

2022

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CAMP 2022

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U | QUEER

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CAMP is created and compiled on the Stolen Lands of the Kulin Nations. On behalf of the editors and contributors, we acknowledge the Woiwurrung, Boon Wurrung, Taungurong, Dja Dja Wurrung and Wadawurrung as the Traditional Owners of the Lands of what is now considered Central Victoria. I pay my respects to their Elders of the past and present.

In this publication, you will see art from a lot of people who call Naarm home and some from people who might not; either way it is important to emphasise that art has been created on this land since time immemorial by its First Peoples. This land and the sovereignty of Aboriginal Australians has never been ceded and we continue to benefit from the continued dispossession of Kulin land. This land, waters and skies Always were and Always Will Be Aboriginal.

It is also important for readers to know that like the rest of the Indigenous world, Queer identities have always been a part of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander society. While this information was almost lost to time due to colonisation, Mobs have always had Queer people and have always respected them and their identities.

We pay our respects to our Brotherboys and Sistergirls and all our Queer Mob, especially those who have fought and continue to fight for acceptance in a colonial world. Their work and dedication allow us to exist safely in these spaces and creates an environment in which we may work to better the future for the generations to come. Gender is a colonial construct, and we are all victims of the institutions that uphold it.

Before continuing this magazine, pay respects to the Traditional Owners of the land you are on.

—Harley Lewis (Aboriginal man) and Brittney Henderson (Bunurong & Wiradjuri person)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY



LETTERS FROM THE EDITORS



Aries Gacutan (they/them) Commentary Editor

CAMP 2022 emerged as the first edition of CAMP since the COVID-19 lockdowns, spitting blood and glitter onto the pavement. With operations finally back on campus, we knew we wanted to come out swinging with an edition that embraces the strangeness, messiness and joyful ambiguities of all sorts of queer experiences. In a world of mounting anti-trans legislation, vapid rainbow capitalism, vitriolic online infighting and the slow erosion of our rights and histories, it is more important than ever to embrace the jagged edges of our defiant, transcendent community. We're here! We're queer! And we are never, ever going away.

XYNTIA / Cyn (pronoun indifferent) Graphic Design Editor

2022 has been a grand year of expressing my identity.

I feel equally as connected and disconnected with my culture/sexuality in ways transcending beyond what I've known, paving a path to the things I'll come to know. I feel incredibly privileged to be sharing my work with you all in CAMP 2022 and collaborating with such talented people in the queer community. I am especially thankful for the land on which I walk to find my next place of being - and to the ancestors and generational suffering/learnings that have guided and shaped me into who I am today.



Zhiyou Low (he/him) Creative Editor

When I learned about CAMP in my first year, I was moved by its project—to represent a historically underrepresented demographic. I wanted to contribute an intersectional perspective to the editorial side of the magazine which would reflect the multiculturalism that has begun to increasingly characterise the university's student body. Because this is the first issue of CAMP to feature an editorial team entirely comprising queer people of colour, we aimed to use this opportunity to represent with accuracy and vigour the diversity of the queer community at the university. I hope we have achieved this. I believe we have.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The CAMP 2022 editorial team would like to extend their warmest thanks to all the contributors that made up this issue. Whether you were a first-time writer or visual artist, or CAMP is just one item in a string of publication achievements, we are thrilled and honoured to have found a home for your art. Thank you for trusting us. We hope you have found the audience you were looking for.

We would also like to thank all the subeditors who offered their expertise in helping to make CAMP 2022 as polished as possible. Your support, though invisible to most, has been crucial. The editorial team is indebted to your work.

Huge thanks are also owed to all past CAMP editors for their insight and guidance, the UMSU legal department for their invaluable advice, Indigenous OBs Harley and Brittney for kindly providing an Acknowledgement of Country, Queer OBs Rose and Rook for their continued activism and support for queer students on campus, and all friends and family who lent a sympathetic ear to the woes of student magazine editors.

Behind every lofty creative vision lurks a thousand-and-one petty, stressful practicalities. This magazine would never have come to fruition without the legendary support of Queer OB Rook Davis, who gets special thanks for his tireless work with promotion, liaising with printing, legal discussions, and perhaps most impressive of all: getting the damn editors paid. A lot of bureaucracy goes into making a magazine. We thank you from the bottom of our queer little hearts for taking care of it all so that we didn't have to.

And finally, thank you, the reader, for picking up our queer-as-hell magazine and seeing what the queer students of UniMelb have to say.

Aries, Cynthia and Zhiyou
CAMP 2022 Editors

Special thanks to our
Editorial Committee

Izzy Byrne	Harry Hook
Bella Farrelly	Zoe Keeghan
Rowan Heath	Uswa Qureshi
Melana Uceda	

FROM THE OBS

Hello hello hello!

We're Rook Davis (they/he) and Rose Power (ze/they), your Queer Officers for 2022. This has been the first year since the pandemic that we've been back on campus and, honestly, it's a welcome change of pace. We are also part of the last generation of officers to inhabit Union House. With luck, the move to the new Student Precinct won't change too much of the department's operations, but it's hard to say goodbye to the asbestos-riddled, rat-infested building that we've come to know and love.

Much like queerness itself, there's no one way to do an issue of CAMP. We are part of a rich, diverse community and each year we get to see new and interesting takes on queer experience. It's always important to recognise and celebrate our differences as well as our commonalities and know that we are better for them. We hope that you'll enjoy all the amazing work that CAMP 2022 has to offer.

We'd like to thank the editors for their tireless work in creating this year's edition of CAMP. Their passion and dedication have been a blessing and they're just generally very lovely people. We'd also like to thank Ailish and Tim for their support and help in setting up the recruitment process for the editors (there were definitely a few panicky last-minute drop-ins to the office so thanks for being patient). Finally, massive thanks to everyone who submitted work as well as the subeditors. It means the world.

Happy reading!

Rook Davis and Rose Power
2022 Queer Office Bearers


Selfish

by winter

That moment when the custard
hits your tongue and two become one—
they neither begin nor end,

but simply are.

How nice it would be to exist like this,
in eternity. Its lack
of naturality, however, loses me,



and I crumble, rolling
over what should and should not be—

be seen or felt or ignored by me. For
me, myself and I—and I, me,

me,

mine,

are all that we'll ever be.

HEY GOD, ARE YOU THERE? IT'S ME, JOHNNY

Rook Davis (he/they)
Content Warning for Profanity

I'm very new to drag. My first performance under the name 'Johnny Cocksville', with the face that I now use, was on the fifteenth of May this year. However, I'm not alone in that regard—there are dozens of new drag performers in the bars and clubs of Melbourne at the moment, everyone coming out of the pandemic desperate to put forward a new persona.

I've never been a fan of RuPaul's Drag Race (haven't watched a single episode), but instead, I ended up getting interested after meeting drag performer Belial B'Zarr at Queer Collaborations 2019 in Warrnambool. I was just starting to come into my own as a non-binary person, and the president of Charles Sturt University's queer collective had urged me to go to the queer student politics conference as I was pretty much the only candidate available to take over the position after they left.

Belial was a delegate from a university in Newcastle, gothic with sharp cheekbones and dark makeup, studying physiotherapy with ambitions in researching the long-term effects of chest binding. To a newly-out trans kid who was only now able to introduce themselves by the right name without hesitating, I'd be lying if I said I wasn't intimidated (and jealous). Of course, I sat in on their drag history workshop, enraptured by discussions of famous

drag kings like Spikey Van Dykey and Clit Eastwood. Beyond just conventional drag, Belial spoke at length about genderfuckery and clown drag, all shit that pushed the gender binary mocked by drag into new and weird dimensions.

I fucking loved it. As a kid, I'd had dreams about being centre stage, graceful and glamorous, the object of everyone's attention—and drag promised all of that. After that conference, I fucked around with some of the body paint I had lying around from my ventures into cosplay and tried on a few clown looks. I tossed up whether I should use the name 'Victor Mortis'.

Not long after that, my interest in drag subsided. Assignments, family, friends took over, and I got distracted by fifty other things, as usual. And then the pandemic... that classic, overused phrase when people talk about any aspect of their lives in the last couple years. I moved to Melbourne, got more trans, gave up on cosplay as I realised it fed into my perfectionism and self-loathing and moved on to more of my own stuff.

But around May, I reconnected with Belial again. We organised to meet up at a local event at the 86 on Smith Street called 'Kingdom'. The weekly show was intended to showcase local drag kings, hosted by one Justin Teliqure.

By this point, I was pretty secure in my identity. However...

Drag kings just do gender better. Justin was smooth, charismatic, handsome, with heavy stubble and eyeliner. You could have told me this man was a pop star and I would have believed you. Never before had masculinity been so beautiful and so real.

I started going to Kingdom by myself. The highlight of each night, aside from Justin's opening performances, was the lip sync competition. Get the most votes for the night, and you'd enter the semi-finals to compete against the winners from the other nights. A lot of local drag performers had entered, as the start of Kingdom had coincided with the end of a few other nearby drag events, and usually no one's keen to go home early, even on a Sunday night when something's on. One quiet night, I put my name down on the list as Johnny Cocksville.

There wasn't a lot of thought to it—pun-based names are popular, and I had just watched Jackass Forever in cinemas a few weeks ago.

For my first ever lip sync, I was in a battle jacket and scuffed up boots, performing 'Dirty King' by The Cliks. The Cliks is fronted by a trans dude, and the song is about a man taking care of his lover by doing all the manual labour for her. It was the sort of song that epitomises what made masculinity appealing to me—it was about protecting and providing for others, and it said this in a way where my masculinity was embraced.

Within the context of drag, gender made sense to me—it became a performance done for the pleasure of yourself and others, and the best part was everyone knew it was a performance too. No one held you to any obligation for longer than the time you were onstage. In contrast, as much as I do love the unflinching masculinity of my day to day presentation—and it is an active choice that I have had to make as I evolve as a non-binary trans man—I do feel shackled to it sometimes. I don't feel like I can wear makeup or a skirt or anything feminine without the fragile veneer of my masculinity evaporating into thin air.

I managed to win pick of the night, and I was asked to turn up in a month's time for the semi-finals with several other performers. At that point, I realised I actually had to look the part. I went back to the original makeup design I did back in 2019, changed some things around and added more colour. I backcombed the shit out of my purple mohawk and covered it in glitter until you could have used me to sweep the floor. One thing they don't tell you about being a drag king is that trying to source glamorous outfits is a real bitch—menswear these days is having a serious beige crisis, so I had to spend a lot of time making do with the women's section of Brunswick's op shops.

My song of choice for the semi-finals was 'I/Me/Myself' by Will Wood—an upbeat song about a man sliding into a mental breakdown while having a gender crisis. Going forward, this song has definitely set the tone for how I like to do drag. On one hand, men rarely get to be cheerful and energetic, and on the other, they don't get to be vulnerable unless they're being angry, which are both spaces that I love to play in. It's fun as shit to perform as a fruity little bastard who's easily



'For me, drag needs to be colourful, glamorous, and expressive.



You can't do a good performance if you're not prepared at any moment to throw all dignity to the dogs.'

Rook Davis
(They/He)

overwhelmed, and it makes for good storytelling.

It also gave me the space to explore my gender presentation in ways I hadn't previously allowed myself. I have always been envious of feminine gay men and their presentation, getting to be glamorous while their masculinity still shone through. As a result, I've tried to channel those feelings into drag (bright colours, pearls, patterned blazers, fancy shoes, fake fur, etc.), and now, that's started crossing over into my day-to-day. I take greater care in how I present myself, I gesture more, I'm more flamboyant—all because I've been given the space to experiment.

I didn't win the semi-finals (the competition's winners were Xavier Switchblades and Theresa Problem), but there I was at the end of it, a drag king with a name and a look and everything.

Fuck.

At that point, you might as well keep going.

My experience is only one of many. Melbourne drag is rising to its feet again after the pandemic, and

there are many talented people rushing back to the stage. Bars like the 86, Mollie's, Sircuit and the Rainbow House Club are holding weekly events, boasting names like Annie Social, Moxie DeLite, Tequila Mockingbird and Kiki Myndacrotch. There are definitely issues with the scene—the pervasive whiteness of queer spaces does extend to drag, the prevalence of shows like RuPaul's Drag Race mean that audiences expect to see certain types of queens (and only those types) and proper compensation for our labour as performers is limited in an economy plagued by inflation. However, that doesn't mean there aren't new performers of all identities joining the scene.

Drag only happens because a bunch of persistent, dramatic motherfuckers keep actively making the choice to get out there and give something of themselves to the audience. If you want to be here, you have to make the choice, and you have to keep making that choice. But don't worry—we'll make space for you.

Put your best foot forward. Let's see who you are.



Walk to Infinite
Maleea Hegarty (they/them)



transform

transcend

your real name? Yes! /

First Time Really Feeling

Dissection
Theo (they/he)

Bug God

Eva Rees (she/her)

Content Warning for Sexual Allusions

bug god says i am bug god and bugs know it's true because bug god doesn't lie.
bug god has been in sky / when bug god lands you are in bug god's toiletries case
bug god flying business class and you are baby cockroach
enveloped by a puny trinity: you are bug.

from up here/eye spy with capital i/white margin of heaven and you are dirty.

in pearly porcelain bathroom bowl bug god offers you the final test
you wanna go to heaven kid?

in pearly porcelain bathroom bowl i question your morality, but you're not dead yet,
no siree.

once i asked a fly how He was doing and He said that
His whole body was covered in tastebuds and
when i asked what that was like He said i really feel
like i'm in everything you know man?

before salt peter mary mother of grace, family man is laughing at a video on his phone.
in the home of family man i don't belong. yet i am let in by family man himself and
after family man himself let himself leave himself in me i am saying my bike riding prayer.

i am praying to bug god over and over and over and
over and funnily enough i did get sick
but not the sick i thought i'd get / they still put a big
needle in my ass though. and

i joked with the nurse oh yeah i'm a pro at this cause
she is also a fan of double entendres and now

my rosary beads seem to be dropping a lot of pollen. when jesus asked the devil his name
the devil says we are legion and that's when most people know demons, as in plural.

so when family man asks for a piece of me i
say multiply me daddy because dear bug god
i am a beefcake sweetheart mortein christmas.
i am the reason i develop breast cancer.

i am the reason churches must be beautiful. i
am the reason the bulimic conspires to believe
in vomit's teeth whitening enamel stripping
properties. i am me asking myself

would you still love me if i was a bundle of sticks?

and you, bug, you: out window,
i hold you in my hand and blow. between
traffic / dropping seed / hand-cell and
gretel praying to bug god saying

goodnight bug god.

i love you.



Being More Than 'Born This Way'

Aries Gacutan (they/them)

'I'm beautiful in my way 'cause God makes no mistakes,' Lady Gaga informs me. I am sitting in the car being driven home, stuck in the crunch of traffic outside my primary school. 'I'm on the right track, baby, I was born this way.' It's not the first time I've heard of being 'born this way', although this is certainly the first time the message has been delivered to me in such an exciting, danceable way. Making the connection between the song lyrics and my own queerness won't happen for a couple more years. Deconstructing this connection will take longer.

The spectre of the 'born this way' narrative looms large over the modern queer rights movement. It has informed public rhetoric, legislation, self-identification and the shaping of queer discourse both online and offline. The 'born this way' narrative is exactly what it sounds like—my queerness is an innate aspect of my selfhood, something that I cannot change and that happens without my influence. I am queer and I was born this way.

Understanding the inherent and, to some people, unchanging nature of their queerness has been deeply helpful for many. This is understandable! Cisheteronormativity is a powerful beast, and humans are excellent at living a lie if the society surrounding them demands it. I was certainly 'born this way'—I

was eschewing signifiers of my assigned gender from a very young age, far before I even knew what being transgender was. To be born this way still rings true for many individuals and has been a source of great comfort and validation. However, it is through the sheer ubiquitousness of the 'born this way' narrative that we begin to see problems.

Why do I call it a narrative? Like most queer things, being 'born this way' is a straightforward enough paradigm that belies a series of complicated assumptions and interpretations. Queerness, in the 'born this way' narrative, becomes a matter of biology—there is something in our brains that hardwires us towards queerness, which cannot be removed or edited. As such, the validity of queerness stems from its position not only as natural, but as fundamentally unchangeable. I can't help being gay! Being trans was not a choice! I am not asexual because I want to be, I was destined to be asexual by the genetic roll of the dice that slammed my atoms together!

For me, being trans is a choice. It's a choice I make every single day—I decide my presentation, I decide the words that can apply to me, I decide when my friends can

misgender me because I decide when it's funniest. Although my transness is inherent, it is also celebrated and actively uplifted by the ways I choose to live my life. Of course, I never made the conscious effort to separate myself from the Western gender binary and float in quantum gender-space for the rest of my life. I think I was always going to do that at some point. Like I said, I would actually fit quite nicely into the 'born this way' narrative. The girl who was not a girl, who wore boys' clothes and cried when adults put her in makeup! But it would be an inaccurate and unfair choice to make. You see, I was a girl for a long time. When I turned fifteen, I decided not to be anymore.

At the start, using they/them pronouns was only ever an experiment. I don't remember exactly what was going through my head when I first asked my friends to use they/them for me, only that it made me shake and cry for reasons I wouldn't come to understand until later. Crucially, I only started to think of myself as trans the moment that choice was made. This same spirit of exploration has characterised my queerness to this day. I came to my asexuality in the midst of a good old-fashioned lockdown





crisis, seeking alternatives to the lesbianism that no longer seemed to be serving me. Afterwards, I didn't care to label my sexuality beyond being 'queer'. Only recently did I start messing around with biromanticism (and on Pride Month too! Bi rights!). I've gathered an impressive collection of queer identifiers, all of which make me incredibly happy and none of which I would have been half as comfortable with exploring if I had stuck with being 'born this way'.

Up until that point, I had been a staunch and enthusiastic lesbian, fitting all those baby gay stereotypes to a T. Although I am not a lesbian anymore, I want to make two things clear. Firstly, I will forever be indebted to the lesbian community for providing me with a space to explore my queerness in a safe and supportive way. I was taught that my desire for women was not bad or wrong, and I learned valuable things about gender non-conformity and queer politics that I still carry to this day. Secondly, my lesbian identity is still just as coherent and significant to me now as it was then. Nowadays, I feel no connection to lesbianism whatsoever, and if you called me a lesbian I would laugh in your face. However, although I am not a lesbian now, I was a lesbian back

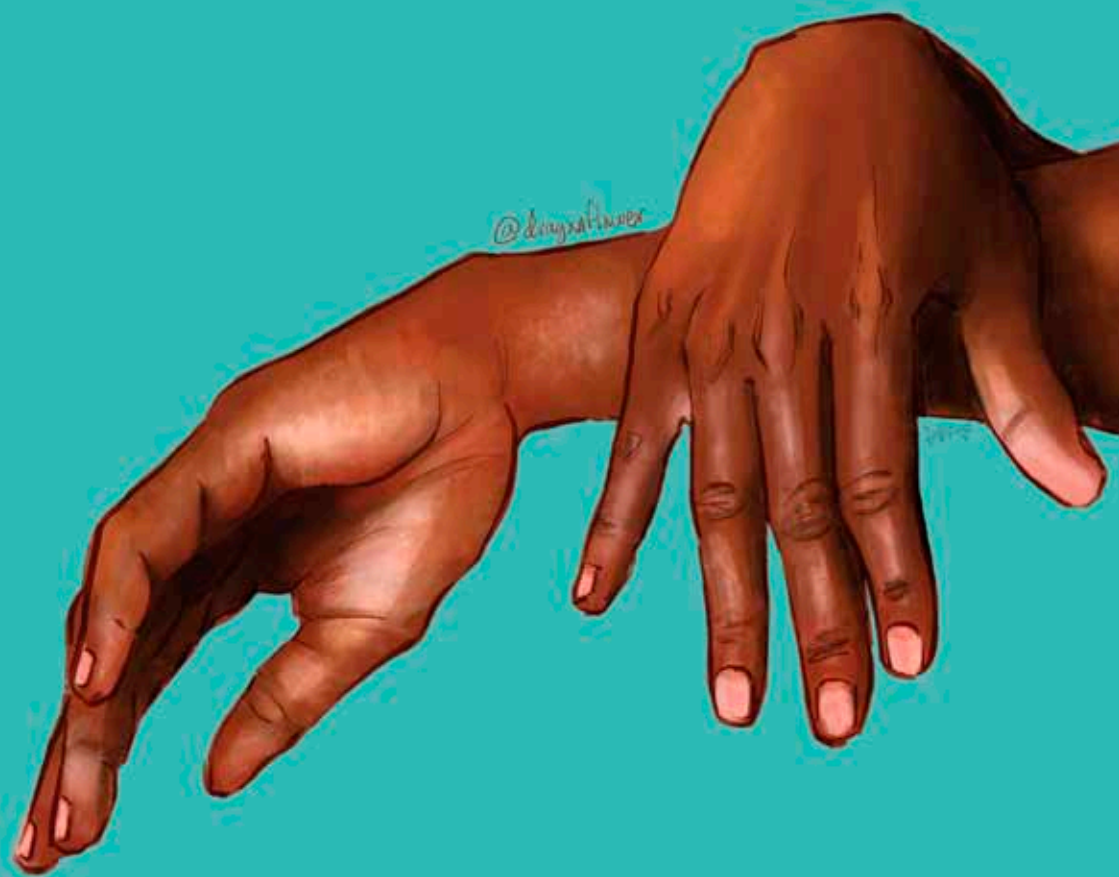
then. I have lived as a lesbian, and I am beginning to live as a biromantic person, and both of those people are still me, even though they are flying different pride flags.

My queer journey has not been a process of peeling back layer after layer of self-deceit to get at the fundamental, unchangeable truth of my being. My queerness has been fluid; it has changed as I have changed. After learning that I don't have to feel pressured to fit myself into being the Real Me, after truly realising that there is only ever going to be this me, I have been able to embrace all aspects of my queerness—past, present and future—and allow myself to be the ever-evolving person that I want to be. I have never been happier.

When queerness is only ever allowed to be a static and unyielding force, we lose the joy of experimentation and evolution. Respectability politics will not save us, nor will flinching away from the fear of change. Just as people who have discovered the truth of themselves deserve respect and honour, so too must we be open to fluidity and the queer capacity of all people to meaningfully hold multiple facets of themselves across time.



Assorted Artworks - continued on next page
Sope/@Dragxfxwer
(They/Them)



Assorted Artworks
Sope/@Dragxfxwer
(They/Them)



Anecdotes

Claire Le Blond (she/her)

i am three
and i've just learnt what a memory is

my shirt is red with the collar turned up
the calendar says Sunday
but i taste Wednesday
in the dew on the half-mown grass
the ripple of my dad's guitar
and the burnt toast
floating
in the kitchen

i am ten
and i'm holding my breath
i can hold it
for a long time
a long, long, time;
forty seconds, maybe one more
chlorine in my teeth
the water silent against my skin

i am twelve
and i've hit a dead end

six essays
five hours on algebra
four newspapers
three torn up shoes
two tears
and one paper-mache figurine

i'm fifteen
and i am in love
not with a person
but with ideas
run wild i say, and the desk laughs
conversations inked in black and blue
while erasers hum
coarse white blisters
against my palms

seventeen
i am here
almost eighteen
colours fly
flags evaporate
my history is what i make of it

i'm nearly nineteen
i don't have memories anymore

well that's a bit dramatic

life breathes. Around me in front of me and beside me
paper lungs inhale lead and colour
artificial stars ebb behind my eyes
screens pass glitched judgements over me:
the phone, the computer, the television,
watching as i drink my second coffee of the day
i live with the present tales
past entertains
future looms—yet, i am
content

i've been nineteen for a while now
i've finally learnt what a memory is

Who Cares Who the 'Real Me' Is?

El (he/they)

I have constantly obsessed over changing who I was, or who I presented as, in order to fit in with whichever group of friends I wanted to fit in with at the time. The fear that I would not be accepted for whatever identity I was currently possessing haunted me. The idea that I could throw a persona away and create a new one when people no longer cared about the 'old me', or if I got bored of the previous character, was such an attractive one. The personas I created were so fleeting, and I was—and still am—terrified that the Real Me, the permanent me, would be rejected once the characters I had made up were no longer around.

Labels are convenient because they tell me something about myself. They tell me how to behave, how to present myself, how to see myself. Personality test results, even the things I was a fan of—these became my identity, and I didn't know who I was without these things. At some point, the desperation to figure myself out and to have a label for the person I was led me to cling on to a laundry list of mental illness diagnoses as a way to explain my existence. All there was to me were the words on the page that gave me a neat little list of character traits that I could try to fit myself into.

My identity as a queer person has also been something I have used to construct an image for myself. I've gone through many labels, and each time, my entire existence would seem to revolve around that specific queer identity and nothing else. I couldn't tell if I was just taking on these identities to fit in with people, or to have something ~special~ about myself. I would think that fit in with a certain label for my queerness and make that the only thing about myself that I focused on—but then find something else that I thought fit better, and so the cycle repeated.

One of my psychiatrists had said I displayed traits of borderline personality disorder (BPD), which I promptly forgot about until I found myself in the emergency room having a panic attack. I overheard a group of nurses being briefed about why I was there, and me having a BPD diagnosis was mentioned. Though I have clung on to various categorisations to figure myself out, the possibility that one of these labels was an explanation for my 'unstable' sense of self filled me with dread. I don't want this to be an explanation. I don't want 'identity disturbance' to be a label for my

identity. I don't want a label that sparks immediate thoughts of 'run' and 'BPD bitches are crazy'.

The term 'attention-seeking' also seems to be associated with people who have BPD. I have personally felt the need to do some things in order to gain some kind of acknowledgement from someone. This behaviour for me was motivated by my desperation to prove that the people around me knew I existed and cared enough about me to acknowledge me. Queer people have also been accused of being 'attention-seeking' when first coming out, which is aggravating to me. Unlike the actions I personally associate with deliberate attention-seeking, coming out is simply letting people know who you are. Yet

doubt still lingers is in relation to me specifically—I know I tend to be attention-seeking, so how do I know my queerness isn't attention-seeking?


A while ago, I read an article about BPD and the identity distortion that comes with it. The author wrote about a friend who discussed the difficulties of feeling comfortable enough to explore the idea of who you are. They suggested that it was difficult to explore gender identity and sexuality if you're uncertain about your core identity in the first place because of their BPD. I don't think this statement resonates with me entirely. How do I know what to attribute to the typical process of exploring sexuality and gender? And how do I know what to attribute to my mental illness?

The article briefly discussed the stigma of people with BPD as being attention-seeking, but did not successfully address this as an issue, which only reinforces the doubt I feel about the process of self-exploration. The perception that people with BPD are attention-seeking and have an unstable sense of identity has fuelled the fear that, no matter what, my self-exploration would not be taken seriously. The focus throughout my life has been to create a character that people wouldn't reject, and the

thought that finding me would destroy all of that is terrifying. Like the article I read said, experimenting with identity labels is difficult when you're plagued with the thought that the people around you might leave you at any moment. The risk that exploring and discovering your 'true self' may cause people around you to leave is just not worth it when your worst fear is abandonment. But I don't agree with the article in one regard: I don't think these fears can definitively be attributed to BPD. Yes, my BPD diagnosis may explain the paralysing paranoia that consumes me when I think of exploring my gender presentation and sexuality and may be a reason that I'm not entirely certain that I have a 'true self' that includes my queer identity. However, I don't believe these fears are an experience unique to people who have BPD. Experimenting with queer identity is difficult, especially since there is so much discrimination from both outside and within the community. Worry that you'll be separated from existing friendship groups, worry that you won't be accepted by other queer people and being concerned that you'll be

told you're faking it for attention are all things that one can face when trying to understand their queerness. Though my BPD can cause similar fears, I don't believe the insecurity I encounter when thinking about my queerness can be wholly attributed to my experiences with BPD.

In relation to gender, performing the stereotype of being cishet and feminine was a dominant feature for much of my life. After realising that I despised being perceived as feminine, I began to specifically try to present as more masculine or androgynous. Though I experience so much euphoria when I present masculine/androgynous, I still worry that because I am taking specific actions to create a certain perception of myself, this somehow makes my genderqueerness less valid. I've spent so much time forcibly creating personas for myself to present in different situations. I don't know if any of those reflect who I truly am. When I was younger, I spent so much time fixated on presenting femininely, wearing skirts and dresses and makeup in a stereotypically feminine manner—because that was what I thought



would get other people to accept me. I thought that was who I was. I certainly did feel uncomfortable, but in my mind, that was simply me not knowing if this was correct enough to be liked by other people. Realising I didn't have to be a girl was a revelation. But when I became more comfortable with the fact I may not be a cis girl, I was more comfortable wearing clothing that would cause many people to assume I am a cis girl. I hate that it is possible for me to be perceived that way. But the ease with which I seemed to switch from presenting hyperfemininely, to trying to present more masculine or androgynous, to being okay with wearing skirts and makeup again, spurred on the fear that all of these were just another set of personas I was trying to play. The problem is that I don't know which—if any—of the presentations or personas I have had are the Real Me, even though some feel more comfortable than others.

Even if I am comfortable and happy with the way I look when I present masculine, the knowledge that I'm essentially performing things to seem this way makes it all feel disingenuous. And I feel like I can attribute this at least partially to BPD-related 'identity disturbance'—I don't know what I am without the performance. At the same time, I don't think I can say whether my constant uncertainty is because of my mental illness or because I'm just learning to deal with the doubt and trepidation that comes with something new. But why should it matter if some aspects of my gender presentation and sexuality are impacted by my mental illness? My mental illness is part of me, and so is my gender and sexuality. Why do I feel the need to separate them to find the Real Me? I may not have the full picture of my identity, but that doesn't matter. Even if things change someday, at the present moment, this is what I'm comfortable with, this is me, and I'll just keep doing what I want.



Confliction
Lumi Tsoi (they/them)







Confliction is a reflection, a representation of one's self.
It is a series of mental turmoil, of progress and of regress.

Weddings and the Gender Binary Blues

Marcie Di Bartolomeo (they/she)
Content Warning for Transphobia

When you were young, you liked the idea of weddings. You thought it was cute: two people who love each other very much declaring that love in front of their friends and family. The concept seemed so innocent and perfect to you at the time. Your mother would reminisce about her wedding with her husband, your father, with buttery warmth in her voice. Her sisters would speak similarly about their weddings to their husbands. It all seemed so ideal, so natural; a rite of passage as common as a birthday party, or a funeral.

Then you heard the big news: your sister was getting married. Initially, you were ecstatic. A well of bubbly excitement had erupted from your heart. But you grew deathly cold when you realised what this wedding would entail. You tried to ask your sister if you could be her maid of honour, or even a bridesmaid. You pleaded with her, begged her. You would make constant pleas to wear a dress—to, at the very least, be actually able to use your preferred name and not your hideous and triggering dead one you had tried burying years ago; a deadname your family would unearth almost every day, sometimes by accident, sometimes with the sick intention to hurt you at the very core of your being.

Your sister, despite her best intentions, would ultimately side with your mother, who had been openly against you presenting as anything other than the sex you were assigned at birth. ‘If you wear a dress and makeup, you will upset the wedding guests—they wouldn’t understand. If you do this you will bring shame upon us and ruin your sister’s wedding. Now do you want that for your sister? Do you hate your sister? Are you abandoning her? You’re willing to abandon her just to wear a dress and makeup?’ would become the common defences she’d use to stonewall any of your attempts to be yourself at your sister’s wedding. Your sister would try at first to listen and understand where you were coming from, but as the wedding drew closer, and she became busier and more stressed with the pressures of presenting a perfect wedding, she’d ultimately choose not to defend you, despite claiming to support you presenting however you like.

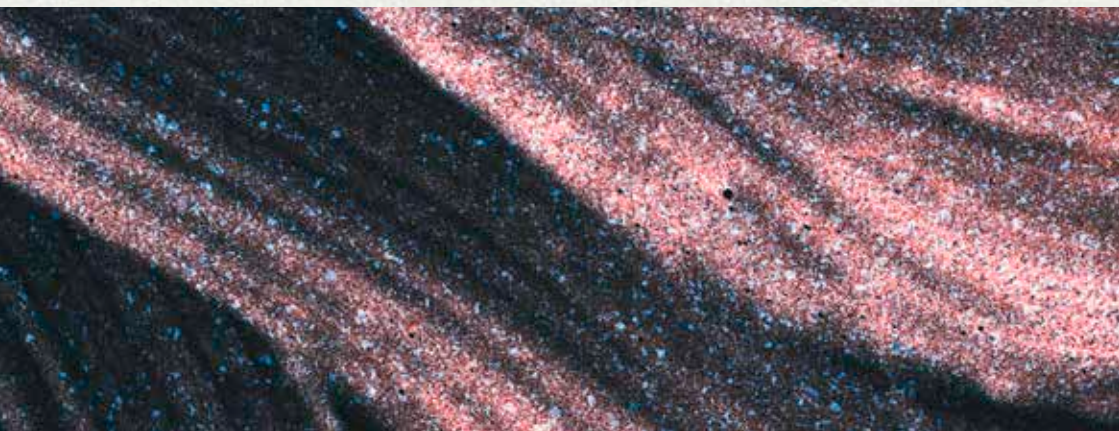
Your mother would have the audacity to encourage you to be a groomsman for the wedding because it would ‘make your sister so happy,’ and, by extension, the rest of the family. You, however, would much rather not be at the

wedding than be a groomsman. In fact, you'd much rather not be at the wedding at all if you couldn't even use your preferred name. Your family would refuse to let you escape the wedding—your mother would threaten to disown you if you went AWOL before the wedding. She would also threaten to disown you if you kept up with your HRT appointments, saying that if you turned up at the wedding with breasts and a dress to complement, you would cause mass hysteria. Despite your desire to keep resisting, you would eventually cave in. You would go to the men's clothes shops and get fitted for a suit and tie, like every other man in the wedding would do. You would promise to pause your HRT appointments until the wedding was over to 'preserve your boyish good looks', as your mother put so eloquently. You end up promising this and your undivided attention and presence at the wedding on the condition your deadname wouldn't be used at the wedding. Your family would hesitate for this one simple request. Eventually they would agree.

The day of the wedding comes. You stand around with a suit and tie. You smile for the photos. You make small talk with the family members and friends that you haven't seen in years. Not once do you smile for real. All smiles mask the numbness inside as you disassociate, and it all becomes a blur, a nightmare you cannot wait to wake up from. Sometimes you hear old acquaintances, those who knew you only by your deadname and who use pronouns you have shed long ago. You clench your teeth and wait eagerly for the day to be over.

The reception comes and goes, and by the end of it all you are in tears. You vow to never attend another wedding again. You also vow to burn your suit and tie afterwards and to continue your HRT appointments to ensure your body can soon complement how you see your true self—and to ensure you will never again have to be forced to play a part you never had any say in, against your consent, and against everything that makes up you.


Never again. Never again.





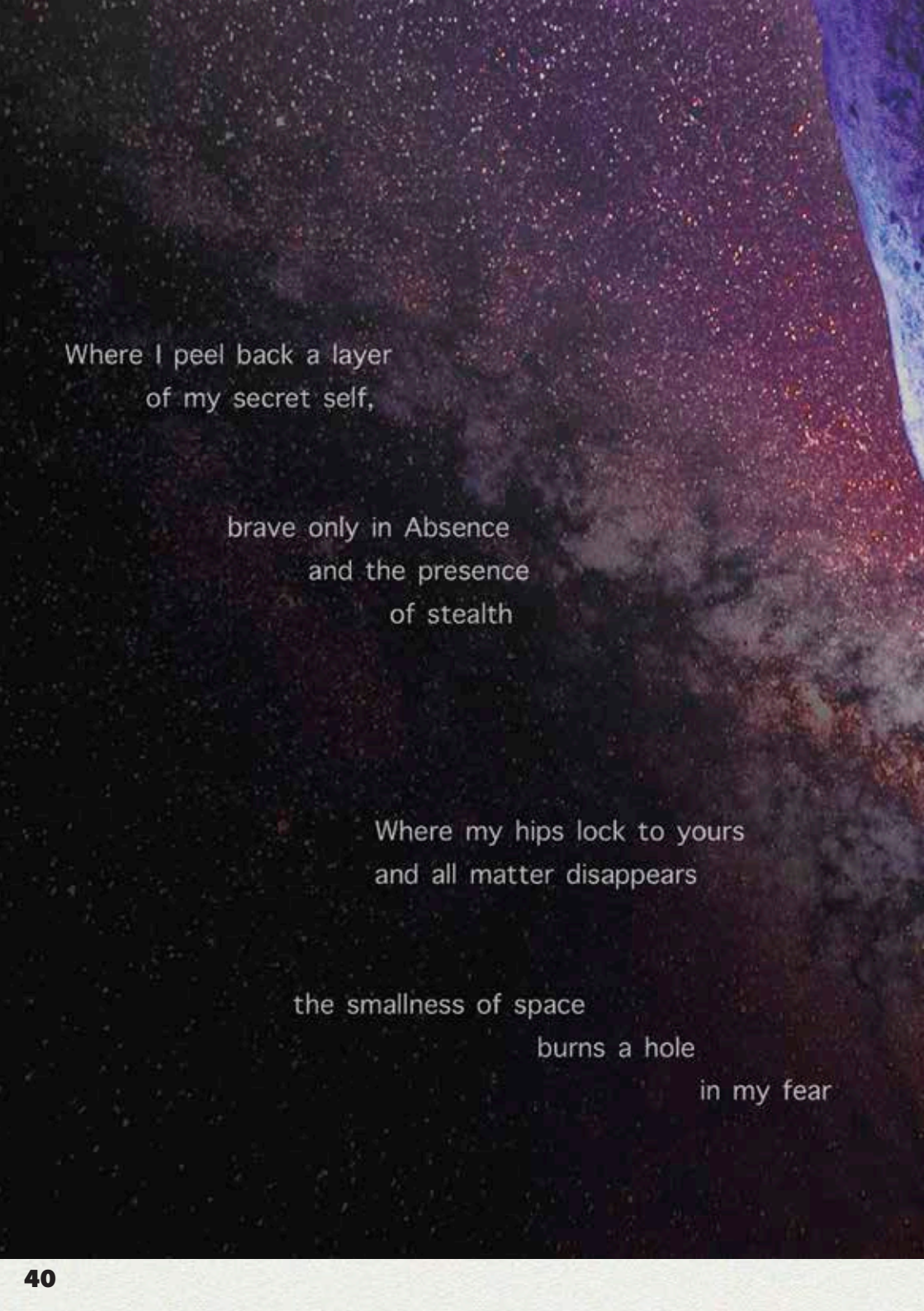
Between the lines

Georgia Palfrey



I gamble here

in the musky dark of another's home
where I swallow your presence
like the touch of lips
I'll never own

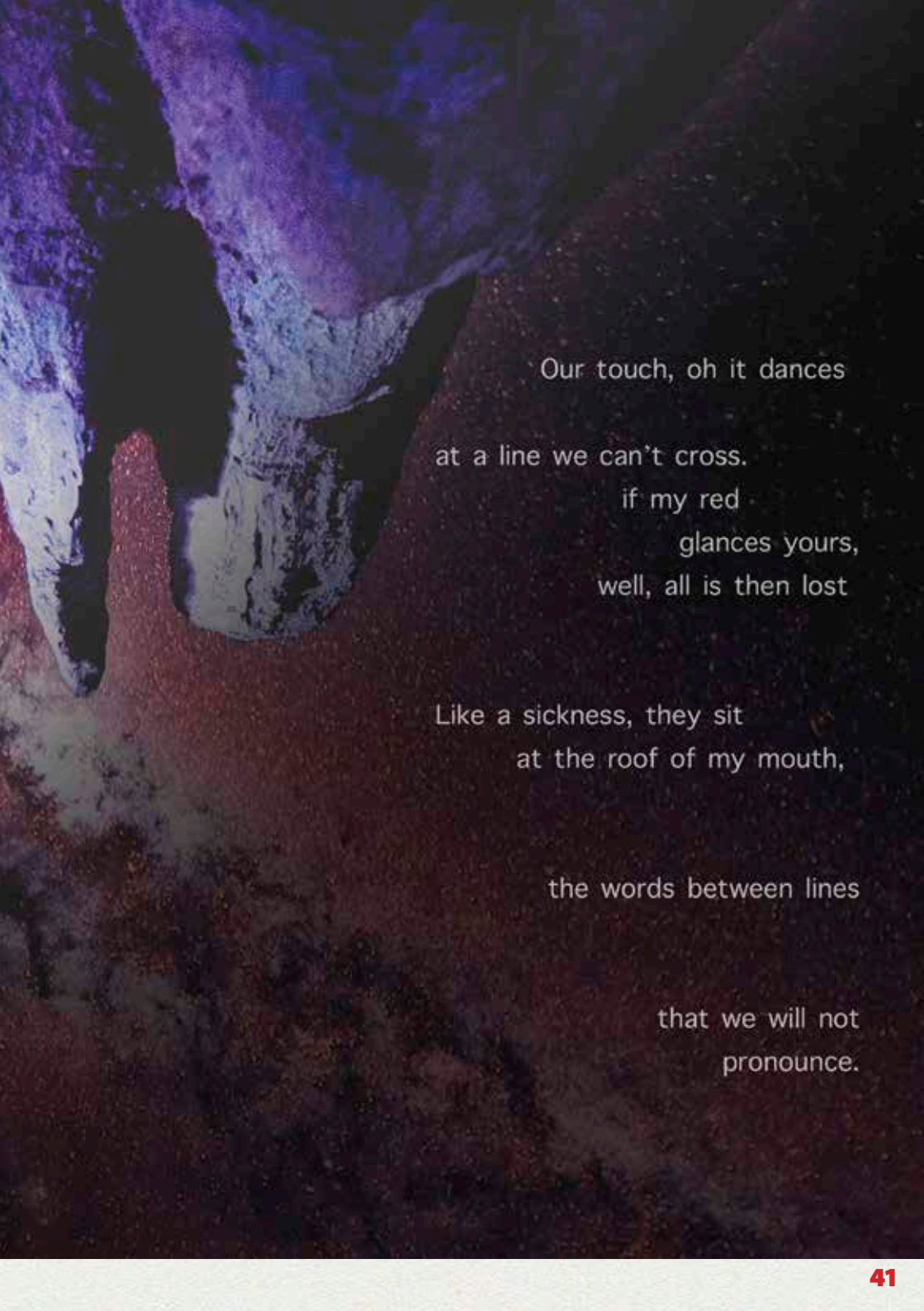


Where I peel back a layer
of my secret self,

brave only in Absence
and the presence
of stealth

Where my hips lock to yours
and all matter disappears

the smallness of space
burns a hole
in my fear



Our touch, oh it dances
at a line we can't cross.
if my red
glances yours,
well, all is then lost

Like a sickness, they sit
at the roof of my mouth,

the words between lines

that we will not
pronounce.

Claustrophobia

Arlo MacLeod (he/him)

The bird sits in silence, his feathers drooping, his colours fading. This room that had once protected him from the world cages him now, the walls inching closer. Maybe once he was happy, maybe once it didn't feel as though he were constantly holding his breath.


He does not remember it, does not remember anymore how to use his voice, so he chirps—soundlessly. He has given up the hope that someone might hear him, condemned it as futile. As they observe him through the bars, they call him by a name he does not recognise. It is insult

poured like gasoline and set alight on his wounds, burning away his dignity with his feathers. He looks at his reflection in the water and sees the scars once concealed, suddenly exposed, and realises he has lost sight of himself. He has forgotten his reason to fight.
The bird weeps

silent tears devoid of emotion. He knows he should feel hatred towards his captors, that he should desire his freedom. But he has grown used to the degradation, grown to feel attachment towards them. He does not flinch anymore when they peer through the bars of his cage with their cold glares and neanderthalic grins, he is prepared for them. He feels

nothing. When the fire comes, abandonment follows with not so much as a glance back. He stands to fly, opens his wings, catches sight of the flames—

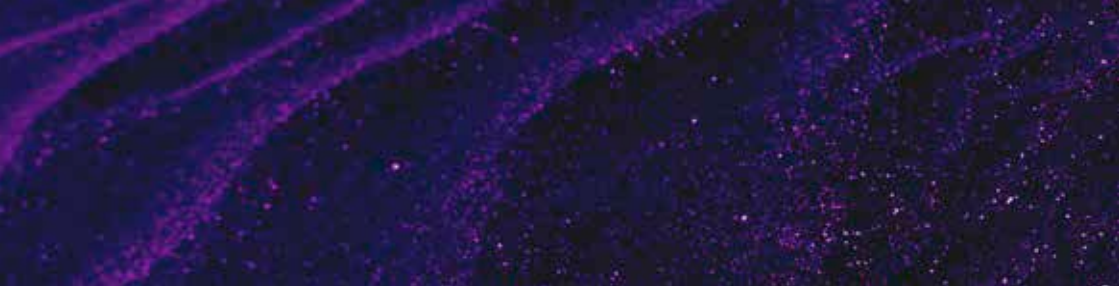
closes them again. For to be consumed by something so bright would be the most dignified way he might embrace death. So he lies down, letting the warmth thaw out his frozen heart. And as he burns, he feels contentment, for once more his feathers burn bright.



IF YOU WANNA BE MY LOVER: THE AROMANTIC PRIORITISATION OF FRIENDSHIPS

Izzy (she/her)

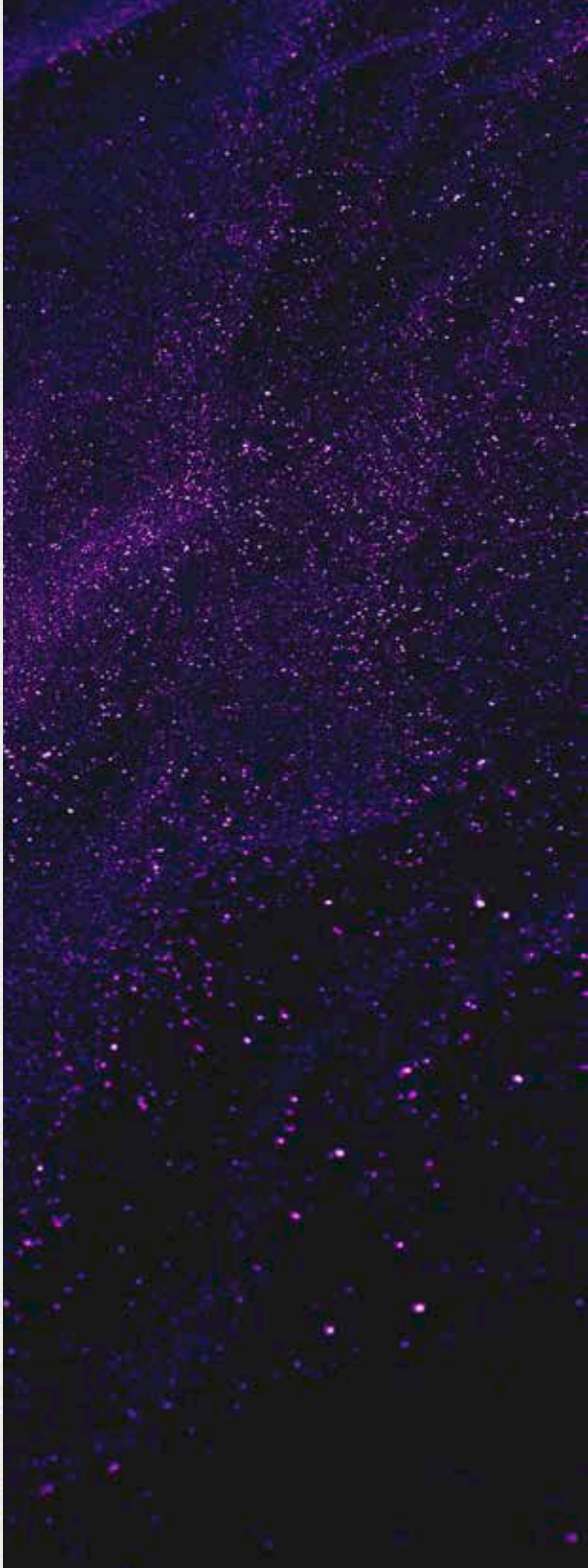
As an aromantic person in my twenties, I am becoming increasingly aware of the fact that society's views on platonic friendships are not very aro-friendly. Our ideas of what's normal are based on the assumption that we all have or will one day have romantic partners to fulfil certain needs. Recently I saw a Tumblr post that said, 'As an aromantic I've so often felt like my desires, boundaries or emotional needs are inherently secondary.' It put into words something that I'd been feeling a lot but wasn't sure if it was selfish of me to think. Platonic relationships are a big priority for me, and I definitely think they are more important to me than they are to most alloromantic people. While many alloromantic people do prioritise their platonic relationships (the Spice Girls: 'If you wanna be my lover, you gotta get with my friends'), their romantic partner is ultimately their go-to, the most important person in their life, the person who monopolises their time and attention. I'm happy to have close alloromantic friends in monogamous relationships with people who are important to them, but I don't want to end up without any aromantic friends who can be that same level of important to me.



While I am not at all interested in being in a romantic relationship, there is still a certain level of platonic affection, attention and closeness I want that can be difficult to find in platonic relationships with alloromantic people. There are certainly alloromantic people who love cuddling with their platonic friends, but there are plenty of others who would prefer to reserve things like cuddling for their romantic partner. Obviously, everyone has different preferences and comfort levels, but I find it kind of sad that many kinds of affection that can be 100% platonic are so often reserved only for romantic partners. While some aro people do date, those of us who don't may still want that kind of affection or closeness and struggle to find it, and it's not as simple as downloading Tinder or asking your friend if their partner has any hot single friends.

Having strong, close platonic relationships with alloromantic people also comes with its fair share of fears about the relationship changing when the alloromantic person enters a romantic relationship. Suddenly, their attention is split. They now have another person who gets a lot of their attention, and certain kinds of affection might become reserved for them. You're close friends, and they care about you, but they also have another person they care about a lot who is probably more important to them. Maybe they used to be someone you'd stay up late texting and having deep conversations with, but those conversations became less frequent with you, and more frequent with their partner instead. I have always thought that if I had a close friendship with a guy who gets a girlfriend, she would find it weird that he's super close with another girl, and it would likely change the dynamic of our friendship. Many magazine articles have been written about how to cope when your best friend gets a new boyfriend, but none of them tell you what to do in that situation when you're aro and will never have your own partner to provide you with the emotional closeness you once had with your best friend.

Although being aromantic can feel like a really lonely experience sometimes, I have met lots of aro people in the last few years. More and more people are learning about aromanticism and the aromantic spectrum and we are starting to talk about and deconstruct amatonormativity. We have a growing community to support each other, and I have started to think about my aromanticism as its own thing rather than just an extension of my asexuality. At the start of this year, I considered for the first time whether I'd be interested in a queerplatonic relationship. I came to the conclusion that I would like the kind of emotional closeness that is hard to find outside of romantic relationships, but would not like to label anything as a relationship or use the word 'partner' because it would remind me too much of a romantic relationship. In general, I feel like our amatonormative society has decided that romantic relationships are the only way we can achieve a certain level of attention and closeness, and it would be nice if our society prioritised platonic relationships as much as romantic ones.





Jump

Emilia Doohan (she/her)

“In this painting I used a previous photographic artwork as the case study, focusing on depicting the tonal variations in human form and utilising colour to portray the highlights and shadows.

I chose a brighter colour palette to accentuate emotion and abstracted her form by applying thick layers of acrylic paint to marry the muscular and fleshy body it depicts.”

UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE EUROVISION SOCIAL CLUB

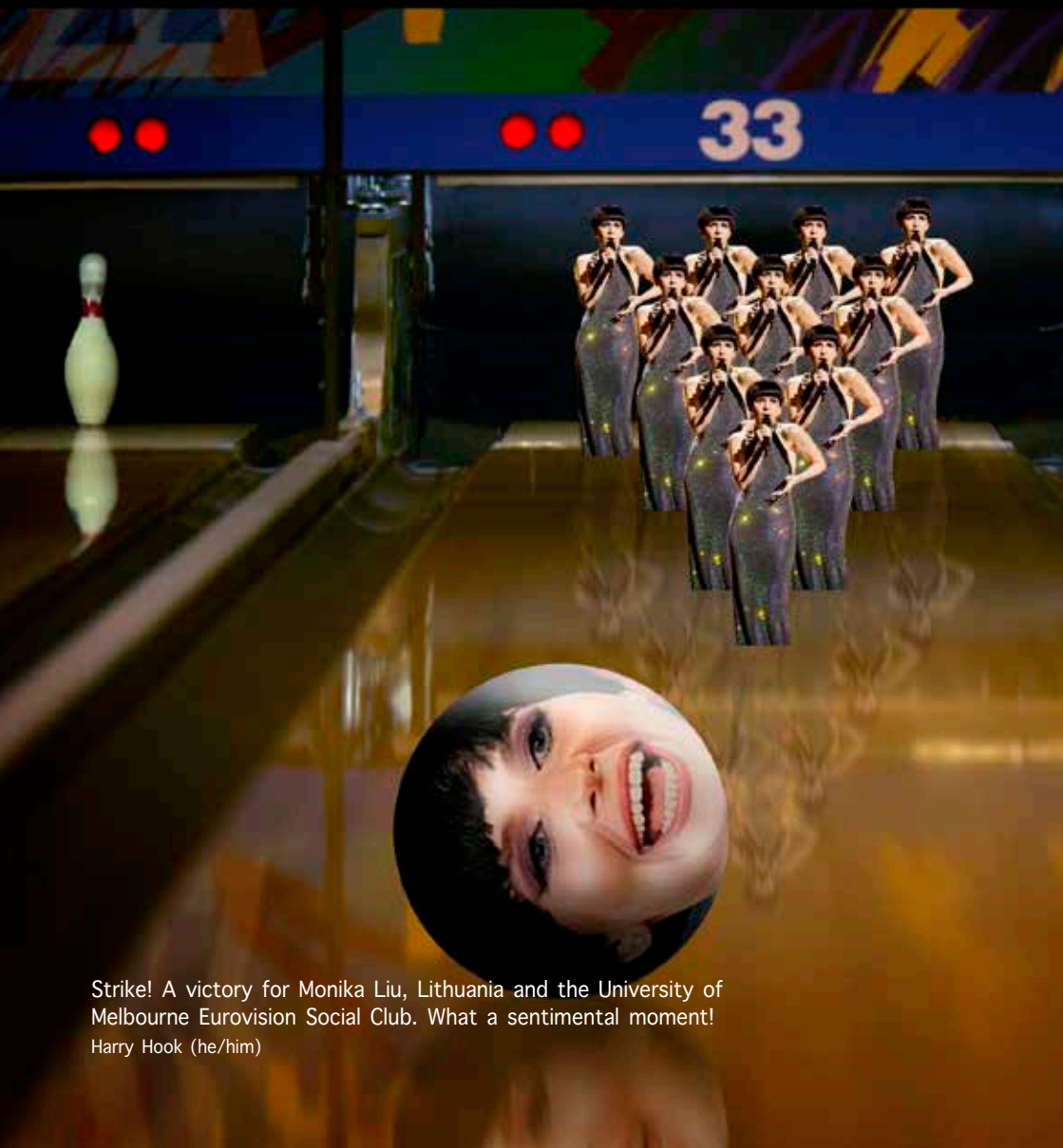
SINGING OUT OF KEY	ETHNIC FLUTE	DRAG QUEEN	SPARKLY SILVER DRESS	BAD RAPPING
COSTUME CHANGE	WIND MACHINE	KEY CHANGE	WINK	HYPNOTIC BOOTY
SCREAMING	WHITE OUTFITS		BALKAN BANGER	BLOC VOTING
EMO	TOO MUCH PYRO	STAGE CRASHER	SINGING OUT OF TIME	QUEER BAITING
LYRICS ABOUT ADVERSITY	CRYING	HOST LAUGHS AT OWN JOKE	DOUBLE ENTENDRE	POLITICAL LYRICS

“Queer New Year is celebrated every May with the Eurovision Song Contest, Europe’s most glittery annual event.

Being part of the Eurovision Social Club has been one of the best parts of my time at uni. I love everyone in our little weird club.”

Harry Hook (he/him)

STRIKE



Strike! A victory for Monika Liu, Lithuania and the University of Melbourne Eurovision Social Club. What a sentimental moment!

Harry Hook (he/him)

WE! STILL



The Ballerina & the Rockstar

Lani Jaye (she/they)

‘She was broken, and needed fixing.’
She was indeed broken, they both were, but not how everyone
else implied.

Rooney couldn’t love. She was scared—to the point where she realised she had loved before, and dreaded saying those eight misused letters to the right person. In the middle of a raging crowd, in the middle of the reeking bittersweet essence of alcohol and the insecurities and past traumatic thoughts that only anger could ignite, she hated them. She thought about her. There she danced, her brown-eyed ballerina, watching over her, ever so graceful and drowned in yellow. It was impossible to tell that she possessed a hurricane in her. It calmed her quivering mind and held her tears at bay. She put her at ease. A smile tingled at the corner of Rooney’s lips, and she felt yellow oozing out from delicate primordial places in her—like sun-kissed daisies.

Her heart screamed the prettiest shade of yellow and skipped two beats extra to the name called Tae.


They were both ballerinas when they’d met, untouched by anything far from floral and fragile. They talked, befriended each other. She fell first.

They lost touch.

The universe kept them apart for five years. They met for the first time all over again. Rooney had given up on ballet. She just couldn’t. She had grown to love the art of emo and rock. She fell first, all over again. But she fell harder. Tae saw colour in people, the same way Rooney did. Purple—‘not too bright. Not too dark. Calm and soothing.’ That’s the way Tae painted her, when all Rooney felt in her was shades of black. Darkly painted lips and nails, wolfbangs, band T-shirts, chequered skirts and fishnets, electric guitars and foul lyrics to her melodies that only she understood. Rooney was a storm to weather, but Tae had sought her calmest shade of lilac behind her curtains of ebony.

Rooney liked it. Rooney liked Tae.

‘Sun-kissed daisies,’ she had said. She was nervous, terrible at expressing feelings and gathering thoughts, but she tried for her. Tae was yellow, the softest shade. Melancholy, but bright enough and kissed by the summer breeze. She was Rooney’s prettiest patch of sun-kissed daisies.



Tae liked it too. Tae liked Rooney.
She fell first.

A couple of months into their second first time, Rooney had grown soft for her. She thought it was unhealthy, but she had grown fond. Tae was cocky, flamboyant, insufferable and everything that made her a flirt—she was smooth with her words, the same way she was in ballet. She was a menace that drove Rooney absolutely insane, almost making her forget she was a ballerina. Nevertheless, Rooney saw Tae as an angel, misused and misinterpreted by too many. Tae loved hugs and forehead kisses. She loved affection, something Rooney was incapable of showing. But she made her want to feel. Rooney was drunk and brutally honest that night.

‘I used to be a cuddler too. I stopped.’

‘It’s okay.’

‘I was used and hurt.’

‘Some things stay permanent, but some things heal over time, slowly and steadily.’

‘I don’t want to go back to being that Rooney.’

‘You don’t have to.’

‘If my demiromantic side ever chooses someone, I would want to be that Rooney just for them. I’m not making sense.’

‘You do make sense.’

Silence.

‘You. I want to say the word to you.’

Tae was smiling.

‘But I wish I could.’

‘It’s okay. Because I know. You say I love you in so many ways. You don’t have to say the exact words.’

‘I’m sorry.’

‘It’s okay. You’re okay. You’re okay to me.’

She made her feel okay. She made her feel.

Rooney was sober. Tae was sober.

She fell harder.

Tae said it first. ‘I don’t know how to define love, but what I feel for you is something close to it. Only romance was lacking in the equation. You don’t mind me being aroace. You never did. Because what we had was something similar to domesticity and love.’

Tae made her feel.

It was that profound confession that resided somewhere primordial behind her ribcage, making the cold void in her warm and full. They were happening before she knew.

‘You’re my queerplatonic partner.’


The word felt right. Best friends. Girlfriends. They were the
something in between.
'I'm sorry I'm incapable of loving you the way others love.'
"Others love". I don't even know what that means.'

To the world, Tae was 'broken', incapable of loving. But it was the world that was void of love. And it made Tae feel guilty and insecure about being unable to love like 'everyone else'. How little did the world know. She was kind. The sweetest creature. And she had woven a broken heart with her indissoluble chains of daisies, found its lost melody, and even given it two beats extra. She was aromantic and asexual. And it didn't matter to Rooney because love came in different forms for Tae. She's an angel. She's her angel. And she's someone who constantly needs to be reminded that she isn't broken, at least not in the context of what they define. 'You're okay'. Tae was okay, because her definition of love is taking care of the people she loves, going for walks while holding their hands, gently tucking their beanie down their ears because she's afraid they'll catch a cold, dancing in the kitchen on a slow day, talking about expenses, weekend housecleaning together, cuddling and forehead kisses, adopting a dog and saying 'mommy's home' after a 9-to-5 job. That's her definition of love. To be present.

Rooney was the luckiest to be loved like that.
Rooney loved. She loved Tae because she made Rooney feel valid. She had built a safe place in her arms for Rooney to be who she was—emo, goth, and the darkest of outfits. Lilac, blue, and shades of amethyst too—as though every flaw in her that everyone else forced her to change was worth embracing. She pulled her up, ever so steadily, unlocked different sides of her Rooney never knew she possessed. She was her inspiration and encouragement. Her prettiest supportive girlfriend. Tae was the first person who said she was okay, okay the way Rooney was, said she was someone worth loving even though all she does is insult her for the amount of mint chocolate ice cream she devours—"You're done," Tae would say, sigh and roll her pretty brown eyes, still smiling. She was pretty. She's her prettiest girl and she loved her—she was fond of her—for a silly amount of reasons. Rooney loved the menace side of her. She loved the version of her that calmed her down, put her at ease. She loved her for her good to euphoric days, the bad to exhausting days. She loved her for her, and every version of her.

Rooney loved.
She loved her because love made sense when it came to Tae,
and Tae only. Rooney loved.





She was aromantic and asexual.

'You don't have to be sorry about anything. I love the way you love. I feel the safest.'

And she made falling in love feel less scary.

'I feel the safest too.'

Tae helped her love again.

Rooney was back on the podium, guitar in hand, overwhelmed and excited by the rush of adrenaline and roaring cheer from the crowd. She had grown to realise that loneliness feels the most tangible in loud, crowded rooms. She was scared. Her eyes lingered over the upper level of the audience. There she was. Tae, her brown-eyed ballerina, watching over her, cheering her on, drowned in yellow, ever so pretty.

A smile found its way onto Rooney's black-painted lips. She felt less overwhelmed. She felt less lonely. She felt less scared. Sometimes she would wonder. Was Tae too good? Was the world simply too cruel for her? And then she'd settle on her thoughts, the same way they'd collectively settled on 'queerplatonic soulmate'. Tae was perfectly good, it's the world that needed fixing. She was okay. She was okay.

They were okay. Rooney was a heart full of daisies, and Tae was her prettiest patch. She looked over at the crowd in front of her, ready to hear her sing for them. She wondered how many of them had the privilege of being sincerely loved. She wondered if they knew what it's like to be loved by someone who was misinterpreted as incapable of loving. Were there any aroace people in the crowd? Would they like to be heard, know that she had settled on someone who had effortlessly taught her the most genuine way of love? She held her guitar, plucked on a string preparing a melody she had been contemplating for a while.

She held onto the thoughts of her ballerina, dancing and twirling in light graceful steps. For the first time in a long while, her lyrics made sense. For the first time in the longest while, her tone held love. She wanted the world to know what loving and being loved by an aroace person felt like, simply the wonderful feeling of being loved. Her fresh lyrics wouldn't make sense to many, but she knew it would make sense to her ballerina; the aroace girl who ached her way into her heart, mended it slowly and steadily with care; her forever and a day.

She and her, they'd torn the line between platonic and romantic. She and her, it would make sense to them.

The ballerina and the rockstar.

And that's all that mattered.

"Inspired by Salvadoran folk artist Fernando Llort - a lot of my works are heavily influenced by the colonial effects on Latin America."



Linoprint on Paper
La Vida Es Un Desmadre (Life is Chaos)
XYNTIA (pronoun indifferent)



A3 Collage (3 part series continued on next page)
Dios, Union, Libertad (God, Union, Liberty)
XYNTIA (pronoun indifferent)



“Colonial history has left many parts of my culture, language, and community inaccessible. I’ve spent a large portion of my lifetime trying to piece together fragmented roots.”



“It’s a bittersweet contradiction for myself as an indigenous person - to be so removed but to feel so connected to a part of me that they tried so hard to erase.”



FEMININITY, IDENTITY & SELF-DISCOVERY

‘I was thinking maybe keeping it long on the sides, but cutting it short in front?’

‘Ah, you don’t want that! You’ll look like a girl.’

How could you know what’s pinging around inside my head? I feel like people never know what you’re after; they only suggest what would work best for themselves.

I’d never really shared a lot of my personal thoughts with people in my life. I’d kept them reserved to my closest friends. The rest of the people I knew detached from the rest of my social life to the point where they couldn’t spill anything even if they wanted to.

If you had told me back then what’s happening to me now, I wouldn’t have believed you. With remote learning came an unprecedented increase in time spent at home, in my room, on the Internet. I feel like around this time femboys started becoming one of the many fascinations of the world wide web.

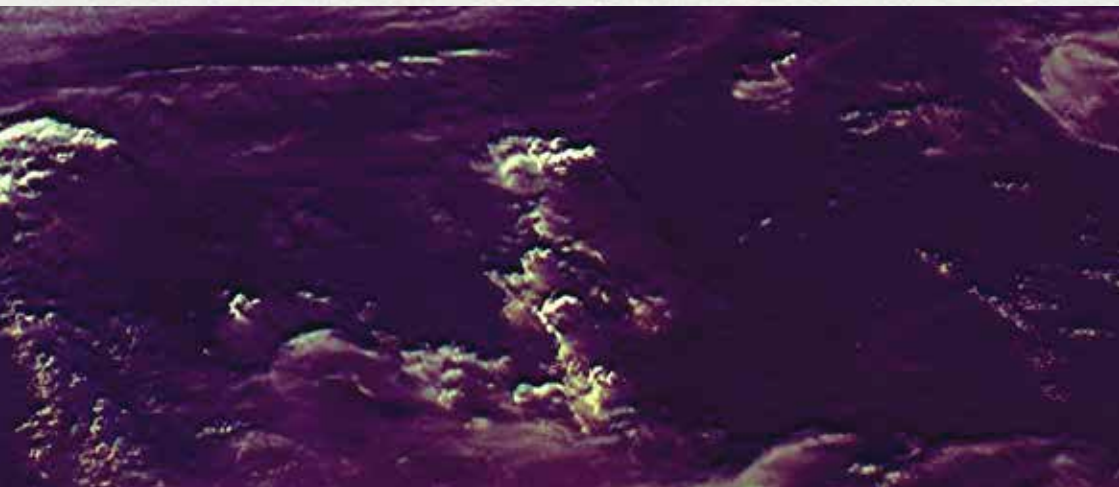
Femboys, as I had understood it, were comfortable with being male in some regard but took a feminine approach to their mannerisms and presentation. This could take the form of more traditionally ‘girly’ behaviours, such as wearing feminine clothes, but generally (and in my case) still identifying as male. I suddenly caught myself wondering what it would be like to wear a skirt, or to have a boyfriend. These aren’t mutually inclusive, but they surfaced concurrently. These thoughts shocked me, one day waking up and dreaming about other boys. Despite the shock, I couldn’t help but be a little excited by the idea of discovering something new, something different.

I decided with some other online femboy friends to make an Instagram account for fun. Privately, I wanted to gauge if I could present well, or if I should give up and quit because I didn’t look how I wanted. The first photo on there was just me, wearing socks, with shaved legs. Having smooth legs for the first time in recent memory gave me a



wonderful feeling of euphoria, and had me stupidly grinning for hours. The problems arose the very next day. I got to school, and found my friends looking at their phones, giggling: they'd found my alt account. The catch was that they didn't realise it was me. They thought it was a hilarious coincidence and told me I should message this femboy (I had joked about femboys in the past). I got sent some of my own posts later that day, instilling a heavy uneasiness which resulted in me blocking everyone I knew from the alt account; they'd think it was deleted, and we all moved on.

At my ex's 18th I had a more formal coming out. Towards the end when people were tipsy, I changed into a skirt. There was no negativity from those that hadn't gone home yet, just some friendly joking, and I got asked relatively quickly about what pronouns I used. I managed to answer with he/him, but it felt somewhat fake. No one had ever asked before, everyone just assumed. People only seemed to care now that I was 'interesting'. They weren't asking for Cameron's pronouns, they were asking the femboy's pronouns. But it was fun and exciting, and I got a rush from the experimentation.





Now, at university, I've had more opportunities to experiment with presentation, and with that has come more euphoria, more fun and new friends. The Union House Queer Space has offered unparalleled opportunities for expression and experimentation, and I couldn't be more thankful for the friends that I've made there. 2022 Winterfest brought the opportunity to experiment with public presentation, protected by the safety net of some ten other queer friends. Seeing myself in makeup gave another strange joy—it was one of the first times in a while that I genuinely felt like I looked good I've asked why I grew my hair out; lockdowns provided the obvious, accurate and convenient half-truth. I've faced pressure to cut it short while wanting to style it in a more feminine manner, and refusal to change anything has become the middle ground between giving up and experimenting more.

For me, dressing up is a double-edged sword. It brings with it a wonderful euphoric bliss while simultaneously complicating my relationship with masculinity. Once I started wanted to wear skirts, I could no longer stand the horrors of facial hair. Hair in other places came with a sense that could best be described as dysphoria. These feelings emerged after I began to start experimenting with femininity, generating intense frustration that I'd become intolerant to

one of my natural characteristics. Whenever I do want to present as a femboy, I must do it 'right'. I obsess over all the details I can to make absolutely sure that I 'pass' as well as possible. I'll shave as close to the event as possible to have the smoothest skin. I plan hair washing days in advance to have just the right texture to bless my increasingly long blonde hair. However, being a femboy is also fun, exciting, and introduces a point of difference that made me feel nice and euphoric.

The realisation of my behaviour and thoughts has had me pondering it more and more.

Until this point, I'd been comfortable and firm in my sense of self identity. Cameron, he/him, bi/pan femboy. I might play around, but I'm still a boy, right? Right?

More recently, I've been faced with a predicament. Suddenly, terms like 'man' and 'guy' have really started to bother me. I've been thinking about dressing up again and trying out she/her pronouns. I feel like I was treading a fine line with my femboy expression; it was fun but didn't really mean anything. Now I've slipped and ended up right in the thick of it.

I don't know how my story will continue, or end, but it's been wonderful thus far and I'm hoping for the best in the future.



Untitled Artwork

Lucy Johnston (they/them)

Content Warning for Violence & Some Blood



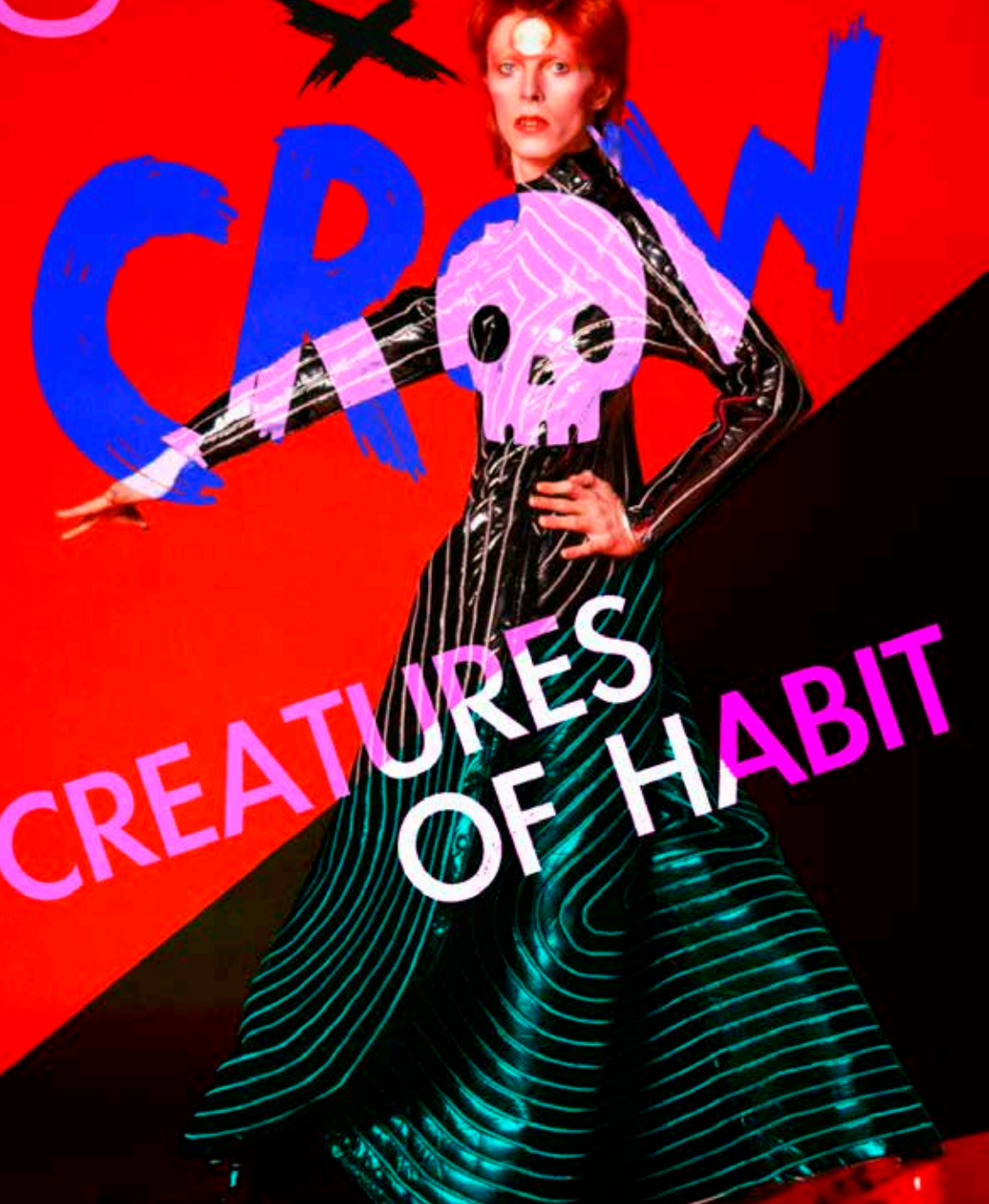
Gorman X Crow Mashup - cause goths need glam too.
XYNTIA (pronoun indifferent)







gorman





Fashion: A Form of Self-Expression, Manoeuvred by Social Norms

Lani Jaye (she/they)

Fashion is generally defined as the prevailing style of dress, accessory, hairstyle, etiquette and socialising throughout a particular time ('Definition of FASHION' 2019). It is a process of continual change until it reaches the standards of a trend or contemporariness. As I prefer to view it, fashion is a form of expressing your identity and individuality. It is a form of self-expression and self-governance or autonomy. However, it has also become a political and social beacon that constructs stereotypes and norms associated with race, gender, class, and sometimes even sexuality; an element manoeuvred by social norms, restricting its ability to flaunt an individual's uniqueness. The following essay is a personal reflection on how fashion is considered an important aspect that influences the ideologies associated with race, gender, class and the intersections between these categories that enhance the concept of identity, and how socio-political norms have restricted individualism in fashion.

Fashion has globally become a beacon of representing race and ethnicity. For instance, in Sri Lanka, where I grew up, Kandyan saris—mostly known as Osaria— and half-sarees for women and young girls, and the National Costume—known as the Jathika Aduma—and sarongs, for men, are considered the national costumes (Team Next Travel Sri Lanka 2020). It is not a must to wear this attire on a daily basis. However, for special occasions, almost everyone is dressed up traditionally. The Sinhala and Tamil New Year that is celebrated during April is a fine example of an event when fashion is brought to light. The Redda and Hatta is another traditional costume that is significantly worn during this festival by Sinhalese women, whereas men wear shirts and sarongs. In this case, gender intersects with the idea of race, distinguishing men and women. An aspect I've come to notice throughout the course of fashion in the Sinhala and Tamil New Year, or simply the Sinhala culture

in general, is that, over time, sarongs have become gender-neutral. During this festival, most women would wear a sarong along with either a regular T-shirt or a top that is known as a lungi, which is quite popular nowadays in Sri Lanka. As someone who is enthralled with the idea of fashion and experiments with a variety of outfits and styles intermingled together, I find the idea of non-binary fashion appealing. Fashion is obsessed with gender and constantly defines and redefines the boundary between genders (Wilson [1985] 2003, 117–33). Although this concept of non-binary fashion or bisexual clothing is embraced among the younger generation to a great extent, the older generations who approach from highly traditional backgrounds still fail to approve of the idea of gender-fluid costumes, especially in the context of cultural identity (Wilson [1985] 2003, 117–33).

Women and young girls in Sri Lanka are given the maximum level of attention in terms of their outfit choices, not merely in traditional outfits but also through casualwear. As a young woman of colour raised in a brown society, I was often judged on what I wore daily, especially by men and by older generations. External judgement and social expectations

have always been constraints that held back individualism and unique choices of fashion. A tension between individual autonomy and relational obligations to others therefore exists (Barnett-Naghshineh 2021). As someone who grew up in populated urban terrain, it was easier to be a victim of judgement based on what you wear. It was not only your seniors who would hold constraints against your fashion preferences, but also your peers. Jealousy and anger were common emotions that were enhanced when another individual wore something that distinguished them from the others. The Sri Lankan urban society, in general, drew the line between civilised and uncivilised, appropriate and inappropriate, with regards to women's fashion. In spite of being concealing, women are often judged for their attire. Furthermore, certain stereotypes associated with women's fashion choices were fabricated, reaching both seniors and peers. For instance, if a woman layered her hair, that was considered 'lavish'; if women wore shorts, ripped jeans or fishnets in public, they were labelled as a 'whore'; experimenting with clothes from the men's section, such as suits, was viewed as inappropriate for girls and women. This idea is linked to women wearing sarongs

and shirts at cultural events. Investigating back to Sri Lanka's indigenous inhabitants, the Veddas who were hunter-gatherers wore a simple garment, about three yards of calico (Bhanushali 2020). The women's garment, similar to men's, was usually topless, along with a piece of calico fastened around the waist like a Malay sarong and stretched to about the ankles (Bhanushali 2020). Sometimes people added another strip to cover their upper body (Bhanushali 2020). Similarly in Wilson's article, it is declared that men and women were difficult to distinguish from a distance, as they continued to dress similarly in many ways during the fifteenth century (Wilson [1985] 2003, 117–33). Despite the cry of outrage, concepts such as bisexual styles, where men and women both appeared flat-chested, and the androgynous splendour of slashed and jewel bodices, were highlighted approaches to non-binary fashion during the sixteenth century (Wilson [1985] 2003, 117–33). Gender fluidity in fashion does not only apply to women who venture their enthusiasm towards more masculine styles. This also includes men who are fascinated by and more comfortable in clothes that are considered feminine. It is not only women who struggle toward liberty (Lugones 2016).

Both women and men of colour are victims of violent domination and exploitation and strive toward freedom of expression (Lugones 2016). In terms of fashion, it is extremely rare to witness a man wearing a dress, skirt or anything considered feminine in the public streets of Sri Lanka, unless it were a stage play or a concert. If a man was spotted wearing nail polish or makeup, they were mocked and ridiculed and would be insulted as 'gay'. Femininity, in general, is highly degraded, especially in countries such as Sri Lanka. Additionally, men wearing jewellery were deemed uncivilised and beyond the boundaries of what defined masculinity. Ironically, royal families and the elite of ancient Sri Lanka wore multiple layers of jewellery along with shades of makeup, regardless of their gender. Most Sri Lankans, particularly the senior generations, believed that the notion of non-binary fashion stemmed from Eurocentric influence and that modern fashion preferences are merely an outcome of Americanisation and globalisation.

Fashion played a great role in determining classism in ancient Sri Lanka. On a base level, the elite or the rulers wore rich and heavy clothing and jewellery, whereas the socially insecure, such

as farmers and marketers, dressed simply and plainly. Class distinction in modern Sri Lanka, like many other regions, has grown more lenient. However, it is still common to assume that a person wearing expensive clothing material is wealthy and well-educated while someone in regular comfortable clothing is less than rich and not educated. As Barnett-Naghshineh depicts in her article, every now and then it looked as though someone had taken inspiration outside local fashion norms (Barnett-Naghshineh 2021). For instance, a manager of the Goroka marketplace often wore a tweed flat cap, leather jacket, smart chequered shirt and chinos with leather boots (Barnett-Naghshineh 2021). Although he lived in a house made from bamboo, wood and woven grasses in a traditional roundhouse in a village on the outskirts of Goroka, his clothing gave the impression of someone conscious of fashion and in line with western trends (Barnett-Naghshineh 2021).

The attire of an individual is universally agreed to depend on ethnicity, social status, economic status and preferences (Team Next Travel Sri Lanka 2020). Modern fashion preferences among the young generation of Sri Lanka have become

westernised (Team Next Travel Sri Lanka 2020), which was initially a result of European colonisation during the fifteenth century. The depiction of contemporary fashion in Sri Lanka as 'white-washed' or influenced by homogenisation is an ongoing conflict. However, as argued previously, the idea of androgynous styling could be seen in the indigenous histories of Sri Lanka. In my opinion, social norms associated with the intersection between fashion, race, gender, and class, and the idea of viewing cultural homogenisation as a negative aspect restrict an individual's freedom to express their identity intertwined with individualism. As the South-Korean idol, Yeonjun Choi once said in an interview, where he was asked about his choice for a dress in a particular photoshoot, his response was that it was 'fun to challenge' himself with something 'not too typical', and to 'develop his own style from there' (Choi 2021). He adds: 'I'm trying out a lot of different things. It'd be great if people end up feeling I look good no matter what I choose to wear' (Choi 2021). In conclusion, society has made fashion into a socio-political element that limits the fluidity of identity and holds constraints associated with race, gender and class.



**WEAR
IT
WITH
PRIDE**



SALVOS

This queer rebrand for Salvos was developed with the idea of creating a new high-fashion visual identity for their clothing outlet stores. I wanted to challenge the extortionate price tags on high fashion brands, demonstrating that money does not equal style.

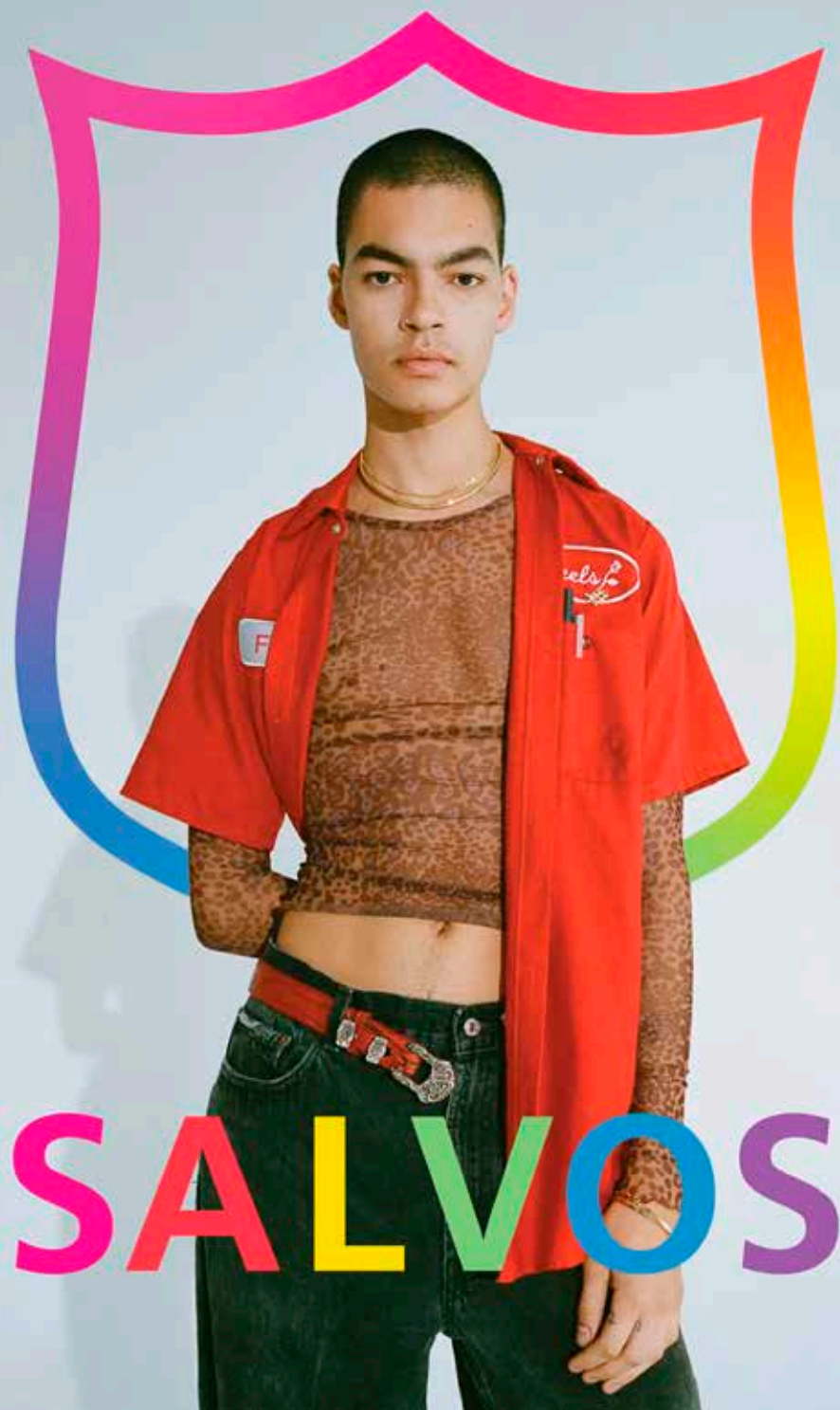


I deliberately chose to create this queer rebrand for Salvos, as opposed to other charity shops, due to the Salvation Army's known involvement with funding homophobic and transphobic event and organisations.



Pasting up a poster series I created in Melbourne (around the corner from mile end bagels in Fitzroy) was a deliberate act of rebellion...f**k you Salvos...but I still wanna go opshopping at your stores.
Emilia Doohan (she/her)





Bodies

Rose Power (ze/zir - they/them)

Gas does not maintain the shape
of the container that once held it
In one piece, that jar

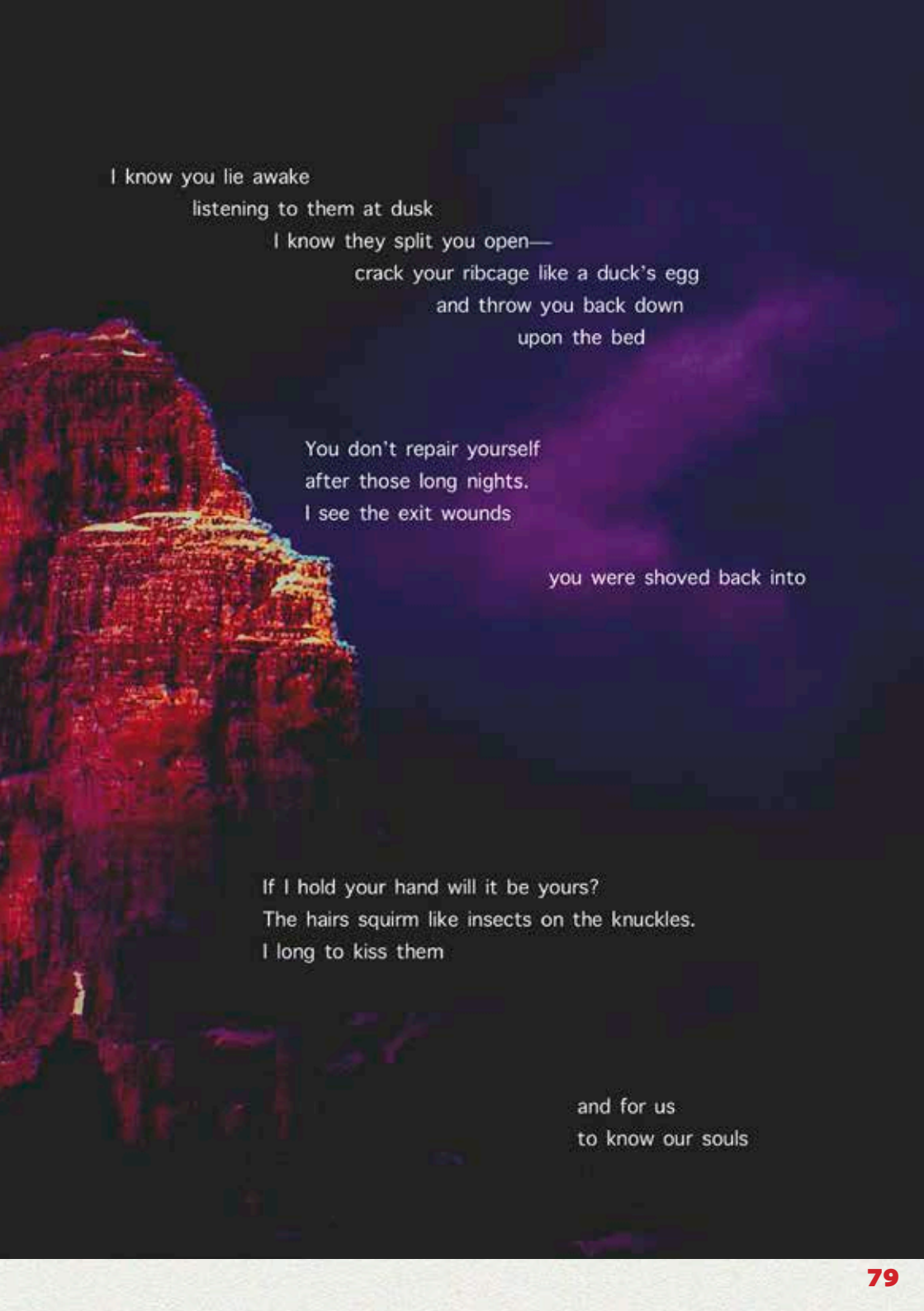
is just as dangerous
as the litter of shards
that cover the ground like teeth
under the feet of our captors

Who am I without that casing?

The one since discarded
The mortal flesh that caught your sight,
the layer of skin and dyed keratin
that I call a home

Who are you without those strange eyes?
The ones that gleam new hues upon each glance
Like water murky

after the pummel of rain
They seldom focus on one thing,
Yet see it all
We never did fear pain that one can touch.
We let the voices tear
our skin clean off
to feed themselves



I know you lie awake
listening to them at dusk
I know they split you open—
crack your ribcage like a duck's egg
and throw you back down
upon the bed

You don't repair yourself
after those long nights.
I see the exit wounds

you were shoved back into

If I hold your hand will it be yours?
The hairs squirm like insects on the knuckles.
I long to kiss them

and for us
to know our souls

Faces for Fun

Finn (he/they)

You blink, and the audience watches your face shift a thousand different shapes before settling on the one you call ‘Jane’. Swapping faces is simple for you. It makes sense. You take a deep breath and begin Jane’s monologue, intense LEDs warming your most recent face. The audience is silent. Captivated. Fascinated. Morbidly curious. Whichever pretty phrase you use, they are held mercilessly by the talons of your performance.

You know Jane’s is not your face to keep. You wouldn’t want it anyway. But for now you are a hitch in the onlookers’ breath, and a memory of this face will be all these voyeurs leave with. You—actor—remain unknown. Nameless. Faceless. Free to be the self which sits beneath.

People have told me that ‘the theatre is a place to take refuge and express oneself away from the judgement of others’, a beautiful sentiment which sounds oddly similar to ‘the theatre is a place to hide’. It isn’t wrong. But being ‘not wrong’ is a wretched

standard to live by, considering all the casual bigotry it has allowed to thrive—surely we are sick of defining our worlds in negatives and lacks by now.

The theatre is a place to perform. This is an obvious statement, but perhaps true beyond being ‘not wrong’. Take the meaning of ‘to perform’: to achieve—according to others’ standards. To present—to others. To entertain—others. But not all entertainment is for the sole benefit of others. Sometimes it’s for us. Sometimes it’s a need, such as for those who use the theatre as a place in which to perform their ‘true’ selves. Historically associated with queer men exploring their femininity, the theatre has long been held as a place of queer safety—in terms of identity exploration, at least.

But the queer reaches of the theatre extend beyond queer men, of course, and not every participant is queer—the exploration of personal identity, while greatly important to theatre and its culture, is not the only type of performance and

exploration that occurs there. Not all performance has to inform the self—it can ‘just’ be fun.

Ultimately, performance is escape; a fantasy land where one can be or speak to or watch any stranger of another time, place and life. A place in which to play freely, take a bow and then cast off whichever face you held over your own. Performance is everywhere, but so rarely are we privileged to call it temporary. To call it fun. There is freedom in performance, more than we talk about.

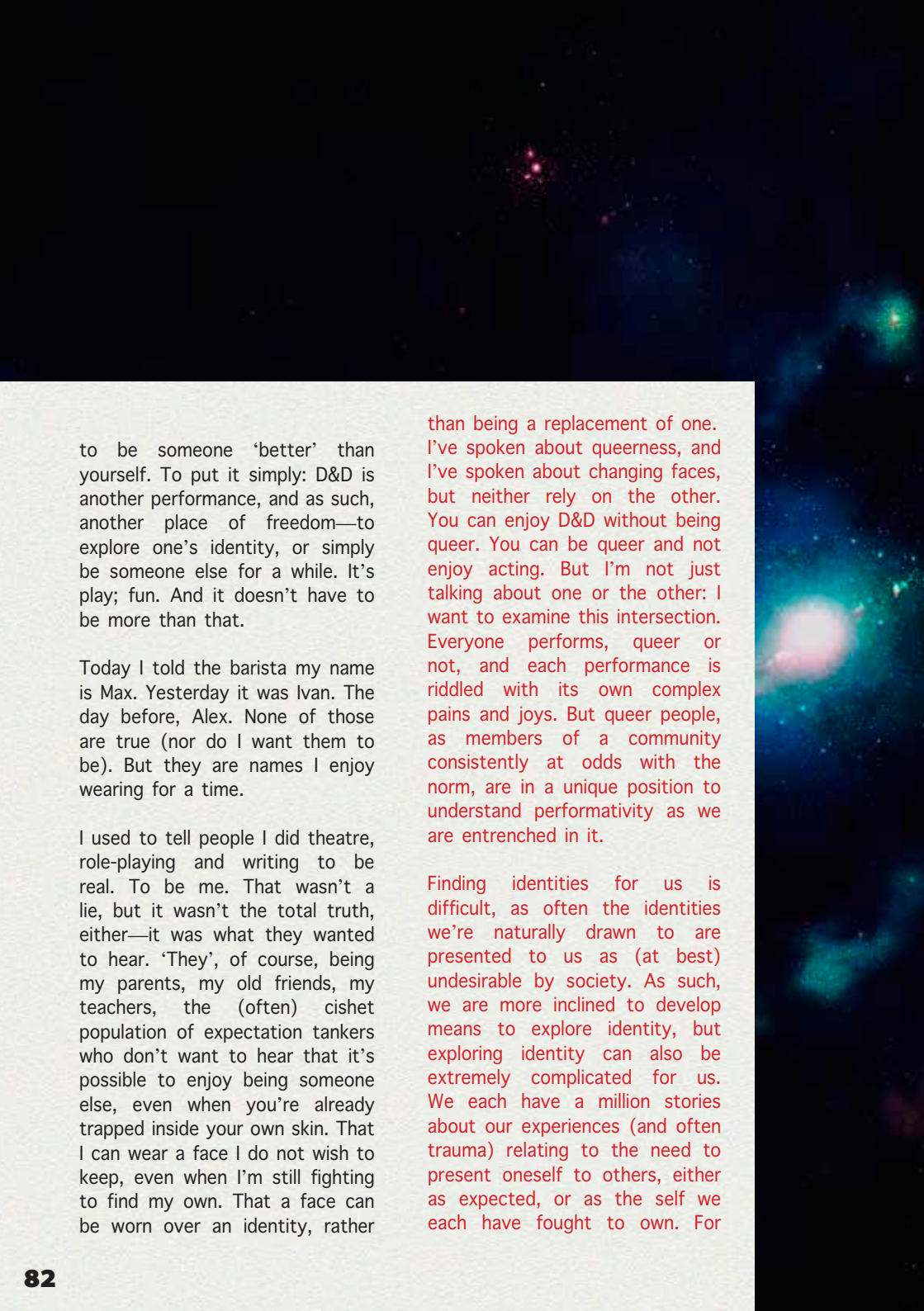
You spent several hours on character creation. Hthroll the Dwarf: quick-witted, hot-tempered and filled with the fear of inadequacy. He was raised by a dwarven village to which he was not born, for tragic backstory reasons which may be revealed later in the campaign for dramatic effect. Hthroll’s life is both exciting and free-spirited; perfect for any adventure thrown his way. He is, simply, not like you.

None of his story is a metaphor for your own struggles, amazingly. You just liked the idea of this character, and now you will defend him as fiercely as he defends his

party members. You like to be him for a time—around four hours a week—and then you fold the paper bearing his name into your pocket, leaving him dormant till next week. He is your creation—not a part of you. Not truly. He is a character sheet paper mask. Numbers and stories, dice rolls and barely informed decisions. A life to be lived recklessly, impersonally, perhaps even wastefully, if you are of the belief that every face created has to mean something. (I, personally, am not.)

Dungeons and Dragons (D&D) is a game for those who wish to escape reality by creating new confines and new oppressions, and vanquishable enemies to deal with the fact that you cannot vanquish the real ones (capitalism, patriarchy, you know the drill). It’s yet another fantasy. Another performance. We should all have a group of escapists we can perform a life of our design with.

Trade your table for a stage. Take a bow. The applause you win is for someone with another name. And what of it? Again, I feel compelled to mention a character is rarely you. And you can desire to be someone else without desiring



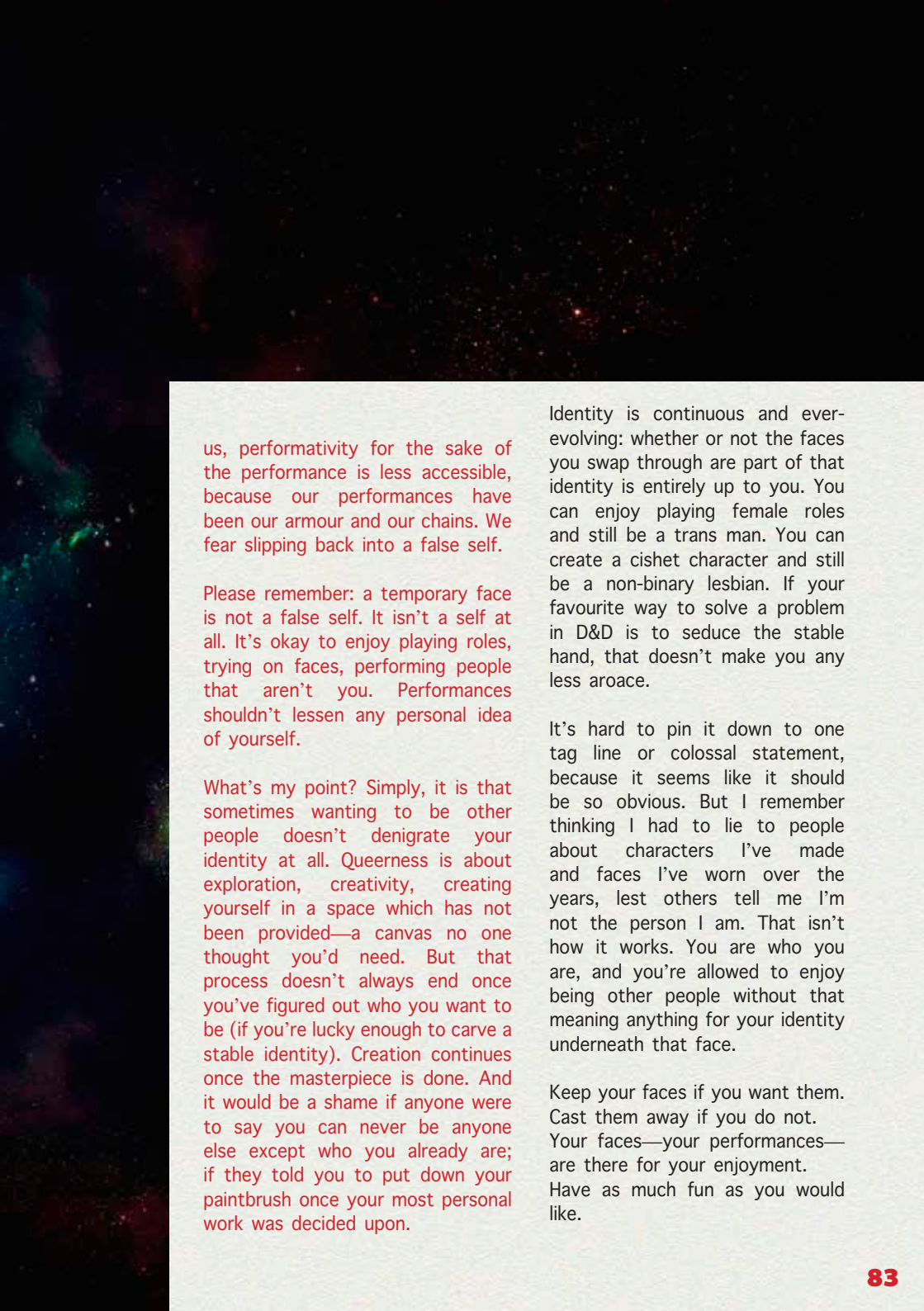
to be someone ‘better’ than yourself. To put it simply: D&D is another performance, and as such, another place of freedom—to explore one’s identity, or simply be someone else for a while. It’s play; fun. And it doesn’t have to be more than that.

Today I told the barista my name is Max. Yesterday it was Ivan. The day before, Alex. None of those are true (nor do I want them to be). But they are names I enjoy wearing for a time.

I used to tell people I did theatre, role-playing and writing to be real. To be me. That wasn’t a lie, but it wasn’t the total truth, either—it was what they wanted to hear. ‘They’, of course, being my parents, my old friends, my teachers, the (often) cishet population of expectation tankers who don’t want to hear that it’s possible to enjoy being someone else, even when you’re already trapped inside your own skin. That I can wear a face I do not wish to keep, even when I’m still fighting to find my own. That a face can be worn over an identity, rather

than being a replacement of one. I’ve spoken about queerness, and I’ve spoken about changing faces, but neither rely on the other. You can enjoy D&D without being queer. You can be queer and not enjoy acting. But I’m not just talking about one or the other: I want to examine this intersection. Everyone performs, queer or not, and each performance is riddled with its own complex pains and joys. But queer people, as members of a community consistently at odds with the norm, are in a unique position to understand performativity as we are entrenched in it.

Finding identities for us is difficult, as often the identities we’re naturally drawn to are presented to us as (at best) undesirable by society. As such, we are more inclined to develop means to explore identity, but exploring identity can also be extremely complicated for us. We each have a million stories about our experiences (and often trauma) relating to the need to present oneself to others, either as expected, or as the self we each have fought to own. For



us, performativity for the sake of the performance is less accessible, because our performances have been our armour and our chains. We fear slipping back into a false self.

Please remember: a temporary face is not a false self. It isn't a self at all. It's okay to enjoy playing roles, trying on faces, performing people that aren't you. Performances shouldn't lessen any personal idea of yourself.

What's my point? Simply, it is that sometimes wanting to be other people doesn't denigrate your identity at all. Queerness is about exploration, creativity, creating yourself in a space which has not been provided—a canvas no one thought you'd need. But that process doesn't always end once you've figured out who you want to be (if you're lucky enough to carve a stable identity). Creation continues once the masterpiece is done. And it would be a shame if anyone were to say you can never be anyone else except who you already are; if they told you to put down your paintbrush once your most personal work was decided upon.

Identity is continuous and ever-evolving: whether or not the faces you swap through are part of that identity is entirely up to you. You can enjoy playing female roles and still be a trans man. You can create a cishet character and still be a non-binary lesbian. If your favourite way to solve a problem in D&D is to seduce the stable hand, that doesn't make you any less aroace.

It's hard to pin it down to one tag line or colossal statement, because it seems like it should be so obvious. But I remember thinking I had to lie to people about characters I've made and faces I've worn over the years, lest others tell me I'm not the person I am. That isn't how it works. You are who you are, and you're allowed to enjoy being other people without that meaning anything for your identity underneath that face.

Keep your faces if you want them. Cast them away if you do not. Your faces—your performances—are there for your enjoyment. Have as much fun as you would like.

love against the machine

Srishti Chatterjee (they/them)

‘for Jack, for where my comradely words come from,
stop, breathe and fall in love.’

RED LOVE

fair warning: this is a silly little gay communist poem

instead of taking my laptop out on the tram—antifa
stickers and lights blinking, I have, like an emo
teenager, mascara overdone, begun to script you on
my notes app.

kiss me. please kiss me. shoplift with me for bread
and roses. let our hands connect, like all of this
world’s emancipation, under picture books of old
revolutions. while we kiss

I can tell you about my fallible heroes of the
academy, the one with the essay that hates your
art’s emancipatory origins, uncritical of the class
analysis that dots our hopes for each other. when
our gazes falter, grab me
where mutiny is spelt on my body—
my wrist, untethered.

I’m a writer, you’re a pianist. every day, in pursuit
of the things we love, our fingers dance across
keyboards— albeit of slightly different kinds. I
like the flagpole grip of your militant hand, and I
like it so much when you look into my eyes and
desperately unionise our faces.

my mother-tongue has a really cool song about
kissing over barricades that I think you’d like—

I swear on kisses and revolutions
that I really really really like you. together, we kiss—
we transgress the interpellation of state apparatus.

this is a stupid little gay communist poem.

WRITE ME ON YOU.

I keep bursting into poem—daffodil grunge, beautiful, unkempt.
No one has ever seen me fall in love before.

I have never seen myself fall in love before, on the kitchen
counter, on a rainy Saturday morning—waking up to you
waking you up to me, to our coffee breaths and lazy smiles,
phonebanking, writing, soft. Metal. Inquilab—Revolution, touches
our weekends, slithers in the fiery touch of the soft glow of the sun.

often in Bangla, poems and songs about love and revolutions collapse
unto each other—like you collapse unto me, justice and faith unite,
embrace. ‘make love’. gay, trans, randy, love has always been
made to hide. we can see it in us, coerced, beaten
and enforced by the cop in people’s heads. Still here,
waiting for me to fare evade at the North Melbourne station.

red is a good colour on me— euphoric, rebellious, seditious.
poems filter into our bed on Saturday morning, fluttering
on your eyelashes, waiting for me to write them into your body.

I melt into poem.



Portrait Photography
XYNTIA (pronoun indifferent)





To Holly Lawford-Smith, With Love

Anonymous

Content Warning for Transphobia

I'm not sure when I first heard your name, but as a trans person attending the University of Melbourne, I'm loathe to admit you come up. When I'm waiting for one of the two gender neutral bathrooms in Baillieu, I sometimes picture you crouched in the women's, waiting patiently for my bladder to win out and for me to succumb to the ease of multi-stall pissing, only for you to leap out and accuse me of invading women's spaces. I'm not sure how you earned your reputation. When I look over your tenure, inquiries into the applicability of theoretical philosophy onto real world issues seems like an ill fit with bizarre, poorly-researched polemics against trans people. Don't get me wrong, I'm all for variations on a theme, but how many 'LGB-drop-the-T' websites do you think you're going make before you admit that your orchestra is a little more like a one-man band?

Recently, I decided to meet you in the marketplace of ideas. I wanted to be fair. I wanted to give you the benefit of the doubt. And so, with an open heart and mind, I went cover to cover on your latest book, "Gender-Critical Feminism." Now Holly, you might not be surprised to learn that I didn't adore your prose style. So putting aside the trite and unoriginal dedication, with nothing but love, I have notes.

Let's start with your introduction, where you provide a couple of definitions. I appreciate the desire for clarity but defining the terms 'male' and 'female' in 'the standard way' isn't exactly doing a lot of intellectual heavy lifting. Credit where credit's due, things become a little clearer when you clarify a man as someone who 'all going well produces sperm', and a woman as someone who 'all going well produces eggs'. I like this definition. I like it for no other reason than it would be vaguely entertaining to watch you deny



‘maleness’ to anyone who has had a vasectomy, or to watch you have to explain to most people on the intersex spectrum that they have to pick between identifying as a binary gender or admit that ‘things aren’t going well’.

Moreover, I can’t help but notice a little bit of trickery you deploy at the end of the section. To quote you in full: ‘the meanings of these terms [male and female] are contested, with some preferring to use them synonymously with ‘man’ and ‘woman’ with both referring exclusively to gender identity. But there are no other terms available to refer to sex, and the ability to refer to sex is indispensable to my project in this book. So that is how I will proceed.’ Not to be a wet blanket, but if finding nuance in language isn’t your strong suit, maybe academic writing isn’t the right pursuit for you? I’m all for bending the rules of academic integrity—I’m literally writing a sarcastic letter to you anonymously—but is claiming the ontological exclusivity of sex and gender by calling upon the fragility of language really the ground you want to stand on?

From what I can gather, you didn’t make it all the way through *Gender Trouble*. However, Judith Butler makes an argument that might be useful here. In refusing the binary between gender as a transmutable and performative thing, and sex as a concretised and verifiable reality, Butler notes that the language that connotes sex was inherited from terms used to describe gender.

Example: if my genes are feminine but my jeans are masculine, what gets linguistic priority—DNA or denim? Thus, any system of feminism which seeks to protect and champion exclusively those that can be sexed female is going to expend an enormous amount of energy verifying the identities of those amongst its ranks, rather than, in your words, ‘simply getting on with the work of feminism’. Considering you blame ‘the gender-as-norms crowd’ for this petty squabbling, you would think this would be below you. But apparently not so.

For much of the book, you concern yourself with lamenting what you see as the erosion of a comprehensive feminist praxis, naming the disappearance of ‘women’s studies’ and the emergence of ‘gender studies’ in the university as one symptom. I appreciate the theatricality of the implication that trans people have conspired against your pedagogical preferences, but I’ve got an alternative hypothesis: maybe it was simple demand that morphed ‘women’s studies’ into something more inclusive. Personally, I like to picture Adam Smith’s ‘invisible hand’ with a French tip manicure. It makes the pill easier to swallow.

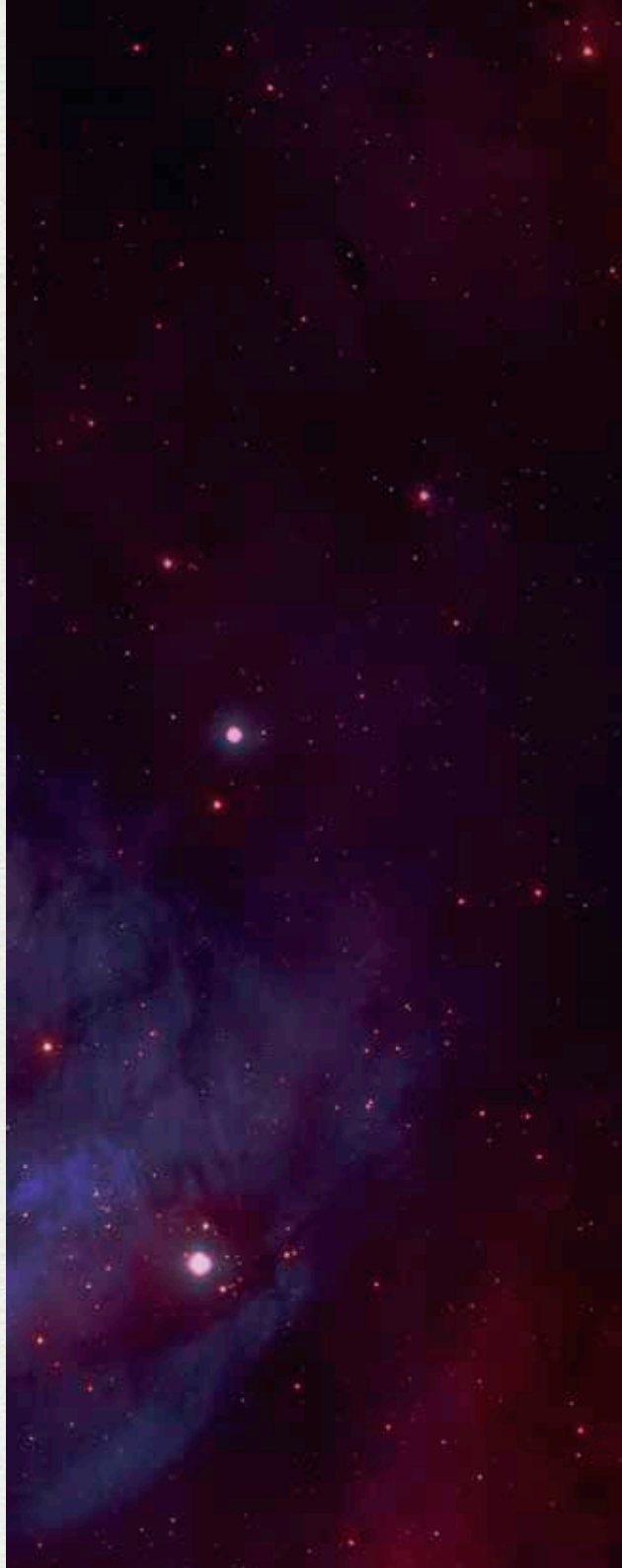
I was somewhat surprised by Chapter Four, ‘The Sex Industry’, in that I found myself occasionally nodding along in agreement. In fact, I too find a certain moral ambiguity that comes with the practise of paying for sex (to specify, my issue is with those who pay for it, and in no way is with those who sell it).

With that said, if your plea is for a feminism that is more discerning in the voices it centres, nominating yourself to speak on behalf of sex workers seems slightly hypocritical. Considering you take issue with the IWD list item number 12, ‘listen to sex worker peer organisations’, I can’t help but wonder what it is about the specific—and as you argue often horrific—conditions faced by sex workers that excludes them from the feminist utopia you seek to establish? I’m no expert, Holly, but blaming sex workers for the conditions of patriarchy feels a little bit like agreeing with the arsonist who says it was the trees that killed all those people in that bushfire.

But let’s cut the shit. Because as much as I can hide behind the homophonic similarities between genes and jeans, the truth is that your book hurts people. In fact, to play by your rules, your book hurts people that you would consider women. And I don’t mean trans-masculine people (who, after reading Chapter Five, I notice you have a particular vitriol for), I mean me. See I am someone whose sex is indeterminate. I have biological attributes that, ‘all going well’, are consistent with both sexes. In order to live in my desired gender

of binary female, I take feminising hormones. It is for this reason I consider myself a transgender woman. A blood sample would tell you I was a girl. The state would tell you I was a boy. A look at my naked body would leave you confused. A chromosomal map is expensive, so I can't account for what that would say, although I'll be sure to keep you updated.

Reading your words, I feel that underneath the callous disregard for many there is a genuine hurt at the ongoing and systemic oppression faced by femme-identifying people every day. I share this pain. Being someone whose gender is interpreted differently hour to hour, I can tell you first hand that the patriarchy is more than alive and kicking; it's practically slamming our heads against the wall. We want the same things, and so I am proposing a truce on the grounds of a common enemy. In fact, if you truly feel you need spaces exclusive to those whose chromosomal, endocrinological, linguistic/aesthetic embodiment and genitalia all align neatly with the feminine, then be my guest. All I ask is that when you take bathroom breaks spare a thought for me, waiting to use the gender-neutral one.





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