

University of Southern Queensland

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Bedside manners

Abstract:

This work is a creative exploration of notions of masculinity and male sexuality. Specifically, it explores the idea that male sexuality and gender exist on a continuum and defy simple categorization. The script was developed using an interdisciplinary approach including traditional research into theories of gender and sexuality and fiction writing techniques such as associative and stream-of-consciousness composition. In this way, a script was produced that indirectly refers to the notion of fluid sexuality whilst telling a dramatic story about two men who occupy very different places on the gender and sexuality spectrum.

Biographical note:

Dr Dallas J Baker is an academic in the School of Arts and Communication at University of Southern Queensland. His study and research intersect with a number of disciplines: writing, editing and publishing, and media and cultural studies. Dallas is also a writer with creative work published in a number of journals and anthologies. His current research interests are memoir and memory, scriptwriting, editing and publishing and ‘self-making’ in cultural practices such as creative writing and popular music consumption.

Keywords:

Creative writing – Scriptwriting as research – LGBTIQ drama

Bedside manners

The Characters

REED WALKER – An effeminate man in his mid-thirties. The focus of a lot of abuse in his conservative hometown of Toowoomba.

DAN BAXTER – A good-looking, rough and tumble guy in his mid-twenties who has, in the past, tormented Reed.

SIMON DONCASTER – A local redneck in his mid-twenties.

MAL MCNAIR – Another local redneck, also in his mid-twenties.

Setting

The action takes place in the autumn of 1982 in Toowoomba, Queensland, a conservative town with tree-lined streets and many old, heritage value homes. Toowoomba is known for its many parks and gardens, as well as its annual Carnival of Flowers, but Toowoomba has a dark side as well, in that it has a history of intolerance and violence.

Locations

Campbell Street – a leafy tree-lined street in Toowoomba featuring rows of weatherboard houses typical of Queensland, with verandas, galvanized iron roofing and redbrick chimneys.

Workers Cottage – A small weatherboard Queenslander, sparsely furnished. This is Dan Baxter's place.

Old Queenslander – a large, slightly run-down weatherboard home with wrap-around verandas in a large, almost overgrown, yard. The interior is decorated in a heady mix of Asian styles popular in the late Victorian era. The bedroom is fussily decorated with an eclectic array of Victoriana and many knick-knacks of Oriental origin.

SCENE 1

1. EXT. A TOOWOOMBA STREET - DAY

From above, we see a quiet tree-lined street. On both sides of the street are weatherboard houses, all with corrugated iron roofs and redbrick chimneys. This is Campbell Street, Toowoomba.

On a footpath that threads its way in and out of tree-shade, a solitary figure walks away from the camera.

From behind, the figure looks like some flamboyant actress, but dressed in a manly fashion. The person wears a well-tailored suit, pants and jacket which, despite its masculine cut, gives an overall impression of femininity. This is REED WALKER.

CUT TO:

2. EXT. TOOWOOMBA STREET - DAY

REED's face is angular and refined. His skin is smooth and pale. He is in his mid-thirties. He wears a lurid red neckerchief with an oriental design. He carries himself with a kind of rebellious and resolute dignity.

CUT TO:

3. EXT. TOOWOOMBA STREET - DAY, CONTINUOUS

REED looks up from tidying his kerchief and sees ahead three shirtless young men coming around a corner towards him.

The men are handsome in a redneck way; well-built but wearing dirty, faded work pants. It is a hot, sweaty day and their shirts are tied around their waists. Their names are SIMON DONCASTER, MAL MCNAIR and DAN BAXTER - three local toughs.

As soon as Reed sees them, he takes a pair of round sunglasses out of his breast pocket and puts them on, straightening his hair at the same time - in an act of vanity, pride ... and anxiety.

The young men see Reed. Simon thumps Mal in the arm and smirks - preliminary signals to the ridicule he intends to throw at Reed. Dan Baxter hangs back a bit.

As the three men get nearer, Reed steels himself for the inevitable.

SIMON DONCASTER

Hey Reed! How are ya this mornin'
darlin'?

MAL MCNAIR

Out for a morning stroll, petal?

Reed ignores them, lifts his head a little higher, and walks past. The shirtless men stop.

SIMON DONCASTER

Hey Reed, how about a bit of this!

Simon grabs his crotch whilst Mal, spurred on by his friend, starts to rub his own nipple.

MAL MCNAIR

How about it Reed! Wanna try some?

The two rednecks laugh, while Dan Baxter, still standing back from his friends, looks a little uncomfortable.

Reed is not foolish enough to stop, but he can't help but mutter a retort:

REED

Just lovely. You boys are so cute I
cannot find words to express...

Simon Doncaster suddenly jumps forward and shoves Reed, who nearly falls down. Dan Baxter steps forward and grabs hold of Simon's shoulder to restrain him. Simon gives Dan a look of disgust and throws him off. Dan staggers back a few paces, then Simon turns his attention back to Reed:

SIMON DONCASTER

You love words like 'lovely' and
'cute', don't you Reed? Yeah, you
love words like that, *poofter*
words.

The word 'poofter' resonates harshly. Reed is visibly disturbed. He turns and continues down the street away from them, trembling. Simon is about to continue his abuse but is stopped when, out of the blue, something strikes him on the head.

SIMON DONCASTER

(to Dan)

Jesus! What did you do that for?!

He holds his head where a projectile struck.

DAN

What? I didn't do nothin'!

SIMON DONCASTER

You threw a fuckin' rock at me!

DAN

No, I didn't.

SIMON DONCASTER

You fuckin' did!

(he turns to Mal)

He did, didn't he, Mal? He threw a fuckin' rock at me!

MAL MCNAIR

I didn't see him throw nothin'.

SIMON DONCASTER

Well, the rock didn't just drop out of the sky, ya dropkick, someone fuckin' threw it.

MAL MCNAIR

Well I didn't see Dan or nobody chuck it, so leave off.

SIMON DONCASTER

(to Mal)

Did you fuckin' chuck it then?

MAL MCNAIR

No, I fuckin' didn't.

Simon glares at Mal, then back at Dan.

DAN

I didn't throw nothin', mate.

Mal shrugs and stalks off down the road, in the opposite direction to Reed.

Simon glares at Dan one more time but then follows Mal, grumbling under his breath and rubbing his head. Dan is left standing on the footpath, he turns to watch Reed hurrying away.

Reed glances back, more interested in making sure he isn't being followed than finding out what's happening, but he sees that the three guys are not pursuing him. He sighs with relief.

A moment later, Reed turns a corner. He is safe. He takes off his sunglasses and puts them back in his breast pocket.

CUT TO:

4. EXT. TOOWOOMBA STREET - DAY, CONTINUOUS

DAN turns to follow his friends, who have renewed their argument about who threw the rock. As he walks away, he drops something from his clenched hand.

The camera zooms in on the object: it is another rock.

Dan smirks and proceeds down the street.

CUT TO:

SCENE 2

5. EXT. SMALL WORKERS' COTTAGE, ESTABLISHING - THAT NIGHT

A well-kept workers' cottage sits in a shadowy street beneath a clear sky. Light from one window spills out into the front yard and illuminates a gnarled tree.

CUT TO:

6. INT. SMALL WORKERS' COTTAGE, BEDROOM - SAME NIGHT

A sparsely furnished, tidy and notably unadorned bedroom is lit by the yellowish light of a single electric light overhead.

DAN BAXTER lies on a single bed dressed only in his underwear. He stares up at the ceiling and chews on his bottom lip as if trying to make a decision.

A towel is draped over a wooden chair beside the bed. To one side of the bed, a door is ajar through which we can see a slightly steamy bathroom, where another electric light glows warmly above an old tub.

Dan suddenly gets up off the bed, looking determined, and grabs a pair of jeans that are folded on the seat of the chair and pulls them on. He then grabs a short-sleeved shirt hanging on the bathroom doorknob and pulls that on. Before buttoning up the shirt, he finds his boots and sits down to put them on as well. Before putting on the boots, he seems to change his mind.

He jumps up off the bed again and takes off the shirt and hangs it back on the doorknob. He pulls off the jeans and sits back down on the bed in his underwear, holding his face in his hands, clearly tormented by indecision. He slumps back on the bed and stares at the ceiling, chewing on his bottom lip again.

After a moment he gets up once more and pulls on his jeans again. He grabs his socks and boots and puts them on. Then he grabs the short sleeve shirt off the doorknob and puts that on. As he's buttoning it up, he looks at it and picks at one of the buttons, seeming dissatisfied with it. He takes the shirt off again and walks over to a wardrobe. He takes out of the wardrobe a pristine white long-sleeved shirt that looks very neatly pressed. He puts that on, rolls up the sleeves a little and then buttons it up. He pauses a moment, chewing on his lip. Then, with a sigh of resignation he turns off the bathroom light and walks out of the bedroom.

CUT TO:

7. EXT. OLD QUEENSLANDER - SAME NIGHT, ESTABLISHING

An old Queenslander with a wrap-around veranda is crossed by the shadow of a single cloud. The place looks unkempt yet somehow appealing. This is REED WALKER's house.

The night breeze causes trees in the large yard to sway and leaves to drift across the ground, as if stalking the cloud above.

CUT TO:

8. INT. REED'S HOUSE, BEDROOM - NIGHT

In REED's bedroom, strips of moonlight shine in between the curtain folds, illuminating an assemblage of Victoriana and oriental knick-knacks, giving a somewhat eerie appearance to the room.

In a large brass bed, the figure of a sleeping Reed is just discernable in the dim light.

CUT TO:

9. EXT. REED'S HOUSE - NIGHT, CONTINUOUS

Outside REED's house, someone is letting themselves in through an unlocked window. The intruder climbs in and makes their way down the hall. By their outline, we can see that it is a man.

CUT TO:

10. INT. REED'S HOUSE, BEDROOM - NIGHT, CONTINUOUS

REED is sound asleep, totally unaware that someone has broken into his house.

The intruder quietly opens Reed's bedroom door and enters. The sound of the door opening causes REED to shift a little in his bed but he does not wake.

The intruder reaches the bed, his shadow falling over Reed's face, and places a large hand over Reed's mouth.

Reed wakes and attempts to scream out for help, he can't - the intruder's hand muffles the sound.

While Reed struggles, the intruder sits down on the bed - his face enters the moonlight.

It is DAN BAXTER. He is wearing dark blue jeans and a loosely buttoned but pristinely white long-sleeved shirt.

DAN

Shush will ya, shush. I'm not goin'
to hurt ya.

Reed stops struggling. Dan takes his hand away from REED's mouth.

REED

Dan Baxter! What are you doing,
climbing in my window and
manhandling me like that! Have you
no manners? I should slap you
silly!

DAN

I should be slapping you! Prancing
around town gettin' everyone all
ticked off.

REED
(insulted)
Prancing! What are you doing here?

DAN
I came to tell you to lay off.

REED
Lay off what?

DAN
Just stay indoors for a while—

REED
(interrupting)
This is my favorite time of year. I
have no intention of—

DAN
If Simon and Mal catch up with ya
they're gonna do somethin' to ya
that you're not gonna like!

REED
I don't care what they do to me.

DAN
That's your problem Reed, you're
just too reckless... But maybe some
people don't wanna see you get
beaten up, or worse.

REED
Like who?

DAN
Like me maybe...

REED
Well, you certainly have turned
around. It seems only this morning
you were tormenting me on Campbell
Street.

DAN
I was just goin' along with my
mates. A bloke's gotta go along
with his mates. It's like a rule.

REED
That is a very dumb rule.

DAN

Maybe... I just wanted to warn you that Simon an' Mal have bees in their bonnets—

REED

The things people do for fashion...

Dan stands up with a sudden outburst of emotion.

DAN

Can't you be serious! They might really hurt you this time! Don't you know what blokes like them do to fellas like you in this town?

REED

Of course I do. You forget I've lived here all my life. I've heard all the stories: young men found bashed to death in Queens Park. Girly little boys whose own fathers tie them in potato sacks and drown them in Cooby Dam. But they're just stories to scare people like me, and I refuse to be scared.

DAN

Some of those aren't just stories. You don't know what people like Simon are capable of. He really hates... Well, he really hates—

REED

Hates what? Faggots? Poofsters?

DAN

I've never used them words on you Reed, you know I haven't. But, yeah, he hates poofsters, really hates 'em. He's mental about it... you've got to be careful Reed.

Reed looks surprised at Dan's concern.

REED

Alright, alright. I'll be careful,
but only if you tell me the reason
you climbed in my window in the
middle of the night dressed in your
best shirt and smelling like a new
bar of soap. Surely not just to
tell me to behave?

Reed looks down at his bedspread and coyly worries at its
edges with his fingers.

Dan looks considerably taken aback. He looks away from Reed
and out the curtained window, then back at Reed who is still
fiddling with the bedspread. He is clearly lost for words, for
he doesn't respond.

Reed sits up, rearranging the bedspread and smoothing it out
in slow strokes, watching Dan expectantly, wondering if he
will ever answer his question.

Reed's movement makes Dan start a little, he is clearly
nervous and agitated.

REED (CONT)

Come on, tell me the real reason
you climbed in my window Dan
Baxter? Surely you didn't just come
to warn me about dumb Simon
Doncaster?

Dan swallows hard, looks out the window again and then,
somewhat hesitantly, sits back down on the bed.

Dan's closeness causes Reed to feel both nervous and curious,
for his body tenses a little as Dan sits, but his eyes look
intrigued.

DAN

I like you Reed, always have. Ever
since I first laid eyes on you
years ago... You make it hard for a
feller though—

REED

Making it hard for fellers is what
I do best...

Dan's upper body jerks back in shock at this very forward
comment, as if he's been struck. But he pauses only a second
before he responds.

DAN

There you go again. Don't you have any decorum at all?

REED

No, I'm afraid not. Besides, 'decorum' is a strange word for a *bloke* like you to use. Could it be there's more to you than meets the eye?

DAN

(meekly)

A whole lot more, if you're lookin'.

REED

I am looking.

Dan blushes.

DAN

Look Reed, I... I just don't know if this is me... If I'm the kind of guy who—

REED

Climbs in another man's window in the middle of the night?

DAN

Yeah.

REED

Well, I don't know you very well, but I do know one thing for certain...

Dan's interest is piqued.

REED (CONT'D)

In this house, in my room, you can be any kind of man you want to be. It doesn't matter who you are outside, when you're with me, you can be whoever you want, whatever you want.

Dan smiles uncertainly, trembling a little. An awkward moment passes before he speaks.

DAN

I don't know if I can be one person
one place and a different person
somewhere else.

REED

Sure you can, you can be whatever
you want to be, whenever and
wherever you want to. It's a myth
that we can only be one thing; that
we have to be the same thing all
the time.

Dan looks as though he wants to believe this but isn't quite
convinced.

DAN

Do you really think so Reed?

REED (CONT)

Yes, I do... Look, the same men who
call people like me faggot on the
street get up to all sorts of queer
business when no-one else is
looking. Everyone has secrets Dan,
everyone.

Dan looks surprised by this, but not alarmed. There is another
awkward pause before he speaks, in which he takes a deep,
calming breath.

DAN

I'm sorry I didn't stand up for you
on the street, it's just—

REED

You didn't want your friends to
think you were queer. It's okay,
you're not required to stand up for
me.

DAN

I know I'm not required... I wanted
to, it's just, with everything—

REED

I understand perfectly. You don't
need to feel obliged.

DAN

And you don't need to cut me off all the time. Let me say what I came to say.

Reed is taken aback and goes quiet.

DAN (CONT)

I've wanted to come see you for a while... but I thought if I knocked on the door you'd just pretend you weren't home.

REED

An astute observation. But, I must say, I probably would've opened the door eventually, I find you quite intriguing.

Dan noticeably relaxes, he pretends to be interested in something amongst the clutter of knick-knacks on Reed's dressing table and smiles to himself.

Reed sees him smiling and smirks to himself as well, then sits up a little taller in his bed and straightens his pajamas.

DAN

I've never seen someone go to bed with so much on.

REED

I'm an imperfect being, forgive me if I hide behind a little flannelette. It's all right for you, with your glitteringly handsome body.

Reed's face tightens a little, he fears that he may have gone too far too soon. But Dan smiles, clearly flattered. He soaks up the compliment for a while, then, acting on impulse, removes his white shirt, hanging it carefully on the bedpost before settling back on the bed again, slightly embarrassed, his hands resting awkwardly in his lap.

DAN

(doubtful)

Does it really glitter, my skin?

REED

It does to me.

Dan looks down at his chest, as if inspecting it.

DAN

It's just the moonlight coming in
the window.

REED

No, no it's not just the moon.

They look into each other's eyes, a moment of understanding
passing between them.

Reed swallows with nerves. Dan stretches his hand across the
covers towards Reed's thigh.

DAN

(hesitantly)

I do like you Reed, but, but you
know I'm not, I'm not a fag.

Reed flinches at the word 'fag', but recovers quickly.

REED

So, why is your hand on my leg?

DAN

Well, like you said, when it comes
to you, I feel, well, different to
normal.

REED

So, what, I make you feel *abnormal*?
Is that what you're saying?

Dan smirks, traces his hand a little higher on Reed's thigh.

DAN

No, not abnormal. You make me feel
good... like I'm... like I'm beautiful
or somethin'.

REED

You are. You are beautiful.

Dan blushes, smiles again.

DAN

I like you a whole lot, Reed. I've
been desperate to climb in that
window for months, to see you on
your own...

REED

Really?

DAN

Yep.

Reed puts a hand to his chest, rubbing at a spot directly above his heart.

REED

My heart needed to hear that.
Sometimes I think the only emotion
anybody ever feels for me is
hatred.

DAN

I'm sorry if I made you feel that
way. I don't hate you, I... well, I
think you're beautiful too.

Dan places a tentative hand on Reed's shoulder.

REED

Good lord, is this really
happening?

DAN

I think it is.

REED

How extraordinary—

Dan moves closer to Reed, caresses his cheek with a trembling hand. Reed looks both frightened and thrilled. Dan takes another deep breath, then leans in close to kiss him.

CUT TO:

11. EXT. REED'S HOUSE- NIGHT, CONTINUOUS

Outside Reed's house, the wind has slowed to a gentle breeze. The yard is still. The curtained bedroom window, still open, is dark, quiet.

FADE TO BLACK

THE END

Research statement

Research background

This creative work is inspired by queer theory relating to gender and sexuality. More specifically, it is a creative expression (in the form of a script) of queer notions of gender and sexuality as diverse, fluid and changeable (Baker 2011). The creative piece is directly inspired by the critical work of Judith Butler (1990, 2004). In line with Butler's work, the script presents masculinity and male sexuality as free of any ontological basis.

Research contribution

The critical work that inspired this script was groundbreaking in that it illustrated the ways that gender and sexuality are discursive and performative constructs (Butler 1990, 2004). The script then, is innovative in that it presents, demonstrates and expresses these critical ideas in a creative way, something that has not been explicitly done in script form. The theoretical ideas have been deployed as characters, action and dialogue (Batty 2014: 35), in the accessible format of a drama script.

Research significance

This work is one of the first Queer Theory informed, creative applications of ideas around the fluidity of masculinity and male sexuality. The work is innovative in that these theories have been rendered as action, character and dialogue in a drama script (Batty 2014). The script is also a wholly original creative work, considered worthy of publication in *TEXT*, a peak journal in the creative writing discipline.

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