



# **Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918-1957 (The Chicago Series on Sexuality, History, and Society)**

*Matt Houlbrook*

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In August 1934, young Cyril L. wrote to his friend Billy about all the exciting men he had met, the swinging nightclubs he had visited, and the vibrant new life he had forged for himself in the big city. He wrote, "I have only been queer since I came to London about two years ago, before then I knew nothing about it." London, for Cyril, meant boundless opportunities to explore his newfound sexuality. But his freedom was limited: he was soon arrested, simply for being in a club frequented by queer men.

Cyril's story is Matt Houlbrook's point of entry into the queer worlds of early twentieth-century London. Drawing on previously unknown sources, from police reports and newspaper exposés to personal letters, diaries, and the first queer guidebook ever written, Houlbrook here explores the relationship between queer sexualities and modern urban culture that we take for granted today. He revisits the diverse queer lives that took hold in London's parks and streets; its restaurants, pubs, and dancehalls; and its Turkish bathhouses and hotels—as well as attempts by municipal authorities to control and crack down on those worlds. He also describes how London shaped the culture and politics of queer life—and how London was in turn shaped by the lives of queer men. Ultimately, Houlbrook unveils the complex ways in which men made sense of their desires and who they were. In so doing, he mounts a sustained challenge to conventional understandings of the city as a place of sexual liberation and a unified queer culture.

A history remarkable in its complexity yet intimate in its portraiture, *Queer London* is a landmark work that redefines queer urban life in England and beyond.

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