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Matt Cook. *Queer Domesticities: Homosexuality and Home Life in Twentieth-Century London.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. xiii + 326 pp. \$105.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-230-22139-0.



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Queer Domesticities explores the lives of several “queer” men from the late nineteenth century through the present day, addressing such subjects as the aesthetics of home, changing definitions of family, finding space in the city, and the interplay between homes and politics. Matt Cook’s intention is to show “how claiming a queer identityâas homosexual, inverted, or indeed queerâdid and does make a difference to domestic life because of the legal, social and cultural positioning of those identities” (p. 4). This intention is achieved through biographical insights into the home lives of individuals who crafted alternative spaces against a backdrop in which heterosexual marriage was, in the eyes of the state, the only permissible form of domestic arrangement.

Cook charts the shifting social and legal landscapes upon which those identifying as queer established a sense of home, examining the “terms, places, identities and identifications [that] mattered in the lives of the men” (p. 12). He avoids the pitfall of attempting to offer an objective account of the subject matter and instead adopts a personality-led approach, with each chapter composed around the biographies of individuals and couples, in answering his historical questions. In this regard, *Queer Domesticities* heeds John Tosh’s argument, in *A Man’s Place*, that “because the home is small, con-

fined and ‘private,’ the domestic lives of men lend themselves to individualistic treatment, in the manner of biography.”[1]

Queer Domesticities is written in an accessible style that will appeal to those with no prior knowledge of the subject matter as well as readers looking for an academic exploration of same-sex relations and histories of the home. For readers familiar with Cook’s previous work, there is an element of repetition as several chapters are based on previously published articles and chapters. However, these pieces are brought together in an engaging arrangement that also offers a substantial amount of new research. Cook’s decision to end each chapter with an epilogue, bringing the historical ideas discussed into the present day, is one of the book’s strengths. Rather than drawing direct links between the past and the present, these epilogues show how memories and evocations of the past have informed men’s lives in the present.

Readers will enjoy the book’s closing chapters, in which the lives of artists and activists Ajamu X and Derek Jarman are discussed. Like Joe Orton and Kenneth Halliwell, who feature in another of Cook’s chapters, Jarman is a much-noted figure in queer histories of late

twentieth-century Britain. Yet Cook excels in bringing Jarman to life by guiding readers through Jarman's London homes in Bloomsbury, in the South Bank, and on Charing Cross Road, as well as his retreat at Prospect Cottage on the Kent coast.

The book is very much focused on men's lives and some readers may question the absence of women in Cook's domestic narratives. Yet the book would not necessarily have benefited from expanding its focus to explore queer women's experiences of domesticity in nineteenth- and twentieth-century London as this fascinating yet comprehensive subject is better addressed in a work of its own. Cook directs readers toward Laura Doan's essay "Woman's Place in the Home" in *Sapphic Modernities: Sexuality, Women and National Culture*, coedited by Doan and Jane Garrity (2006) and Martha Vicinus's *Intimate Friends: Women Who Loved Women, 1778-1928* (2004). Still, one does wonder what role women played in the lives of the men discussed. As friends, mothers, sisters, co-parents, and lovers, women undoubtedly played, and continue to play, a role in how men experienced queer domesticity.

Queer Domesticities is an intellectually rigorous work that contributes to the field of study through its shar-

ing of personal stories and framing of these experiences within the context of social and legal changes. But it is also a personal history. An introductory section entitled "My Home" shares extracts from Cook's biography, describing his parents, partners, and children, and how they interact with his experience and understanding of home, making himself a queer subject of his own historical scrutiny. This is a history in which Cook is not only author but also active participant, with his own experiences inextricably the product of wider political movements in late twentieth-century Britain. With this in mind, reading this work as someone who is in the early years of setting up their own "queer domesticity," it is a moving experience to read elements of one's own life in the pages of a history book. Cook champions the interconnected nature of historical events and lived realities and makes clear that home life, historically and in the present, defines and is defined by one's identity. This is a history that is very much still under construction and that *Queer Domesticities* confidently conveys.

Note

[1]. John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 1.

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