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ANDREW SALKEY, THE BRITISH HOME, AND THE INTIMACIES IN-BETWEEN

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Caribbean
home
migrant
queer
respectable
homosexual
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*Caribbean author Andrew Salkey's 1960 novel, *Escape to an Autumn Pavement*, diverges from the 'unhomeliness' of many contemporary diasporic narratives by placing its sexually confused West Indian protagonist within the domestic milieu of the English home. It also troubles the peculiarly English discourse of the 'respectable homosexual' to account for the presence of the Caribbean migrant. In so doing, Salkey makes domestic space a site where migrant and queer affiliations collide, with ideas of nationhood proving crucial to both. In offering an early prototype of a figure both black and gay, this text explores the hazards and the possibilities of an intimate life conducted 'out of line'.*

The Migrant and Home as National Frontier

In the postwar era a number of high-profile West Indian authors such as eventual Nobel Prize winners Derek Walcott and V. S. Naipaul did much to establish the region on the international literary stage. Writing primarily from metropolitan centres like London, they vividly evoked everyday

Caribbean lives both at home and abroad. Their migrant characters seemingly embody the ‘unhomeliness’ of exile with the stereotypical ‘basements and bedsits’ they inhabit, supporting James Procter’s assertion that ‘diaspora communities have been largely seen as detached from the local, material landscapes in which they have “settled”’ (2003: 4, 13). In *The Emigrants* (1954), for example, George Lamming portrays the stereotypical unease of Collis, who, when visiting his potential English employer, feels himself to be ‘in a stranger’s house, a fortnight from home’, with the cosy domesticity of the living space forming ‘a persistent rebuke’ to his own ‘rudimentary shelter’ (1980: 135, 136). Similarly – and despite its vigorous assertion of a kind of ‘outsider’ authority – Sam Selvon’s powerful work *The Lonely Londoners* (1956) acknowledges the importance of knowing ‘which part they will slam door in your face and which part they will take in spades’ (2004: 25). Often, then, writing from this period conforms to Svetlana Boym’s wider claim that ‘diasporic intimacy’ ‘is possible only when one masters a certain imperfect aesthetics of survival and learns to inhabit exile’ (1998: 524).

Yet, at the same time, diasporic communities also demonstrated a greater intimacy with Britain than these examples might suggest. Stuart Hall, for example, asserts that ‘people like me who came to England in the 1950s have been there for centuries . . . I was coming home. I am the sugar at the bottom of the English cup of tea’ (2000: 48). Evocatively marshalling the humble cup of tea, comforting symbol of domestic order and routine, Hall gestures towards the unspoken existence of those ‘others’ on whose labour the country’s imperial might was built. He makes clear the ‘familiar, strange and unarticulated ways in which empire has appeared and disappeared’ from the intimate spaces of British life (Stoler 2006: 1) and hints at the complicated relationship between the English home – bastion of social and sexual order – and the discomfiting appearance of those heralding from its colonies. Taking into account that it was the genteel women of eighteenth-century Britain who first made tea-drinking ‘a crucial part in domestic rituals of consumption’, Hall’s words also gesture towards the gendered dynamics that would go on to inform British responses to postwar migrancy.¹

1 In contrast, Mimi Sheller describes how it was the coffee houses of eighteenth-century England ‘where a masculine and bourgeois public sphere first emerged’ (2008: 84).

Widely published Jamaican author Andrew Salkey (1928–95) embodied the kinds of complex crossings between the personal, national and international so representative of his generation. His writings persistently address questions of love, sexuality and home. They actively explore the spaces available for different kinds of intimate life, while also retaining doubts about the possibilities of intimacy itself in the context of the emotional and sexual legacies of colonialism. His pathbreaking 1960 novel, *Escape to an Autumn Pavement*, set in London, focuses upon a sexually confused, middle-class young Jamaican who is caught in a love triangle with two white Britons, predatory Fiona and gentle, homosexual Dick. Salkey

situates Johnnie *within* the British home and deploys the very English discourse of the ‘respectable homosexual’, a construction rooted in ideas of privacy and middle-class domestic space. Yet his protagonist proves an unsettled and unsettling presence, one revealing the particular tensions of home for a queer, diasporic figure; for Johnnie’s sense of home is mediated and in fluctuating ways by his sexual, racial and class affiliations.

Torn between the Caribbean domicile he has rejected and the confusing realities of life in London, Salkey’s protagonist displays the kind of ‘homing desire’ discussed by Avtar Brah, who describes how, on the one hand, “‘home’ is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination . . . it is a place of no return, even if it is possible to visit the geographic territory that is seen as the place of ‘origin’” (1996: 188–9). Yet, on the other hand, Brah also describes home as ‘the lived experience of a locality’ and the ‘humdrum of everyday lived culture’ (188–9). Boarding in leafy, middle-class Hampstead, Johnnie displays some familiarity with the day-to-day comforts and social relations of the English domestic space in which he finds himself. Confidently appraising the room of hated landlord’s lackey Trado, he notes the ‘ubiquitous Penguins, little reviews, Thomas Manns, Evelyn Waughs, and precious back numbers of Horizon’, while the abbreviated ‘Ken’ when he sneers at how his tormenter ‘quotes Ken Tynan the way a Jamaican peasant quotes the Bible’ confirms his growing knowledge of this environment (Salkey 1970: 19). Standing in far more intimate relation to the white English home than many of his fictional counterparts, Salkey’s protagonist speaks from neither an exotic, nor an entirely subordinated, elsewhere. As Brah goes on to conceptualize the idea of ‘diaspora space’, where migrants and Britons alike are altered by meeting on ‘home’ territory, we might wonder what the effects are of Johnnie crossing this particular domestic threshold.

Johnnie’s unusual position as an insider–outsider within the English home also offers the opportunity for wider reflection on the relations between migrancy, home space and ideas of nationhood. Brah extends her discussion of homing desires by making clear that the question of home is ‘intrinsically linked with the way in which processes of exclusion operate and are subjectively experienced under given circumstances. It is centrally about our political and personal struggles over the social regulation of “belonging”’ (1996: 189). This notion of ‘belonging’ is directly connected to the national stage by Sara Ahmed when she points to the powerful ‘alignment of family, history and race’ which ‘works to transform whiteness into a familial tie, into a form of racial kindred, that recognizes all non-white others as strangers’ (2004: 2). Consequently, the ‘risk of being a “soft touch” for the nation, and for the national subject, is not only the risk of becoming feminine, but also of becoming “less white”, by allowing those who are recognized as racially other to penetrate the surface of the body’ (3). Postwar

Britain, I want to suggest, saw a particular confluence of these ideas of home, belonging and nationhood, as Claire Langhamer indicates when she asserts how ‘the view that “a happy home and family life is the bulwark of a Nation” might indeed be taken as the blueprint for postwar reconstruction in Britain’ (2005: 345). The historically specific idea of home with which I therefore want to place Salkey’s novel in conversation is one dependent on privacy, where physical boundaries are theoretically secure and where racial ‘others’ dare not trespass. This is a home loaded with the freight of national morality and anchored in the image of the white, middle-class family; when I talk of home, then, psychological terrain is as resonant as the physical space itself.

The Queer, Privacy and National Integrity

These references to family also signal a second constituency with an awkward relationship to the English home: those failing to correspond to models of heteronormative family life. It is not, therefore, simply the migrant for whom home served as the nexus for questions of national belonging; in the sober climate of postwar Britain, ideas of ‘private’ life were also central to discussions of homosexuality. Salkey disembarked in 1952 to find Britain in the throes of a moral panic, with queerness regularly featuring in mainstream media and discussion in stridently negative terms. In the context of a number of high-profile trials and spy scandals, homosexual men had become the pariahs of their day.² They, and to a lesser extent female prostitutes, were thought to be increasingly visible on the streets of the country’s cities, tempting the ordinary citizen into a world of vice. Both figures served as a convenient locus for more general postwar anxieties about appropriate family, labour and gender roles, with historians Matt Houlbrook and Chris Waters going so far as to identify ‘a wider crisis of Britishness’ (2006: 145).

As a consequence of such trends, the lives of many homosexual men in 1950s and 1960s Britain were affected by fear of disclosure, ostracism and arrest, and subsequently a number of coalitions formed in the hope of effecting change. Conservative and progressive agendas jostled against each other, proffering a range of arguments and tactics, with the figure of the ‘respectable homosexual’ eventually emerging from their competing claims. ‘He’ became the primary signifier of the emergent cause, providing what was effectively a discursive resolution to these disparate alliances. Historian Jeffrey Weeks has described this figure as a ‘distinctly new way of articulating a homosexual self, normal in all but his homosexual proclivities’, with ‘normal’ meaning white, middle class, associating with like others and above all, private (2007: 48). Instrumental in propagating this

2 For example, the 1951 escape to the Soviet Union of British spies Donald Maclean and the homosexual Guy Burgess or the 1954 buggery trial of Peter Wildeblood, Lord Montagu and Michael Pitt-Rivers.

construction was Peter Wildeblood who, following his 1954 trial for sodomy, argued powerfully: 'I seek only to apply to my own life the rules which govern the lives of all good men: freedom to choose a partner and, when that partner is found, to live with him discreetly and faithfully' (1955: 175–6). Wildeblood subsequently gave evidence to the Wolfenden Committee – called to review the law and practice of homosexuality and prostitution – and the 'respectable homosexual' became enshrined within the ideological structure of the committee's controversial 1957 report. The report recommended a tightening of restrictions on prostitution in tandem with the repeal of laws against homosexual behaviour in private, and heralded a decade of rapidly changing sexual standards in the United Kingdom. Its key legacy though was, as Stuart Hall has summarized, 'the *privatization* of selective aspects of sexual conduct' (1980: 13; emphasis in original).

For a fleeting moment in the mid-1950s, the 'respectable homosexual' migrated on to the pages of the country's literature. Britain already had a limited tradition of the homosexual protest novel, epitomized by Radclyffe Hall's contentious *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), or Reginald Underwood's works from the 1930s onwards. These earlier texts shared themes such as the use of various sexological and/or Freudian ideas; distaste for the perceived impurity of heterosexual liaisons; a concern about queer urban culture; and a reliance on historical precedents (such as those of Hellenistic male relationships) to demonstrate their legitimacy.³ The novels of the 1950s did not disregard these tropes, but they shifted in tone to incorporate the changing times of their conception. Although few in number, books like *The Charioteer* (1953) and *The Heart in Exile* (1953) had the 'respectable homosexual' at their core, with Houlbrook and Waters describing the latter as making a 'powerful political statement' by 'mapping a queer subject situated within the site of love and fidelity that was the middle-class home' (2006: 152).

Salkey – educated, socially engaged, working at the BBC – would have been well aware of this dominant liberal construction of homosexuality, as is demonstrated by his knowing reference to the Wolfenden Report in the later novel *The Adventures of Catullus Kelly* (1969).⁴ *Escape to an Autumn Pavement* demonstrates some familiarity with this vocabulary as it tells the story of Johnnie and the emotional turmoil he experiences attempting to understand the nature of his feelings for his white English friend, Dick. The two men first talk outside the communal toilet of their rooming house, a knowing choice of location considering the era and Dick's sexual preferences, with Frank Mort (2010), for example, having made clear the significance of toilets as male homosexual pick-up sites in the 1950s. Its significance is made more obvious as Johnnie realizes it is the fifth time in two weeks that they have met there, seemingly 'the only ones' ever to do so (Salkey 1970: 14). Yet, in keeping with the emphasis on private behaviour so

3 Innovative readings of the losses attendant with this emergent gay literature are elsewhere discussed by Love (2007) and Sinfield (1997).

4 A woman is described as 'the only surviving post-Wolfenden Barbadian-Cockney prostitute in the strip age' (Salkey 1969: 34).

crucial to ideas of the ‘respectable homosexual’, this nod towards an external world is not pursued between them.

Instead, their relationship is conducted almost entirely within domestic spaces, specifically the rooming houses and flats of postwar London. Langhamer (2005) has illustrated both the importance of ideas of home ownership in the postwar climate and the difficulties experienced by many in achieving this aim, due to poor housing stock and war damage. Many Britons actually found themselves living in boarding houses, flats or with family, and these domestic spaces tended to be viewed as compromised versions of the ideal family home. One specific aspect of life compromised by these more communal forms of living was the ‘desire to retreat into the private world of home’ (360), for British citizens in cities such as London found themselves sharing domestic space with precisely those racial ‘others’ thought to be excluded from both the national body and, by extension, the home. James Procter has emphasized the importance of the stairwell in postwar accounts of the black dwelling place, claiming that ‘it was at the stairwell that the dangers of admitting the black lodger were to be frequently witnessed, and at which the white tenant was perceived as at greatest risk from a squalid, socially deviant black presence’ (2003: 35). He goes on to characterize this ‘key symbolic location’ not ‘as a site of cultural hybridity but as a racially fraught contact-zone at which blacks and whites came into confrontation’ (35). Such ideas are elaborated by Sarah Brophy in her discussion of the work of British Caribbean author Andrea Levy, when she makes the important point that ‘the staircase constitutes the secondary contact zone available only to those who cross the threshold and have already become provisionally internal’ (2009: 4–5), a description appearing to correspond to the insider–outsider status I have ascribed to Salkey’s protagonist.

Brophy goes on to highlight the ‘simultaneously laborious, exciting, tense, and interrupted intimacies that characterized the fraught sharing of social space in Britain in the 1940s’ (2009: 17). In this context, what is striking about those sections of *Escape to an Autumn Pavement* dealing with Johnnie and Dick’s relationship is that they appear, on an overt level at least, to deny any such friction and to subscribe fully to the ideal of privatized family life. If anything, their relationship accepts, and even aspires to, bourgeois heterosexual norms. From the beginning, Dick’s abiding visual signification with domestic chores means that he is rarely seen without cooking or cleaning materials in hand, leading Johnnie to note approvingly his ‘brisk house-wife movements’, as if appraising his friend for that role (Salkey 1970: 52). When they eventually leave their rooming house lodgings and set up home in a flat together, they are resentfully described by Fiona as ‘a honeymoon couple’ (155), a prescient statement anticipating the blissful happiness of their cohabitation, this despite the relationship never being

physically consummated. The innuendo of this remark is also clear; Fiona is reading Johnnie and Dick's relationship as queer – and perhaps anticipating its eventual consummation – despite Johnnie's own refusal to do the same. Finally, and in keeping with the stereotypical trajectory of their romance, the men go on to develop a more settled domesticity, Johnnie proprietarily observing when Dick wears 'our favourite overcoat...and our favourite suit', an implicit acknowledgement of the merging of their lives along standard heterosexual patterns (155, 165).

Just in case this portrayal of Dick's estimable qualities were not clear enough, Salkey also provides us with a foil to that character in the person of Fiona. Johnnie's first sexual encounter with her takes place at the notorious, and very public, cruising ground of Hampstead Heath, thereby signalling what was only hinted at, and dismissed, in his and Dick's first meeting. Throughout this disturbing scene Johnnie is desperately uncomfortable, showing a palpable disgust for Fiona that is only repeated and exaggerated as the novel progresses. She takes on mythical dimensions, becoming a negative, essentializing illustration of a white woman over-burdened by her own grasping femininity, or rather, Johnnie's perception of it. In opposition to Dick, Fiona positively thrives on her own transgression and its very public staging; in Johnnie's troubled mind Fiona's perverse longings become confused with female heterosexuality itself. During their encounter his internal monologue leads the reader outwards, multiplying his and Fiona's activities in an orgiastic tumult that is far in excess of the moment. He muses 'this is the treatment, all right. This is what the Heath's for. All bloody Heaths. All over the panting world', so giving the liaison a similar representative power to Fiona herself, as it comes perhaps to stand for all heterosexual experiences to Johnnie (99). Fittingly, therefore, the phrase 'all over' to describe sex on the Heath mirrors the protagonist's later repulsion at the 'illicit albumen all over the place', which itself offers a certain (female) gendering in its chosen analogy (102). 'Woman' and heterosexuality have both become exaggerated and, implicitly, linked to public display. No wonder, then, that the Heath takes on a symbolic relevance in their continuing relations, Fiona exhorting him to repeat its potent memory, Johnnie shuddering at the thought.

Mica Nava (2006) has criticized Salkey's novel for offering a 'misogynistic view of women'. Although it certainly is possible to interpret the gender relations of *Escape* in this way, I instead suggest that Salkey's female characters are key to his critique of prevailing racial and sexual norms. For portraits of women are what allow the novel to elaborate and name queerness, producing readings of Johnnie's non-heteronormative desires that he can no longer ignore.⁵ It is also, arguably, the women of Salkey's novel who shore up those racial and sexual boundaries so necessary to the white English nation. During Fiona's first conversation with Johnnie she tells the

5 As the book draws to its close, it is Fiona, for example, who states 'Frankly, Johnnie, I do think you're homosexual' (188).

story of her African ex-lover who abandoned her when pregnant. Fiona describes him as having ‘the whole of Africa on his back . . . it would seem that he wanted me only as a sort of beating-stick for the white man’s plunder of Africa’ (Salkey 1970: 42). Further to this, Johnnie observes Fiona’s profile in the streetlight and notes that ‘she becomes a silver coin for a moment’ (44), an analogy linking her to the national figurehead of the queen. Later in the novel, it is also Fiona who reads (and dismisses) a race-hate pamphlet to Johnnie, an uncomfortable situation which drives Dick from the room, causing Fiona to claim subsequently that she is attempting to ‘win you back from sodomy, darling boy’ (135). This strange mobilization of Fiona’s racial cosmopolitanism in the service of enforced heterosexuality is indicative of precisely the interwoven nature of racial and sexual norms that Salkey’s novel is attempting to think its way through.

Similar trends are also evident in the portrayal of Bidy, Johnnie’s co-worker at the nightclub in which he is employed. It is Bidy who first names the sinister basement-dwelling figure of ‘the *other*’ (emphasis in the original), an additional staff member. She asks Johnnie to do the bottles because ‘I get the shivers when the *other* does them’, a description clearly conveying a degree of disapprobation for this liminal figure (32). This disapproval, illustrated by Bidy’s ‘shivers’, signals precisely the kind of affective response attributed to women by the dominant discourses on both race and homosexuality; even though ‘the *other*’ is not named, the affects he is shown to create also work to consolidate his outsider status. Just as she is the first to mention ‘the *other*’, Bidy is also the first person at the club to recognize Johnnie’s latent homosexuality, spitefully telling him, ‘You’re also bloody well finished as a man. No woman in her right senses would want to know anything like you’, a pronouncement that goes on to haunt him (169). Salkey’s presentation of women in this novel, then, proves more complex than a label of simple misogyny allows, as their racial cosmopolitanism is shown to perpetuate heteronormative standards.

Importing a seemingly benign (though still, perhaps, feared) gay and black presence into the private home, which is presumed to be heterosexual and white, Salkey’s novel also resonates with contemporary discussions in queer theory. Sara Ahmed, for example, has pointed to the ‘straightening’ effects of the orientations provided by the heteronormative world, arguing that ‘the lines that allow us to find our way, those that are “in front” of us, also make certain things, and not others, available’ so that ‘we are “in line” when we face the direction that is already faced by others. Being “in line” allows bodies to extend into spaces that, as it were, have already taken their shape’ (2006: 23, 14, 15). The demand to be ‘in line’ means ‘that we not only have to turn toward the objects that are given to us by heterosexual culture, but also that we must “turn away” from objects that take us off this line’ (21).

Consequently, 'the queer subject within straight culture' deviates and 'is made socially present as deviant' (21); those refusing to 'straighten' are persistently framed as threat. Gayatri Gopinath explores similar ideas in of the context of nationhood when she acknowledges how the 'non-heteronormative subject' is commonly 'seen as both a threat to national integrity and as perpetually outside the boundaries of nation, home and family' (2003: 138). If queer lives can play out in subversive ways within the constraints of seemingly 'impossible' locations (Gopinath 2005), then 'home' is a space of desire as well as a site of both limitation and possibility. Much as Johnnie's presence as racial 'other' both threatens and also potentially opens up postwar ideas of home, so too the homosexual intimacy between Johnnie and Dick troubles ideas of home. Domestic space is therefore where Johnnie's migrant and queer affiliations collide the most dramatically.

Both Gopinath's acknowledgement of how ideas of nationhood frame and regulate socially acceptable forms of intimacy, and Brah and Ahmed's discussions of belonging, race and nationhood are relevant to Salkey's novel, as they emphasize the disruptive possibilities of his placement of a black and gay man within the British home. Similarly, in Houlbrook and Waters' analysis of Rodney Garland's *The Heart in Exile* (1953), they fashion a convincing argument as to the politically charged nature of that novel's intent. Framing the demonization of homosexuals as representative of more general concerns around changing social roles in mid-twentieth-century Britain, they present Garland's novel, and its locating of the 'respectable homosexual' within the home, as a conscious riposte to such easy scapegoating, one making a claim to national and civic belonging for gay men. Returning to the phrase 'a wider crisis of Britishness', which Houlbrook and Waters (2006: 135) specifically use in relation to the early 1950s, I suggest that Salkey's *Escape* (1960) appears at the juncture of another such crisis, this time around race and immigration.

Salkey published *Escape* just two years after the Notting Hill riots – first triggered by an attack by young white men on a mixed-race couple – which embodied fears around race, sexuality and miscegenation and were described by Caribbean intellectual George Lamming as 'the event that really started to twist feelings... that critical moment when as it were, the wound opened very wide' (1998: 8). The unrest heralded a decade in which race became a defining issue in British public life, an era in which, as Frank Mort (2010) makes clear, the increasingly multicultural Notting Hill joined Soho as a moral flashpoint for wider public anxieties. Such concerns are epitomized by Enoch Powell's inflammatory 1968 'Rivers of Blood' speech, which notably deployed the metaphor of a white woman repelling two black men from entering her home, an image in accordance with James Procter's claim that, at this time, 'the threshold of the British homestead took on the significance

6 Conservative member of parliament for Wolverhampton South West, Enoch Powell made his notorious speech against immigration on 20 April 1968 in Birmingham.

of a national frontier' (2003: 22).⁶ As the idea of the black man as social menace arguably joined that of the maligned homosexual in the public domain, with 'Caribbean newcomers and homosexual men' both 'key players' in the 'combustible mix' of London life (Mort 2010: 352), we see Salkey adapting the political valency of inserting a gay man into the English home and adding a further, racial charge, one that works both with and against the political thrust of the idea of the 'respectable homosexual'.

How Far is Intimacy Allowed?

I have outlined the complex and tentative ways in which Johnnie's migrant and queer affiliations operate within the British home. Finally, however, they are only accommodated up to a point and are not permitted to alter the interior landscapes of British domestic space. *Escape* opens with Johnnie drinking tea and discussing the radio with his aged landlady, a woman who believes 'that more people ought to listen to the Third Programme and talk less about Colonial Development and Welfare schemes' (Salkey 1970: 11). Classifying Johnnie as overly 'angry', she suggests that those migrants 'working in the Underground' or 'on dust-carts' surely have 'some sort of child-like right to be angry and resentful. Not you' (11–12). Clearly implying that Johnnie ought to be grateful for his comparatively privileged position, his internal retort indicates where the boundaries of Mrs Blount's authority lie, as he exclaims: 'House-owning bitch!' (13). When Johnnie falls into rent arrears, he is forced into a showdown with Trado. That loathed figure pointedly claims 'coloured tenants are prone' to such financial behaviour, before emphasizing 'there aren't many houses in Hampstead that would have your kind; you know that, don't you?' (20–1). A seething Johnnie, furious at himself for acting like 'an idiotic nigger-coward', borrows the money and clears his debt, eventually returning to the 'little cabin' of his room, a sea-faring image evoking the multiple passages which have brought him to England (22, 37).

Similarly, Salkey's chosen framing of 'respectable homosexuality' fails to account for those less 'respectable' forms of sexuality which, in the case of *Escape*, are not only pushed outside of the home, but outside of the novel itself. The one time we see Dick in the public world follows a further betrayal by Johnnie with Fiona. Appearing at the West Indian club near Oxford Circus where Johnnie works, Salkey's protagonist is understandably surprised at Dick's arrival. Musing after he has left, Johnnie thinks:

He had never visited me before, yet I couldn't help feeling that he had somehow appeared too accustomed to what he had found: the mixed clientele, the vulgarity, the crush. He showed no surprise, no wonderment, no strangeness. He didn't even look around. (Salkey 1970: 166)

Here, it is suggested that the private (though more experienced) Dick has, in fact, explored more of the world outside of the home than has so far been acknowledged. A chink opens up in Dick's neat housewife persona and the spectre of a homosexual domain outside their immediate relationship becomes manifest. This intimation suddenly resonates back through the whole book, giving new substance to previously innocent sounding phrases such as Johnnie's flippant labelling of chauffeur Dick as 'the man with a thousand routes to the West End' (100). Retrospectively, the home comes into view as a restraining influence upon Dick, 'containing' his proclivities within the model of white, middle-class family life that the 'respectable homosexual' strains to approximate. Those operating outside of such domestic ideals may, we imagine, find themselves entering the city's homosexual underworld.

An example of such alternative sexual lives is offered by the mysterious figure of 'the *other*'. While initially Johnnie attributes this naming simply to Biddy's particular turn of phrase, he goes on to adopt it himself, with equally negative implications. He references 'the *other*' on four separate occasions across the text, always when thinking with distaste of the club and the activities of its patrons. Although we hear few other details to complete this picture, I cannot believe in a book so consciously critical of social fears around both homosexuality and race that 'the *other*' is not part of Salkey's agenda. This shadowy figure can be read as a harbinger of that which Johnnie is afraid to face and as corresponding to Ahmed's conceptualization of disgust as 'an imperative not only to expel, but to make that very expulsion stick to some things and not others' (2004: 99). He is also, perhaps more importantly in terms of the book's own framing devices, representative of those men falling outside the terms of the 'respectable homosexual'.

The problematic ways in which Johnnie's migrant and queer affiliations relate to the English home are most pronounced at the close of the novel, where he is finally driven out onto the streets of London by the force of his dilemma. Returning to the flat he shares with Dick, Johnnie realizes that he 'wasn't in the sitting-room. He wasn't in his bedroom. I looked everywhere. I called his name' (Salkey 1970: 207). Finding a note from his friend, Johnnie realizes that Dick has moved out, giving him a week to make a decision about his sexuality. Asking Johnnie to 'choose with both your head and your heart', Dick's note reminds him of 'the pleasant memories we've stored up through the months of partnership in the flat', an instruction readers imagine Johnnie is acting on as he walks into Dick's deserted bedroom and notes 'the aroma of his Old Spice shaving lotion was the only part of him left behind' (207–8), a further correspondence with Ahmed's (2004) discussion of the 'stickiness' of emotional effects. Suddenly, we hear 'I felt compelled to get out and go for a long walk. Anywhere' and Johnnie rushes out onto the street. 'Heading nowhere in particular', the reader is told, 'I walked up

Whitcombe Street. Into Leicester Square. Up Charing Cross Road. Up to Cambridge Circus. Left into Shaftesbury Avenue. On to Piccadilly Circus. Into Piccadilly. And down to Green Park' (Salkey 1970: 208). Evoking the typical locations of other migrant novels of the period, this litany of London's streets suggests that a definitive break has been made with the domestic environment in which the majority of the novel has been set, hinting at the impossibility of that space fully accommodating Johnnie's racial and sexual identities. Significantly, these locales were also the centre of gay life in the city. As the novel closes on Johnnie's assertion 'Fiona was waiting. / Dick was waiting. / And in another way, London also was' the reader can, therefore, easily imagine the London of this statement encompassing those very same streets that 'the *other*' perhaps already inhabits (208).

The Intimacies In-Between

Ahmed's discussion of 'orientation' provides a model for understanding the vexed interrelation of Johnnie's queer and migrant identifications. Using spatial metaphors to explore how 'bodies are gendered, sexualized, and raced' (2006: 5), Ahmed first discusses the idea of a 'migrant orientation' in terms that resonate with Brah's discussion of homing desire and those lived realities providing a provisional sense of home. Ahmed describes the migrant as having 'the vivid experience of facing at least two directions: toward a home that has been lost, and to a place that is not yet home' (9). She also portrays migrancy as offering a 'reinhabitation' of the skin, whereby the

different 'impressions' of a new landscape, the air, the smells, the sounds, which accumulate like points, to create lines, or which accumulate like lines, to create new textures on the surface of the skin. Such spaces 'impress' on the body, involving the mark of unfamiliar impressions, which in turn reshapes the body surface. (Ahmed 2006: 9)

What Ahmed adds to Brah's discussion of migrant homing desires, however, is the recognition that these might also intersect with a 'queer orientation'; Johnnie's body, inevitably and to the dismay of he and others, becomes a 'meeting point' for the various 'lines' of queer and migrant, racial and sexual, identity (Ahmed 2007: 159). It is this idea of Johnnie as 'meeting point' which I suggest offers a way to understand the different modes by which the heteronormative and whitening pressures of English domestic life 'impress' upon Johnnie and Dick differently. In turn, Salkey's novel can itself be seen as a 'meeting point', a literary exploration of queer and migrant lives conducted in the intimate space of the British home.

It is not only the loaded site of the English home that affects, or impresses upon, the possibilities of Johnnie's life as a migrant and/or queer subject. Both these affiliations also work upon, and change, each other. For both men operate under dual pressures of racial and sexual imperatives: Johnnie as a racial and sexual insider–outsider and Dick as a gay man conforming to the whitening and, arguably, the straightening effects of discourse around the 'respectable homosexual'. Although their sense of home is similarly threatened by their sexual orientation – one could easily replace Trado's racial inferences with their sexual equivalents and maintain the same coercive power – Johnnie's migrant positionality ultimately has a greater impact on his status within the English home. This recognition is implicit rather than overtly signalled – it is because of what is not said that we realize the depth of Johnnie's dilemma – but this marks the novel out as unusual for its dating of 1960. Presaging the criticisms faced by the proponents of the idea of the 'respectable homosexual' (for presenting too narrow a view of gay life), Johnnie can, I argue, be viewed as an early prototype of a character both black *and* gay (or curious in this case), a figure subsequently of importance to both postcolonial and queer theorists.⁷ As such, he helps to highlight the gaps between mid-century and contemporary ways of theorizing queer sexuality and race. The novel therefore provides a caution to critics in the present moment not to subscribe automatically to a progressivist understanding of identity issues. In this, parallels can be drawn between Salkey's project and Heather Love's recent emphasis on the importance of reading the queer archive for 'negative affects – the need, the aversion and the longing – that characterize the relation between past and present' (2007: 31–2).

7 In later years the idea of the 'respectable homosexual' was maligned for being too exclusive and for ignoring the voices of those homosexual men who did not fit its peculiarly class-focused model. Peter Wildeblood, for example, has gone 'from being a liberal hero and victim of an intolerant society in the 1950s and 1960s' to being 'attacked for his illiberalism in recent years' (Weeks 2007: 48). In the changed environment of the 1980s, diverse voices also challenged the white hegemony of the gay rights movement, with thinkers such as Mercer and Julien (1998) arguing persuasively for there being no voice for their sexuality within

The domestic spaces of *Escape* are energized by two opposing influences. On the one hand, Salkey's placement of Johnnie within the English home maintains the political aims of the idea of the 'respectable homosexual' in terms of national belonging, also building outward to encompass the newer scapegoat of the black migrant. On the other hand, although the fact of Johnnie being black expands upon the 'respectable homosexual', his lived experience of blackness fades into the background in this domestic milieu, with only the intensity of the character's dilemma alerting us to that which is being left out. In making the claim for home being haunted and unsettled by unacknowledged racial and sexual desires, Salkey destabilizes both the hypermasculinity and the unhomeliness of many narratives of migrant life as well as the queer discourse of respectability with which the novel is engaged. In the process, the author evokes what Gopinath has described as 'a space of home' that is 'permanently and already ruptured, rent by colliding and colluding discourses around class, sexuality and ethnic identity' (2003: 152). Despite the fact that Johnnie and Dick's ménage conforms to heterosexual patterns of intimate life, Johnnie proves a character 'out of line' in the

black discourse and little acknowledgement of race within the gay world.

English home, with the women of the book vocalizing this tension on the reader's behalf. Echoing Lauren Berlant's claim that: 'hegemonic fantasies . . . thrive in the minds and on the bodies of subjects while, at the same time, attachments are developing that might redirect the different routes taken' (Berlant 1998: 286), Ahmed proposes that 'disorientation' may (though not always) 'offer us the hope of new directions' (2006: 158). In writing about a queer, migrant subject *within* the English home as early as 1960, Salkey's novel attempts just such a 'redirection'. In so doing, he evokes the possibility of the kinds of cross-racial or same-sex intimacies only rarely acknowledged by his peers, and anticipates the concerns of a later generation of British Caribbean writers.

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Kate Houlden

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