair’s visit to London in 1951, for example, Courage wrote to Charles Brasch that he wished he felt ‘well enough to see him’ but that he shrank ‘from contacts, whether I ought to or not’. See James Courage to Charles Brasch, 14 January 1951, MS-0996-003/042, HC.

James Courage to Charles Brasch, 12 July 1956, MS-0996-003/042, HC.
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62 Ibid.
63 Courage to Brasch, 12 January, 1961, MS-0996-003/042, HC.
64 Ibid.
65 James Courage to Charles Brasch, 12 July 1956, MS-0996-003/042, HC.
72 Courage, Journal, 1929-1931, 16 January 1930, MS-0999/080, HC.
73 Courage, Journal, 1929-1931, 25 May 1930, MS-0999/080, HC.
75 Ibid.
76 Courage, Journal, 1929-1931, 13 March 1930, MS-0999/080, HC.
77 Courage, Journal, 1929-1931, 28 April 1930, MS-0999/080, HC.
78 Courage, Journal, 1929-1931, 2 December 1930, MS-0999/080, HC.
79 Courage, Journal, 1929-1931, 6 January 1931, MS-0999/080, HC.
81 Ibid.
82 Ibid.
83 Courage, Journal, 1932-1934, 2 September 1932, MS-0999/083, HC.
84 Courage, Journal, 1931, 11 February 1931, MS-0999/081, HC.
85 Ibid.
86 Courage had written of how this early correspondence with Fleet reminded him of painful memories: ‘I hated the past and must be rid of it’. See Courage, Journal, 1950-1959, 21 January 1951, MS-0999/088, HC.
87 Courage, Journal, 1931-1932, 5 April 1932, MS-0999 /082, HC. (original emphasis).
88 Ibid.
89 Courage, Journal, 1932-1934, 21 June 1932, MS-0999/083, HC.
90 Courage, Journal, 1932-1934, 1 September 1932, MS-0999/083, HC.
91 Ibid.
92 Courage, Journal, 1932-1934, 11 February 1933, MS-0999/083, HC.
93 Ibid.
94 Ibid.
95 Ibid. (original emphasis)
96 Ibid.
97 Ibid.
98 Ibid.
99 Ibid. (emphasis added).
100 Courage, Journal, 1937-1940, 1 July 1939, MS-0999/085, HC.
102 Frank Fleet to James Courage, 27 January 1959, MS-0999/142, HC.
106 Courage, Journal, 1937-1940, 26 July 1940, MS-0999/085, HC.
107 Ibid.
108 Ibid.
109 Courage, Journal, 1937-1940, 1 August 1940, MS-0999/085, HC.
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110 Ibid.
111 Courage, Journal (‘The Diary of a Neurotic’), 1960-1961, 8 September 1960, MS-0999/089, HC.
112 Ibid.
114 Ibid.
119 Lettice Cooper to Charles Brasch, 5 May 1969, MS-0996-003/043, HC.
120 Ibid.
121 Courage, Journal, 1929-1931, 27 April 1929, MS-0999/080, HC.
122 Courage, Journal, 1927-1928, 28 September 1928, MS-0999/079, HC.
123 Courage, Journal, 1929-1931, 28 February 1929, MS-0999/080, HC.
124 Ibid.
125 Courage, Journal, 1929-1931, 26 November 1930, MS-0999/080, HC.
126 Cresswell to Courage, 8 November 1934, MS-0999/123, HC.
129 As I suggest in Chapters Six and Seven, A Call Home is very much a resimulation of the adult-focused narrative of Courage’s failed Some Other Being. The protagonist Norman returns home to New Zealand after 12 year absence. Like Eric Bentham in Courage’s earlier story, Norman is under a veil of mental anguish and suffering from a protracted unhappiness in love (his wife dies suddenly in a car accident). See Chapter Six and Seven for my analysis of this novel, particularly for my assessment of Courage’s subversive and queer subtexts.
Friendship

135 Courage, Journal, 1927-1929, 31 May 1928, MS-0999/079, HC.
136 Courage, Journal, 1927-1929, 26 June 1928, MS-0999/079, HC.
137 Courage, Journal, 1929-1931, 26 July 1929, MS-0999/080, HC.
138 Courage, Journal (‘The Diary of a Neurotic’), 1960-1961, 7 November 1960, MS-0999/089, HC. Courage’s address book from 1956 is helpful in fleshing out the identities of social intimates who, like Basset, are sometimes referred to in Courage’s journal by their initials only. See James Courage, address book, 1956, MS-0999/103, HC.
139 Courage, Journal, (‘The Diary of a Neurotic’), 1960-1961, 7 December 1960, MS-0999/089, HC.
140 Ibid
141 Ibid.
142 Ibid.
143 Courage, Journal, (‘The Diary of a Neurotic’), 1960-1961, 9 December 1960, MS-0999/089, HC.
144 Courage, Journal, (‘The Diary of a Neurotic’), 1960-1961, 7 November 1960, MS-0999/089, HC.
145 Ibid.
146 Ibid.
147 Ibid.
149 Ibid.
150 Courage, Journal, 1927-1929, 10 September 1927, MS-0999/079, HC.
151 Courage, Journal, 1927-1929, 13 November 1927, MS-0999/079, HC.
152 Ibid. (emphasis added).
153 Courage, Journal, 1932-1934, 11 February 1933, MS-0999/083, HC.
154 Ibid.
Friendship

155 Courage, Journal, 1927-1929, 27 November 1927, MS-0999/079, HC. (original emphasis)


157 Foucault, The History of Sexuality, p. 100.
Chapter Six

‘You men know nothing of us girls’: Professional identity, autobiography and negotiated narratives

Introduction: Feeling Schizoid
James Courage had been writing professionally for five years when he graduated from Oxford University in 1927. He had already published poetry, prose, even musical criticism; the latter in *Isis*, an Oxford weekly. It was not until 1933, however, that Courage finally brought *One House*, a novel, successfully to publication. Far from idle, Courage had in fact written at least three monographs in his years since Oxford – *Episode in Early Life, The Promising Years*, and *Some Other Being*. All had been rejected with polite, if emphatic, firmness by various English publishers, possibly for their sexual subject matter.¹ It was only in the late 1940s that Courage truly found his voice as a novelist; he published six books in the course of a decade, and a further two in the opening years of the 1960s.

Despite this, even as an established writer Courage continued to view his vocation with considerable diffidence. ‘I had a familiar schizoid feeling’, Courage said upon reading William Plomer’s advance review of his 1956 novel *The Call Home*, for example.² Plomer had nothing but praise for Courage’s latest New Zealand novel, but Courage’s professional unease was plain: “This can’t be I.” I feel, in fact, insecure³.

Courage’s wider mental problems are pronounced in these episodes. For instance, he uses the language of psychiatry (‘schizoid’) to describe his discomfort. Courage also describes Plomer not merely as a man of note but as his paternal benefactor (‘my good angel’).⁴ Plomer is the mirror-opposite of Courage’s own father – a man who still resided in rural Canterbury, but supported his son in monetary terms alone.

The same vignette, however, also sheds light on Courage’s wider professional experience. Courage’s vocation had so far provided him contact with many of the leading lights of the literary industry – Plomer included. And it was indeed an
achievement for Courage to see his name printed in publications such as *Now and Then* and *The Listener* (UK). By the mid-1950s Courage had cultivated a respected, if modest literary reputation. He was praised for his ‘sensitivity’ and skill as a writer, though at times derided as excessively ‘sentimental’ by some critics.5

*The Call Home* confirmed for Courage the achievement of a life-long dream. But this success was not without its cost. By mid-July *The Call Home* was scheduled for a ‘central double-page review’ in *Books and Bookmen* – a monthly-illustrated magazine devoted to books and authors.6 The novel, which was due to be published at the end of July, was slated to be their ‘Book of the Month’.7 Instead of elation, however, Courage reported anxiety and unease at this early and unexpected attention. Indeed, Courage baulked when the editor of *Books and Bookmen* requested he provide material for a short ‘biographical article’ about himself.8 Innocuous – even ordinary – though it seemed, the request touched off one of Courage’s most lingering misgivings: the tensions that he felt existed between his life as a novelist and his identity as a New Zealand male. ‘I hated doing this’, Courage wrote of the situation, ‘one is so vulnerable to criticism’.9

This simple promotional exercise was an ordeal for the then fifty-three-year-old. Courage felt that his life embodied the very antithesis of New Zealand’s supposed masculine ethos; this was supposed to be premised on active strength, male physicality and stoic endurance.10 Instead Courage felt his history was one of ‘neurosis, illness, [and] unhappiness’.11 A knowledge of psychiatry may have exacerbated these associations, and perhaps it even provided a new means for their articulation. But as I showed in Chapter One, these tensions between gender (normative masculinity especially) and work were far from new: they had been a part of Courage’s scripted repertoire since early adulthood. In addition, as *The Call Home* was strongly based on Courage’s own experience, the *Books and Bookmen* article also threatened a much broader exposure.

*The Call Home* dealt with Norman Grant, a doctor and recently bereaved husband who returns to New Zealand after living and working in Britain for twelve years. The novel was based on Courage’s own trip to New Zealand in 1933 and salvaged at last part of his failed novel *Some Other Being*.12 In doing so, he showed that he had learnt from his earliest disappointments in writing. On
the face of it, this story seemed a conventional romance. Below the surface, the novel concealed one of New Zealand's earliest, and more interesting, accounts of male homosexuality.

Having surveyed much of Courage's wider experience, I turn in these final two chapters to his professional life and output. I do this because Courage's professional narratives are more than simply incidental to the wider schema of his life. Rather, episodes like those above suggest how Courage's constitution as a writer gave fundamental and critical substance to his existence, both culturally and psychologically.

Courage's published and unpublished stories offer more than interesting asides to the wider historical backdrop surveyed already. By now we can see this was not always an easy existence. Nor did Courage always find fulfillment in writing. In fact, in writing The Call Home in 1956 he was clear that while he derived professional 'respect and admiration' from his peers, the process of completing the novel had provided 'precious little enjoyment'. The exactitudes, discipline and interior focus required to write this kind of narrative served only to worsen a mental equilibrium that, for Courage, was already precarious at best.

I save much of my literary analysis for the chapter that follows this one. Here I focus primarily on Courage's constitution as a professional writer and how he transposed his life into literature.

Unlike others in his circle of associates, Courage did not sit down and compose a conventional autobiography (contemporaries like D'Arcy Cresswell and Frank Sargeson perhaps serve as the most useful comparisons here). However, armed with an array of technical abilities and evasions, large fragments of Courage's life appear within an array of fictive productions, many of which were brought to publication (or production, in the case of Courage's plays). My intention here is not to test these narratives for their 'truthfulness'. Neither do I wish to retreat to Courage's private archive for an exhaustive comparison with his personal life. Instead, Courage's journal and correspondence – usually to other writers – are useful for the rich insights they give into his writerly craft. Read in this light, Courage's creative endeavours show a rather unique inventiveness. They also indicate the sometimes-considerable strain involved in one man's negotiation of personal, cultural and editorial restrictions across time and space.
I begin this chapter by considering Courage's vocation as a literary man. Having already looked at writing within the context of lived-experience in Chapter Three, my interest lies much less in Courage's material life – where he wrote, how he wrote, and under what conditions, for example – and more in the influence that his status as a professional writer had in shaping broader conceptions of identity. As I have already suggested, Courage did not depend on writing to provide economic support; he drew a small private income from his father for much of his life. Even so, creative literary endeavour formed Courage's central and daily preoccupation. This routine was only ever interrupted by the worst excesses of mental illness or other external intrusions, such as the outbreak of World War II.

Here I consider how Courage's conception of 'writing as work' ran counter to other ideas – particularly those that pertained to gender in general, and normative masculinity more particularly. While these tensions run throughout Courage's private narrative, later interventions – especially psychiatry – show how his self conception was not entirely static. Writing was transformed into a 'compulsion': the 'natural' outlet for Courage's 'unnatural' constitution as a homosexual.¹⁵

Having established this wider frame of reference, I then look to Courage's private archive for evidence of his consciousness as a particular kind of writer. Later scholars, myself included, have Courage to be a writer of New Zealand as well as queer literatures.¹⁶ However, Courage's journal and literary correspondence provide a unique opportunity to gauge his own self-conception as a writer. They show the gradual coalescing of a particular set of professional identities that occurred over successive decades – not merely the years of early adulthood that one might presume.

These views complement my analysis of national identity in the previous chapter. However, we can see how Courage's self-identification as a New Zealand writer crystallised in modes other than the social (friendships, literary gatherings and other such like). Courage's inclusion in an emerging critical literature on New Zealand writing, and especially in New Zealand periodicals like *Landfall*, provided an important intellectual connection to a growing national literature that was, for the most part, occurring elsewhere. At the same time,
while Courage had been writing fiction that featured queer (usually male) characters for some years, it was only much later that he articulated his belonging to an overtly ‘queer’ literary movement. More often than not, these stories usually tell of Courage’s own life experience.

Even so, Courage did not – and could not – always write with a free rein. Instead his private narrative illustrates the difficulty sometimes experienced in transposing ‘real life’ into literary forms. In the third section of this chapter I propose that Courage’s stories were not always the objective, convincing, and sympathetic narratives he sometimes hoped them to be. In addition, and as I have already suggested, psychiatric illness often complicated Courage’s self-conception in later years. This made writing difficult. It also altered the very shape and substance of some later narratives, by transforming stories into ‘psychoanalytic’ case studies, for example. With their frequent references to real – if sometimes coded – people and places, Courage also reveals the impact that his professional writing may have had on others.

Perhaps Courage’s most difficult negotiation, however, was with publishers – usually in England – who baulked at the kinds of narratives he usually wished to see in print. In this fourth and final section I turn my attention to the sorts of editorial interventions Courage faced in publishing overtly queer stories. Courage wrote in an era where sexuality, especially its non-normative varieties, remained a delicate subject. Public discussions of sex and sexual identity existed, but legal and cultural restrictions made this discussion difficult – sometimes even impossible.

I look more closely at examples of Courage’s cultural resistance in Chapter Seven, where I analyse his literary output. In the current chapter, I help contextualise this material by exploring how he reacted to efforts to restrict his creative expression. Rather than give way completely to editorial and cultural expectations, Courage displayed both tenacity and sophistication in finding ways around these restrictions. Far from silent or even ‘passive’, as he sometimes assumed he was, Courage wrote tenaciously and continuously from within the social structure in which he found himself. This system made the writing of affirming depictions of homosexuality difficult. But, as Courage’s own life narrative so ably demonstrates, such writing was not impossible.
Writing and professional identity

Courage’s decision to pursue a literary career, rather than a farming one, gave a lasting and critical shape to the unfolding of his life. This aspiration helped to determine Courage’s geographical place in the world. With class and cultural expectations in mind, Courage had followed in the footsteps of other New Zealanders who continued to view Britain as the centre of the English-speaking world and London as its seat of artistic and cultural excellence.

This decision to travel to England exerted a profound, if not determinative influence over the trajectory that Courage’s life would take. As I have suggested, he joined, for example, a very precise metropolitan milieu. This was middle-class, artistic, expatriate, and queer in particular. And Courage’s location at a nexus of economic and literary activity also brought other material and professional gains. For instance, he was able to foster relationships with publishers, agents and other writers. Courage fashioned a vibrant life for himself at the centre of the British world. This existence spoke both to Courage’s professional aspirations and his personal desires. His new metropolitan milieu provided sexual, social and literary opportunities that may not be have been possible in New Zealand.

Along with these material considerations, Courage’s vocational decision held other psychic, but no less tangible, consequences for his own subjectivity. Courage’s life as a man of literature was, after all, greatly removed from that of a ‘sheep farmer in New Zealand’ – the fate for which he had originally been intended.\(^\text{17}\) I have already discussed some of the tensions evident between Courage’s artistic and gendered (and national) identities. The extent of this conflict, however, and the degree to which this shaped Courage’s experience of writing, means that this issue deserves much more thorough attention here, within the wider context of his professional life. We see, for example, that an artistic life was one of Courage's greatest and long cherished desires; this much is clear in his earliest journal entries.\(^\text{18}\) Even so, Courage found it difficult to escape the cultural demands of a colonial upbringing; one, which emphasised a very particular set of gendered expectations for both men and women.

Even while Courage considered his artistic temperament to be the expression of his ‘truer’ (and feminine) self in the 1920s, it is perhaps not surprising that he found no great sense of ‘liberation’ in the life of the artist.\(^\text{19}\) Courage
characterised his decision to embrace an artistic identity to be one of his foremost desires as a young man. In 1920 Courage had written of his aspiration to live a life beyond the ordinary.\textsuperscript{20} As a seventeen year-old living in Canterbury, Courage wished to ‘go off the beaten path’, and give up any claim to a ‘normal’ life.\textsuperscript{21} This expression links a number of Courage’s views regarding the artistically inclined. It suggested, for example, a life free of the constraining ties of conventional society; an existence that Courage felt overlooked the importance of art as one of the basic ingredients of human happiness. However, while an artistic life could indeed be an existence of exceptional individuality, there are perceivable limits to its liberating claims: after all, these paths were divergent, but not detached.

This did not mean, of course, that Courage was without considerable sympathy for artists. Here, and in my earlier analysis of the role of the artist, we see, for example, that an artistic life was frequently a solitary one (the ‘path’ is ‘unbeaten’, for instance), and that the artist’s position – beyond the masses of conventional society – could be as painful as it was necessary for producing anything of artistic merit.\textsuperscript{22} This existence seemed to demand a certain level of heroism and self-sacrifice on the part of the artist; and Courage’s own life showed that the price paid could sometimes be a very high one indeed. Even so, this language of deviation runs throughout Courage’s private narration of work; and Courage frequently characterised his own literary exertions in the most abject terms. Nearing a full decade of literary exertion in 1929, for example, Courage wrote that he considered his vocation both ‘hum-bug’ and ‘pretence’.\textsuperscript{23} He expressed dissatisfaction at the ‘poor, mutilated abortions’ he’d been able to produce so far.\textsuperscript{24} But these frustrations were not solely explained by the difficulties he had in bringing these early narratives to publication.

Indeed Courage did not enumerate the problems of achieving a toehold in the fiercely competitive world of literature. Rather, he complained instead about the emasculating effects produced by a life spent writing. This was not, for example, the honest day’s physical labour that his pioneer father or grandfather might have celebrated as a virtuous or respectable male pursuit. Instead, writing seemed to engender for Courage a sense of lived-passivity that was inescapably feminine. Along with other descriptors like ‘hum-bug’ and ‘pretence’, it is clear
that Courage considered his life to be at least partly fraudulent on this basis. ‘I cling to it [...] out of vanity’, Courage said of writing. This seemed to be the worst kind of ‘personal negation’ for the young New Zealander. Constantly pursuing the ‘malady of the ideal’, Courage lived in a state of almost continual hysteria. His life seemed to take on a narrow, emotionally volatile caste and, for all his artistic ‘suffering’, was inherently unmanly.

I mention Courage’s father deliberately here since, as I have already suggested, he considered both parents to be archetypal examples of their respective gendered and colonial identities. Frank Courage’s feelings about his son’s literary ambitions, however, are difficult to surmise from the correspondence that still exists. Frank did not appear to be outwardly hostile to Courage’s literary ambitions in these exchanges; he is diffident at best. These tensions are clearer elsewhere though. Courage’s 1932 story, the autobiographical novel The Promising Years, is one example. This work (which I look at more closely in Chapter Seven) fleshes out the paternal relationship, and, more importantly, it does so within the context of professional and gendered identity. Courage wrote, for example, of how the protagonist’s decision to become a poet rent a hole in the fabric of their relationship. This was a ‘barrier’ of sorts, and one the narrator considered to have been ‘a hundred times more sundering’ than would be a ‘sea, a stone wall, an overt quarrel’.

Certainly, this breakdown spoke to more than simply a question of future employment for Courage. The father’s reaction in The Promising Years is instead very plainly premised on a particular cultural divide. In place of a child whose ‘future could easily be calculated’, the Courage-like protagonist of The Promising Years becomes ‘albeit by proxy [through his artistically-inclined grandmother], a person who had assumed, beneath features as familiar as his [father’s], signs of a disturbing and totally unpredicted individuality’. His father had intended that his son receive ‘a good healthy year in the Navy’, a decidedly masculine training for a life of manual exertion on the family farm. The protagonist’s siding with his grandmother however is meant to be read as more than simply literal. Through the grandmother, Courage signals the conscious identification of the protagonist’s inverted and artistic nature with the feminine. This was a
connection that, ‘by proxy’, sundered his relationship with his father, and through him, the normative masculine world he is supposed to represent.\textsuperscript{33}

Courage’s usually solitary work conditions often left the New Zealander feeling intensely lonely and ‘cut-off’.\textsuperscript{34} The gendered associations of artistic work were no less debilitating, and these served only to deepen a misgiving that was never wholly absent from Courage’s narrative register. Courage’s feelings about his profession fluctuated, but it is clear that Courage was never entirely comfortable with an existence he considered to be a ‘cowardly escape’ from life in New Zealand.\textsuperscript{35}

These feelings came to a head in 1941 when Courage took a job at Wilson’s Bookshop in Hampstead, a position he kept until mental collapse forced him to give up paid work completely in 1952. It is perhaps not surprising that Courage’s decision to take up employment coincided with the middle years of World War II, given the heightened emphasis on civic and gendered duty at the time.\textsuperscript{36} In letters to New Zealand poet Charles Brasch, Courage made it clear that he took up his job at Wilson’s for more than simply monetary gain. Indeed, his lingering sense of disquiet was rather plain:

\[\ldots\text{to tell you the truth, my dear Charles, I have been in rather a jam lately – in fact, have been suffering, rather a lot. You see, it’s all very well for me to go on as I have been going on – i.e. living on a private income, and ‘writing’. But I’ve felt lately that \ldots\text{ I must do something more than that in the world. I know this may seem naïf to you, but it has been the cause of much melancholy and mental suffering to me lately – in fact, I’ve been getting to feel rather desperate over what seems to me my own uselessness}.\textsuperscript{37}\]

Courage’s decision to enter paid professional work seemed a salvation from an ongoing mental unease, and here Courage suggests a situation entirely attributable to his life of writing. While Courage does not explicate the gendered associations I have been at pains to set out above, we can see these ideas are implicit in his descriptions of a lived-passivity and in his rather dismissive characterisation of his life to date (‘living on a private income, and “writing”’).\textsuperscript{38}

In my analysis so far I have shown that Courage’s discomfort with the ‘emasculating’ life of a writer existed with remarkable consistency. Under Freudian psychoanalysis these associations did not simply vanish. If anything,
Courage’s private materials show an increasingly beleaguered attitude toward his literary craft. In letters to Frank Sargeson in 1954, for example, Courage seemed to have reached a point of absolute despondency: ‘I suppose we all have our crosses – you no less than I – but I often curse the day I ever decided to write’.\(^{39}\) Elsewhere Courage wrote of how his ‘conscience’ tormented him about work.\(^{40}\) With no ‘real’ ‘earning power’ Courage suggested that he had ‘faded out’ – and ‘dried up’ – as both an artist and a man.\(^{41}\) Courage had reached an impasse. If he wrote, then the conditions of his own environment seemed to exert a terrifying malevolence. But if he did not work at writing then he was goaded instead by the ‘conviction’ of his ‘own nothingness [...] an annihilating fear of my own worth’.\(^{42}\)

Writing was no longer the natural instinct of an inverted temperament. Literary work instead embodied the ‘absolute compulsion’ of the neurotic and a physical symptom of much deeper malaise.\(^{43}\) Earlier I suggested that Courage was frequently critical of the pathologising tendencies of medical men and their views on sexuality. Here we can see how Courage’s status as a ‘professional writer’ existed within a broader rubric of personal dysfunction.\(^{44}\) Again picking up on the idea of passivity, Courage wrote of his ‘eternal guilt-feeling’ over his professional existence.\(^{45}\) ‘I am always guilty, always depressed, by my passivity’, Courage said during one session with his psychiatrist.\(^{46}\) Courage believed that his father, long dead by 1960, lingered in less overt ways. Indeed Courage’s father had become an inescapable part of his condemning superego: ‘Always my father inside me, telling me I ought to work at a manly job [...] I’m doomed by my own inertia [...] I fancy that people look at me in the street and condemn me’.\(^{47}\)

**Literary identities**

Courage’s professional life was at once complicating and at times deeply disaffecting. While Freudian psychoanalysis provided a very precise set of diagnoses and terminologies, Courage had struggled for some time to cope with many of the values he felt underpinned a career in literature. My analysis so far has explored the important psychic dimensions of Courage’s professional encounters. These exertions both informed and mediated Courage’s day-to-day experience. They also triggered much wider issues of identity, and raised
questions of national and gendered existence in particular. Thus far, however, we have conceived of Courage’s professional experience in broad brushstrokes only. While we now have a fairly sophisticated picture of the discursive life of Courage as an artist, we have yet to fully flesh out the precise nuances of his own artistic self conception.

Courage’s artistic identity coalesced over the course of some decades. While I have noted already his decision early in life to pursue a literary career, Courage was much less clear about the precise direction this should take. When he surveyed his artistic trajectory in 1941, for example, he revealed that he had not considered himself a novelist or – even a writer of fiction – at the outset of his artistic odyssey. Rather, Courage had been a ‘New Zealand poet’; a ‘spiritual exile’ whose home was in England. Under the tutorship of his poetry-loving maternal grandmother Ida Florence Peache, he had largely shunned the writing of prose. Key early examples that survive in Courage’s journal and elsewhere are in the vein of the Romantics – poets like William Wordsworth and Percy Shelley – or modeled on the late-Georgian masters – men like Rupert Brooke.

At the same time Courage was also heavily involved in theatrical circles. Courage had performed in Ngaio Marsh’s production of Sir Arthur Wing Pinero’s *The Amazons* at the Choral Hall, in Christchurch, in 1924, for example. Courage was praised by critics for ‘the lion’s share of the entertainment’ as one of the play’s two aristocratic men said to be intimate ‘friends’ and ‘markedly eccentric’. Since the play depicted women in men’s clothing it had caused a sensation when it was first performed in London in 1893. Marsh’s local production was warmly received, however. Courage had completed his own play three years before his performance in *The Amazons*, at just eighteen years of age. It was entitled *Margaret’s Platonic Marriage* and featured notable queer subtexts, but was never performed (see Chapter Seven). It was not until Courage was at Oxford, in 1926, that his own dramatic productions were staged: *Life’s Too Short* – set in the waiting room of a ‘nerve-specialist’ in London – and the New Zealand set – and homoerotic *New Country*. Only the latter script survives.

Courage had been active as a poet and a playwright for some time when he reported his desire to write prose in the mid-to-late twenties. He had had at
least one story (‘Concerto’) published in *Oxford Outlook* in 1926, and as early as 1923 he showed the first inclinations towards short story writing.⁵⁷ Even so, Courage remained an enthusiastic contributor to *Oxford Poetry* during this time, and it is unclear whether Courage viewed his forays into prose as anything other than a simple experiment.⁵⁸ Indeed, Courage viewed poetry and prose as quite separate pursuits. He sought elegance and lyricism in much of his poetry, for example. Prose, however, was ‘far more difficult to write’, and demanded, so Courage believed, very different qualities of skill and precision.⁵⁹ Too often Courage felt his stories were ‘obscure’, ‘affected’ and ‘muddy’; not the ‘penetrating, trenchant and sympathetic’ excursions he felt they should be.⁶⁰

Courage began to identify himself as a writer of fiction much more strongly from the 1930s onwards. I do not mean to suggest that his initial poetic and dramatic ambitions were suddenly supplanted or set aside. Even a cursory glance at Courage’s collection of surviving manuscripts shows how he continued to work on both poetry and dramatic performance throughout his life. Moreover, as I noted in Chapter Three, in 1938 the homosexually-themed *Private History* heralded a breakthrough for Courage both professionally and socially. (The play granted him increased access to queer, literary and artistic circles in the metropolis, for example.)⁶¹ By this time, Courage had begun to gravitate much more strongly to an identity as a prose writer, however; and he turned his sights to a very particular kind of writing. As I noted at the outset, Courage had already completed three manuscripts by this time – all three had been set in New Zealand, all contained queer subtexts, and all had ultimately been rejected for publication.

Despite these setbacks, it is clear that Courage had begun to tentatively think of himself as a writer of New Zealand stories. In doing so, he tapped into the drive for an authentically New Zealand ‘voice’ which was then emerging as an aspiration amongst local New Zealand writers and artists.⁶² On the 4th of September 1931, for example, Courage wrote of his reaction upon reading the *London Mercury’s* letter on New Zealand writing. Courage heard how critics were ‘scanning the landscape’ for a writer of note but had so far found no one of great import. Katherine Mansfield had dominated the short story, but what of the great New Zealand novel? ‘I have more than a good mind to have a shot at that novel
myself, Courage wrote: ‘if I can think of a fine subject’.\textsuperscript{63} Courage finally succeeded in publishing his first novel, \textit{One House}, two years later, whilst recuperating with tuberculosis at Mundesley, Norfolk. This, as I have already noted, was not a New Zealand-based story, but a narrative of emphatically British mood and focus.

Courage’s determination to tackle New Zealand subjects emerged from the artistic friendships I noted in Chapter Five. It is clear, for example, that Courage maintained a close correspondence with author D’Arcy Cresswell on the subject of writing New Zealand stories throughout the 1930s. Courage’s excitement was palpable during one exchange where both men’s views on the subject converged (Cresswell had written a ten page assessment on the New Zealand novel).\textsuperscript{64} New Zealanders ultimately adopted social realist approaches to literature, writing on New Zealand subjects for a primarily New Zealand audience (Frank Sargeson was one of the leading lights on both counts).\textsuperscript{65} Cresswell and Courage, though, had hoped for a very different direction:

So far from being beside the point, [Cresswell’s] remarks are so apropos that their penetration amazes. Largely a question of proper names, vocabulary. Poets’ sensitiveness to words, especially in realism. Vulgar aura of native words, unsanctified by poetry. You and I over-sensitive to words – [Katherine] Mansfield and ‘manuka’ and ‘pohutukawa’ in stories – concretion of vocabulary – yes! Place-names. Using English names in first draft as glyphs: then altering. \textit{No Kiwis}, […] Bring in ‘N.Z.’ once with sure touch. \textit{No} Maoris. But it is difficult. And will people in the Old World – for whom one writes – really understand, without the resentment towards a new baby (possibly even a Maori one, you know, coming from N.Z. !).\textsuperscript{66}

For poet and historian Keith Sinclair it was not until the 1950s that the ‘New Zealand intellect and imagination’ truly ‘came alive’.\textsuperscript{67} The country had by that stage several universities (many of which would soon teach courses on New Zealand literature) and a number of publishing houses. Authors also had an established – if irascible – ally in the form of the New Zealand Literary Fund.\textsuperscript{68} Certainly, Courage spoke of an authentically ‘New Zealand literature’ as early as 1946.\textsuperscript{69} Courage had read Frank Sargeson’s first short story collection, \textit{A Man and his Wife}, one year before – thanks, in part, to Brasch, who had sent him a copy
from Dunedin. These stories looked – and sounded – considerably different from those Courage and Cresswell had envisaged. But Courage was nevertheless considerably impressed: ‘Here is the real voice of N.Z. at last – twang and all. A million times more expressive of the country than those shiny photographs which are going to illustrate Charles’s article [in a forthcoming edition of National Geographic Magazine].’

Courage was immensely taken by Sargeson’s adoption of a consciously New Zealand and working-class idiom. He was not, however, entirely at home in this style himself. This was not, after all, the lyrical or ‘poetic’ style Cresswell and Courage had preferred in 1934; neither did it belong to the particular (and very privileged) way of life that Courage remembered of his own time in New Zealand. While Sargeson was ‘the real thing’, for Courage it is clear that the expatriate writer felt alienated by this style of writing and had yet to find his own footing as a writer of New Zealand fiction. Courage would not publish his first New Zealand novel – The Fifth Child – until 1948, though his first New Zealand story, ‘Uncle Adam Shot a Stag’ (which I consider at greater length below), appeared in the anthology series English Story in 1945.

Courage reveals how his inclusion within an emerging critical literature on New Zealand writing (see Figure 12), and in periodicals like Landfall and the New Zealand Quarterly – helped shape his identification as a writer of New Zealand fiction. These intellectual productions help designate for Courage his own position within an emerging cohort of intellectual pioneers: he felt that these productions would have a place in ‘any future history’ of New Zealand culture. Seeing his work mentioned – and his stories in print – in these New Zealand-specific productions lent legitimacy to his ambition for a place within his nation’s emergent literature. With three New Zealand novels in print by the early 1950s, and a number of short stories about to be published in Landfall (including the explicitly queer ‘Scusi’, and ‘Guest at the Wedding’) Courage seemed to finally feel comfortable under the rubric of New Zealand literary man: ‘[...] why do I go on writing? One reason is that I believe I’ve written about people in Canterbury (N.Z.) as it has never been done before – just as [Ivan] Turgenev wrote about certain people in Russian provincial society as it had not been done before’.
Courage’s gradual self-identification as both a writer of prose and a writer of New Zealand literature was an erratic and piecemeal process. Far from a simple or linear sequence of events, Courage’s experience was influenced by broader historical and cultural processes – by the active ‘nation-making’ of those New Zealand artists imaging their own country, for example. As I have already showed, Courage’s struggle was also a very personal one. He fought to find a medium that he could master, and one that he felt reflected the particular culture he felt connected to. Unlike Sargeson and other literary pioneers, Courage’s New Zealand was invariably middle-class, Cantabrian and refined. 

Courage’s self-identification as a writer of queer fiction was no less complicating. Much like Courage’s affiliation to New Zealand fiction, it was made up of external influences – trends in the writing of sexuality, for example (such as the use of fiction as a vehicle of middle-class respectability, or the importance of psychology as a means for explaining – and legitimising – non-normative sexualities). Courage’s professional affiliation was also informed by his cultural preferences in respect of homosexual stories, as well as his growing awareness of his particular readership. In Chapter Two I spoke of the particular kind of literature that appealed to Courage most as a reader. My analysis in that chapter focused on fiction’s shaping of Courage’s daily and scripted repertoire. Here we
see, however, that many of these same artists featured in Courage’s own conceptions on writing.

French novelists, like Marcel Proust and André Gide, remained highly influential throughout Courage’s life. Courage was attracted by these men’s interest in the psychological construction of the invert. Many of Courage’s earliest prose efforts – his failed *The Promising Years* included – aped Proust’s style. Proust was – as literary commentator Margaret Topping suggests – interested in the ‘duality’ and ‘multiplicity’ of human nature. Proust’s emphasis on interior complexity attracted Courage. Writing that focused merely on the sexual failed to account for the inner-workings of a queer subconscious; and, as I showed in Chapter Two, Courage was dismissive of talent that derived chiefly from one’s homosexuality. For instance, Courage wrote how Cresswell was ‘a minor artist’ whose ‘talent proceeds, so to speak, almost entirely from a revolt against society due to his homosexuality’.

As the field of the respectable novelist writing on homosexuality gradually widened by the 1950s, it is perhaps not surprising that Courage’s identification as a writer of queer fiction was cemented during this time as well. Certainly, and as I suggested earlier, Courage had been attracted by the writing of Americans Christopher Isherwood and Charles R. Jackson. The latter, in particular, spoke to Courage’s own political hopes that fiction could raise sympathy for homosexuals, especially amongst heterosexual audiences. With its quiet demands for understanding it also spoke to the respectability so entrenched in Courage’s own persona as a middle-class homosexual.

It was the reception of his fiction, however, that appeared to solidify Courage’s self-conception as a writer on homosexuality. As I indicate in the final section of this chapter, Courage found ways to negotiate the often-narrow allowances that editors would permit their authors in terms of representing homosexuality in their literature. Stories that many readers might pass over without flinching often concealed queer subtexts. As I will show, these covert meanings were accessible to those readers versed in detecting such subtleties.

Letters from fans well before the publication of 1959’s *A Way of Love* point to this kind of reading amongst at least some of Courage’s literary admirers. One fan identified only as Andrew wrote of having acquired *The Young Have Secrets*
(1954) from a local bookseller at a reduced cost (‘been a heart-throb since I wore short pants, but he doesn’t care!’).\textsuperscript{80} Andrew asked specifically for ‘the new one from Mr. Courage’; the bookseller confirmed – ‘rather pointedly’, Andrew suggests – that the novel had ‘something especial [sic] about it’ and was probably ‘one of those’ stories.\textsuperscript{81} The novel features at least one character coded as homosexual, while the adolescent protagonist is himself just beginning to perceive his own sexual otherness.

Courage’s intention of writing an ‘unashamedly queer’ novel was realised with the publication of \textit{A Way of Love} three years later.\textsuperscript{82} As I show in the final stages of this chapter, Courage was forced to excise or rewrite large sections of this story before it was allowed to go to press. This was not the wholly unapologetic narrative Courage had ‘for years’ hoped to produce.\textsuperscript{83} Yet it is clear that Courage was at least partly inspired to write this story by the (positive) reactions of readers – many of them homosexual – who had responded so favourably to many of his previous narratives, both coded and otherwise.\textsuperscript{84}

In letters to Brasch, Courage wrote that much of the press on the novel had been predictably ‘disapproving and snooty’.\textsuperscript{85} However, these ‘critical beatings’ were compensated by the ‘wonderfully enthusiastic letters from strangers’ Courage had received from Europe and abroad in the wake of its publication – correspondence that included letters from New Zealand’s hinterlands.\textsuperscript{86} Some of Courage’s fan letters took rather ingenious forms:

\begin{quote}
An enormous self-made Christmas card came yesterday from a man in Invercargill who describes himself as a display artist. The card (painted) shows Santa Claus reading “A Way of Love” with avid but astonished interest, while almost falling off a pile of books (mostly my own, by the titles). The card measures 2 x 3 feet and cost 5/3 by air-post. There’s fame for you! And all from Invercargill (N.Z.).\textsuperscript{87}
\end{quote}

These letters had a more than incidental importance in the formation of Courage’s professional identity. Regardless of their respective backgrounds, Courage felt that his writing had touched upon something both fundamental and relatable amongst his queer readership. Just weeks after \textit{A Way of Love}’s publication, on the 16\textsuperscript{th} of February 1959, Courage wrote how he was ‘getting
more and more letters’ from well wishers.\textsuperscript{88} He recorded no detractors, and
certainly none can be found in the collection of correspondence that remains.
Many letters were ‘difficult to answer’; others suggested ‘agonies of loneliness’
that were ‘heartbreaking’.\textsuperscript{89} On balance, however, Courage was left with a
lingering sense of his own vindication: ‘Strange, it invariably is, if one puts down
honestly and frankly something one feels oneself, how it awakens vibrations in
other people’.\textsuperscript{90}

**Autobiography and transposing identity**

I have so far looked to Courage’s own narrative to show the meanings and
ambivalences he attached to his working life. Far from peripheral, this value-
making spoke directly to Courage’s sense of personhood. It helped shape his
daily existence and formed a fundamental aspect of his subjectivity. By tracking
this development across time and space we also see the dynamism of this
identity, in terms of both nuance and development. Psychoanalysis connected to
many values Courage already maintained regarding his own self conception, for
example; and I pick up on psychoanalysis again here (and finally in Chapter
Seven) by showing the impact Freudian interventions had in shaping and
reshaping Courage’s fictional and published narratives.

Courage’s conscious identification with specific literary codes, New Zealand
and queer affiliations especially, show his particular artistic identity was always
in a constant state of flux, even before his later encounter with medical and
psychiatric ideas about sexuality and identity. I have shown already that many of
Courage’s earliest productions contained New Zealand and queer themes. 1932’s
*The Promising Years* is perhaps the best and most elaborate of those that survive.
However, as I have also suggested, it was only with the onset of certain cultural
processes – developments in a national literary culture, and an overtly
homosexual literary movement in particular – that Courage was led to affiliate
himself consciously as a writer of both queer and New Zealand fictions.

These affiliations had consequences for Courage’s creative output from the
1930s onwards. As I suggest above, it was at this time that these sorts of
affiliations first began to manifest most strongly in Courage’s narrative register.
In constructing both queer and New Zealand-themed stories Courage did not
turn to pure fantasy, but to his own life history as a means for assembling narratives he considered both authentic and emotionally vital. I have already explained how Courage was inspired by Katherine Mansfield to regard his past as a storehouse of literary ‘treasures’.

Proust, whom Courage had thoroughly read by 1927, made a similar use of his past, but used fiction to ‘displace’ any easy correlation been himself and the events depicted in his stories. Mansfield seemed much less concerned with exposure in her own stories. She did not, after all, depict ‘deviant’ sexualities, and her protagonists often showed only a very partial understanding of their life circumstances. Courage would also exploit this technique although, as I suggest below, to wholly different ends.

Courage seemed to share much more with Proust than Mansfield in terms of transposing life into literature. While they worked in different times and places, their subject matter – which was frequently morally and personally sensitive – generated much greater complexities of negotiation. For Courage, these strategies were most necessary where depictions touched on matters that pertained to his own family's privacy or the life-histories of other social intimates. ‘Uncle Adam Shot a Stag’, for example, heralded a major return to form for the then forty-three year-old when it was published in 1945. Courage had not completed anything of note since *Private History* in 1938; and this inaction had only deepened Courage’s misgivings about his ostensibly sedentary and emasculating lifestyle.

However, Courage was concerned when he heard that the serial *English Story* – then owned by Collins – intended to run ‘Uncle Adam Shot a Stag’ in one of its forthcoming issues: ‘I expect family repercussions if and when the story reaches N.Z.’

The story introduced Walter Blakiston: a child protagonist who was modeled on Courage and appeared in a number of his New Zealand-based stories from the 1940s onwards. 1954’s *The Young Have Secrets* was the longest and most successful, critically and otherwise. However, it was not the simple autobiographical extension of Courage-as-protagonist that contributed to Courage’s discomfort. The uncle Adam of the *English Story* narrative had been based on Courage’s own uncle Robert: a man who had been ‘inured in an asylum these many years’ after making undisclosed sexual advances to Courage when he had been a teenager.

The story – which is told from Walter’s perspective – does
not describe the sexual episode in question; nor does Courage mention Robert’s later admission to Seaford Lunatic Asylum, near Dunedin, in the years that followed. His uncle’s ‘pervasive’ leanings instead appear in depictions of an unremitting sadism that is perpetrated upon animals (in this case the carcass of the story’s eponymous stag). Walter witnesses Adam dance around the butchered body of a deer – a symbol that seems to signify the very embodiment of an artistic and vulnerable male inversion.96

I return to this story later. Here, I merely want to draw attention to the potential volatility of Courage’s very particular literary bent for the ‘authentic’ in art. For Courage, this encounter with his uncle remained a ‘sexually guilt-laden event’ from which he believed he never recovered (though, rather crucially, he did not believe it had contributed to his own homosexuality).97 In later years Courage explained to his psychiatrist that, at 14 years of age, the event had been sufficiently traumatising to lead to a complete ‘breakdown’ at school (the ‘first’ of at least two collapses at Christ’s College, in Christchurch, where he boarded).98 Even so, Courage chose to return to the narrative again, in his 1950 novel Desire Without Content, and he wrote poignantly of the pain he feared these stories might cause for those close to him – his beloved grandmother, Robert’s mother – especially.99

Courage’s insistence on depicting real events brought about the collapse of at least one close relationship – that with youngest sister Sarah. Her relationship with the family had been strained since the publication of The Fifth Child in 1948. According to Courage’s eldest sister Constance (Tiny) Gray, Sarah took the story ‘very badly’ and would have ‘nothing to do with Jim after its publication’.100 The novel depicts domestic discord amongst a Canterbury farming family much like the Courages. This tension, though, is mostly attributable to the mother’s unexpected pregnancy with a fifth child – the literary stand in for Courage’s youngest sister. Correspondence elsewhere – in letters from Courage’s Surrey-based sister Patricia Fanshawe, for instance – speaks of there being a ‘Canterbury opposition to Courage’s work’; and in 1957 Courage himself wrote that certain members of the family (he does not name whom) were usually in turns ‘shocked’ or ‘scathing’ about his work.101 These facts show that such
tensions could have lasting effects, and that the impact of Courage’s autobiographical leanings often went beyond a simple question of hurt feelings.

Courage’s use of real experiences had the potential to inflame more than passions, however. Despite its success, Courage’s editors had been alarmed by some of the tensions raised by 1954’s *The Young Have Secrets*, for example.¹⁰² Courage had based the story on his adolescent memories of Sumner, where he had been a boarder of Clement Lester Wiggins, his headmaster at Dunelm Preparatory School, Christchurch, which Courage had attended from 1912 to 1915.¹⁰³ While the precise nature of the dispute is unclear, Gray noted to Brasch that the ‘surviving Wiggins daughter had been very angry’ at some of the inferences made in the novel.¹⁰⁴ Fanshawe similarly corroborated her sister’s testimony when she stated in 1972 that ‘Miss Wiggins was furious’ upon the book’s publication.¹⁰⁵

While *The Young Have Secrets* did not ultimately result in legal action, Courage’s editors were much more cautious in their dealings with him over future publications. Courage records his frustrations at having to confirm the ‘purely fictional’ basis of his more explicitly homosexual characters on more than one occasion.¹⁰⁶ This fear of defamation – one which I will consider at greater length below – could well have been justified. Homosexuality remained grounds for libel throughout Courage’s life; and he depicted homosexual characters in most of his stories.¹⁰⁷ Even those who lived openly queer lives could well have resented a narrative strategy that, for all intents and purposes, amounted to a kind of sexual ‘outing’.

Certainly, the dividing line between reality and fiction was sometimes a difficult one for Courage to measure. In 1947, for example, he wrote one pain-filled journal entry lamenting his (as it would turn out, well founded) fear that his New Zealand friends and family would see *The Fifth Child* not as art but as a series of ‘malicious caricatures’ meant to embarrass or punish them.¹⁰⁸ This difficulty could sometimes be attributed to more than simply Courage’s yearning to avoid fallout amongst social intimates. Many episodes, for instance, show Courage’s own desire to avoid too close an identification with the events or circumstances that were depicted in his published stories. Most often these stories were ones with overtly queer overtones. Their publication risked
upsetting the respectable (and public) decorum that were so important to Courage.

In publishing these narratives Courage actively rejected the use of pseudonyms to protect his identity. Certainly other authors writing at the time had used this distancing strategy. Edward Sagarin, for example, published his 1952 treatise *The Homosexual in America* under the pseudonym Donald W. Cory. Others, most notably friend and fellow writer E. M. Forster, would allow their homosexual narratives to be published only after their deaths. Courage was clearly much less worried about the possibilities of defamation than the more wide-ranging – and indeed unpredictable – damage that his published and personal reputation might face in the wake of a public scandal.

Short stories ‘Scusi’ and ‘Guest at the Wedding’ illustrate Courage’s conundrum rather well, and both were drawn from Courage's life-narrative. I have already outlined ‘Guest at the Wedding’ in Chapter Three. It features a man coming to terms with his own sexual identity in New Zealand in the years after an unhappy schooling. The man professes a sexual desire for another man about to marry a female friend; and at least one of the story’s characters is modeled on a close acquaintance (Anama-based Ronnie Peter). ‘Scusi’, on the other hand, depicts the repressed sexual desires of a respectable retired naval commander for his devoted, and rather alluring, working-class Italian manservant. The story was not drawn from Courage’s own experience, but based on that of a cousin, who lived in Brighton, England until at least the late 1960s.

Courage’s discomfort over these narratives was apparent in his correspondence with Charles Brasch. There he took considerable pains to distance himself from these stories, though both would appear in *Landfall* (‘Scusi’ was published in *Landfall* in June 1954; ‘A Guest at the Wedding’ one year earlier, in 1953). In letters prior to their publication, Courage continually emphasised his critical distance from these excursions into the sexual. Speaking of ‘Guest at the Wedding’, for example, Courage all but disclaimed any attachment: ‘Don’t take the “I” of the stories as necessarily autobiographical, though of course in each case there is more than an element’. Despite the fact that Brasch was one of his most intimate friends, Courage was keen to impress
upon the poet that the narratives should ‘stand and fall as stories’, and that nothing extraneous be read into them.\textsuperscript{113}

Brasch was not without encouragement. He found both stories stimulating and forthright (‘I admire your ability to be so frank’).\textsuperscript{114} ‘Scusi’, in particular, Brasch believed, showed ‘extraordinary sureness and delicacy’; a story ‘beautifully revealing’ in its subtlety.\textsuperscript{115} Overall, however, Brasch’s replies confirmed Courage’s own discomfort. He agreed with Courage that autobiographical-leanings – especially where they impinged in quite so sensitive an area – risked distressing or at least distracting the reader.\textsuperscript{116} Moreover, and probably more significantly for Courage, Brasch felt Courage had not been altogether successful in his evasions. ‘Guest at the Wedding’, after all, was written in the first person and framed by a narrator whose background was astonishingly like Courage’s own.\textsuperscript{117} Brasch believed these ‘allusions’ to himself were ‘unnecessarily frank’ – even ‘embarrassingly so’.\textsuperscript{118} As a reader, Brasch felt Courage’s ‘biography’ ‘obtruded’ too forcibly into the frame of the narrative. As an editor and friend, he felt it left Courage too open to criticism.\textsuperscript{119}

If Courage’s published narratives were shaped by his life-history, it was always a history that was heavily mediated. As I have already shown, questions of respectability, personal sensitivity – even legality – exerted themselves in the production process. But most of these narratives are mediated in other ways as well. Courage’s private materials also show the influence – and indeed, eventual preeminence – of Freudian psychoanalysis in shaping fictional accounts that borrowed from his lived-experience. Psychiatry profoundly reshaped Courage’s views of New Zealand in his later years. It also played an important part in the unfolding of his professional outlook.

Given that much of Courage’s published work dates from the late 1940s onwards – coinciding and even contributing to his first mental collapse – it is perhaps not surprising to see that psychiatry played such a crucial role in fictional narratives. These were invariably excursions into Courage’s own history. As I will show in Chapter Seven, however, these narratives do not always follow the same trajectory as those already outlined. Indeed, Courage’s treatment of New Zealand in his fictional narratives remains relatively even-handed. Psychiatry is instead much more readily evident in the inner lives of Courage’s
adult or adolescent homosexuals. This is perhaps most clearly expressed in 1959's *A Way of Love* and Courage's final novel, *A Visit to Penmorton*, which he wrote in 1961 as a 'psychoanalytic cases-history'. He borrowed this term from F. L. Lucas's *Literature and Psychology*.\(^{120}\)

Neither novel engaged with the pathologising (and reductive) views of homosexuality that were then favoured in the medical profession of the 1950s and '60s.\(^{121}\) Instead, and especially in the case of *A Visit to Penmorton*, Courage hoped to identify the inner 'conflicts' evident in the queer psyche, and, in doing so, draw from his own struggle with 'so-called neurosis' for inspiration.\(^{122}\) In letters to Brasch, Courage wrote that he had written the novel in the hopes of better understanding the 'inextricable under-binding of the past in any given life example'.\(^{123}\) The story features a young man named Walter Lythgo. Lythgo stands at the edge of a complete mental collapse, and turns to a psychiatrist friend – amongst others – for help. Courage suggested that the novel was a 'Freudian Fairytale': one that condensed 'into six analytical sessions what would “in real life” [have taken] sixty'.\(^{124}\)

Elsewhere psychoanalysis informs Courage's narration of family and upbringing. Reflecting in his journal on the completed draft of *The Young Have Secrets*, for example, Courage acknowledged on the 25th of July 1953 that the 'naïve aspect' of the adolescent Walter could be 'turned to [his] advantage'.\(^{125}\) We can see psychiatry's influence in transposing Courage's own life narrative into fictive forms. The story, Courage confirms, drew from his 'own childhood-and-school-recollections as background' and provided the means through which Walter was given his 'own expanding [awareness of] the world'.\(^{126}\)

Courage had written *The Young Have Secrets* with 'all possible simplicity' but also a careful eye for the 'psychologically authentic'.\(^{127}\) 'The boy's story had to lead to some satisfactory conclusion', Courage wrote.\(^{128}\) It was therefore important that he show some 'effort towards an integration'.\(^{129}\) Courage believed that some aspect of 'growth and knowledge' would help the boy to understand the 'hint of the nature of love itself' – if not in the narrative present, then at least in the future as an adult and an 'invert'.\(^{130}\) Courage is careful not to present late childhood as essentially sexless. He draws from Freudian ideas like 'integration' to describe the child's – and his own – remembered quest for sexual knowledge.

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Walter’s self awareness is imperfect but not entirely absent. This is ‘apropos’ of ‘pre-adolescent’ psychology, Courage wrote: the phase at which the world begins to shift from a ‘rumoured’ and ‘wonderful place’ to one of ‘disappointment’ and debilitating adult ‘stresses’.\textsuperscript{131}

Much of Courage’s fiction is critical of the fracturing conditions of domestic life. He singles out the maternal figure as being a particular driver of future unhappiness (and indeed potential neuroses). Here Courage is much more measured in his critique. For example, Walter’s mother is careless, not negligent. Even so, the story taps into Courage’s own – and very Freudian – view of the home. In Chapters One and Three I explained how Courage saw his childhood – at least in retrospect – as one of malignancy, and largely devoid of emotional sustenance. Here it is a space of endless suppressions and repressions; a zone of harmful subterfuge and Calvinistic self-denial.

\textbf{Cultural negotiation}

By the 1950s Courage was intent on writing queer narratives, and these were often set in the remembered landscape of his New Zealand childhood. My analysis so far has indicated the degree of exertion involved in producing these stories. I have argued that these publications were often heavily – and necessarily – mediated. Courage’s Freudian leanings were perhaps a matter of personal preference. Other factors though – matters pertaining to privacy, respectability and especially legality – show that these stories were also very much exercises in cultural negotiation. Courage did not deal in pure fantasy. He drew instead from a stock of lived-experience that, while strictly personal, touched on the lives of others, and – in the case of \textit{The Fifth Child} and \textit{The Young Have Secrets} – was frequently highly volatile and sensitive.

In Chapter Seven I will look more closely at the substance of Courage’s literary output. In many ways Courage’s published stories represent what he was able to say at any particular time (though with its suppression in 1961, \textit{A Way of Love} is an obvious exception in the New Zealand context). With this and my analysis above in mind, however, I first wish to explore the sometimes complex – but crucial – work that would otherwise remain undetected in relation to this material in its final published incarnation.
Much of my analysis so far has considered external factors to be central to understanding Courage’s personal narrative-making. Dynamics, among them cultural trends in writing or discourses of respectability, certainly played their part in the unfolding of Courage’s professional trajectories. However, other social actors – especially editors – also played a role in the formation of each text. Courage’s private narrative indicates that he was never able to wholly write the stories he intended to. His meticulous account of the writing process, though – as well as those novels that survive in manuscript form – provide unique opportunities to gauge the manoeuvres he executed in order to bring each work successfully to publication.

Of these, *A Way of Love* is the most complete example. As Courage’s longest and most explicitly homosexual story, it is arguably the most interesting historically. Of all Courage’s novels it took the longest to write; he first mentioned the novel – to Charles Brasch – on the 11th of September 1956. But Courage had already been writing for some time prior to this. He explained to Brasch that this novel was ‘unashamedly queer’, and that the story did not feature any of the subterfuge that had so far proved necessary in his previous depictions of homosexuality. Even at this early stage, however, Courage was already aware that he might face difficulties in bringing the novel to publication. Indeed, he felt certain that Jonathan Cape, who had published his two previous novels, would baulk at the concept.

While Courage wrote with all the ‘moral delicacy’ he could muster, he was mindful that the novel’s (homosexual) subject matter would likely have an incendiary effect far beyond that of any of his previous work. Far from naïve or even cynical, Courage showed a keen awareness of the cultural boundary-keeping of editors and the precise limits to which authors were allowed literary freedom. By November of 1956 Courage had already completed a ‘first-version of the initial 180 pages’ of the novel. He had a firm idea of the novel’s central themes, but also of its supposed limitations. In a letter dated the 22nd of November 1956, Courage continued to emphasise to Brasch that the story would, in all likelihood, remain unpublished. It was, after all, an ‘unapologetic’ narrative and invariably far more ‘frank’ than anything he had then written. The
Negotiations

problem, he suggested, was not that the central protagonist Bruce Quantock was homosexual, but that he was so unrepentantly so.\footnote{138}

Courage's fears were not without foundation. Editors in both the United States and Great Britain routinely struck out homosexual plots and references from their authors' novels, and many overtly homosexual stories never saw the light of day.\footnote{139} A good number of successful – even critically-acclaimed – homosexual novels had emerged by the mid-1950s. Courage had read works by James Baldwin, Mary Renault and Rodney Garland. Even so, printing homosexual fiction still remained a risky business for publishers. Prosecutions on both sides of the Atlantic were not unheard of.\footnote{140}

Courage hoped to avoid accusations of vulgarity by adopting the style of 'poetic implication' he had used in 'Scusi'.\footnote{141} After all, the protagonist of 'Scusi' was only faintly aware of his own sexual nature. Courage's current endeavour, however, was quite different. It dealt with a homosexual who was both self aware and unashamed of his sexuality. The story was also sexually explicit. These 'sexual passages' would only emerge later in the story, Courage wrote, but he understood them to be perhaps his greatest stumbling block: '[they] will probably get me prosecuted (if the book's ever published at all)'.\footnote{142}

Courage was not unfamiliar with these kinds of negotiations. In 1949, for example, Courage reported that Constable (who had just published The Fifth Child) had only accepted Desire Without Content – his then-latest novel – after considerable exertion on his part.\footnote{143} Constable's reader, the novelist Michael Sadleir, had initially praised the story as 'graceful and masterly'.\footnote{144} In subsequent correspondence, however – and after the manuscript had been passed between the firm's partners – Courage was accused of 'obscenity' and 'sadism', as well as unspecified 'revolting details' that Constable believed would alienate its predominantly female readership.\footnote{145}

The novel contained coded references to male homosexuality, and I examine the novel's queer subtext below, and again, more extensively, in Chapter Seven. It is unclear whether Constable's partners picked up on this subtext; the use of 'obscenity' would suggest this, though the novel's graphic depictions of infanticide may equally have provoked their moral censure.\footnote{146} Despite these reservations, Courage was eventually allowed to publish the story – but only
after significant revisions to the original text. Courage records that he re-typed several pages that required ‘smoothing’. He also altered a ‘good many phrases’ which Constable deemed to ‘excite disgust’.\textsuperscript{147} Finally, Courage was also forced to change the novel’s title from the sinister \textit{Unhallowed Ground} to the Shakespearean-derived \textit{Desire Without Content}.\textsuperscript{148}

In securing publication of \textit{A Way of Love} with Cape in mid-1958 Courage followed a negotiated trajectory that was similar to \textit{Desire Without Content}. With its much greater sexual explicitness, however, Courage found that this particular negotiation was by far the more arduous. Courage wrote to Brasch on 1\textsuperscript{st} of March 1958, for example, that Cape’s head-reader ‘had been overcome by moral scruples’ upon reading his first manuscript; the man had drawn up a ‘list of about a dozen phrases and expressions’ that felt must be excised from the story if Cape were to proceed with publication.\textsuperscript{149} In writing to Brasch, Courage spoke of his relief at having secured an agreement to publish. He also played down the severity of Cape’s interventions. The surviving original manuscript, however, shows that these measures were anything but incidental: they forced an entire overhaul of plot, characterisation – even the revision of the novel’s final dramatic resolution.

Courage’s manuscript indicates the slew of concessions necessary to secure publication. It shows, for example, that Courage had originally intended for Philip – the younger of his novel’s two homosexual protagonists – to leave Bruce for Maurice: a man Philip’s own age.\textsuperscript{150} Under pressure from Cape, however, Courage revised the final sequences of his story. After a violent struggle with Bruce, Philip instead begs his older partner to ‘release him back to a “normal” existence’.\textsuperscript{151} There Philip would ‘marry’ and, however futilely, ‘inoculate’ himself against a life of homosexual ‘repetition and loneliness’.\textsuperscript{152}

These editorial interventions wrought considerable violence upon Courage’s original manuscript. While it would be unfair to suggest that these intrusions violated the fundamental integrity of the novel – Courage was certainly successful in his primary aim of publishing an overtly homosexual story – Cape’s editorial concessions certainly altered the tenor and intended emotional direction of Courage’s narrative. Courage drew back from explicit depictions of male intimacy, for example. References to the ‘sepia roses’ of ‘nipples’ do not
appear in the final version of Courage’s story; nor does the ‘suffocation of orgasm’ or the ‘tender globes’ of men’s genitals.\textsuperscript{153} These revisions placed greater emphasis on respectability, and considerably less on the sexual vitalities of Courage’s homosexual protagonists. Indeed, Bruce, as the romantic hero of the story, is transformed from a ‘hedonist [...] a lover of youth in the fullest and most erotic sense’ to a figure of quiet rectitude and reserve: a ‘gentleman’ ‘no more despicable than other men’ and certainly ‘no creature of depravity’.\textsuperscript{154}

\textit{A Way of Love} is groundbreaking: it depicts a passionate love affair between men in the years before gay men’s so-called ‘liberation’ in both England and New Zealand. And it is clear from Courage’s fan mail that his Antipodean readers were quick to consume his story with enthusiasm and alacrity; they spoke of the thrill of reading a homosexual story by a writer who was himself both homosexual and a New Zealander.\textsuperscript{155} Courage, however, was understandably resentful at the extended ordeal of Cape’s interventions.

By the time \textit{A Way of Love} emerged in published form in early 1959, the story had undergone two name changes – from \textit{The Name is Spoken}, to \textit{In Private} – and several rounds of editorial revision. ‘I think you might like \textit{parts} of the book, though by no means all’, Courage wrote to Brash on the eve of publication.\textsuperscript{156} Much of the writing had become ‘clogged’, he suggests, ‘not simple enough, opaque from caution’.\textsuperscript{157} The loss of the novel’s ‘physical or erotic descriptions’, though, were most galling.\textsuperscript{158} It had, Courage felt, robbed his story of its human warmth. More importantly, it also implied a shame where he felt – quite emphatically – there should be none.\textsuperscript{159}

Courage never again attempted such an explicit account of homosexuality. He wrote only one further novel before his death – \textit{A Visit to Penmorten} – but returned there to the tried and true methods of indirect suggestion. This was not necessarily a ‘retreat’ but represented a very different kind of cultural negotiation. I will look more closely at the strategies Courage used to explore sexual identity in Chapter Seven. I will argue that many of his coded narratives make far stronger – and more surprising – assertions regarding sexual identity than, say, his more conventionally explicit accounts of homosexuality in \textit{A Way of Love}. 
By looking to Courage’s own private narrative, however, we can see how he consciously mobilised certain strategies to circumvent the kinds of editorial interventions that he encountered in writing *A Way of Love* (and, to slightly lesser extent, *Desire Without Content*). In *Desire Without Content*, for example, Courage sought to conceal a homosexual narrative by casting one of his two romantic leads not as a man – but as a woman. Courage acknowledged this rather flamboyantly in a letter written to a school-friend around the time book was published:

Ah, those days at Morere Springs [near Rotorua] – wherever they may be – and you with your big manly form. Of course I loved every moment of it, but Mother (hush) must never know. I’ve hardly recovered yet. [...] Read my other book, “Desire Without Content”, and find out what it really is to be a woman. Yes, my sweet, I mean it. You men know nothing of us girls. [...] Meanwhile, let us all keep our little secret, shall we? Nobody must know that you’re just another girl, disguised. But how clever of you to choose such an unassuming name as Jim Harris: it puts everyone off the scent.¹⁶⁰

Courage spoke of this strategy – concealing homosexual sensibilities in female form – five years later, in relation to *The Call Home*. He mentioned to Brasch how the tactic obviated editorial censure by allowing him to focus on situations that were queer but developed ‘up to a point [...] within the conventions of accepted fiction’.¹⁶¹ Like Effie Shelbeck in *Desire Without Content*, Louise Morton of *The Call Home* is a mask for queerness: the ‘compound picture of two people, both of them (of course) men’ that Courage met on his seaward voyage from New Zealand to England, in 1935.¹⁶²

Courage also asserted his agency by using other literary stratagems. Queer characters appear in Courage’s fiction long before the publication of *A Way of Love* in 1959. As I will show in Chapter Seven, these characters remain at the periphery of the main narrative action, or, in the case of those who feature more prominently, have only the faintest knowledge of their own sexual makeup.

In *The Young Have Secrets*, for example, the narrative universe is mediated by a protagonist who, as an adolescent, has only the most fragmentary understanding of the ‘adult’ and sexual world around him.¹⁶³ Other adult
homosexuals – Leo Warner in 1952’s *Fires In the Distance*, for example – show only the very slightest ‘awareness’ of their respective situations. This is not, then, the ‘unrepentant’ or ‘hedonistic’ protagonist of *A Way of Love* (at least as he was originally intended), but a figure of more impressive sympathy; one who must be viewed as ‘blameless’ for a condition he cannot wholly account for.

These episodes show that Courage thought very carefully about constructing narratives for publication. On the one hand, he employed strategies that would satisfy the ‘sophisticated’ homosexual reader; they would be the ones to ‘fill in’ the missing ‘psychological knowledge’ of his queer protagonists. On the other hand, it also shows that Courage was keenly aware of the limited (though productive) agency at his disposal. With few exceptions, he was able to work within the prevailing editorial and cultural contexts of his time. And he did so with considerable skill and dexterity. Seen in this light, *A Way of Love* can be considered a gamble on Courage’s part – one that pays off, but only after significant exertions on his part, and the not inconsiderable reduction of scope that the original narrative shows he had intended.

**Conclusion**

It would be easy to overlook the historical richness of James Courage’s creative output. As historian Antoinette Burton has written, a degree of cultural hegemony still persists around the notion of ‘the archive’ in historical scholarship; and it is only recently that academics have begun to challenge the ‘presumptive boundaries of official archive space’. Here I have drawn on traditional archive materials – journals and letters, for example – and Courage’s own literary productions as the bedrock for my assessment of his professional experience. Far from being incidental, this material helps describe a crucial aspect of Courage’s own subjectivity as both man and artist. And by looking to the inner-workings of Courage’s professional life we also perceive the creative agency that he exerted in producing stories that often stretched the very limits of existing editorial and cultural protocols.

My analysis shows the involved exertions that went into Courage’s artistic experience. As a professional writer, for example, Courage was particularly cognisant of his own perceived marginal status. These episodes show how he
struggled to reconcile his professional aspirations with the particular scripts of masculinity and femininity that he believed originated from his New Zealand past. These social constructs supplied clear imperatives about gendered conduct. This placed a great deal of importance on hard work, and a masculinity that was robust both physically and mentally. These scripts, Courage suggests, conferred very precise parameters to vocational opportunities available to New Zealand men and women (physical labour was innately praiseworthy); and Courage’s own personal narrative shows that he frequently considered himself at odds with this normative code.

In Chapter Three I explored Courage’s working life in the context of space. Here, however, we see how Courage’s professional identity was also informed by a further – and very important – psychic dimension. This went to the very centre of his daily existence, and gave his professional life its very particular shape and quality. These associations were not eradicated over time. Indeed, under Freudian psychoanalysis Courage came to regard his vocation in terms that were increasingly reified and disaffecting. Even so, a broad historical analysis does indicate the remarkable growth and expansion over time of Courage’s identity as a particular kind of writer. As I have shown here, and as I will emphasise again in the following chapter, Courage’s earliest narratives were often New Zealand-focused and replete with queer themes and figures. Even so, it was only after the progression of some years – even decades – that Courage came to see himself both as a writer of prose and a member of queer and New Zealand literary movements.

Courage had begun to identify as a writer of New Zealand fiction by the 1930s, and as a writer of queer fiction by the 1950s. This, along with my analysis of Courage’s professional identity, informed the very particular discursive context from which Courage produced much of his cultural and creative productions.

My analysis shows that no particular set of cultural sources can explain Courage’s outlook. Rather, Courage’s professional subjectivity was produced from a combination of cultural and historical processes and the particular tastes and preferences that he brought to writing as an individual. Courage’s professional identity, for example, coalesced through social interaction with other artists, as well as an increasing awareness of ‘national’ and queer
literatures that he derived from his own reading. Combined with a growing sense of whom he was writing for and why, Courage increasingly produced narratives that he felt resonated not only with New Zealanders but also with those who did not consider themselves heterosexual.

These professional articulations fed into the kinds of stories Courage sought to produce; it also brought about a series of personal and professional negotiations with others that were both ongoing and necessary. Courage’s tendency to draw from real experience, and his desire to engage with queer themes and characters in particular, meant that many of his stories were frequently highly volatile and of a potentially incendiary nature. My analysis shows that this could have consequences socially – in maintaining harmony within the family, for example. These episodes show how Courage’s stories inevitably touched off other people’s life histories. Clearly, not everyone shared Courage’s enthusiasm to be the focus of literary dissection.

The cultural discourses that surrounded homosexuality during Courage’s lifetime also meant he frequently grappled with the interventions of editors who sought to limit the potential moral – and legal – fallout of his novels. The failure of Courage’s earliest stories and, indeed, the subsequent suppression of *A Way of Love* in New Zealand, speak to the fact that Courage was not always successful in eluding questions of literary propriety. Even when he was allowed to write about homosexuality, he was often only able to do so after lengthy negotiations and repeated assurances to his editors that his homosexual characters had no basis in reality.¹⁶⁸ Courage’s private material – his journal entries and correspondence – show the difficulties in navigating the writing of explicitly homosexual stories like *A Way of Love* in the years before liberation.

Whether coded or explicit, these episodes show how queer authors were not entirely divested of their critical agency. Courage’s literary output is the focus of my seventh and final chapter. As I have indicated here, Courage found space in literature to explore sexuality fairly openly, if with some circumspection. This is an appropriate place to draw to a close our analysis of Courage’s life-history. As I have already indicated, much of his literary output bears more than a passing resemblance to his own experience. Courage also touches on many of the central themes I have closely examined so far – questions of masculinity, space and
friendship among them. This analysis provides a further degree of particularity – and sometimes divergence – to an understanding of Courage as an artist and a man. In an era where homosexuals were supposedly ‘silenced’ by a heterosexual majority, it also shows the remarkable extent to which Courage was able to exploit literature as a space of public discussion about sexuality and sexual otherness.
Notes

1 In rejecting Courage’s *Episode in Early Life* J. C. Squire perhaps made the clearest statement against Courage’s transgression: ‘You write so extremely well – you are so evidently a good novelist in prose – that I am sorry you should have expended so much pains [sic] on a story that will never be printed by any paper which a person of your intelligence would wish it to appear’. Courage wrote that he was ‘stunned’ and ‘humiliated’ by Squire’s attitude (which he transcribed into his journal), but believed that his treatment of homosexuality was ‘beyond reproach’. See James Courage, Journal, 1929-1931, 15 October 1930, MS-0999/080, HC.


3 Ibid. (original emphasis).

4 Ibid.

5 Speaking of *One House*, for example, a reviewer for *Tatler* wrote that Courage wrote with a ‘gentle primness’ that ‘shouts a refined femininity’. See Author unknown, copy of book review from *Tatler*, 15 February 1933, MS-0999/125, HC.


7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid. (original emphasis).

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.


15 Courage, Journal (‘The Diary of a Neurotic’), 1960-1961, 3 June 1960, MS-0999/089, HC.
Negotiations


17 Ibid.


19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

23 Courage, Journal, 1929-1931, 1 August 1929, MS-0999/080, HC.

24 Ibid. These words echoed a quote that Courage had carefully transcribed from J. B. Priestly. Priestly seemed to sum up for Courage his own reservations about writing as a manly pursuit: ‘Oh, yes, we scribble for a livelihood, out of vanity, for this and out of that, but behind all these things is that pressure of life which hurts unless we can escape by putting something down on paper [...]’ See Courage, Journal, 1929-1931, 11 May 1929, MS-0999/080, HC.

25 Courage, Journal, 1929-1931, 1 August 1929, MS-0999/080, HC.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

29 Courage, Journal, 1927-1929, 23 March 1928, MS-0999/079, HC.


32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

34 Courage, Journal, 1929-1931, 13 October 1929, MS-0999/080, HC.

35 Ibid.
37 James Courage to Charles Brasch, 4 September 1941, MS-0996-003/042, HC.
38 Ibid.
39 James Courage to Frank Sargeson, 9 May 1954, MS-0432-152, ATL.
41 Ibid.
42 Courage, Journal (‘The Diary of a Neurotic’), 1960-1961, 3 June 1960, MS-0999/089, HC.
43 Ibid.
44 Ibid.
46 Ibid.
47 Ibid.
48 Courage made this designation retrospectively in 1941. He believed he fit the template of New Zealand’s first real poets as defined by Eric McCormick in his then recently published Letters and Art in New Zealand. Courage read how these figures lived in New Zealand but ‘found it more natural to use the traditional language of English poets than the very different idiom of their own country’. See Courage, Journal, 1941-1946, 20 April 1941, MS-0999/086, HC.
49 Courage, Journal, 1920-1924, undated poem, MS-0999/078, HC.
50 ‘A Pinero Classic: A Good Amateur Production’, undated newspaper clipping, MS-0999/171, HC.
51 Ibid.
53 A Pinero Classic: A Good Amateur Production’, undated newspaper clipping, MS-0999/171, HC.
54 James Courage, note on original typescript of Margaret’s Platonic Wedding, 20 April 1938, MS-0999/006, HC.
55 James Courage, New Country, unpublished manuscript, 1926, MS-0999/002, HC.
56 Courage, Journal, 1920-1924, 11 November 1923, MS-0999/078, HC.
58 Courage, Journal, 1929-1931, 19 May 1929, MS-0999/080, HC.
60 Ibid.
61 Indeed, had the performance of Private History not coincided with the outbreak of World War II it is possible that Courage may have been able to more rigorously pursue a career as a playwright. Wartime conditions in London made dramatic productions difficult. Private History failed to pass the Chief Censor’s rating to proceed beyond its initial run at the Gate Theatre. Courage’s subsequent scripts (the early war years were his most active as a playwright) were rejected because of wartime restrictions – and not because of questions relating to their quality or subject matter. For a brief overview of war’s impact on the London theatre scene see Society of London Theatre, ‘1938-1947’, Official London Theatre Guide [online], 12 July 2011, available URL: http://www.officiallondontheatre.co.uk/stats-and-facts/decade_by_decade/view/item98393/1938-1947/.
62 Lawrence Jones notes that there were three waves of New Zealand writing (and writers) in the first half of the twentieth century. Courage does not appear in his list but, interestingly, would sit between the second (the ‘central wave’ that arrived in the 1930s and were associated with the Caxton Press) and third waves (authors who were active by the 1930s but whose careers were seriously interrupted by World War II). Stuart Murray has likewise identified the 1930s as a pivotal moment in the building of a New Zealand literary culture but warns that this period has been ‘over-mythologized’ by writers and historians alike. He

63 Courage, Journal, 1929-1931, 4 September 1931, MS-0999/080, HC.

64 Courage, Journal, 1934-1936, 3 May 1934, MS-0999/084, HC.

65 These new approaches to writing can be seen as early as the 1940s, in such anthologies as *New Writing*. Rachel Barrowman has written how these stories were ‘infused’ with New Zealand’s increasingly popular “cult of gloom” and a ‘spare, realist narrative style’ that was employed to most effect by Frank Sargeson. See Rachel Barrowman, *A Popular Vision: The Arts and the Left in New Zealand* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1991), p. 154.

66 Courage, Journal, 1934-1936, 3 May 1934, MS-0999/084, HC.


69 James Courage to Charles Brasch, 7 November 1946, MS-0996-003/042, HC.

70 Courage, Journal, 1941-1946, 25 January 1945, MS-0999/086, HC.

71 Ibid. (original emphasis).

72 Courage made this point most strongly in a letter he wrote to close friend and fellow New Zealand writer Basil Dowling: ‘[…] the people I knew in N.Z. […] spoke more or less standard English (with so few local words that they’re utterly unimportant and would only confuse non-local readers), and to represent them as speaking in any other idiom would be, simply and categorically, an artistic falsification […]. It’s very curious – this insistence by the indigenous N.Z.
reviewer [...] that [a] character [is] not “N.Z.” [sic] and [does not] belong to the landscape unless they speak in some (not explained) sort of colonial patois. On the same argument, all characters in English novels should speak dialect or Cockney. Not even [Frank] Sargeson (in his reflection of N.Z. speech, or some fraction of it) makes such a blunder [...]' See James Courage to Basil Dowling, 9 June 1953, MS-0996-003/042, HC. (original emphasis).


74 James Courage to Charles Brasch, 7 November 1946, MS-0996-003/042, HC.

75 Ibid.


78 Courage, Journal, 1937-1940, 2 December 1938, MS-0999/085, HC.

79 James Courage to Charles Brasch, 29 December 1947, MS-0996-003/042, HC.

80 Andrew to James Courage, 24 November 1954, MS-0999/149, HC.

81 Ibid.

82 James Courage to Charles Brasch, 11 September 1956, MS-0996-003/042, HC.

83 Ibid.

84 James Courage to Charles Brasch, 22 November 1956, MS-0996-003/042, HC.

85 James Courage to Charles Brasch, 17 February 1959, MS-0996-003/042, HC.

86 Ibid.

87 James Courage to Charles Brasch, 15 September 1962, MS-0996-003/042, HC. (original emphasis).

88 James Courage to Charles Brasch, 16 February 1959, MS-0996-003/042, HC.
Negotiations

89 Ibid.

90 Ibid.

91 Courage, Journal, 1934-1936, 21 April 1934, MS-0999/084, HC.


93 Courage, Journal, 1941-1946, 16 October 1942, MS-0999/086, HC.

94 Courage, Journal, 1941-1946, 5 April 1945, MS-0999/086, HC.

95 Ibid.


98 Ibid.


100 Constance Gray to Charles Brasch, 22 September 1972, MS-0996-003/043, HC.

101 Patricia Fanshawe to Charles Brasch, 29 July 1972, MS-0996-003/043, HC; James Courage to Charles Brasch, 29 December 1947, MS-0996-003/042, HC.

102 Michael Howard to James Courage, 12 January 1955, MS-0999/120, HC.


104 Constance Gray to Charles Brasch, undated, MS-0996-003/043, HC.

105 Ibid; Patricia Fanshawe to Charles Brasch, 29 July 1972, MS-0996-003/043, HC.

106 Courage became involved in a bitter dispute over his depiction of one homosexual character, Peter Fitzgerald, in The Call Home, for example. Fitzgerald was based on Courage’s friend Ronnie Peter, but, in letters to his publisher, Courage denied his resembling any living person: ‘[Fitzgerald] is an entire invention of mine and had no factual existence whatever. Furthermore, he is nowhere described as a homosexual, except by implication. Whether there is anyone of the name PETER FITZGERALD at present in New Zealand I have no means of knowing, but I have never met anyone of this name at any time. And,
after all, a character in a novel has to have some name or other – if only to assist the reader’. See James Courage to Michael Howard, 29 April 1956, MS-0999/120, HC. (original emphasis).

107 The current legal status surrounding homosexuality as grounds for defamation is unclear. It was enforceable in New Zealand, however, until at least 1996, when New Zealand Magazines Ltd v Hadlee held that imputations that a woman was lesbian were considered ‘capable of bearing a defamatory meaning’. See Dean R. Knight, “‘I’m Not Gay! Not That There’s Anything Wrong With That!’: Are Unwanted Imputations of Gayness Defamatory?”, Victoria University of Wellington Law Review, 37 (2006), p. 259.


109 For their insight into Sagarin’s decision to write using a penname see Deborah Cameron and Don Kulick, eds., The Language and Sexuality Reader (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 16.

110 E. M. Forster had begun work on his homosexual novel, Maurice, in 1913. This was a ‘defiant declaration’ of homosexual pride, writes literary biographer Philip Gardner, but one that Forster – much like Courage – struggled to reconcile to both prevailing social conventions and his own, rather impeccable sense of respectability. It was only in 1971, after Forster’s death, that the novel was finally made available (though several friends, Gardner notes, had had the opportunity to read it privately much earlier). See Gardner, E. M. Forster: The Critical Heritage (London: Taylor & Francis: 2002), p. 463.

111 Patricia Fanshawe to Charles Brasch, 19 January 1969, MS-0996-003/043, HC; Patricia Fanshawe to Charles Brasch, 3 June 1969, MS-0996-003/043, HC.

112 James Courage to Charles Brasch, 1 November 1952, MS-0996-003/042, HC.

113 Ibid.

114 Charles Brasch to James Courage, 6 September 1953, MS-0996-003/042, HC.

115 Ibid.

116 Ibid.


118 Charles Brasch to James Courage, 6 September 1953, MS-0996-003/042, HC.
Brasch wrote how one admirer of ‘Guest at the Wedding’ had remarked that, though he had enjoyed his story, that he thought Courage wore his heart too much on his ‘blazer-sleeve’ as a writer. Brasch wrote that James left himself vulnerable to ‘Denis Glover’s magpies to peck at’ (a reference to Glover’s iconic poem ‘The Magpies’). See Ibid.

James Courage, undated note on psychology and writing, MS-9999/099, HC.


James Courage to Charles Brasch, 23 May 1961, MS-0996-003/042, HC.

Ibid.


Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.


James Courage to Charles Brasch, 11 September 1956, MS-0996-003/042, HC.

Ibid.

James Courage to Charles Brasch, 22 November 1956, MS-0996-003/042, HC.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

James Courage to Charles Brasch, 11 September 1956, MS-0996-003/042, HC; James Courage to Charles Brasch, 22 November 1956, MS-0996-003/042, HC.

Negotiations


141 James Courage to Brasch, 22 November 1956, MS-0996-003/042, HC.

142 Ibid.

143 James Courage to Charles Brasch, 22 November 1949, MS-0996-003/042, HC.

144 Ibid.

145 Ibid.


147 James Courage to Michael Sadleir, 23 January 1950, MS-0999/09, HC.


150 James Courage, synopsis of In Private, undated, MS-0999/053, HC.

151 James Courage, revised synopsis of In Private, 17 September 1957, MS-0999/053, HC.

152 Ibid.

153 James Courage, editorial notes on In Private, undated, MS-0999/053, HC.


155 James Courage to Charles Brasch, 15 September 1962, MS-0996-003/042, HC.

156 James Courage to Charles Brasch, 17 February 1959, MS-0996-003/042, HC. (original emphasis).

157 Ibid.

158 James Courage to Charles Brasch, 16 April 1959, MS-0996-003/042, HC.

159 James Courage to Charles Brasch, 5 November 1958, MS-0996-003/042, HC.

160 James Courage to Jim Harris, 7 November 1951, MS-0999/155, HC.

161 James Courage to Charles Brasch, 22 November 1956, MS-0996-003/042, HC. (original emphasis).

162 Ibid.


165 Courage, editorial notes on In Private, undated, MS-0999/053, HC.

166 James Courage to Charles Brasch, 18 October 1952, MS-0996-003/042, HC.

168 James Courage to Michael Howard, 29 April 1956, MS-0999/120, HC.
Chapter Seven

‘But it is a necessity – if one is to understand oneself and other human beings’: Literature, cultural resistance and constructing imagined worlds

Introduction: Life’s astonishing game

New Zealand continued to exert a profound influence over Courage’s imagination well into the latter part of his life. The New Zealand expatriate returned often to remembered scenes from his childhood in his personal journal and correspondence. But it was in his creative writing – the literary reimaginings of his past – that Courage most often reminisced about Canterbury life. Many of these stories were of a lyrical nature; they celebrated the liberating capacities of New Zealand’s natural landscape. Others – especially those set in the remembered landscape of his grandmother’s Mount Somers’ property – commemorate Courage’s enduring feeling for past people and places.

Many of his stories feature the recurring figure of Walter, Courage’s own autobiographical projection. In these stories Courage very consciously invests Walter’s world with the ambivalences and emotional traumas he remembered from childhood. In one short prose piece, entitled ‘A Serious Story’, Walter’s love of the natural world is interrupted by the aggressive intervention of masculine authority. This intercession manifests in the form of Walter’s father; a man who, like Courage’s paternal guardian, is a ‘successful and very practical sheep-farmer’.

In ‘A Serious Story’, Walter, a six year-old, is enlisted by his father to assist with the annual lamb marking. This event, however, is given a grotesque – even Freudian – significance when Walter is made to hold each lamb while his father, first with a knife, then with his teeth, severs the testes of each male animal in turn. Walter senses – and then represses – something grimly symbolic in his father’s actions. He is aware, for example, that his father’s actions embodied ‘something central’ to his own experience, but he is ultimately unable to fully access the significance of this revelation. Instead Walter notes, half
understanding, that each lamb has a small ‘pod’ above the crotch; a ‘purse’, in fact, identical to the one on his ‘own boyish body’.5 ‘A Serious Story’ is a comment on the cultural and sexual pressures that Courage believed played a determining role in the unfolding of his own consciousness as an adult. This was a ‘kind of astonishing game’, Walter perceives, and one that was more than merely a question of animal husbandry.6

These kinds of narratives deserve serious attention in any treatment of Courage’s life course. As I argued in Chapter Six, Courage continually drew from his unique personal history. Through his profession as writer, Courage was able to reflect on, rework, and transform aspects of his memories and his lived experience into his creative output. In addition, and as I showed earlier, fiction also offered men like Courage a vehicle to explore and critique notions of sexuality and identity – if within certain bounded conventions. Narratives like ‘A Serious Story’ are therefore useful because they show how at least some homosexual writers resisted dominant discourses of identity – sexual and otherwise. In Courage’s case, they also give additional (if mediated) insights into his very precise emotional and psychological perspectives.

I use this final chapter to look more closely at Courage’s archive of creative material. I use a selective reading of Courage’s literary output to read his life and experience in fresh and dynamic ways. My approach fuses literary analysis, historiography, and biography in order to gain a rich, nuanced and textured insight into the outworking of Courage’s identity in his creative output. This both enables Courage’s fiction to be read in fresh and original ways and meditates on the intersections between life and art that were so much a part of Courage’s life history.

This material indicates the degree to which Courage was engaged with issues of his day. Questions of national and sexual identity are especially important. The same material also reveals how creative writing played a key role in at least one man’s ongoing self conceptualisation. Through this, Courage reveals how queer actors of a certain class and generation engaged critically with the world around them. As I have already argued, Courage’s literary engagement enables a comprehensive critique of certain public narratives about homosexuality. Even so, Courage did not approach his writing as solely a means for achieving
professional recognition; nor did he consider his writing as chiefly a weapon against the heteronormative. Both were motivating factors that shifted in importance as Courage moved through time and space.

Courage was forty-five years old when the vast proportion of his work (seven of his eight novels) entered publication. The first section of this chapter looks to the work that predates this period of later success. Many of Courage’s earliest manuscripts were written immediately after his years at Oxford; though most were later destroyed. Their rejection had been a painful exercise in humility for Courage. Moreover, they had also functioned as an early and important lesson in the limited freedom Courage would be accorded by his editors in writing openly homosexual stories (the kinds of factors I considered at length in Chapter Six). Even so, some key manuscripts survive: _The Promising Years_ is the largest and most sophisticated of these. Courage had also achieved at least a modicum of success by the 1930s. He published a novel, _One House_, through Victor Gollancz, in 1933, and staged a play, _Private History_, at the Gate Theatre, London, in 1938.

These works indicate the extent of Courage’s commitment to exploring issues of national and sexual identity in his work. They also show his remarkable persistence in choosing to pursue New Zealand and queer narratives so rigorously – despite the supposedly limited market for both kinds of stories internationally.

The second section of my analysis shifts its focus to Courage’s later, and arguably better known, published material. Here I look to Courage’s treatment of space. In Chapter Three I showed how psychiatric intervention from the late 1940s greatly altered Courage’s views of New Zealand. In this section I show how vestiges of his earlier, much more evenhanded treatment of national space survive in his published work. Courage’s published narratives from this period do not betray quite the same level of vehemence. Equally, they are not simply celebrations of a remembered and idealised childhood. A consideration of space in Courage’s fiction therefore adds much greater complexity – even incoherence – to the picture I have already established. It also indicates the extent to which fiction functioned as a space from which Courage felt he was able to unpack and make sense of his own place in the world.
Given that Courage's most successful literary works were published during or after he had begun his own psychiatric intervention, these novels also offer space from which to consider Courage's views of psychology. These writings flesh out much of what we already know about Courage's views on such matters. They also further illustrate Courage's understanding of experience and experiential learning. Like 'A Serious Story', these narratives tend to dwell much less on remembered aspects of the wider environment (the general state of the nation, for example) and much more on the internal workings of the individual. They clarify how Courage understood Freudian ideas in practice; they also further underscore the role of fiction writing in Courage's ongoing process of critical self understanding.

As I showed in Chapter Six and elsewhere, Courage was not entirely silenced by those social and editorial pressures that sometimes opposed representations of homosexuality in literature. Here I closely examine the texts that employ the methods of subterfuge I signaled in Chapter Six as the means through which Courage concealed his narratives of sexual otherness. On the other end of the spectrum, I also examine the extent of Courage's social critique in narratives like *A Way of Love* that dispense with these strategies for a much more direct discussion of homosexuality.

These readings stress Courage's agency in public discussions of private morality. I also complicate one of the presumptions favoured in much liberationist and activist accounts of homosexuality: namely that homosexuals were for the most part divested of their powers of resistance, and silent in the face of a hostile and all-pervading homophobia.

**Early creative forays**
In his earliest writings, Courage showed an immediate interest in the sexual dissident. He preferred for the most part to pursue the colonial setting he remembered from childhood. Many of Courage's works, especially those published at the height of his success (from roughly the late 1940s onwards) were written some time after the events they touch on. Courage's earliest stories, however, engage with the complexities of colonial belonging much closer to the events they depict. These stories rehearse many of the same themes,
preoccupations and literary strategies that Courage would return to in the 1940s and beyond. While manuscripts of *An Episode in Early Life* and *Some Other Being* have been lost – destroyed by Courage sometime before World War II – his manuscript for the autobiographical novel *The Promising Years* was preserved, perhaps in the hopes of future publication.

Unlike *An Episode in Early Life*, which Courage indicated in his journal featured explicit homosexual themes and was rejected on that basis, *The Promising Years* contained only inferences of the protagonist’s sexual inversion. Its rejection by T. S. Eliot, for Faber – a decision made in consultation with respected novelist Walter de la Mare – left Courage in a state of unsurpassed abjection (‘it is really as much as I can do to prevent myself committing suicide. I walk about in a sort of dream, but a dream that aches.’).8 Courage had reason to be upset. The novel had initially been received with considerable enthusiasm by Eliot, and both Eliot and de la Mare praised the novel’s ‘authentic’ colonial background. Despite Courage’s attempts to dilute the novel’s queer aspects – at both men’s request – the novel failed to attract a favourable review in the final instance.9

*The Promising Years* is an autobiographical novel divided into five distinct sections. These sections follow the Courage-like protagonist from his earliest years (‘The Waggonette’) to his emergence as an artist and a young man (concluding with a chapter entitled ‘The Tower’). As I indicate below, *The Promising Years* is revealing for its careful approach to understanding the development of sexuality in youth. More than this, however, the story also shows the remarkable consistency evident in Courage’s representations of his life history. Indeed, all of Courage’s New Zealand-set novels and short stories follow the domestic and provincial patterning established in *The Promising Years*, although using different place and character names in each. Here, the protagonist (also doubling as the novel’s sole narrative perspective) is unnamed, but ultimately not dissimilar in any way to the autobiographical figure of Walter – the usually-child protagonist who features in such novels as *The Young Have Secrets* (1954).

Courage uses epigrams at the beginning of each section of *The Promising Years* in order to illustrate his Proustian aspirations to unlock the full continuum of personal memory – sexual and otherwise. Marcel Proust called this ‘the vast
structure of recollection’ in Volume One of Remembrance of Things Past – a phrase Courage affirms and appropriates in his novel. Like Proust, for Courage the landscape of The Promising Years is as much sensual as it is social: Courage gives particular attention to the smells, tastes and other associations that recall distant memory. But the depiction of domestic discord – particularly between the protagonist’s parents – shows how Courage’s memories of familial unhappiness were not simply imported from later Freudian interventions. Indeed, The Promising Years suggests that Courage always felt some familial unhappiness, at least to some degree.

Family strife in The Promising Years only differs from other narratives in that domestic tensions play out not between the mother and father, but between the protagonist’s father and his maternal grandmother. I consider Courage’s use of the grandmother figure – a character based on his own maternal grandmother, Ida Florence Peache – at greater length below. Here, however, we see how the arrangement of masculine practicality – as embodied by the protagonist’s father – is carefully played off against the grandmother’s much more responsive – and artistic – humanism. The protagonist’s grandmother is a figure of refined and humane sensibilities. She displays an instinctive empathy that sharply contrasts with the father protagonist: ‘The kindness of her heart flowed towards me, was mine, without reservations [...]. I would sigh for her as a companion, as the best friend I had yet had’.

The protagonist’s father is very much the same kind of patriarch seen in Courage’s later narratives. He is not imbued with the gothic and Freudian overtones evident in ‘A Serious Story’. Even so, he epitomises an archetypal colonial masculinity – that brand of normative manliness first encountered in Courage’s descriptions of his father in Chapter One of this thesis. ‘My father had a rooted dislike of anything in life that was even faintly flavoured with the melodramatic, so that if possible he never gave anyone in his presence an opportunity for a display of a heart-felt personal emotion’, the protagonist laments. Evoking the kinds of discourses of work and respectability that I discussed in Chapter Six, the narrator notes his father’s opinion that the ‘sweat of a man’s brow’ represented ‘the first’ and most important ‘evidence’ of personal ‘integrity’. According to this paradigm, men who belonged to the ‘professions’ –
essentially those in sedentary and intellectual employment – were (in his own words) to be considered ‘charlatans and braggarts’ of one kind or another.14

In this narrative, white-collar workers are deserving of derision and suspicion, since such men exist beyond the reforming and tempering powers of male manual labour. These kinds of value judgments become important not merely in evoking the colonial cultural landscape but also in unveiling the protagonist’s inverted nature, which only ever becomes clear in the fifth and final section of the novel, where the narrator is depicted as an adult, studying at the University of Oxford. In this sense, these representations of familial tensions are much less interested in uncovering the location of a ‘hidden infantile trauma’ – the focus of Courage’s later novels. Instead *The Promising Years* shows the unfolding of a masculine subjectivity considered to be anathema to the dominant paradigm of his frontier and colonial upbringing.

This is the articulation of a hidden inversion: the primordial female ‘glamour exhaled’ by the protagonist’s grandmother.15 Here, inversion is not primarily designated by sex object choice. Indeed, the protagonist, much like Courage himself, does not articulate an exclusive interest in men. Using a ‘naïve’ perspective that becomes central in Courage’s later coded homosexual narratives (*Fires in the Distance*, for example, or the short story ‘Guest at the Wedding’), the protagonist is drawn to both men and women. As a young man, he is attracted to at least two figures of robust, and working-class masculinity – one, the local lighthouse keeper, another, ‘a young man who had once been a sailor’.16 At the same time, the protagonist also voices his affection for a number of women. One is a girl named Stella Laurens, said to have led a ‘worldly life’ in the novel’s reimagined Christchurch.17

Of course there is danger in reading too literally into a protagonist’s affective attentions in Courage’s fiction. Aside from the very queer parameters of Courage’s own erotic continuum (see Chapters Four and Five), it is also important to remind ourselves of how normative arrangements in Courage’s novels frequently mask covert homosexuality. I will return to Courage’s use of female signal characters, but it is interesting to note that the protagonist’s feelings for Stella are not so much sexual as psychic: an ‘affinity’ of like minds and souls.18 Whether Stella is ‘authentically’ female or simply the mask for male
homosexuality, the narrator is primarily drawn to her for her Bohemian and artistic sensibilities. These are attributes that speak to the protagonist’s inverted nature; a nature that is not so much ‘sexual’, Courage is careful to suggest, as of a primarily artistic and gendered conception.¹⁹

An emphasis on the artistic and gendered parameters of inversion is further exemplified in Courage’s only surviving piece of juvenilia, *Margaret’s Platonic Marriage*. This was written sometime in 1920. A tale of intergenerational tension, *Margaret’s Platonic Marriage* focuses on the eponymous Margaret and her intention to marry a local man, David. Their marriage offers Margaret the means to escape forever her life of provincial (though affluent) obscurity. Both Margaret and David are implied to be inverts. Their inversion is articulated not as a question of sexuality, but as the expression of artistic and Bohemian deportment. Much like the connection between the protagonist and Stella in *The Promising Years*, Margaret and David possess an essentially intellectual bond; a kind of shared recognition that manifests ‘suddenly’ when the two meet for the first time at a ‘fancy-dress carnival’.²⁰ David, though a colonial, has already established himself as a local artist of some repute. But it is the expression of some essentially feminine inner nature that seems to explain Margaret’s attraction. David is said to be the very incarnation of ‘the modern artist’: he has a ‘head that might belong to a poet’, the bearing of a ‘painter or perhaps a sculptor’, and hands that ‘give at once a sense of power and of sensuousness’.²¹

It is possible that excluding explicit depictions of sexuality spoke more fully to Courage’s rather particular views on respectability. I have already considered views on sexuality in practice and shown, amongst other things, how he tended to approach passionate and carnal relationships. Courage saw the latter as particularly degrading to his personal constitution – to the intellect especially. However, since *Margaret’s Platonic Marriage* does not seem to have been intended for performance, the need to ‘mask’ sexual identity must surely have been greatly reduced. Nevertheless, *Margaret’s Platonic Marriage* is important because it shows the degree to which literature was used by Courage as a vehicle for self-conceptualisation. Indeed, since it was written during Courage’s time in New Zealand, before his migration to London to take up his studies, it shows how these ideas must have been foremost in his mind from an early age.
It would be tempting to overlook Courage’s first major published work – the 1933 novel, One House – and to suggest that it has little to add to this discussion. One House is not set in New Zealand. Neither is it, at least at first glance, specifically concerned with identity – sexual or otherwise. The novel focuses on the discord evident between three sisters who reside in gentrified obscurity in rural England. Even so, its English setting is secondary to the attention Courage gives to the construction of individuation and subjectivity – the novel is very much a study on the notion of inversion, if only at the level of subtext. Reviews of the novel spoke of Courage’s consciously Brontëian turn – particularly in its gothic and romantic overtones. Other critics suggested – possibly those who detected the story’s deception – that the story’s ‘gentle primness’ must surely point to ‘the identity of a lady’ writer (the first of several such accusations during Courage’s years of writing).22

This ‘detection’ is at least partly explained by the attention to feminine subjectivity that Courage shows in sketching each sibling. Again, it is the protagonist, this time a woman, who seems to most articulate a hidden, queer subjectivity. Catherine Wanklin is said to be ‘rigid, aloof, [and] frigid’, for example. She is, however, possessed of a deep, and artistic sensitivity that verges on that of a ‘saint or mystic’.23 While Catherine does not articulate a sexual desire for other women, her intuitive understanding of the male psyche suggests an inner complexity that defies her appearance as quintessentially feminine.24 Much like Stephen Gordon in Radclyffe Hall’s The Well of Loneliness (published just five years before One House) Catherine’s inversion manifests as a kind of spiritual torment. This is a suffering that is balanced in turn by a depth of insight not evident in either of her sisters.

Rather interestingly, Courage seems to posit an inherited basis for Catherine’s inversion. Catherine is said to be ‘poles apart’ from Mona, her sister; a woman of more ‘Latin’ disposition than Catherine who is, by contrast, ‘feckless, sensual, and life-loving’.25 Significantly, Catherine and Mona are of ‘divergent races’; related as siblings, but possessed of internal and ‘fundamental differences’.26 Catherine’s ‘difference’ is not attributed to infantile trauma, neither is it articulated using the medical pathologies that emerge during the 1950s to explain homosexuality. Catherine’s inverted temperament is instead directly inherited from her father,
Hubert. ‘All that’ was manifest in her father, the narrator suggests, Catherine finds ‘retrace[d] in herself’.\textsuperscript{27} This includes a ‘love of the past for its own sake’, but also a ‘defence’ of the ‘sensitive spirit’, and a ‘loneliness’ and ‘desire for love’ that remains somehow impossible to fully articulate to others.\textsuperscript{28}

\textit{One House} engages the language of eugenics to describe the inherited traits of all three daughters. A trusted family friend, Mr Helmore, observes, for example, that ‘we may like to imagine that each of us is minted afresh’ but each generation inevitably carries ‘something’ of their parents.\textsuperscript{29} He suggests that ‘each is the child of his parents and re-lives something of their lives’.\textsuperscript{30}

This reinforces my earlier assertion that Courage had a good understanding of sexological scripts by the 1930s. Richard von Krafft-Ebing, for example, posited an inherited basis for sexual deviance.\textsuperscript{31} But it is Courage’s description of Hubert Wanklin’s own uniquely inverted temperament that is most interesting here. In Hubert’s writing (he was a historian), Catherine detects his true persona ‘scattered incidentally’ amongst his personal musings.\textsuperscript{32} By virtue of a kind of close reading (‘analysis’) Catherine comes to understand certain ‘key traits’ of both her father’s and her own temperament. Here she gains a ‘surer’ understanding of the man who raised her, but also the inherited characteristics that survive in both herself and her siblings.\textsuperscript{33} Hubert’s ‘complex character’ was composed of both female and male elements, Catherine discovers, ‘an extraordinary interplay of ‘passion and reason and of the male and female traits’ that constituted his ‘true nature’, ‘stripped’ of its ‘enigmatic reserve’.\textsuperscript{34}

\textit{One House} exemplifies the kinds of queer depictions that Courage most preferred in much of his early (surviving) creative output. It is likely that these manoeuvres made the editorial interventions I outlined in Chapter Six easier to manage. These depictions were, after all, subtle, and not typically linked to graphic depictions of sexual expression. In this and other of Courage’s early stories, we see that inversion was his trope of choice in signaling non-normative subjectivities. These associations favour a comparatively universalising view of sexuality (in the sense that any number of individuals might show signs of inversion), though Courage is clear that sex-object choice was not the primary signal of internal difference.
While these representations sit well alongside Courage’s own private articulations of sexuality (we remember that he described himself mostly as an invert during this time), his dramatic production, Private History, also reflects the increasing hegemony of other sexual scripts in the years leading up to World War II. While Private History sees Courage switch from prose to performance, we see here a very different set of approaches to understanding human sexuality. Set in a prestigious private boarding school, Private History concerns student and prefect Geoffrey Longman, and the fallout of his romantic involvement with another male student at the school they both attend. Like One House, Private History is very much English in setting. Even so, it is a setting that could be easily replicated in any number of Anglo-British contexts – and in writing Private History it is possible that Courage actively drew from his own queer experiences of private school life.

Private History is primarily a critique of Anglo-British social values. Using the tropes of brotherly love and ‘romantic friendship’ (a term used throughout the play) the narrative is an exercise in evoking heterosexual sympathies for otherwise respectable middle-class homosexuals. Courage exposes the British education system’s inherent intolerance towards difference, for example. One character suggests that ‘having long ago ceased to regard boys as human beings’, school headmasters instead ‘prefer to treat’ their charges as a ‘cross between animal and devil’. Longman’s principal, a Mr Maxton, is capable of seeing Geoffrey’s passionate regard for Danvers – a boy three years his junior – as simply the expression of base perversion: a ‘moral delinquency’ that corrodes the reforming powers of the college, and therefore must be immediately and brutally expurgated from the school before others are ‘corrupted’.

Private History reveals the full complexities of male-male erotic attachments. Courage suggests that true homosexuality is a minority experience, and one that is not without legitimacy. Longman states that his love for Danvers is one of purity and of redeeming comfort. Indeed, Longman holds that their relationship is ‘everything’. Their champion, a House Master named Brian Nuthall, recognises their bond to be something more than boyhood ‘smut’ or ‘street-corner dirtiness’. The latter is something that any boy might engage in, he suggests, and is not homosexuality per se. Since it is purely sexual gratification,
and usually involves the seduction of some innocent younger boy, Nuthall considers such attachments to be the expression of base perversion and deserving of condemnation.\textsuperscript{40} Considering the case of Longman and Danvers, however, Nuthall allows that romantic liaisons between boys might be ‘no different in essentials from millions of other’ homosexuals.\textsuperscript{41} Though Nuthall is married, he also reveals how his own life had featured a number of passionate male friendships at key moments in his youth (‘I seem to remember there was a Danvers in my career too’).\textsuperscript{42}

For his part, Longman is careful to assert his feeling that his own homosexuality is something more than a ‘passing phase’.\textsuperscript{43} Some ten years after the incident, Longman and Nuthall meet as friends. Longman is cohabiting with another man his own age, Kit, in a rented cottage in Cornwall that overlooks the River Fal.\textsuperscript{44} The pair possess a kind of domestic security; they banter with one another on the morning of Longman’s re-meeting Nuthall (‘I’m dashed glad I wasn’t your fag at school’), and it is clear that they exist in a kind of homosocial tranquility (to Nuthall: ‘we sunbathe most of the day, when it’s hot enough’).\textsuperscript{45} While psychology is used to describe Longman’s homosexuality (his mother’s rejection over his affair with Danvers evokes for Longman a long-lasting distaste for women), their relationship is one of a clearly intimate – and respectable – tenor: ‘I’ve always turned to men, rather than women for humanity ... true companionship’.\textsuperscript{46} Such a relationship is carefully presented in terms that are beyond the carnal. He speaks of a personal fulfillment (‘for humanity’) that, for Longman, is only possible through the homosocial.
Figure 13: One of a number of images taken by renowned London-based photographers Angus Mcbean and John Vickers during Private History’s run at the Gate Theatre. Geoffrey (Basil Coleman) adjusts the tie of Kit (John Kevan) during a moment of queer domestic intimacy at the start of the play’s opening scene. [MS-0999/005, S12-505g, Hocken Collections, Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of Otago]
Spaces and Courage’s picture of New Zealand

The preceding discussion places Courage’s later output in its context. While The Promising Years is in large part the model for Courage’s later coded novels (The Young Have Secrets, or Fires in the Distance, for example), Private History – with its deployment of explicitly queer characters and themes – is very much on a par with Courage’s later excursions into homosexual literature. A Way of Love is the most developed example of the latter.

Of Courage’s earliest writings, only The Promising Years shows any attention to considerations of space. There Courage takes pains to simulate both colonial and metropolitan settings – though it is only the former that features prominently in the narrative (the last sections set in Oxford are much smaller and only very thinly sketched). Courage’s attention to both sets of spaces in most of his later narratives helps to flesh out and complicate his views about his dual colonial and metropolitan citizenship. Here I focus mostly on his views on colonial life, though his representation of the metropolis – and wider European spaces – is no less variegated.

I do this because, as I showed in Chapter Three, Courage’s views on his colonial upbringing radically changed over time. This occurred as he came into contact with Freudian psychiatry – especially his psychiatrist Dr Larkin’s assertions regarding Courage’s so-called ‘infantile trauma’. As I have already noted, most of Courage’s novels were produced during or after he had begun psychoanalysis. Even so, these literary excursions – stories that Courage says amounted to re-tellings of his own life story – show a much less rigid approach to articulations of his past. Indeed, they betray an evenhandedness that, while not wholly positive, reminds us of the potential incoherence of all personal story-tellings, regardless of their purported facility in ‘truthfulness’.

Invariably, the protagonist’s immediate domestic surrounds receive Courage’s greatest authorial approbation. These assertions are strongest in Courage’s Walter-focused narratives – works like ‘A Serious Story’ and The Young Have Secrets among them – but feature just as powerfully in others – 1948’s The Fifth Child included. Unlike the struggle evident between the protagonist’s father and maternal grandmother in The Promising Years, these narratives turn their sights to the marriage relationship as the central driver of personal and domestic
tension. Even so, Courage approaches the position of the mother in particular with considerable delicacy; even, at times using her perspectives as the chief narrative filter of some stories.

Certainly Florence Warner – the mother in *The Fifth Child* – is not the so-called ‘bad breast’ conjured up by Courage’s psychiatrist. A woman without the supposedly ‘instinctive’ qualities of maternal feeling, Mrs Warner is instead a vehicle for Courage’s views against gender conformity. Nearing her forty-seventh year, Mrs Warner retreats with her children to an unnamed Canterbury town; there she awaits the birth of her fifth child. Florence leaves behind a bitterly unfulfilled marriage (one which she eventually returns to out of duty), and a life of rural obscurity that, while comfortable, meant that she was never able to ‘contemplate’ a life beyond the one she already knew.\(^49\) Arriving at her new home, Mrs Warner realises she has spent the better part of twenty years ‘bearing children, nursing children, planning for children, suffering children’, and fearing to have more; a revelation that leaves Florence ‘cold’, ‘defeated’, and feeling distinctly ‘unarmed against a hostile future’.\(^50\)

Courage’s sympathy for the lot of colonial women, especially women who are mothers, embodies one of the central and abiding themes of much of his fiction. Courage’s compassion for women may have allowed for the tacit defence of other social marginals – homosexuals especially. On the other hand, Courage’s representations of domestic discord also reflects his belief that ‘infantile trauma’ could be wrought as much through neglect as any sudden shock or other external event.\(^51\) This disregard for the interests of the child is not borne out of any abject evil on the part of the parents. Rather, it manifests through the rigid gendered codes that each parent respectively inhabits. Such a manoeuvre is integral to Courage’s ongoing critique of the heteronormative (which I return to in the final section of this chapter).

These otherwise extenuating contexts place a careful emphasis on cause and effect in tracing the impact of environmental factors on the lives of the individual. In the world of *The Fifth Child*, both parents’ enclosure within a bounded system of gender relations is shown to have developmental consequences for all of the Warner offspring. Tensions that generate between Florence and Hubert, her husband, leave the domestic space in a state of constant
upset and turmoil (Courage uses the phrase ‘emotional tangles’). Faced with Florence’s admissions of marital unhappiness, Hubert Warner is paralysed by emphatically gendered inhibitions. He is a ‘man shut in a box’, Courage writes, able to see Florence only as a mother and a ‘helpmate’, but not a woman with needs of her own.

This is a world where the individual’s happiness is continually apprehended and inhibited by artificial and man-made structures. On an excursion to the local museum, for example, the two boys of the family, Roland and Alec, enter the space with considerable excitement. This is not, however, a storehouse of wonder, but an edifice of dour and ominous asceticism: ‘an austere granite building [...] bare to the winter sky’. Their initial enthusiasm (‘[t]his was happiness, this was the reason for existence’) is almost immediately extinguished. In each room the boys confront a series of disillusionments: a meteorite that is merely a ‘mass of craggy, ink-dark stone’; Greek statues (nudes) that are placed oddly and without explanation (‘they all seemed to be going for a bathe [sic] somewhere’); and ‘stuffed’ tropical birds with ‘dead black beaks’ and ‘even deader eyes’.

Here both boys are unsettled by some wider but poorly understood revelation regarding their social world. It is the oldest, Roland, who seems most cognisant of this building disquiet. Suddenly aware of the artificial and ominous workings that underpin the museum collection, Roland declares that the space is ‘no place for a living man’. Butterflies and birds, all ‘resplendent’ in life, are here ‘mere carcases [sic] beneath the glass, remote from their Amazonian jungle’. Replicating the systems of entrapment that occur elsewhere in colonial life, the museum – an ‘institution’ both literally and otherwise – is a reminder of society’s powerful and enmeshing normativity. Difference and non-conformity are here exotic and relieved of their animating properties. The boys are palpably disappointed by their experience, but not primarily out of frustrated leisure. ‘The alive should love the alive’, Roland reasons with passion: ‘no naturalist deal[s] only with the dead’.

Given that Courage’s lyrical connection to New Zealand’s natural landscape persisted well into his late fifties, it is perhaps not surprising that he accords much greater freedom to characters that inhabit spaces beyond the urban
environment. In *The Call Home*, Norman Grant returns to New Zealand after suffering the loss of his wife. As I wrote in Chapter Six, the novel was based on Courage’s trip to New Zealand in 1933 and salvaged aspects of his failed novel *Some Other Being*. Grant arrives in Canterbury from Britain under a pall of imminent mental and physical collapse. In New Zealand, Courage suggests that Grant is a remnant of his former ‘inward’ self: ‘a creature armoured’ by ‘reserve, hardly approachable, a soul locked within itself’.59

Norman is ultimately ‘rescued’ by the redeeming powers of romantic love.60 I unpack the hidden queer aspects of this below. For our present purposes, we see how spaces are shown to play a central part in most characters’ material wellbeing. Here the New Zealand landscape plays a critical role in helping to shape Norman’s restoration. This is a ‘confidence’ in life that the narrator suggests must be ‘carefully rebuilt’.61 Rather crucially, Courage suggests that Norman is very much the product of childhood neglect. Once again this is not the result of ‘malice’, but of repressed and long-lasting unhappiness in the parental relationship (the narrator suggests that Mrs Grant hasn’t ‘laughed easily’ for some time).62

Here we see how the domestic space – indeed, the domestic spaces of all immediate family members in *The Call Home* – are essentially unlivable. Having reached the supposed safety of the family home, for example, Norman collapses as if from the accumulated stresses of grief and past mental pressures:

> From the hall they [Norman and his sister Meg] went onto the porch. The heat met them abruptly, thrust forward from the wide greenish-yellow country between the homestead and the distant sea, a heat that seemed to clang from the blue enamel of the sky. To Norman the heat and the immediate encounter with the body, no longer obedient to a mind in confusion, refused him its primal balance; he felt for the concrete steps with his feet and, with darkness before his eyes, drooped blindly forward.63

Here the nourishing warmth of the sun is diverted; its rays absorbed and amplified by the narrow, interior features of the familial home. Rather symbolically, the force of this accumulated energy is not for Norman’s betterment. Instead it quite literally results in his ejection from the protected space of the domestic centre. In other extracts this space is described as the
‘origin of love’ – the ‘primal force’ from which all else flows – but one from which individuals cannot draw twice ‘with any certainty’. From the vantage point of the Grants’ homestead the natural landscape is devoid of all nurturing power. A parched and anemic waste (‘yellow’ and ‘enamel’), this space offers neither balm or shelter to the people who inhabit it.

There are moments in Courage’s fiction where the urban landscape offers specific liberating possibilities; in areas marked out as Bohemian, for example. For the most part, however, personal freedom is typically at its most expansive in the wildest hinterlands of New Zealand. Such a revelation is reflected in Courage’s own life narrative. In Chapter Three, and elsewhere, for example, I noted how the landscape remained open to Courage’s personal and queer appropriation; and we see this reflected in Courage’s literary explorations as well. In The Call Home, for example, Norman recovers considerable equilibrium from the region’s rugged coastline. These spaces are often far from idyllic; the beach near his sister’s home, for example, bears signs of tribal warfare and its own ‘murderous past’. Even so, here, finally, Norman locates a kind of peace in the ‘subtle’ and ‘almost mindless’ pleasure of enjoying the ‘drifting’ sand and shingle of the Pacific Ocean.

It would be wrong to presume that, because these spaces are removed from centres of population, personal liberty only ever arrives through isolation and solitude. Indeed, The Call Home and other stories posit significant danger in becoming too disconnected from the wider social world. Like other artists of Courage’s generation – Frank Sargeson among them – the social landscape is often peppered with individuals of a uniquely puritanical type and disposition. However, this is only one half of the picture in Courage’s writing: New Zealand is not solely a breeding ground for social conservatism and emotional repressions. Liberals and other Bohemian types in Courage’s fiction can be found in depictions of both New Zealand’s urban and provincial contexts. What is more, it is typically these figures who play indispensable parts in revitalising the lives of Courage’s often emotionally imperiled (and queer) protagonists.

Here, characters who might otherwise be described as ‘eccentric’ – or even queer, in the original sense of the word – exploit a curious ambivalence in New Zealand’s social system. On the one hand, and as I have already demonstrated,
colonial austerity helped to shape exacting forms of social conformity. For many – particularly those characters modeled on Courage’s parents – this orthodoxy is an inescapable part of life, normally associated with pervasive attitudes about gender and gendered behaviour. On the other hand, New Zealand remains a frontier society in these stories – if, in Courage’s purview at least, a British and genteel one. This is a ‘freer’ and ‘less stiff’ social order than the older and more hierarchical one established at the metropolitan centre, Courage suggests.70

For characters like Theresa Kendal in Desire Without Content (1950), lasting equilibrium is not encountered at Winterhaven – her home in the High Country – but at Melcombe, a seaside town that Courage sets somewhere on the South Island’s east coast. ‘Open to the Pacific’, Melcombe is possessed of great natural beauty. Equally, it also offers a source of social interaction that Courage suggests must always constitute one’s daily life. Here Mrs Kendal lives some ten years after the dramatic concluding events of the novel that sees her only son Lewis (a replica of Courage’s own uncle) interred at Seacliff Mental Asylum for murder.71 Freed of past anguish, Theresa immerses herself in a life of her own choosing that is ‘neither besieged or isolated’.72 Her ‘sole function’ is now ‘awaiting the disclosure’ of God’s ‘serene’ purpose.73 While this is not entirely realised in the frame of the novel, it is perhaps telling that, by the story’s end, Mrs Kendal has become Melcombe’s rather sibyllic arbiter of wisdom.74

Modeled on Courage’s own maternal grandmother, Mrs Kendal is one of several figures offered up as the antithesis of the New Zealand puritan. These figures invariably embody a humanist ethos, and are the synthesis of British and colonial values (usually a mix of European artistic expression and the practicality attributed to life in the colonies). Here again we see the pattern of Courage’s previous literary endeavours extending far into his later years. Characters like Mrs Kendal, and especially Mrs Grace in The Young Have Secrets, are very much the same maternal grandmother figure first encountered in The Promising Years. While these figures are not signalled as homosexual themselves, Courage’s resimulations of his maternal grandmother Ida Florence Peache (who we first encountered in Chapter One) act as a mouthpiece for colonial reform, and offer a humanistic approach to questions of tolerance and diversity.
Of all Courage's characters, it is those based on Courage's grandmother who display the greatest knowledge of, and sympathy for, the world. The 'law of the police', for example, is the law of 'the rabble', Mrs Kendal argues at one stage in *Desire Without Content*. These laws lack the essential ideals of 'charity' and compassion that underpin all questions of social justice and governance. According to Mrs Kendal, humanity is instead much more invested in notions of retribution and 'revenge'. Sitting in church one morning, Mrs Kendal concludes that 'all humanity' is alike before the 'immensity of the universe'. Kendal believes that that we are all of us 'a mass of unfortunate children' at the 'mercy of mundane passions' and 'terrors'. All 'humanity' is in fact alone, 'essentially wayward', and in constant need of 'faith'. Such a worldview calls into question the moral basis of both secular and religious laws. For Mrs Kendal, these systems lack an essential and selfless regard for others ('charity'). Society is instead subject to a volatility and vindictiveness ('revenge') that only works to deepen the isolation and unhappiness of all individuals.

**Psychology and feeling other**

We have already seen the close attention Courage paid to psychology in his creative writing. In considering issues of space, for example, Freudian ideas informed Courage's ideas about the domestic space and its impact on the development of fractured adult identities (as in *The Call Home*). Such analysis is fruitful because, while it demonstrates the way in which these social scripts – gender and sexuality especially – may have been understood by Courage in practice, they also suggest how he departed in some key respects from some of the official views of his Freudian psychiatrists. We have already witnessed these departures in Courage's resistance to Larkin's inference that his identity was purely the product of a deeper internal maladjustment. There are other interventions too. Courage's views of motherhood and childbearing are much more sympathetic than those usually proposed by practitioners of Freudian medicine, for example.

Psychology, however, is the appropriate starting place from which to move our analysis finally into questions of sexual identity. While Courage proved resistant to his psychiatrist's pathologising views on homosexuality, the same
cannot be said for Courage's use of psychiatry as a means for describing his wider psychological landscape. Furthermore, and as I have already hinted, psychology also offered Courage a valuable tool with which to explore queer subjectivities in his published work – in coded narratives about homosexuality especially.

These kinds of representations raise themselves in a number of Courage’s stories. They become particularly productive in Courage’s Walter-focused narratives, for example, where questions of self-knowledge and external ‘integration’ continually circumvent the protagonist’s own ability to perceive his sexual otherness – at least, in precise terms. In this, Courage co-opts the Jungian drive toward ‘wholeness’ (sometimes called ‘ultimacy’) but without, perhaps, its spiritual overtones. Walter is continually faced with archetypal symbols of his own identity – such as the castrated lambs in ‘A Serious Story’ – but he lacks the conceptual expertise to make the final leap to complete understanding. In this respect, ‘A Serious Story’ establishes a kind of narrative pattern from which Courage seldom deviates.

Fish are frequently imbued with a terrible psychological urgency in much of Courage’s writing, for example. Herrings ‘wink’ at Walter and his friend Jimmy on the slab of a fishmonger’s marble chopping block in The Young Have Secrets, and in later sequences, trout living in the creek of Walter’s grandparent’s farm are evoked alongside discussions of ‘human passion’. Rather suggestively, these are adult concerns that Walter’s grandfather holds are beyond Walter’s conceptualising power (he’s ‘not yet old enough to understand’). For his part, Walter is enthralled by the ‘mysterious lives’ of the trout that he finds in mountainside streams. In episodes that suggest queer sexual upheaval Walter is shown to be ‘completely happy’ in extinguishing their lives in typically unthinking adolescent fashion. Walter pierces their gills with ‘a sprig of broom’ and watches the ‘rainbow spots of their flanks’ as their life is left to ‘ebb’ in the heat of the spring sun.

Courage returns to the same episode several times in his fiction, and uses these occasions to elicit the trauma of a sometimes pain-filled queer subjectivity. Courage shows an even younger Walter fishing in ‘An Evening For Fish’, for example – this time as the companion of an (as always) overbearing and
emotionally austere colonial father. The scene is infused with Walter's desperate desire to please his father in performances of masculinity that inevitably fail. Rather symbolically, Walter falls into the creek just as his father – whilst uttering an ‘immense curse’ – impales a trout on the end of a rather primitive spear. The event has a frightening and archetypal significance for Walter, who afterward lies alongside the impaled creature: ‘Two minutes later, disentangling the gaff from his shirt, Walter lay alongside the convulsions of the trout. Through the hair over his eyes he saw, now and forever, what was certainly the most beautiful fish he had ever imagined’. Since Walter’s perspective is very deliberately a ‘naïve’ one, it is only in later narratives, where the boy becomes a man, that Courage is able to articulate the significance of childhood experience in hindsight. In The Call Home, for example, Norman realises the full Freudian horror of this earlier boyhood fishing expedition. Returning to a pool he remembered in childhood (again on his grandparents’ property), Norman seeks ‘a reversal of time’ or a ‘sanctuary’ from his own (now adult) maladjustments. Instead of the liberation the natural world seems to offer, however, the experience only leads Norman to the realisation of guilt and self-loathing. The trout he catches is at once his own phallic and, now inhibited, masculine vitality:

Norman took the small fish between his hands: he lifted it, feeling the terrible paroxysm of the small death continue against his own flesh, the taper of the cold, brilliantly freckled body of the fish folding limp in the air [...].

The ‘unthinking’ and perhaps masturbatory ‘pleasures’ of boyhood pastimes are now knowingly imbued with failure and impotency. This is the expression of something ‘dead’ and flawed, an object of valid self-directed misanthropy: ‘The past had withheld its aid [...] salvation would come only and evidently through the living’. In Chapter Four, we saw how ‘guilt’ was generated by Courage’s feelings about his body, as well as his own sense of masculine inadequacy. These were amplified by other factors, Courage’s professional identity as a writer among them. In Chapter Six and elsewhere I showed how Courage struggled to reconcile
masculine and national archetypes in the face of a seemingly instinctive propensity toward sensitivity and artistic expression. While I have signalled some of these same considerations in The Promising Years (particularly in the tensions event between gendered and artistic identity), these factors take on increasing prominence in Courage’s later writing, as he progressed through years of increasingly aggressive psychoanalytic intervention. Indeed, this interest in the psychological is very much the central focus of Courage’s final and rather haunting novel, The Visit to Penmorten.

Here Courage’s literary and private materials show a rather interesting correlation. This is articulated perhaps most clearly in Courage’s journal for 1960, which he entitled ‘The Diary of a Neurotic’ – reflecting his feeling that the volume contained nothing but the obsessive ramblings of a sociopath. The Visit to Penmorten and other later writings resonate in their articulation of abjection and a mental outlook that was emphatically Freudian. Here, Walter is an adult, but with only a partial awareness of self. In this, Courage shows Walter to be the manifestation of Freudian inhibition: a man in form, but not in mind. Much like the Walter of earlier stories, Walter Lythgo in The Visit to Penmorten is only ever aware of an ‘indefinable’ and ‘vague’ understanding of events and their significance.92 Retreating to Penmorten, a seaside town in Cornwall (probably based on St. Ives), Walter finds himself in the grips of mental collapse that is as much inhibition as it is regression (a retreat into the ‘void of himself’).93

The Visit to Penmorten is very much the remembered experience of Courage’s mental difficulties in the years after university; a situation which he only ever referred to indirectly in his journal and elsewhere.94 Rather significantly, Walter is not British, but an Australian who, like Courage, makes the long journey from the Antipodes to study at Oxford in the early part of the twentieth century.95 ‘Diffident’ and ‘inept in personal relationships’, Walter’s trajectory narrates many of the same experiences that, near the end of his life, Courage believed had played a significant role in determining his own adult experience.96 Walter is an outsider in England: a man of artistic (and neurotic) inclinations, a child who had been profoundly disturbed by a fractured and disordered home life. Walter’s mother leaves his father for another man, returning to the family home only to die from a mysterious illness when Walter was still young.97
These correlations make it tempting to map Courage’s own life narrative over the discursive frame of the novel. The story, however – a ‘Freudian fairytale’, as Courage himself admits – is not simply a recounting of his memories from youth. Following Walter’s professional and personal relationship with his psychiatrist, the Scotsman Dr. Budden, the story is, at least in part, the manifestation of Courage’s hope for successful realignment. By the story’s end, Walter and Budden successfully achieve transference, allowing Walter to ‘escape’ the trauma of his repressed childhood. This is a feat never achieved by Courage in his own time, however and, as I have already argued, this perceived failure in treatment only worsened Courage’s sense of helplessness.

*The Visit to Penmorton*, and other narratives of its kind, cannot be read in any straightforward fashion. Instead, these stories are useful for their insights into the experiential – and always pain-filled – qualities of abjection. In short, they explain, if in mediated forms, how Courage’s own sense of ‘otherness’ – sexual or otherwise – may have been manifested and understood in practice.

While Walter professes no sexual outlook in *The Visit to Penmorton* (his impending marriage cannot be taken as any fixed sign of orientation) the wider narrative continually engages questions of ‘guilt’ and suffering that might easily have been extracted from Courage’s own journal. Here Walter directly echoes one of the key refrains of Courage’s private narrative about mental wellbeing: ‘At twenty-four no man should remain a child, anxious, abandoned, profoundly guilty’. Walter’s guilt is ascribed to the remorse he feels over his father’s suicide. In dreams he relates shooting his father in the face: ‘I wanted to kill him [...] He’d taken something away from me’. But it is Walter’s articulation about writing as the impulse of the ‘neurotic’, and his assertions about the difficulties of social interaction that most connect to the disfigurations that Courage believed plagued his own life.

In Courage’s stories, neither writing nor contact with others can entirely cure the individual of his or her personal malaise. Like Courage’s private narration of mental (un)wellness, this is a ‘daylight desolation’ which continually sees the ‘withdrawal of warmth of present feeling’. Here, and in other of his published narratives from the period, Courage recounts the desperate toll of personal anxiety and the erosion of personal resources in the face of serious mental
disfigurement. In *The Visit to Penmorton* and other stories the possibility of suicide is omnipresent. These episodes are almost always generated by questions of childhood unhappiness (‘lack of love’), a poorly defined sense of guilt, and a deepening personal crisis that, like Courage’s own, only worsens as the individual is forced to retreat from the world:

From the trance of his unhappy mind he gazed out of the window and remembered the fox running low up the field, ten miles back [...]. The foxes have homes, he thought. And present to him at once was the room in London, his single nightmare of a room, where he would kill himself because he had been desperate for a long time. Now there was no hope or future that he could see.¹⁰⁵

**Queer critiques and Courage’s challenge to the heteronormative**

Queerness has been omnipresent in much of my discussion about Courage’s fiction so far. Whether set in New Zealand or England (few stories opt for a third locale), most of these narratives feature queer themes and characterisations as a matter of course. These representations are most explicit in *A Way of Love*, or in short stories like ‘Guest at the Wedding’ and ‘Scusi’ (though, as I suggest below, perhaps not as unproblematically as we might presume). But queer critiques are also available elsewhere, particularly in allegorical and less direct forms, such as in those favoured in *The Young Have Secrets* and Courage’s other, usually New Zealand-based, novels.

As I show throughout this thesis, Courage was not rendered passive by his supposedly marginal status as queer. In his capacity as a professional writer, at least, he was able to speak out to a certain degree against an array of structures he considered particularly disfiguring to sexual minorities – to respectable middle-class homosexuals especially.¹⁰⁶

We have seen already the central role that psychology played in much of Courage’s work. I have suggested that the primacy of psychiatry in Courage’s writing can be explained in part by the intensity of his psychiatric treatment from the late 1940s onwards. Equally, as we saw in the preceding sections, certain – usually Freudian – ideas played a pivotal role in conveying notions of abjection and the early traumas exerted upon individuals in childhood. This invariably reflected how Courage believed Freudian ideas functioned in practice.
In terms of vocabulary, tone, and emotional tenor, however, these ideas also projected Courage’s own psychological and cultural landscape.

We can return to this same material once more, not simply as an expression of Courage’s ever-negotiated understanding of the world, but as a particularly rich vein of critique against the heteronormative. These themes appear in both of Courage’s explicit and allegorical narratives of homosexuality.

I have already hinted at the productive aspects of Walter’s psychological naïveté in *The Young Have Secrets* (see Chapter Six). Walter’s only-partial understanding of his own sexual difference is given special poignancy by the implied recognition of at least two characters in the novel – one of whom, lighthouse keeper Mark Garnett, is signalled to be homosexual (though it is clear he is not sexually active). Despite the coded aspect of Courage’s novels, we know with some certainty that queer-oriented audiences were vigilant to these evasions, and read queerness into the frame of the text. While the incisiveness of Courage’s critique is perhaps dulled by these necessary and critical negotiations, the story is notable for its evocation of the exigencies of a puritan lifestyle. For adult homosexuals like Garnett and others, these conditions are always at the ‘expense of the spirit’ and a bodily repression that is both brutal and inhumane in quality.

Courage is able to engage questions of sexual identity, while at the same time escaping the potential public conflagration that emerged after the publication of *A Way of Love* in New Zealand in 1961. For example, Walter’s attraction for his friend Jimmy Nelson, a half-caste Maori boy, is at best only ever half-consciously understood. This is an impulse that capitalises on both the naïve aspects of the protagonist’s outlook, as well as the kind of ambivalences of male intimacy we noted earlier in our explorations of both *Private History* and my account of romantic friendship in Chapter Five. Rose, the most worldly of the Garnett sisters, is the first to note the intimate excesses of the boys’ relationship. Her views (‘Oh, only at your age ... the attachments of the heart’) are, at least by modern standards, frustratingly circumspect. ‘Faltering’ in the apparent intimate trajectory of her thinking, Rose merely states that ‘it’s all a drift, a dream without passion ... a thistledown’. Here the romantic ideal of finding a compatible romantic partner is mired (‘a drift’) in the cocooning entropy
(‘thistledown’) of daily life. This is an expression as much of Rose’s own situation in life (she finds herself in an unfulfilled marriage) as any hope borne for Walter’s future happiness.\footnote{111}

Naïve perspectives in Courage’s fiction would seem to be most productive in stories where the protagonist is a child, or, like Walter in *The Young Have Secrets*, an adolescent at the outside. Questions of homosexuality are almost always circumscribed in these stories; at other times they are co-opted implicitly into wider critiques of gender and social conformity. While these narratives are notable as examples of Courage’s rather sophisticated strategies of evasion, other, less covert, narratives of homosexuality show how psychological perspectives also provided discursive space for far more direct narratives about homosexuality in adult contexts. Moreover, Courage constructed these in such a way as to make editorial critiques of impropriety difficult.

This is quite different from characters like Bruce Quantock in *A Way of Love*, who profess self-identifying homosexual identities. I suggest below how these ‘knowingly’ homosexual characters are necessarily framed by innate middle-class sensibilities in Courage’s fiction. This necessity is obviated, however, where homosexual characters – adults in every sense of the word – display explicitly homosexual tendencies without the requisite leap to understanding.

Like Francis Wood (also called ‘the Commander’) in Courage’s 1954 short story ‘Scusi,’ these homosexual characters usually possess mental impediments – some manifestation of Freudian repression – that makes self-recognition impossible. Living in a ‘fine little Regency house’ in Brighton, England, Francis is a widower who lives alone except for an Italian manservant, Giovanni – a former German P.O.W. who dreams of one day driving his own produce lorry, but who, for the moment, (and rather conveniently) is impeded by an only rudimentary grasp of the English language.\footnote{112}

Courage is careful to stress that the Commander has ‘always preferred his bachelor ease’ to the hedonisms of the outside of the world.\footnote{113} Francis considers himself to be ‘not particularly lonely’ at the outset of the story, and describes a life that is essentially ‘celibate’ in character.\footnote{114} While Francis has no cognisance of the crisis that looms (he develops a kind of animalistic longing for Giovanni), the reader is provided with a multitude of cues regarding Francis’s repressed
homosexuality.\textsuperscript{115} He inhabits, for example, a domestic space that is suggestively refined and feminine – where ‘long net curtains’ ripple, and ornate ‘petals’ fall onto an ‘elegant table in a beautiful room’.\textsuperscript{116} While this is a site of refined gentlemanly pleasures – the Commander ‘occupies his time’ with ‘golf, bridge, the theatre, books and race-meetings’, for instance – the Commander’s home is fundamentally inured to a ‘male cleanliness’ and repression that is imported from his years in the British navy.\textsuperscript{117}

Within the confines of a house described as having the twisted ‘insides’ of a ‘submarine’, Wood is finally brought into jarring contact with his repressed queer desires:

Francis drew back. The gesture [Giovanni kisses him out of sympathy after a violent fall] had touched so deep a nerve of horror and shock in him that the blow with which he answered the Italian was beyond his will, automatic. It went off like an explosion. He hit the man hard in the chest, feeling all the pain in his back rush upward in a steel tension [...]. Now it was only his mind that hurt him. [...] His mind hurt very much.\textsuperscript{118}

Courage’s use of machine imagery (‘automatic’, ‘steel tension’) is a strong critique of the social systems under which men are forced to repress their inner desires. Courage is careful to enumerate the personal cost of sexual repression, and this a ‘pain’ that is once both physical and psychic. ‘Scusi’ is a carefully constructed narrative designed to elicit sympathy in what must have been a primarily heterosexual audience (since it was published in \textit{Landfall}, and then the New York-based periodical \textit{Gentry}). And correspondence with Charles Brasch and other readers suggests that Courage was largely successful in this enterprise (we remember, for example, Brasch’s praise for the ‘delicacy’ of ‘Scusi’ in Chapter Six).\textsuperscript{119}

In ‘Scusi’ and other stories of this type, the homosexual protagonist is brought to the gradual realisation of his repressed inner nature, but never allowed to consummate his sexual desire for another man. Here Courage is able to avoid the impugning nature of graphic depictions of homosexuality. Such representations, in Courage’s view at least, would have eroded the all-too-easily exhausted sympathies of his audience. Reflecting the exigencies of repression, and an
instinct found to be at the least uncontrollable (as the extract above suggests),
characters like the Commander are found to be otherwise blameless. Indeed,
these men are victims of a set of social conditions that impair their psychological
well-being, much to the detriment of all involved.

The availability of psychologically sympathetic models of homosexuality
meant that even Courage’s less explicit texts, 1952’s *Fires in the Distance*, for
example, contain some overt depictions of queerness. *Fires in the Distance*
follows Paul Warner – a Courage-like figure – and his romantic entanglements
with both Leo and Katherine Donovan (probably based on Anama-based Ronnie
and Rosamond Peter, to whom the novel is dedicated). Like Francis Wood in
‘Scusi’, Leo and Paul (who is of a distinctly artistic inclination and about to leave
New Zealand for university life in Oxford) are drawn to each other by a sexual
magnetism that is poorly understood but nevertheless impossible to resist. Such a dynamic is not simply integral for the novel’s romantic interplay, but
rather provides the means through which fairly overt depictions of homosexuality – and the traumatic impositions of the heteronormative – become
possible.

Leo’s confinement to the environs of the Canterbury countryside (the
Donovans are of indifferent economic means) is used to explain his lack of self
awareness. The claustrophobic sense of inhibition these conditions generate
explain the ‘awful strain’ that Leo suggests becomes a continual pattern of pain
and abjection: a psychology where ‘everything’ vital-giving – including love –
ievitably turns ‘inside’ and ‘back in on itself’. Leo’s fumbling (and ultimately
futile) attempt to seduce Paul results in a violent and homoerotic struggle
between the two men. It is only at this moment of sadistic and animal longing –
the ascendancy of his psychological struggle – that Leo is finally cognisant of his
own ‘perverse’ leanings. Far from ‘liberating’, Leo’s realisation is at once one of
trauma and internalised self-loathing: ‘It did not cease until Leo gasped and lay
still, as if fainting, as if dead, his face twisted back on his bare neck, his mouth
shuddering open to the moonlight’.

Characters like Francis Wood and Leo Donovan usefully embody the
horrifying exigencies of repression. Their tragic trajectories are vehicles for
exploiting heterosexual sympathies, and they are not meant to yield lasting and
romantic resolution (though, by the story’s end both men are now brought into final and critical self understanding).

These character types are useful only up to a point. As I have suggested, Courage invested characters like Francis and Leo with only limited agency in enacting their affective desires; to do more than this would be to risk the fragile sensitivities of the intended readership. The use of female signal characters – one of Courage’s key tools in cultural negotiation – offers a much more productive means through which more intimate encounters could be pursued more rigorously in Courage’s implicitly queer narratives.

Effie Shelbeck is offered up as the female romantic lead in Desire Without Content. A figure of purity and faith, she attracts the attentions of Mrs Kendal’s mentally afflicted son, Lewis. Effie’s mask for a homosexual man is confirmed by Courage in letters to Charles Brasch (see Chapter Six). This subterfuge is signalled to Courage’s readership by her adornment with a ‘white hyacinth’ – a plant that Courage and others of his class and generation would have connected to Hyacinthus and his lover, the Olympian god Apollo.124 Here the hyacinth plant is charged with sacrificial force – the brutalised ‘spears’ are mixed by Mrs Kendal’s sexually deranged son, Lewis, in the ‘red embers’ of his mother’s hearth.125 This is an expression, perhaps, of Lewis’s own self-annihilating tendencies, but also the threat that his unbridled passions represent to Effie’s prim sexual propriety. Lewis is invariably described in animalistic terms – the embodiment, perhaps, of an unrestrained – and therefore dangerous – desire for carnality.126

While Lewis and Effie’s romance is doomed (Lewis drowns their child in a fit of paranoiac rage in one of Winterhaven’s streams) the romantic trajectories of Louise Morton in The Call Home – another of Courage’s female signal characters – show that Courage’s queer romantic liaisons were not always designed to be unhappy or tragic.127 Louise is very much the incarnation of liberating homosexual love; a pure attraction that is at once chaste and morally sanctioned: ‘You and Louise have remade one another. Go ahead, the two of you; marry, unite, propagate’.128 Here romantic love reflects many of the ennobling aspects that I noted Courage saw as laudable in the most ideal homosexual liaisons.129 Within the frame of the novel, romantic love between inverts is a companionate
as well as a passionate construction; something which bespeaks respectability in
the redeeming powers of personal connection for those who in might otherwise
be helpless and alone. 130

In this capacity at least, 1959’s A Way of Love cannot be said to be a significant
departure from Courage’s coded narratives of queerness. Here respectability
underpins the most praiseworthy of the novel’s homosexual relationships –
Bruce’s liaison with Philip especially – and social and affective ties are shown to
function beyond mere questions of simple physical gratification. Still, several
intimate episodes in the novel show that Courage did not entirely yield to
editorial demands to remove all reference to sexual intimacy. One scene, for
example, refers to Bruce as ‘no stranger in the land of Sodom’ – an expression of
a fairly robust sexual life. 131 Other episodes are much more suggestive, if
markedly restrained by today’s standards: ‘I tilted up his face. [Philip’s] mouth
tasted of darkness and fresh water and the rind of some healthy fruit not yet
ripened by the sun’. 132

Even so, Courage engages the social scripts surrounding respectability to
slightly different ends in A Way of Love. Replicating the pattern established in
1938’s Private History, respectability forms an important – and essential –
personal quality that Courage uses to absolve the repugnance that might
otherwise be generated by Bruce’s ultimately failed ‘history’ of romantic
attachment. 133 Bruce is of respectable farming stock with a jaw ‘inherited from a
yeoman father’ and a backbone as ‘hard as a plough-handle’. 134 Other
conventional tropes of respectability pepper the narrative. Bruce was raised
never to talk ‘gratuitously’ of himself, and continually underscores the
individual’s right to privacy (‘we are all separate beings’). 135 Moreover, Bruce’s
love for Philip is not simply carnal in nature, but borne of some deeper (and
human) longing for companionship and comfort: ‘picking up a body for the night
at some queer bar or other is altogether too precarious – to say nothing of the
ashes in the mouth’. 136

With these qualities in place, however, Courage is given surprising leniency in
systematically attacking many of the structural exigencies that remain mostly
tact in much of his early writing. In this, A Way of Love cannot be seen as an early
prototype of the liberationist excursions that emerge in gay contexts in the years
after Stonewall (and, indeed, Courage’s own death). Instead Bruce is shown to have the same longings as many otherwise respectable middle-class men and women might have. Here ‘the homosexual’, cannot be said to be a threat to the nuclear family, or even the heteronormative. Indeed, Bruce hungers for the domestic stability and ‘normality of living’ that he believes marriage supplies to others’ lives – his sister’s in particular.137

Deepening our sympathies, Bruce inhabits – and resists – a feeling of abjection said to be ‘common’ amongst men of his ‘kind’.138 Social critics who view homosexuality as criminal or unnatural – both sentiments which Courage takes pains to disprove in his novel – generate despondency in Bruce (‘all the doubts and regrets of my kind’) that few individuals of a ‘normal’ sexual disposition could appreciate.139 Bruce explains, however, that he is ‘no more despicable than other men and certainly no creature of depravity’.140 While Bruce briefly considers marriage to a female friend (later revealed to be lesbian), he asserts that in his ‘soul’ he was ‘alone’ and that, in pursing his relationship with Philip, he sought ‘not to be alone’ again.141

Far from the ruthless hedonism assumed in much homophobic diatribe of his day, Courage offers a picture of queer mutuality that is affirming even at the point of its imminent collapse:

In my vigil I sat listening to the empty house and to the beat of my own pulse in my ears. I had time for thought, for reflection. I told myself that I had no reason to regret the years Philip spent with me; I found nothing alien to me, nothing bitter, in our association. Philip, coming late, had given me a kind of bonus in life, not to be belittled and not easily to be renounced.142

Queerness is not ‘alien’ but something familiar and entirely unthreatening in its critical significance for men like Bruce. In this regard, A Way of Love is exceptional not merely for its depictions of male intimacy, but also for the place it occupies in the oeuvre of Courage’s own work. Unlike several of Courage’s earlier novels, A Way of Love presents an overwhelmingly positive picture of male homosexuality. While abjection continues to plague the formation of queer subjectivities – Bruce and other men are continually plagued by a deep-seated sense of loneliness, for example – these feelings are always countered by the
special vitalities of same-sex intimacy, and queer sociability more generally. Along with 1938’s *Private History, A Way of Love* is a bold and forthright strike against the heteronormative. Not merely a critique of the exigencies that continually plague queer figures – such as in *Fires in the Distance*, or ‘Scusi’ – these narratives are celebrations of those pre-liberation ambivalences that Courage himself found both within and outside the metropolis with ‘men of [his] kind’.143

**Conclusion**
Starting with James Courage’s earliest available manuscripts, we can see at once the degree of urgency and exertion that this author showed in creating artistic worlds that spoke most to his own very specific personal and sexual subjectivity.

Far from ancillary to the main thrust of this thesis (biographical and generally historical in direction), these narratives deserve careful reflection and analysis. Indeed, they are an historically rich vein of materials in their own right. To borrow the words of one unnamed character, a soldier and invert in Courage’s 1947 story ‘In the Shadow of Ice and Pines’, these stories are ‘a necessity – if one is to understand oneself and other human beings’.144 They add an important dimension to Courage’s own experience of the world. This is a dimension that, while not always happy (many stories reflect a range of abject experiences, for example) nevertheless comprise part of the full continuum of human contingencies – both ‘good’ and ‘bad’ – that were open to those men and women who lived in the years before liberation.

In the previous chapter, I took pains to describe the sometimes difficult struggle of Courage’s life as an artist. Courage fought not only with editorial constraints that made any depictions of male homosexuality difficult, but also with his own very particular social outlook which tended to look on writing as an inappropriate pastime for a man of Courage’s class and national identity.145 In this sense, one cannot claim that Courage’s experience as a writer was always ‘liberating’. Nor did Courage have an entirely free rein in determining the range and scope of his literary representations.

Despite this, Courage’s creative narratives, most of them published, show remarkable consistency in both shape and character. While Courage’s writing
was continually influenced by both physical and textual interactions (his reading of Proust, for example) my analysis of his earliest creative sojourns indicates a continual focus on issues of national and sexual identity. Such an impulse was not conceived solely in the years after Courage’s graduation from Oxford. Works like Margaret’s Platonic Marriage – an early example of Courage’s interest in inversion and sexual identity – show Courage’s interest in these issues early in life.

These stories show the careful rehearsal of plot and theme that become important in most of Courage’s later literary efforts, for example. Indeed, we can see that The Promising Years and Private History are prototypes of Courage’s later, and more successful literary output – manifestations of both coded (The Promising Years) and explicit (Private History) accounts of sexual otherness.

This analysis deepens, and sometimes even problematises, the conclusions we might otherwise draw from reading Courage’s personal archive in isolation. We can see, for example, that Courage’s sense of space was not wholly eradicated by the powerful revising force of Freudian psychoanalysis. Courage’s New Zealand and colonial narratives display a range of interesting ambivalences and assertive claims, none of which ultimately cast his remembered home as entirely puritanical. Courage’s personal narrative largely represented his New Zealand as a zone of unmitigated repression (‘the New Zealand superego’). In his novels and plays, Courage’s views are much less certain. They show an evenhandedness much more reminiscent of his view of New Zealand in the years before his mental collapse in 1950.

These conflicting assertions cannot be read definitively one way or another – indeed, it is the very incoherence of these stories (both personal and literary) that perhaps makes them most valuable. These tensions of meaning alert us to the complications of one man’s sense-making. They also pose useful reminders as to the multiplicity of meaning that should arise in all historical assessments of the past.

Courage’s literary narratives betray a remarkable idiosyncrasy – even elasticity. This is particularly so in his engagement with discourses surrounding psychology. In evoking domestic spaces, for example, Courage shows considerable sensitivity in his accounts of infantile trauma. These sequences
stress the dangers of neglect as the culprit of childhood disfigurement; and these assertions are continually framed by a sometimes oppressive and gendered landscape that renders the parents as much victims of internalised disfigurement as the child themselves.

Psychological scripts manifest more fully in the evocation of the often abject experience of adult homosexuality. These scripts are further evident in the so-called naïve perspectives of children; figures who show a propensity toward the non-normative that others might note (Mark and Rose Garnett in *The Young Have Secrets*, for example), but ultimately lack the ability to recognise in their own range of self-conception.

Here Courage’s knowledge of psychiatry is put to remarkable good effect once again. Courage uses this knowledge to construct convincing psychological landscapes that others – especially other queer subjects – might recognise and empathise with. At the same time, other ‘psychological realities’, especially those of repression and integration, supply one of his most powerful strategies of negotiation. These occur in both explicit and coded narratives (like *Fires in the Distance*) and, along with signal characters that are used to mask male queerness, provided Courage with the means for mounting a critique of the coercive and oppressive systems that he believed most afflicted men of his own outlook and disposition.

Courage displays an undeniable sense of his own agency. Fiction acted as a vehicle for exploring his own sense of subjectivity; a space sometimes of fact, sometimes of fantasy – where his life narrative was continually drawn and re-drawn at different historical moments. At the same time, fiction quite clearly enabled men like Courage to publicly denounce their oppression in a language and terminology that predates gay liberation by some years. Far from passive or culturally marginalised, my analysis shows that Courage was at once connected to and critical of his own personal and social situations.
Notes

1 Walter is never quite the same. In The Young Have Secrets Walter carries the surname Blakiston; in The Visit to Penmorton it is Lythgo. In most stories Walter appears as a youth. Some later stories – especially The Visit to Penmorton, and the 1957 short story 'Flowers on the Table' – show Walter in maturity (his twenties and late-middle-age respectively). See James Courage, 'Flowers on the Table', in Such Separate Creatures: Stories, 1947 (Christchurch: Caxton, 1973), pp. 179-88; The Young Have Secrets (London: Jonathan Cape, 1954); The Visit to Penmorton (London: Jonathan Cape, 1961).

2 'A Serious Story' remained unpublished until it was selected by Charles Brasch for inclusion in Courage's posthumously-published short story anthology Such Separate Creatures. Brasch does not indicate when Courage wrote 'A Serious Story', but notes in his preface to Such Separate Creatures that it had been turned down for publication by the American monthly Tomorrow, which had previously published Courage's 'In The Shadow of Ice and Pines'. This would place the story as having been written sometime after 1947, probably in the middle part of 1952. See Charles Brasch, 'Preface', in Such Separate Creatures: Stories (Christchurch: Caxton Press, 1973), p. 11.


4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Walter's father enacts the Freudian process by which individuals are robbed of their sexual selfhood. This is a kind of sexual gatekeeping that is described through Walter's compromised child's perspective as 'wild, 'brutal' and, ultimately, 'secret' – a damaging encounter that is exaggerated by the story's setting in the normative masculine and ritualised routines of the family's sheep farm. See Courage, 'A Serious Story', p. 30.


8 Courage, Journal, 1931-1932, 20 February 1932, MS-0999/082, HC.


14 Ibid.

15 Courage, *The Promising Years*, p. 64.


19 Ibid.


22 Author unknown, undated *Tatler* review, MS-0999/125, HC, n.p. Courage received one such letter from a reader in 1954. She addressed Courage as ‘Madam’ and, having just read *The Young Have Secrets*, declared that she had sensed Courage’s subterfuge practically immediately: ‘Actually, I never pick out a novel by a woman author at random, for I know how “sickly feminine” such writing can be, and I think it is abominable for a woman to write under a masculine name. I have no shadow of a doubt that you are a woman, for no man would demean himself by writing such utter twaddle. I just stripped a lot of it, especially page after page of futile dialogue, and I am surprised that any Publishers [sic] can expect people to read such trash. I am of course indignant at having been deceived by the name “James”. Hence this letter’. See J. H. Cross to James Courage, 18 February 1954, MS-0999/104, HC.

23 James Courage, *One House* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1933), pp, 8, 27. It is possible that Courage discovered these connections in circulating notions of sexual identity at the time, particularly those he encountered in his reading. Edward Carpenter, for example, argued in 1911 that there was a clear ‘connection’ between the ‘homosexual temperament’ and ‘unusual psychic powers’. Carpenter argued that ‘primitive religions of the earth’ had maintained
rituals that were 'largely sexual, and even homosexual' in nature, and that this, in part, explained why homosexuality was regarded by 'later religionists' – Christians especially – as a social threat. See Carpenter, 'On the Connexion Between Homosexuality and Divination, and the Importance of Intermediate Sexes Generally in Early Civilisations', *Revue D’Ethnographie et Sociologie* (1911), p. 229.

24 Courage, *One House*, p. 35.

25 Courage, *One House*, p. 27.

26 Ibid.

27 Courage, *One House*, p. 64.

28 Ibid.


30 Ibid.


33 Ibid.


35 James Courage, *Private History*, unpublished typescript, 1938, HC, p. 88. In doing so, *Private History* functions in much the same way as Courage's later novel, the explicitly homosexual *A Way of Love*. See my analysis on *A Way of Love* in the context of class and respectability in the final section of this chapter.


37 Courage, *Private History*, pp. 81, 84.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid.
42 Ibid.
44 These scenes may have been based on Courage’s relationship with the English painter Christopher Wood. Wood and Courage were lovers during latter’s time at Oxford. See my discussion of this relationship in Chapter Three of this thesis.
45 Ibid.
46 Ibid.
47 James Courage to Charles Brasch, 5 November 1958, MS-0996-003/042, HC.
48 Claudia Breger, for example, argues that incoherence is not the result of ‘retrospective deconstructive examination’ by the historian but should be acknowledged as an ‘integral, constitutive part’ of all modern narratives of sexual identity. See Breger, ‘Feminine Masculinities: Scientific and Literary Representations of “Female Inversion” at Turn of Twentieth Century’, *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 14, 1/2 (2005), p. 90.
50 Ibid.
51 Ibid.
52 Ibid.
54 Ibid.
55 Ibid.
56 Ibid.
57 Ibid.
58 Ibid.


61 Ibid.


64 Courage, *The Call Home*, p. 56.


66 Norman's brother-in-law David explains that greenstone axe-heads can still be found in the surrounding area. See Courage, *The Call Home*, p. 92.


68 This is reflected in the experience of Peter Fitzgerald in *The Call Home*. Fitzgerald has remained in rural isolation in a 'draughty shack of unpainted timber'. A man Norman was intimately involved with at school ('an adolescent episode') Courage implies that Fitzgerald's retreat is in part due to his homosexuality. He remains very much a 'retarded schoolboy' in a space that is notably devoid of all nurturing power. Fitzgerald occupies a farm house wedged between 'rank, yellowing nasturtiums' and 'uncut grass'. See Courage, *The Call Home*, pp. 99, 100-2.


71 Courage, *Journal*, 1941-1946, 5 April 1945, MS-0999/086, HC.


74 Mrs Kendal provides a detailed picture of her place in the community in letters she writes regularly to Lewis. There she explains she pointedly makes a trip to the shops twice weekly. There she derives social contact and offers advice to
those she meets in the town: ‘The grocer informs me that his wife wakes him at night to insist on telling him her dreams, and the man who sells me tomatoes hates the barking of a neighbour’s dog. Dreams and dogs are part of God’s scheme for us all, as we come to understand. An acceptance of both is ordained for us from birth. My grocer and my tomato-man, however, think otherwise. They kick most decidedly against the pricks. For my part, I tell them they must listen to the sea, the voice of eternal reconciliation of opposites. But good and evil, right and wrong, wives and dogs, continue to torment their excellent souls’. See Courage, *Desire Without Content*, pp. 203-4.

75 *Courage, Desire Without Content*, p. 183.

76 *Courage, Desire Without Content*, p. 179.

77 *Courage, Desire Without Content*, pp. 89-90.

78 Ibid.

79 Ibid.

80 *Courage, Desire Without Content*, p. 179.

81 Carl Jung reasoned that human beings were ‘by nature’ religious and that the existence of God had an at least ‘psychic reality’ in the life of the individual. For a more thorough explanation of Jung’s engagement with religious ideas see Michael F. Palmer, *Freud and Jung on Religion* (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 182.


84 Ibid.

85 Ibid. The fish in *The Young Have Secrets* are at home in their gully-side waterholes. Taken from these hidden and protective spaces, however, they are ‘jerking’ and ‘frantic’ in the unforgiving conditions of life on the land. The plight of the trout is very much reflected in Walter’s grandmother’s assessment of Walter Arnold’s iconographic poem ‘The Forsaken Merman’, which all three (Walter and his grandparents) discuss immediately before Walter’s solitary fishing expedition. For his grandmother the poem speaks of the tragic poignancy of an artistically (and therefore queer) love of life: ‘That poor Merman – crazed

86 His father, for example, suggests Walter will ‘never make a proper man’ if he shivers from the cold. He also holds that Walter is much more like his mother than himself: ‘You rely on feelings, emotions. It’s a woman’s failing’. See James Courage, ‘An Evening For Fish’, in *Such Separate Creatures: Stories*, 1955 (Christchurch: Caxton, 1973), pp. 161, 164.

87 Courage, ‘An Evening For Fish’, p. 166.

88 Ibid.

89 *Courage, The Call Home*, p. 69.

90 Ibid.

91 Ibid.

92 Courage, *The Visit to Penmorten*, p. 33.

93 Courage, *The Visit to Penmorten*, p. 20.

94 In Chapter One, for example, I mentioned Courage’s memory of having ‘slunked off’ to Cornwall, ‘passively’ intent on writing in the months after his graduation. See Courage, Journal, 1960-1961, 29 August 1960, MS-0999/089, HC.


96 Courage, *The Visit to Penmorten*, p. 25.

97 Courage, *The Visit to Penmorten*, pp. 15, 65, 175.

98 James Courage to Charles Brasch, 23 May 1961, MS-0996-003/042, HC.


100 The story is also openly antagonistic towards some psychiatric approaches to subjectivity, making any liberating claim about Walter’s predicament at once provisional at best. Indeed, explicitly homosexual characters in the novel continually critique lapses in Dr. Budden’s own critical expertise that view homosexuality as the symptom of wider mental instability. One homosexual character – Morgan – claims that Budden is himself a neurotic, and that psychiatry amounts to mere ‘blood-sucking’. See Courage, *The Visit to Penmorten*, p. 172.


102 Courage, *The Visit to Penmorten*, p. 87.
Here the man’s situation is given special poignancy since his situation is said to be worse than that of a hunted animal. Moreover, given that foxes are hunted for sport, the scene further underscores this poignancy by suggesting the purposelessness of the narrator’s constantly embattled – and tormented – state. While the fox is accorded some freedom and security (it can run, and the fox has a den), the protagonist determines that his own situation is far more stifling. Here the parameters of social space – London, and the ‘single nightmare’ of the man’s room – implicate society as at least partly responsible for his psychological predicament. See James Courage, ‘Before’, in Such Separate Creatures: Stories, undated (Christchurch: Caxton, 1973), p. 190.

As I showed in the previous chapter, editorial restraints and cultural discourses – especially those surrounding propriety – made this process a sometimes difficult one. However, Courage’s prolific publication record from the late 1940s shows that he was wholly successful in exploiting a range of stratagems of negotiation and evasion. Far from inconsequential in the wider schema of Courage’s life and outlook, these manoeuvres opened up a surprisingly large discursive field for discussions about queer subjectivities. I suggest that this allowed Courage to participate in an ever-widening debate on sexuality and the place of the homosexual in society.

Mark Garnett lives an ascetic life, residing alone in a lighthouse some distance from civilisation. Mark does not speak candidly about his sexual preferences. His comments to Walter about the inner torment caused by sex, however, – the reason he gives for his retreat from society – are compellingly gender-neutral and strikingly similar to those Courage makes in his journal: ‘[Man] will rush to the lust that’s in him and that other body he can’t get out of his mind. If he’s religious, so much more damnable for himself and everyone concerned – so much more the expense of his spirit. And all because man is born incomplete in his own image – he craves something outside his own image’. Interestingly, Mark pulls back from a more explicit confession at the last moment: ‘Run in before I betray my soul’. See Courage, The Young Have Secrets, pp. 82, 222-3.
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109 Courage, *The Young Have Secrets*, p. 82.
110 Ibid.
111 Ibid.
113 Courage, ‘Scusi’, p. 139.
114 Ibid.
115 These homoerotic tensions continually escalate in the course of the narrative. This is particularly so where both men are brought into intimate contact with one another. This arises in one scene where, as the man’s employer, the Commander is impelled by propriety to ask Giovanni whether he is happy in his work: ‘The Commander felt him standing there: the man’s breathing and vulnerable flesh, in this fastidious upper room of his house, was a liability he could not meet. He must make some move to extricate himself’. See Courage, ‘Scusi’, p. 150.
117 Courage, ‘Scusi’, p. 139.
119 Charles Brasch to James Courage, 6 September 1953, MS-0996-003/042, HC.
120 Rather tantalisingly, Courage also dedicated the novel to his close friends, his Hampstead neighbours, the writers and sisters Lettice and Barbara Cooper. Presumably referring to those aspects of his life he drew from for inspiration for the story, Courage singles out the Coopers as being uniquely aware of the novel’s significance: ‘who know all about it’. See James Courage, *Fires in the Distance* (London: Constable, 1952), Dedication.
121 Courage, *Fires in the Distance*, pp. 25, 31.
125 Courage, *Desire Without Content*, pp. 58-9
126 Courage, *Desire Without Content*, pp. 58-9, 204.
This sometimes takes remarkably surprising forms, like Elizabeth Jessop’s (pointed out to be lesbian in all but name) forthcoming marriage to Philip. He is a socialist, homosexual, and many years her junior: ‘I shall at least make an admirable substitute for the teachings of Karl Marx. The boy should be pleased, bless his heart. [...] He’s dying of T.B., Norman, but I shall try to make him happy for a year or so. He can sleep on that open veranda out there. We neither of us want children’. See Courage, *The Call Home*, pp. 229-30.


Courage, *A Way of Love*, p. 39. Indeed, reflecting on friends Martin and Wallace, is clear that Bruce longs for a kind of respectable domesticity that infuses heteronormative and middle-class homosexual standards of propriety: ‘I had known these two long enough to excuse their badinage, aware that it concealed a genuine mutual affection – more, a genuine love. They lived in fact very much as though they had taken over the obligations of marriage (and let it be enough if I add that Martin played the part of the wife of the establishment with fidelity and not without pride). Of the many similar unions or alliances I had known, or in which I had been one of the partners, theirs was the most stable or at any rate at least unstable: it had lasted for eight years and might endure for many more. Wallace’s emotions had become settled and were permanently directed on the younger man, while Martin, certain of security, refused in turn the adventures his youth and attractive looks laid him open to’. See Courage, *A Way of Love*, pp. 38-9.


Ibid.

Ibid.
140 Ibid.
141 Ibid.
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Friends were quick to mark James Courage's passing when he died in London in 1963. Courage had found both popular and critical acclaim in Britain and elsewhere. This was an accomplishment few others of his generation had matched. Still fewer, perhaps only Frank Sargeson, and the novelist G. B. Lancaster, could claim to have the attained even a modicum of his success internationally.¹ Courage’s friends implied, however, that this success – eight novels in three decades – was bought at great cost. Courage had died just two years after his homosexual novel A Way of Love was withdrawn from circulation. Courage’s friends suggested he had died in exile: without friends, without even a place in the world. As friend and fellow writer, Phillip Wilson stated, Courage had ‘died as he had lived, in exile and alone’².

With the exception of a lengthy memorial in Landfall, a periodical which remained staunchly supportive of one of its more prominent and long-time contributors, Courage very quickly slipped from New Zealand's national imaginary. Indeed, with the censorship of A Way of Love in 1961, a curious and rather implacable reversal of fortune was set in motion. By connecting Courage to ‘indecent’ – even ‘pornographic’ – literature (as some had called A Way of Love), his detractors brought his professional and personal integrity into disrepute. Christ’s College in Christchurch, where Courage had been schooled as a teenager, quietly distanced itself from its former pupil.³ And all of Courage’s novels – not just A Way of Love – were withdrawn from circulation in some of New Zealand’s public libraries.⁴

Only some years later, in the context of gay liberation, did Courage’s work – and indeed his own life story – return to prominence.⁵ Courage took centre stage in activists’ attempts to ‘recuperate’ a queer national imaginary that many felt had been actively suppressed by New Zealand’s inexorable pattern of homophobia and gender conformity. For instance, writing ten years after New Zealand’s homosexual law reform, Peter Wells suggested that gay men and lesbians were still actively kept from their homosexual heritage. Wells and poet Rex Pilgrim sought to include Courage in Best Mates, New Zealand's first anthology of gay fiction. But their enthusiasm was met with disappointment when Patricia Fanshawe, Courage’s sister and literary executor, would not allow

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them to use his stories. Courage’s writings are the forced ‘numbness of absences’
that Wells refers to in his critical introduction; a wanting that was doubly-felt
since, as Wells argues, Courage’s stories were the first to break the bleakness and
silence instilled by New Zealand’s homophobia.6

Wells’s introduction represents the critical highpoint of liberationist
narratives about Courage. Here Courage’s story becomes a kind of cultural
shorthand, representing in fairly stark terms the homophobia and oppression
assumed to have formed the reality of ‘preliberation’ life in New Zealand. Indeed,
New Zealand, Wells suggests, remained ‘frighteningly provincial’ during
Courage’s lifetime.7 Wells writes that A Way of Love was a ‘rather beautiful fish’
that glittered ‘for a moment in the sunlight’ before ‘submerging again’ into the
‘murky depths’ of New Zealand’s endemic puritanism.8 For contemporary
writers like Wells, it followed that gatekeepers like Fanshawe were critical in
maintaining this repressive regime well into the present. Fanshawe and others
ensured that – even in death – men like Courage remained oppressed. Courage
was ‘nurtured into a deeper silence’, Wells writes.9 This was a willful repression
that contemporary gays and lesbians would no longer tolerate.10

Many similar treatments can be found in other activist tracts, including the gay
periodical Pink Triangle. These re-tellings combined the notion of ‘Courage in
exile’ that emerged immediately after his death, and affirmed a sexual minority
that sought to ‘recuperate’ and ‘reaffirm’ past homosexual forebears.11 These
exertions hint at the curious afterlife of Courage’s story. They also illustrate how
certain narratives of sexual dissidence – Oscar Wilde’s is perhaps the best known
example internationally – are reused and reinvigorated under changing political
and cultural circumstances. However, just as these reassessments were
influenced by changing conceptions of sexuality, they were also confounded by
the restrictions placed upon Courage’s personal archive. An official embargo
remained in place until 2005.

I do not wish to dismiss these past recuperative efforts, or to suggest that such
accounts have not produced productive insights into New Zealand’s queer past.
Indeed, without these interventions it is likely that many such stories of sexual
otherness – Courage’s included – might never have been restored to public
memory. Rather than speak of homosexual ‘ancestors’, however, as many
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liberationists might have us think of Courage, this thesis has instead worked to trouble these early liberationist impulses. Indeed, I have tried to complicate our picture of what it ‘meant’ to be queer in the years before ‘liberation’.

Throughout this thesis I have been careful to assert that liberationist approaches have favoured a particular – and very problematic – historical trajectory. The drive to ‘rescue’ and ‘recuperate’ men and women thought to be homosexual has often paid little attention to questions of subjectivity – or, for that matter, the complexities of how past sexual identities were produced. While these histories – Michael King’s Frank Sargeson: A Life or Paul Millar’s No Fretful Sleeper (a biography of W. H. Pearson) especially – have successfully mined sources thought to be impervious to queer interventions, their assertions about genealogical connectedness have played down difference between historical actors. These histories typically view sexual object choice as the sole (and universal) signifier of sexual otherness. They presume trajectories of progress, and mobilise illusory sameness as a means for claiming a collective unity based on a shared ‘gay identity’.

To be clear, this thesis is not a conventional biography. Nor do I wish to claim Courage as an early prototype for ‘gay identity’ as individuals experience it today. As historians, we have reason to be suspicious of biographies, particularly those that rely solely on the perspective of one individual as the ‘lens’ onto broader historical processes. I have argued elsewhere that historians must look to period and place to contextualise personal experiences. Similarly, it is important that we view the individual within the broader community of people to which they belong. Queer theorists and others have been entirely rigorous in their assertions that there can be no ‘representative’ story of sexual otherness, regardless of the care taken in articulating one (or however-many) voices to that end. But this does not mean that Courage should be viewed as entirely disconnected from today’s gay communities. His life narrative anticipates many of the transformations of sexuality under the influence of 1970s ‘gay liberation’. Gay identity is typically articulated as a minoritising experience, after all. Other aspects of Courage’s scripted repertoire – the importance of classical literature, for instance – still resonate with many contemporary homosexuals. However, there is much left desired in existing metaphors that uncritically stress a
subject's genealogical connectedness. These configurations imply a degree of coherence between social actors that must be viewed as entirely fictive and historically predetermining.

Let us turn the die one more time. We do need to be wary about uncritically stressing any subject's genealogical connectedness. Courage’s subjectivity is not the same as the post-liberation ‘gay’ man. ‘Gayness’ implies a degree of coherence between social actors that is historically specific. My analysis has drawn upon the views of those historians – scholars like H. G. Cocks, Matt Houlbrook and others – who have written so convincingly about queer subjectivities and the production of identity within the context of a (normally) urban modernity. Without losing sight of Courage’s articulations of experience, I move away from sex-object choice as the sole focus of study in histories of sexuality.

I have instead looked to the multifarious, divergent and sometimes even incoherent ways that one individual’s identity is produced, experienced and transformed through time, space and text. In particular, Speak To Me, Stranger follows Cocks’s recent assertion about modernity and its role in producing individuation. As Cocks and others have explained, modernity is best understood as a ‘localized’ and ‘partial process’, with ‘specific’ and diverging ‘effects’ on individuals – whether those subjects be publicly avowed as gay, lesbian, or some other descriptor of collective identity.¹⁶ These divergences speak very carefully to various categories of identity and experience – class, race, nation, locality, gender, and ability, to name but a few. Together, these help to shape modern lives.¹⁷

Cocks suggests that these models of identity and behaviour do not exist in ‘chaotic simultaneity’.¹⁸ Rather, particular vectors of identity (class, for example) can fluctuate and shift over time. Turning to Courage’s own narrative, we see, for instance, how conceptions of gender, class and nationality profoundly mediated his sense of selfhood. Courage’s personal and literary archive, which represents a breadth of material that extends across one lifetime, provides a unique opportunity to track these transformations across a swathe of social experience. My analysis shows how, for Courage at least, these processes were not always unstable. Social scripts surrounding masculinity, class (especially notions of
respectability) and national identity, for example, continually reinforced ongoing conceptions of selfhood – sexual and otherwise. Indeed, as I showed in Chapter One, many of these scripts pre-dated Courage’s birth and were reproduced and reified by domestic and national processes in the course of the twentieth century.

I adopted scripting early on as my preferred mode of analysis. This is an approach borrowed from symbolic interactionist sociology. I understand ‘scripts’ to refer to the broad recipes of behaviour and meaning that, together, are used by subjects to navigate everyday social life. In doing so, I do not wish to dismiss discourse analysis as an appropriate mode of reading past lives. Indeed this deconstructive impulse is readily apparent in much of my reading of Courage’s life – and there is no need to see either as mutually excluding.

Scripts are helpful, however, because they expose how knowledge becomes performed and transformed through interaction – whether that is through face-to-face interaction or another, usually symbolic interface. Reading is one such example. As Chris Brickell has argued, individuals do not merely take on ‘pre-packaged’ identities that are available on a wider social level. Rather ideas are ‘negotiated and modified’ at the level of the individual.19 By looking to Courage’s storied sources we have been able to establish with some clarity how he navigated specific social and cultural spaces. More than this, however, we have also been able to distill Courage’s own role in ordering and making sense of his cultural milieu.

My work heeds the views expressed by historian Matt Houlbrook. Houlbrook asserts that scholars of sexuality must remain alert to the ‘crucial analytical bridge’ between the ‘discursive exclusion’ imposed by the heteronormative and the diverse ‘lived experience’ of material lives.20 Simply put, just because Courage articulated a sense of sexual (and cultural) otherness it does not necessarily follow that he was at all times socially disenfranchised or marginalised. Similarly, and with our notions of scripts kept firmly in sight, it is also clear that Courage actively negotiated the cultural and symbolic landscape in which he found himself. In short, the discursive and material structures he encountered were specific to his own time and space; but his understanding and integration of these social meanings were equally multiple and dynamic.
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Courage was no cultural automaton rendered passive by the supposedly stifling times in which he lived. Courage's own life narrative disrupts much of what has been presumed about preliberation. Indeed, my analysis sits well alongside accounts of other scholars working within the field of new queer history – H. G. Cocks, Matt Houlbrook, Matt Cook, Sean Brady and others. These histories represent a significant 'historical turn', literary scholar Chris Waters suggests; one where historical 'boundaries are more fluid' and 'identities less stable'.21 Courage cannot be said to have lived an always-happy existence; we see this in the expressions of abjection that pepper both his private and published material. Even so, these same sources unveil the remarkable complexity of one man's social and sexual existence. They show, as Houlbrook suggests, how queer sexual practices and desires are positioned within a 'particular interpretive field that cannot be imposed straightforwardly on the past'.22

Speak To Me, Stranger shows – among other things – how wholesale assertions about 'oppression' and 'homophobia' risk obscuring important ambivalences that persist within systems of knowledge, spatiality and power. Whether in New Zealand or overseas, Courage continually participated in a series of social worlds that yielded both sexual and professional fulfillment. Indeed, these worlds often overlapped. While the spectre of puritanism is indeed implicit in many of Courage's assertions about colonial life, his wider life narrative often stresses how social conservatism was mostly manifest in the domestic unit, not an implacable national 'reality'. National spaces were riven with both liberating and disabling potentialities.

Courage was far from a cultural aberration. Indeed, it is important that we see him as a member of a particular cultural cohort, in terms of age, class, profession, and sexual outlook, for example. New Zealand historians writing in more recent times have been careful to stress the sexual possibilities and queer ambivalences that existed in the colonial world; and Courage's own experiences show us how 'provinciality' was no hindrance to forming lasting – and often erotic – bonds with other men. Whether in New Zealand or abroad we can see how Courage was able to pursue meaningful social and intimate relationships, and that at no time did his status as queer – or, indeed, as colonial – result in outright marginalisation. Certainly, scripts surrounding normative masculinity often left
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Courage feeling abject and excluded. Using the much older language of romantic friendship, however, Courage was able to pursue intimate relationships with men. Some of these attachments, his relationship with Frank Fleet especially, endured across decades and changing conceptions of sexuality. These relationships were sexually and socially integral to Courage's conception of self, guiding in crucial ways questions of national and sexual citizenship.

Courage was far from a peripheral figure. He took on an increasingly central role as a social lynchpin in both queer and New Zealand literary communities within the metropolis. His central position in multiple networks of sociability allowed Courage to facilitate the entry of a number of individuals – particularly young men and other New Zealanders – into the sexual and cultural fabric of the metropolis. In this sense, Courage was far from a cultural exile. He wielded significant amounts of social capital and acted as a node from which other social intimates – Charles Brasch, Douglas Lilburn and others – materially benefited. This role deepened if anything over time as Courage grew older, and the discourses surrounding the nation and national identity strengthened New Zealand's nascent literary movement.

With regard in particular to Courage's sexual outlook, we have seen how specific spaces, scripts and interactions combine to produce one man's subjectivity. Drawing from the work of urban historians and cultural geographers in particular, I show how space mediates conceptions of bodily and cultural difference, particularly within the urban environment of the metropolis. Class in particular, Houlbrook suggests, helped to guide men's experiences of London in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Sex and sociability are at once a contingent and always-mediated affair fed by 'broader social differences' and the very construction of urban spaces. I have been careful to show how sexual identity is inseparable from broader scripts and social processes. It is undeniable that Courage was caught up in these changes.

Courage’s experience of World War II is very much a case in point. While wartime privations and the disruption to Courage’s working life brought inconvenience, even anguish, his own narratives of daily life reflect the transformations occurring to the queer sexual economy at that time. For many of Courage’s contemporaries – men like Quentin Crisp, for example – the war
provided a new and expansive set of intimate possibilities (in *The Naked Civil Servant*, Crisp infamously described London at this time as being a ‘paved double bed’).\(^{24}\) Courage was no different; he reported numerous encounters with men – particularly sailors – during the war years. For Courage, however, this urban transformation held its own material and discursive challenges. His narratives show how scripts of respectability and sexual restraint complicated casual sexual affairs with working-class men: individuals who often professed no ‘deviant’ persuasion, and may have pursued queer sexual relationships for material gain.

Courage’s life also fits the broader urban and social changes noted as unfolding in the aftermath of the war years in Britain. Economic and social advancement amongst a new ‘heterosexually-minded youth culture’ largely ended cross-class affairs.\(^{25}\) What is more the increasing regulation of certain queer ‘spaces of leisure’ (parks, street corners, cafes and nightclubs included) similarly altered the architecture of many queer men’s lives.\(^{26}\)

Cocks suggests that many middle-class homosexuals deliberately distanced themselves from the ‘chaotic and criminal world of queer London’.\(^{27}\) Courage’s own mental anguish had already seen his retreat to largely private and class-specific interactions by this stage. Richard Hornsey’s *The Spiv and the Architect* largely echoes Cocks and Houlbrook’s conclusions that middle-class homosexuals – and not merely the interventions of state and city authority – helped assist in the ‘privatisation’ of queer sociabilities.\(^{28}\) ‘Mounting outrage at […] “male vice” [particularly public sex] and “perversion”’ fundamentally reconfigured public spaces, Hornsey suggests.\(^{29}\) For Courage, who had already voiced considerable disquiet about effeminate ‘queans’ and the ‘degradations’ of ‘public queer life’ as early as the 1920s, these reconfigurations – even while they narrowed the sexual market place – were not altogether negative.\(^{30}\) Courage’s intimate liaisons, for example, were already tied to the protected space of the domestic sphere as a matter of personal preference.

Crucially, the increasing centrality of psychiatry and medical understandings of sexual selfhood provided men like Courage – most of them middle-class and affluent – space in which to articulate new forms of subjectivity. These conceptualisations were important because they placed ‘respectable homosexuality’ beyond the ‘boundaries of individual culpability’ and
transformed a category of ‘perversity’ into a recognised medical affliction.\textsuperscript{31} As Hornsey argues, this transformation provided men with a powerful ‘counterdiscourse’ that opposed the connection of ‘queer sexual practices’ to ‘willful sin or national degeneracy’.\textsuperscript{32} Sean Brady has noted that these medical views arrived fairly late in the piece, since such allowances threatened to unravel the very bedrock upon which British masculinity rested.\textsuperscript{33} My own analysis, however, shows that Courage was aware of these scientific views on sexuality – mostly Continental European and North American in origin – long before the urban transformations of the 1950s, and indeed, his own mental collapse in the late 1940s.\textsuperscript{34}

Such revelations reflect how different types of sexualities acquire their power from being ‘invented and reinvented’, located in specific institutions, or taken up by other ‘powerful discourses’.\textsuperscript{35} ‘Homosexuality’, for example, was produced and reinforced through the aegis of medical men and the supposedly objective ‘truth-telling’ of scientific study. More than this, however, my analyses also reaffirm the individual’s role in making sense of his or her social world. I suggest how a subject’s articulations of self might defy ‘predicted’ assumptions and outcomes about periods, places and identities.

In conducting this research, I have been influenced by the output of cultural studies and new historicist traditions that seek to exhibit the ‘strangeness’ and unique historicity of past lives.\textsuperscript{36} As Houlbrook and other historians remind us, historical actors must be seen as ‘distinctly queer’, both in the sense that these individuals do not reside in the ‘gay world’ as we know it today but also in so far as that historical actors were also ‘irreducibly different from each other’.\textsuperscript{37}

Courage’s narrative of selfhood continually reminds us of his individuation. Even as he articulated and performed scripts of inversion and, later, homosexuality, Courage continued to view women with an erotic ambivalence that would be unthinkable for most gay New Zealanders today. And Courage’s professional identity as a writer also brought its own complexities and variegations. Literature played a key part in Courage’s own exploration of selfhood. We have also seen how Courage’s professional negotiations continually challenged his sense of gendered identity – sometimes at great personal cost.
Conclusion

There is space for further work in this regard, and future projects might elicit even greater complexity by scrutinising these divergences (class and profession, for example) more closely. These kinds of exercises reveal the ‘illusory sameness’ of individuals by not only exposing the fracturing differences that exist between social actors, but also the incoherence and ambivalence that can be observed within even a single life course. These ‘incoherences’ can be seen in Courage’s approach to national and metropolitan spaces, for example, where assertions about ‘liberation’ and ‘inhibition’ can be found in both contexts. Similarly, Courage also made strong pronouncements about sexual sublimation whilst simultaneously writing in celebratory tones about the revitalising capacities of sexual intercourse with various partners – both casual and longer-lasting. These investigations reveal the constant tensions and transformations that remain a continual feature of all lives. They also suggest how certain social scripts might be brought into violent conflict with one another – even irreconcilably so.

Given the highly mobile nature of many New Zealanders, much more could also be made of transnational experiences. Again, this thesis has shown the degree of Courage’s connectedness. I suggest that many New Zealanders, at least during Courage’s lifetime, traversed a largely British world, both within and outside of national spaces. While divergences clearly existed within and between cultural spaces, it is clear that these different national zones featured a number of similar social and sexual scripts. What is more, the traversal of spaces formed a central experience for those social actors with the material resources and inclinations to follow such migration pathways.

While I have been careful to show Courage’s place within the fabric of these wider social and cultural worlds, queer and otherwise, other studies might take up this focus much more explicitly. For example, Courage was just one of several homosexual artists known to have migrated to the cultural centre in the years before liberation, and his ongoing connection to those who remained in New Zealand shows just how tenacious and deeply-felt these lines of sociability must have been. An approach that synthesises comparative biography, queer and cultural history approaches can productively analyse several such figures in tandem, and provide a clearer picture of the extent and scope of their transnational networks.
Speak To Me, Stranger signals the rich possibilities available within hybrid approaches to history. My account of Courage’s life shows that sophisticated reading techniques are not always necessary in order to ‘uncover’ supposedly ‘hidden’ lives. Courage’s archive, as rich and fulsome as it is, is just one such repository; there are others. I have also shown how expanding our scope to include other, less traditional sources – literature especially – can aid historical assessments. Together, these sources have unveiled the remarkable complexity of preliberation individuation and subjectivity. They also indicate the dynamism and sometimes-surprising extent of Courage’s agency. As Hornsey and others suggest, fiction bridges the gap between dominant and queer narratives of selfhood.40 Never entirely divested of his critical power, Courage wrote against these powerful and disfiguring narratives, often doing so with both elegance and precision.

While Courage must at all times be viewed as a ‘stranger’ in terms of his own unique subjectivity, his story is very much part of the increasingly complicated picture we now have of New Zealand’s recent past. Too often, these narratives have neglected queer actors, marginalised their contributions, or simply erased their existence entirely.

Courage’s story, in turns dramatic and mundane, triumphant and tragic, deserves to be told. ‘Rescuing’ is one thing, but ‘recuperation’ quite another. Even while Courage cannot be claimed as a gay ‘cultural ancestor’ (at least, not conventionally speaking) his story must be seen as historically significant for today’s queer communities. Through it, perhaps for the first time, New Zealanders see the unfolding of history through emphatically queer eyes. At times, contemporary readers may well find glimpses of recognition and familiarity; at others, there appear moments of difference and in comprehensation. Alike or alien, familiar or foreign, these personal and literary stories speak to modernity in powerful ways. To borrow the words of one homosexual character in A Way of Love, these are stories that treat ‘queers [...] as human beings’ – intricate, complicated, and at all times themselves.41
Notes


3 Arnold Wall to Kathleen Sheila Williams, 27 November 1986, MS -6138, TL.

4 This was a rather unhappy end to a decade or more of near continual output for Courage. He had the opportunity to write just one final novel, the Freudian-inspired The Visit to Penmorten, before his death by heart failure in October of 1963. Rather crucially, the novel received an indifferent reception in both New Zealand and Britain. This seemed to confirm for Courage the end of his creative career. Embattled by mental and finally physical illness, any further literary enterprise seemed impossible. Courage does not record working on anything further of note. For discussions of this creative impasse see James Courage, Journal, 1962-1963, 13 December 1962, MS-0999/091, HC.

5 This recuperation has very much been a New Zealand-focused one. I have found no mention of Courage’s work (or indeed his life) in British or American circles, either popular or academic. Still, Courage is briefly mentioned in Richard Hornsey’s recent monograph on queer urban sexualities in London, suggesting his work may not have been entirely forgotten outside of New Zealand. See Hornsey, The Spiv and the Architect: Unruly Life in Postwar London (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), p. 29.


7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.
Conclusion

11 For a key example see Bobby Pickering, ‘The Conspiracy Against James Courage’, *Pink Triangle*, 18 (1980), p. 5. Rather interestingly, a similar piece was run by David Young in mainstream magazine, the *New Zealand Listener*, suggesting that ‘liberationist discourses’ were not solely taken up by avowedly gay activists but may have formed cultural investments across political and sexual spectrums. See David Young, ‘Courage in Exile’, *New Zealand Listener*, 101, 2211 (June 1982), p. 24.


18 Ibid.

Conclusion


26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid. Richard Hornsey argues, for example, that the ‘postwar period’ in England saw the ‘collusion’ of psychologists and ‘certain groups of queer men’ that would have included middle-class homosexuals, like Courage. Both groups helped produce new accounts of a ‘legitimate social citizenship’ for these queer actors, allowing for the resituating of ‘homosexual desire’ away from ‘London’s streets and public houses’. See Hornsey, *The Spiv and the Architect*, p. 30.


30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.


34 Ibid.


37 Houlbrook, *Queer London*, p. 266. (original emphasis).

Conclusion

39 Such traversals need not exclude social actors of more reduced means. Janet Frame’s journey to Europe in the late 1950s, for example, suggests one situation where networks of support might assist an individual’s migratory aspirations (and Courage himself made several contributions to this end). Rather interestingly, Frame’s own mental troubles meant that Courage was unusually reluctant to offer anything more than material support – monetary for the most part – which he sent signed as ‘a Wellwisher [sic]’. For examples of Courage’s support of Frame while she was in Europe see Frank Sargeson to James Courage, 25 December, 1956, MS-0999/111, HC; 27 March, 1958, MS-0999/111, HC. For Courage’s reluctance to take up meaningful contact with Frame see Janet Frame to Frank Sargeson, undated, MS-0432-165, ATL.


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