



The Boy I Love

Marion Husband

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A tangled web of love and betrayal develops when war hero Paul returns from the trenches. He finds himself torn between desire and duty, his lover Adam awaits but so too does Margot, the pregnant fiancée of his dead brother. Set in a time when homosexuality was still illegal, Paul has to decide where his loyalty and his heart lie.

The Boy I Love Details

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From Reader Review *The Boy I Love* for online ebook

Elisa Rolle says

If not for the extensive reading I did in the past few years about the WWI was poets and their close relationship with each other, sometime bordering and merging into love, I would have probably considered this as only a good piece of fiction. But I do know about Siegfried Sassoon, and his love for Wilfred Owen, tragically ended with Owen's death in 1918; his close relationship with Robert Graves, maybe more friendship than love; and his second attempt at happiness Stephen Tennant, that maybe pushed him to marry Hester Gatty and finally having a family, like he had always desired.

I can see the Paul of *The Boy I love* in Siegfried Sassoon, like probably I can see Adam in Robert Graves, and why not Patrick in Wilfred Owen (with a different ending); there is also Margot in Hester Gatty. Of course the inter-relationships are different, like different are their outcomes. And truth be told, I don't like so much Paul, there is who sees courage in his decisions, but the only thing I can see is the broken hearts he is leaving behind. Already from the beginning, when he is describing the intense desire he has to be with Adam, and his desire is genuine, I can see that he is already detaching himself from his real life, to build a fake one. On this regard, Patrick is maybe less refined than Paul, but he is more sincere and open in his approaches.

It's true that all these men, even Adam, were completely and tragically changed by the war, and it's also true that many of them didn't have a choice; it was probably easier for the Stephen Tennant of the time, people from aristocracy, being dubbed as "eccentric", and living as they liked, but for the many Pauls, Adams and Patricks it was not so simple.

Just recently I argued with another reader on what makes a romance; the other opinion was that to be a romance you need to have an uplifting happily ever after; my opinion is that you need to have a love story, and the happily ever after is a bonus, but not a rule. So yes, I consider *The Boy I Love* a wonderful romance, maybe even comparable to the likes of Maurice, but unlike Maurice, it has not an happily ever after, at least not for Paul. I'm not sure if the author is planning something different for Adam and Patrick, maybe at the time she wrote this novel, she wanted for the reader to build their own finale. Now there are two more books in the series, so it will be interesting to see what is waiting for these men.

I wanted for this novel to have an happily ever after, even if I don't like so much Paul (but more for the output of his decisions that for him as a character), I was enthralled by his story, as I was by Patrick and Adam (Adam is probably my favorite), but I knew it was not in the star; in a way, it could have been worst, in the end, Paul and Patrick are back from war (and many didn't make it), Adam is still alive, but what life is without the total happiness of being able to basking to the sun of your love? It's like living in a perennial shadow, it's not bad, but not even perfection.

<http://www.amazon.com/dp/1908262729/?...>

SueC says

Being the military junkie that I am, I've read a ton of books depicting soldiers fighting and living in war zones. I've read about them falling for, and fighting for, love. I've read about them coming home to deal

with the effects of war, both mentally and physically - and those are a given.

But sometimes, like in this instance, we're lucky enough to come across something out of the ordinary. A story that feels more like real life than fiction with all its despair and tragedy. With shortcomings and desperation. And also chances for hope and happiness.

The Boy I Love is a sombre story depicting the life and loves of a small circle of people shortly after the end of WW1. It's about the sacrifices people make for themselves and the people they love.

Above all, the great triumph here is in the characters Husband has created. The living, breathing, wounded souls that waded through their lives with both bravery and fear. I was mesmerised by their stiff politeness; the rigid efforts of communication between strangers trying to muster affection in awkward situations. The desperation each and every character exudes for some happiness, or simply inner peace.

The story is centred around Paul and most of the pain of the story surrounds him. There's a looming sense of unease surrounding him and (both in present time and in flashbacks to the war zone) that adds a sense of mystery to the plot. He is plagued by grief and we wonder the whole time "what happened between Paul and Jenkins?"

It's a fairly incestuous plot, in that three characters are interwoven quite closely. I struggled with the idea that despite the leagues of soldiers in various deployments and their respective loved ones, they somehow all happen to cross paths. But admittedly that niggle is inconsequential in the grand scheme of this plot considering this final product.

There are no bells and whistles here; there are no grunting alphas, no overbearing displays of masculinity, there are no adrenaline pumped action scenes and there's certainly no cute-meet. This is worlds apart from every soldier themed story I've read. This is about recovery and reconnecting with life after war. And it's done wonderfully.

Note: *The Boy I Love* is book one in a three-part series, but I get the feeling that this first book ends well enough to be considered a stand alone story. If you want more, you can simply go onto the next of the books.

Sarah Walsh says

Husband's books came recommended. Sitting on my 'to read' shelf for some years, it's with kind relief to finally finish her first. *The Boy I Love*, Trilogy No.1, is a gay fiction set after World War 1 in the hoi polloi of England's Midlands. And not your regular white hetero hero saves damsel narrative. There's saving to be done as you'd imagine after a War, the theme of history and its intolerance of acts and persons proving even today because intolerance, is fascinating as you'd foresee.

Why read this book? The setting's detailed, proving meticulous editing and research, Husband, finding her calling, a wonderful writer. Never one for patriarchy, its wars nor reading books online, a first for me - I could imagine a TV adaptation of this.

Daily, I'd sit with tea and love on a chapter, understanding the development of these characters, the rawness

of community and a somewhat false commitment to marriage. In the shadows, secretive sex giving the story and the reader, an open and to continue drama.

Whatever your thoughts on identity, and gender constructs of The State, this book will provoke.

“There is no such thing as a homosexual or a heterosexual person. There are only homo or heterosexual acts.” Gore Vidal

Stephen says

Former doughboy Paul is torn between his affection for Adam and his duty toward his dead brother's pregnant fiancée Margot.

This book is as British as they come and swiftly took me back *across the pond*. Not to the England that I've visited physically as a tourist but to the England that I've visited psychically through all of the dramas and documentaries.

This book is an engrossing read and as with all travel, you'll learn something as well.

Kassa says

3.5 stars

The Boy I Love is at once a stunning portrayal of life, love, and reality post-WWI and a rather depressing read. I'm torn because I think this story is technically an absolute masterpiece, well written with heart breaking characters and never afraid to depict poor conditions and disfigured men. While the men and action are unbelievably compelling, keeping you glued to the story page after page, it's also very dark and no one gets a happy ending. That's not a bad thing necessarily and normally I never personally mind but the emotional investment is high and the payoff will vary for readers. I can easily and whole heartedly recommend this story based on it's technical brilliance but whether you'll enjoy reading the story is going to vary reader to reader.

The summary is rather inadequate to describe the story (as you no doubt guessed). There is a rather large cast but they all revolve around the main character of Paul Harris. Paul is recently released after a lengthy recovery at an asylum after the war. Losing his left eye in the war compounds the mental and emotional anguish Paul experiences following the atrocities he saw and committed. Paul happens to run into his dead brother's girlfriend and realizes she's pregnant with Robbie's child. Deciding to marry Margot, Paul seems at peace but his decision affects everyone differently. From Paul's lover Adam who he continues to see even after marriage to Patrick, an old military friend with a crush on Paul, the men and women orbiting around Paul all depict different perspectives and goals as they try to etch out lives for themselves.

The story is told in differing third person point of views and is gripping from the very beginning. Husband weaves a slight mystery and question of exactly what Paul did during the war that causes him such anguish into the story so the reader wonders throughout until the answer is revealed at the very end. Besides this question, the rest of the story is character driven with a fully realized, incredibly complicated cast. While

every single person included has depth and purpose, a feat in itself, many remain a mystery for the duration. Adam, Patrick, and Margot are all Paul's lovers at one point or another, and at one point he's sleeping with all three individually. They each offer something completely different and complex and show individuals trying incredibly hard to create small happiness where they can find it.

Paul is clearly the main character and all others revolve around him either directly or on the periphery but he remains an enigma. His journey is occasionally heart breaking to read as you watch him begin each relationship with excitement and purpose, only to grow restless and distant. Ultimately turning what was a loving encounter into a chore and duty. Paul is perhaps the most damaged of the cast, above and beyond the injured Mick missing both legs. His inability to be happy and deep emotional scarring create a fascinating character but one that is very hard to read. I found myself rooting for Paul to find happiness with any one of his lovers but realized that he never truly could be happy with anyone, but that won't stop him from trying with person after person. This started to wear on me and I can't necessarily fault the story or the author but I felt bad for all the characters involved.

Part of this is that the story is so gripping and engaging, I couldn't put it down. I read it in one sitting, staying up very late to finish and ultimately never got that pay off that I put into the story. Mick gets a happy ending of sorts and I was gratified to see how that worked out but his story is very peripheral. I wanted Adam or Patrick to find something for themselves. Adam especially ends up a sad character with his damp house and resentment while Patrick's final resolution almost brought me to tears. I felt wrung out with the intensity of the story, honesty of the time period and characters, yet given little hope that any of them would be happy. Content maybe, but not happy so this is ultimately a reader choice that is likely to vary from reader to reader.

The Boy I Love is an ambitious novel that does have a few stumbles, the most notably in that the characters remain mysterious even after close to 300 pages. Yet for that the stunning writing and inspired prose lend well to the honest characters laid open honestly with their flaws and strengths. On the one hand it's incredibly easy to read and sucks you in to the story immediately, yet the resolutions simply can't be easy. The book is better for never taking the easy route and keeping each character brutally honest, yet I would have preferred even the hint of hope. I easily and enthusiastically recommend this story to everyone but be careful and read this when you're in the mood for something intense and moving.

One final note on the rating. I found this book an enigma to rate. It fully deserves the highest marks, 5 stars or more, based on several elements not the least is the incredible writing. Yet I can't say this is a book I *enjoyed* reading. I couldn't put it down and may even read it again but I didn't enjoy it. Thus I ended up with an odd rating that reflects the dichotomy of a great book that I just can't say I liked reading it even though I felt compelled to. So in this case, ignore the stars and decide for yourself.

Comus says

For a book as highly praised as *The Boy I Love*, I was expecting something more. Ostensibly the book 'explores' social issues regarding homosexuality, injury, love, loss, guilt, trauma--so on and so on--and while it seems that Husband was able to touch on enough of these themes to convince her readers that the book contained anything particularly probing or psychologically compelling, her portrayal of war trauma, post-war alienation, and homosexual alienation was enormously bland. It seems that Husband goes through the book writing of what she feels a First World War veteran or early 20th century gay man *should* think, according to popular modern conception.

The dialogue seemed as if it could have been spoken by more or less anyone; the actions seemed as if they could have been performed by more or less anyone. Nothing attached me to the characters as living, breathing entities that existed beyond the page. I have the feeling that Husband, in some of the most outwardly uninteresting scenes, was attempting to allude to the 'Great English Unsaid'; yet unlike more masterful novels (*The Charioteer* is notable for this; if you think you'll like *The Boy I Love*, do yourself a favor and read *The Charioteer* instead), one doesn't feel that what's left unsaid is really pressing so much at the characters' minds. The more externally honest, confrontational scenes fall flat with a similar lack of urgency.

The prose style is as bland as the psychological investigation; Husband subsists on small paragraphs of lacklustre description of action and sparse scene-setting, strings of undistinguished dialogue, and occasionally a larger block of straightforward introspection. There is no poetry in Husband's prose, which reads with about as much excitement as an instruction booklet.

I've just virtually flipped through my Kindle edition of this book and come across this passage, which illustrates my points well, I believe:

'He remembered that Cooper bled to death in his arms, his blood soaking his tunic so that later he would pick off the dry crust, noticing how it cracked into crazy-paving patterns beneath his busy fingers. Cooper's blood stayed beneath his fingernails for days, and sometimes he imagined it was pigs' blood, that he hadn't been clean since the slaughtering in the shop's yard. He remembered that in the German trench Paul had used his pistol to shoot the machine gunner and that he seemed not to notice the blood and brains that splashed his face. Worse than the noise and confusion, worse than Cooper's bloody, silent death, was his fear for Paul, the terror of having two lives to lose instead of one.'

What should have been a recollection pulsing and alive with the fury of trauma leaves me entirely cold--perhaps not even cold--room temperature? One is presented with the cause and effect of war--'bled to death in his arms', 'brains that splashed his face', 'confusion' and 'terror'--but one doesn't read *The Boy I Love* with the sense that the characters *feel* this trauma fully and wholly. That the Great War created enormous trauma in those who fought is almost universally known; but the fact that any reader *knows* that veterans would have been traumatized isn't sufficient to carry a flat, rote fictionalization of that trauma. The same problem occurs in literature regarding homosexuality in turn of the century/early 20th century England, which is a similarly easy subject to slide through with a few stale scenes of the expected 'internal turmoil'.

In essence, *The Boy I Love* relies too heavily on preconceptions and generalizations about homosexuality, war trauma, disability, etc to make any new kind of investigation into the social climate of the post-war years; it lacks characters compelling enough to give any renewal and freshness to pre-established narratives about those subjects; and its prose is too dull to carry the weight of the book's blandness on the shoulders of poetic beauty.

For a long time, I've searched for a book that represents homosexuality, disability and trauma during the First World War and interwar years with the same perceptiveness and psychological depth as classics of gay literature like *Maurice*, *Brideshead Revisited*, *The Charioteer*, etc. When I found *The Boy I Love*, I thought that my wishes had been granted, and that I would be thrust into the literary equivalent of a twelve-course dinner at Escoffier's Savoy--instead I found a slightly stale slab of Wonderbread with a Kraft Single and a tatter of deli ham lumped on top. I will continue to search.

John says

A beautiful, melancholy book which feels terribly true to its time and to the characters. It is, after all, set in a difficult time, just after the Great War, and the characters are faced with difficult circumstances. The psychological and physical scars of that awful war are excruciatingly fresh and the issues they wrestle with allow them little respite. It's the war-at-home that follows the war-in-France, and the book's characters are as ill-equipped to fight that battle as were the soldiers of the 1914-18 war their own. Yet, it's not hopeless. It is a bit sad that none of the characters finds happiness but they all in their own way muddle through. And that *is* a victory. Not a happy one, perhaps, but a result that feels true.

Marion Husband has written beautifully descriptively of a deeply ironic time in a provincial corner of England. She conveys her characters with the understatement they themselves would use and in a way that feels very true to them. Not unlike peeling an onion. It's also completely impossible to put down. It's not that one dramatic event occurs after the other, more that characters have more of their extraordinary essence exposed through ordinary life.

Erastes says

I devoured this book. It was like comfort food. English to the core and had (for me) the same effect as scoffing steak and kidney pudding. I wallowed.

It's based just after the First World War and Paul has returned home after 18 months in a mental hospital due to a severe case of shellshock. His brother, whom he and everyone else adored, has been killed – ironically after the armistice – in a car crash. Paul's "queer", and is discreetly continuing a relationship with Adam that he had started before the war. When his brother's girlfriend tells him she's pregnant by Robbie, Paul has some choices to make. It's further complicated by Pat, a man damaged by his past, who was Paul's sergeant and who has, or so he thinks, an unrequited crush on Paul.

What I loved about this was the frank and bleak look at men returning from the trenches. None of them are whole, Paul's eye was "dug out by a rusty spoon" and he still wakes up screaming with shellshock, Mick (Pat's brother) has lost his legs, Adam was "unfit for service", and most families in the town have lost someone, but still – it's a very English novel, with the world moving on, people drinking tea and getting quietly on with their lives. The country is changing, women are working, women are smoking, women are going out when pregnant! (Another nice touch about this book is that there are women characters who resonate and aren't just there for decoration or to be The Bitch.)

The author is deft and skilful in the way the story unfolds – which is told partly in flashback. There's a mystery at the heart of the book too; we are told that something happened to Paul in the trenches (other than the normal!); something involving a man called Jenkins and it takes the book to unravel what happens whilst still coping with about six different plotlines. Impressive.

If I have one tiny quibble, I'd say that it didn't, to my mind, get deep enough into the character's points of view, I think Pat was the character whose head we were deepest into, and with such dark subjects – and with such choices to be made I would have liked to have known more of what people were thinking. Perhaps it should have been longer to try and encompass this, perhaps it was a tiny bit ambitious for a first novel. That being said, even without a deeper POV, the characters are very memorable and I was rooting for all of them

even though I knew that it couldn't ALL work out in a pat fashion.

Duane Colwell says

Wonderful book. One of those that I just couldn't put down. The character studies went on throughout the book, and you only got a clear picture of them at the end. But they were very well developed, very real and very believable. Very well done and highly recommended.

Update July 2012. Just read this terrific book again in preparation for reading her new book "All the Beauty of the Sun". I think the story is really sad, and I felt bad for nearly everybody, however it is so brilliantly written that I was totally mesmerized. This is a book worth reading over and over, and I'm sure I'll read it again. And now, with great anticipation I'm going to start on "All the Beauty of the Sun".

Steve Woods says

This is a very fine novel indeed. There is just so much here. The struggle of men returning after war, particularly the First World War and the tremendous personal struggles that a gay man at that time would have been faced with. This story is intense, it gets to grips with some extreme situations and the human responses to them. The characterisations were among the best I have ever read, (particularly in a novel so short); they were both full and satisfying, I felt I knew these people and the details of both the war experience and English society of the time were accurate in every way. Very believable.

I would go so far as to place the book among some of my favourite authors who dealt with that period including the greats of WW1 writing Graves, Sassoon and Owen. This is a remarkable achievement for the author reaching across the divides of time, gender and sexuality.

Interestingly, there is much about what happens in this story that reflects the actual details of Sassoon's life. Particularly his relationships with Owen and Graves and his marriage despite being gay!

It was a wonderful if emotional read for me. I felt for these people all of them but particularly for the main character Paul. I found myself, as a combat veteran, attuned to much he thinks and feels. I will read the sequel certainly

Lucas Steele says

This is a stunning book about a gay soldier returning from WW1. It was a time when homosexuality was illegal and he is trapped by the strict moral code of the period. You really empathise with him and the awful dilemmas he faces. It is beautifully written but is also a real page-turner. A must read!

Jayne Rogers says

Thoroughly enjoyed this WW1 gay romance. Lovely characterisation and a mind on the little things in

people's lives that makes the bigger things so important. Have downloaded the rest of the trilogy, can't wait to see what happens next. A really good read.

Emily-Jo says

I loved reading it, but it is undeniably Not Very Good, and I can't give it more than two stars. I do wish Husband had done some more research into gay life in the period she's writing it in - it's beyond infuriating to see words used out of their time, and a lot of the Gayngst reads like it's from a fan fiction. A good fan fiction - one you'd read again and again and recommend to all your fellow fans, but fan fiction nonetheless. I'll probably read the second one, though, so she's not failed at getting me invested.

Gavin Stephenson-Jackman says

The trials and tribulations of post WWI Britain entangle the lives of three former soldiers. Paul marries his deceased brother's girlfriend to disguise her pregnancy with his brother's child, as he deals with his war injuries, physical and emotional, all the while loving another. Patrick is fascinated by Paul as he cares for his brother and his injuries from the war. Throw an ex lover into the mix and stir well. This is really a great read. I had trouble putting it down. I'm looking forward to the next in the series.

Rosie says

Wonderful book. Fantastic three dimensional characters.
