

BECOMING QUEER

VOLUME 7

ISSUE 1

the

GAY SAINT

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The Gay Saint
Becoming Queer
Volume 7
Issue 1
September 2023



Note from the editor: “Becoming Queer”

JACK TRAVERS

What does it mean to “become” queer?

Well that’s up to you.

For me, becoming queer was discovering who I am and unashamedly embracing my queer self. It’s loving who I love. It’s shaving my head and painting my nails, piercing my ears. It’s who I listen to, who I live with, who I hang out with. It’s the issues I fight for, and the world I dream of. Becoming queer is becoming yourself. It’s seeing the beauty that surrounds you and letting your world become technicolour in queerness.

The Gay Saint volume 7 issue 1 is our expression of this journey. Of how we see ourselves, our friends, our lovers and our world through poetry and prose. It’s who we listen to, what we read and what we learn from each other. It’s community like no other.

Let’s become queer together.

Whether you’re new to *The Gay Saint* or a returning reader, we hope you enjoy our first issue of the academic year. If you’re new to St Andrews, we hope you find community here. It’s a small town with a big heart, and we’re here for you. Come get involved!

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p o e t r y

A Question

ALEX BARTON

How do I tell you
You can't clap on beat
But that I don't care
Because
Once in a while
I get lost in your rhythm
And understand better what composes you

Roadkill

SOPHIA HAIGH

Let's say you are driving down the road with your eyes closed.

My eyes are also closed

I can hardly be in a vehicle without feeling like

A dying thing. So in my head we are somewhere else.

I sense you turning off the engine prematurely and

When I look

You are by the side of the road

Explaining to the hedgehog that you hit,

That it was an accident. It cannot forgive you

But if it could then it would. You accept this

Get back in the car and tell me that

It would have been heartless to let the universe

Claim purposeful obsolescence.

The back of my throat is dry.

We make it to someone's party.

We stand by the side of the crowd and you're desperate

To get to the centre of it, to do bad things without the fear

Of your mother finding out

But I still have nightmares of really wanting.

You're doing all the talking

While I stare at the ground.

My feet fill out my favourite socks

That you didn't compliment. And shoes,

They're comfortable shoes.

I don't listen to the words you are saying but

I feel safe in the drone of your voice.

I don't tell anyone that I miss you.

I'm afraid that it will mess me up.

Woman and Me

AUDREY IVESTER

I love woman
 she is soft, gentle, kind she cares so hard
 lights up the stars
 a whole universe in her mind
 her thoughts spoken so tactfully
 a carefully woven tapestry,
 but do not call me by her name.
 I love woman
 the ancestral rage she holds
 for centuries
 she folds her knees

her troubles left untold
 the fire that burns in her heart
 yes, woman is a work of art,
 but still, do not call me by her name.
 I love woman
 I have for quite some time
 her tender lips
 her fingertips
 the gentle curve of her spine and when
 everything burned, she still stood the
 universe's gentlest proof,
 but do not call me by her name.

I am like the moon
 dancing shadows on a silent lake
 untethered to the binary world
 unfettered by societal dictation
 defiant in my very existence.
 I wax and wane, ever-changing,
 fluid and free
 I love woman
 she is everything that is good
 but when you call me by her name I am
 chained to the ground in shame forever to
 be misunderstood.
 I love woman.

but please,
 do not call me by her name.

Boys

TRINITY GÖRTSCHACHER

maybe I should love a girl again
with pretty eyes, gentle hands
and hair that falls just so
where these restless hands learn to idle
how my sides would ache from laughing
how she'd stare and smile so smugly
and we'd lie there in the sun unblinking

I could love a girl again
but I have a softness reserved
for these patrochlean boys

how I would love a boy
with pretty eyes and gentle hands
and hair that that falls just so
there for idle hands to plait and twist and
twirl
how I'd tease him, how he'd stare
how he'd like it when I wore his clothes
and how he'd raid my wardrobe in return

now I dream of tracing bone, touching
skin
resting hands on napes of necks
with beauty whispers in his ear
and maybe
in his eyes I can be handsome too
and on those days when
I wish I'd been born looking just like him
he'll want me
to love him the way boys do

and I thought it ugly desire
when I saw them on the silver screen
when I felt them spring on printed pages
and my dancing heart
carried me through Dreaming's gates
to live their love all for myself
but there is no 'them', there never was
I felt such fear
thought it no better
than men who itch to watch girls kissing
but there never was
anything but us
I just didn't know it then

so now I lie here dreaming
and how I love this feeling
I hit play and
the tapes in my mind keep rewinding
of my pretty boy and his pretty eyes
and I think I'll stay a little while
grinning with the hope of it all
and wait
to feel that fever thrill again
just from looking in his eyes and when
my head screams "run, run, run"
I think I'll stay another day
crushing
on my patrochlean boy



The Creation of Adam by Michelangelo. Composition and poetry by Jack Travers.

p r o s e

A Peach Smoothie

THOMAS SCOTT

Tell me about the time we would spend shivering in the coffee shop with a single peach smoothie between the two of us. It was always too big, I would tell you. I could never finish one myself. But really I wanted a piece of your mouth inside of my own.

How – as we shook from the ice and the laughter and the terror that the lady at the counter would proclaim my intentions – the sun burned my arm when it pierced through the window. How we would mourn those with hot drinks yet I inhaled its acrid breath. I think I saw you do that too.

I wanted to live here, with you, with that peach smoothie and the sunburn and the roasting smells. I would follow you home and listen to your words and pretend I wasn't watching the way your hands swung from side to side or paint the air when you got overly excited. When the world darkened you would tell me my parents would get worried but I told you it was okay. I was with you so that was okay.

You would smile and I would smile and when I finally went home my father would greet me with fresh bruises, but I would still smile because my mouth tasted like peaches and I knew your mouth did too.

You told me how this was wrong. When we were growing up and you stood atop the pulpit and spoke about eternal family. About the covenants we make with God. I wore the tie you gave me when I was fifteen. It was orange and spotted and hideous but I loved it because it made you think of me and you bought it and you gave it to me for no other reason than because we're friends.

I couldn't help but notice how you wouldn't look at me that Sunday. You sat with your family and spoke your truth the moment you could. Was it because you flayed me? I would have died if you didn't! That ice broke and the water pulled me in and I couldn't feel my body. Couldn't hear anything but you call my name before I realized what was happening. I thought I saw something, a phone or a house or an angel. Your car was stuck and it was late and the snow was drowning. I thought I was helping.

You pulled me out but I couldn't feel your hands. You gave me breath but I couldn't feel my lungs. You cried out for help but I couldn't hear your words. Nobody could. You could feel me shiver and you peeled off my clothes and I felt you hesitate when you got to my garments, stuck tight to my flesh like a second organ threatening to suffocate me. I'll die either way, so get it over with.

You became a butcher and sliced through my skin and I thanked you for it. Nerves and muscle and bone and veins and guts. Hot red meat that pulsed under your shaking hands. It was ugly. I could taste the bile on my tongue and knew you tasted it too and I smiled. You told me I wasn't going to die. I don't mind. But you pulled me into the backseat and wrapped my body in burial shards. You held me. Your breath was on my neck and your hands willed life into my arms, my back, my legs. I really don't mind if I don't make it through the night. I'm not breaking any rules, I won't get punished for this.

But I didn't die and the sun let us leave and you didn't look at me when I saw you again. When you got me home I was shivering and sweating and my mother helped me to bed with a cup of chamomile tea and you left. The next day, you called to check on me. You saved my life, I told you, but you paused and said that was Heavenly Father. You hung up the phone and on Sunday you didn't look at me.

I don't know what you spoke with the bishop about but I know what I didn't tell him. Then you looked at me again and we got peach smoothies. Remember when we were little and you couldn't finish it? you laughed.

And then we were men. And then we got our assignments. You told me I was lucky, the Paris Mission, what an honor! But you were leaving for London and you didn't have to learn another language and you got to leave the Training Center before me. I couldn't bear to look at you now. I was afraid my breath would entangle with yours and ruin you. You smiled at me. You lifted your hand and it hovered over my heart. Could you feel the way my pulse sped just by the presence of your hand? You seemed to want to touch me, or at least I wanted you to want to touch me. But I shouldn't. And you shouldn't. So you patted my shoulder. I could see my reflection in your name tag. I watched you leave.

I thought leaving would fix me. That this new country with these words of truth and these people to drown would save me. Nothing but the truth. Yet I held your name in my pocket like a drug.

I pushed, I smiled. I pushed, I prayed. I pushed, I spoke of truth. I pushed, I prayed. I pushed, I dreamt of you. I prayed, I prayed, I prayed. I ate a can of peaches on the street corner. We're not working hard enough, my companion told me. Okay, I said. I prayed some more.

I watched the women of France as we cavorted through the parks, their chests bare. I noticed we came to this park often despite nobody listening to us. It's a shortcut, said my companion. But I know he thought of those women each morning in the shower. As I lay at night, I tried to think of them too. Of their curves and their breasts and their voices like birds, but my mind would always go back to you. I decided not to tell the Mission President about either of our sins.

Months had passed. A year had passed. I lost weight. I lost my voice. I lost my mind. I thought of you.

A new prospect! It had been so long! A new companion. I let him do the talking. We couldn't lose another person, and this one seemed so promising. I couldn't let him hear my doubts. Why was I preaching this again? That's right, it was because you broke me.

The man asked about eternal family. He told us about his struggles and I felt glass in my throat. Oh gosh no, my companion told the prospect, it is only a man and a woman. The man looked at me and his eyes singed my mind. He knew. He knew about you. He knew about all of this. About how I was envious of the wind, that it could touch your skin and fill your lungs. About how I wanted to crawl inside you and burn up there. About how I would shred my flesh and wrap it up and gift it to you if only you asked. He felt the ice as it broke and felt you on me. He felt your breath. He felt as you stripped away my garments, never to leave. He heard the whispers I longed to tell you and the sharp sting of a blade when I thought about it too long. He saw all the scars hidden under my clothes, how they made me look like a tabby cat. He saw your hands. He saw your hands on me. He saw your mouth and tasted peaches.

My companion is right, I told the man, anything else is wrong. Oh, he said. We shook hands. He thanked us for the lesson. I felt sick. We left.

You know I hate you?

There was a lady instead of the man, eyes like a drunk. Where's our man? He's so close to getting baptized, you know. My brother is dead, she told us, he slit his wrists in the bath. The lady spoke and my companion spoke but I was quiet. I couldn't speak, my lungs were sliced apart. I ran.

A scarf, red and swinging, brushed past. I thought of the man I spoke with, thought of his blood twisting in that water and pulling out his life. I thought of the words I told him, I thought of his eyes. Did you know I killed this man? He saw you in my mind and I killed him.

Why am I looking at these bricks? How did I get here? My eyes and throat and stomach burned and I felt my body split open as I vomited. I prayed it was blood and the man was getting me back for killing him. You did this. You ruined me and I killed a man.

We didn't do this, my companion told me. When did he get here? I said I killed him, that I deserve to die too, that I love a man. He stepped away from me. Good. I don't want to ruin anyone else.

I left. My companion stopped looking at me and I stopped talking with prospective people and my tabby marks grew visible. I killed a man. I love a man. I was finished.

How is your mission going? Have you done what I have done or are you perfect? What am I saying? Of course you're perfect. You're you. Fuck you.

Has it been two years now? Is it time for you to come home? I'm sure you don't want to see me, I don't even go to church anymore. Everybody else stopped talking to me. Did you know I killed a man? Did you know I'm in love with you?

This place is claustrophobic, I need to leave. Go somewhere where the lakes aren't salty and they don't sell peach smoothies.

I'm living with my aunt. She drinks coffee. I tried it for the first time and it was foul. But the green tea was good. I wish you could try the tea, it's marvelous.

I know I shouldn't but I went to the coffee shop where we would drink the peach smoothie. I thought of you and heard your voice but that really was your voice and you were back from your mission and you hugged me. Was that coffee on your breath? You told me you missed me, that you never stopped thinking about me and that you have looking everywhere for me. But I killed a man. You have to stop touching me or I'll kill you too. You only held me tighter. I couldn't stand it, I felt knives against my eyes and wept and wept and wept. You pulled me into the single bathroom. It was dark and smelt like disinfectant. I'm sorry, I told you. You have nothing to be sorry for, you said. But I love you, you know. I know, you said, but I love you too. I ruined you. No, you told me – were you crying to? – no, you saved me.

And then you pulled away and held my face and that was coffee on your breath, have you tried tea? It's a million times better. And you kissed me and I kissed you back. We kissed and kissed and kissed and I was glad that I didn't die the night I fell through the ice. When we broke you told me you were sorry. Sorry for hiding. Sorry for pretending. Sorry for speaking lies. I kissed you.

You told me you loved me again and I laughed because your lips felt like the sun and I made your mouth taste like peaches.

Friendless Behaviour

TRINITY GÖRTSCHACHER

Moral of the story: I'm not good at making friends, but at least I have a car.

The other day my friend called me, anxious and in want of mindless distraction: my specialty.

It was the middle of the night, and there I was blabbing about discrepancies in the Star Wars timeline and how tall Bo Burnham is – only this time, I hadn't trapped someone in an infodump, no, he called me. Granted, I was the logical choice; it's no secret that I keep odd hours.

But even so, a phone call beat a Hozier concert in being the highlight of my day. “Yes, that's called friendship,” my sibling said to me when I told them that.

But that's the thing, making friends didn't come as easily to me at uni as when I was younger – even when I thought I'd managed to befriend someone, it was always me who'd message, it was always me who'd show up at their house. I did all the friendly things you're supposed to do, even autistically asking if we were, but it didn't feel like we were friends. Still, I hoped the call would come, that one day the knock would be on my door. But the goodness you carry for someone can be a breaking weight and the injury of convincing a sunset to care about you never really heals.

So, when the realisation comes that your dearest friend thinks of you as their friend too, it comes like a knock at the door, like a father you thought was still working abroad holding red shoes and stripy tights you won't ever take off.

I can already hear the voice in your head screaming to get to the point,

Insert colourful expletive of choice

We're getting to that... after another anecdote.

The main difference here, which will come as a surprise to absolutely no-one, is that I stumbled upon my little troupe when I wasn't actively trying to find new friends.

Picture it, it's cold and dark and late and this DJ gig just ended but the girl I'd trauma bonded with last year (we sat next to each other in the 2nd year chemistry NMR workshop) wanted to go to the after party – problem, the after party was strictly 'need to know'.

So, the Gemini in me starts scheming. We hang around by the door, have a chinwag and smoke, until the DJs start to leave. I jingle my keys; we walk to the car; I turn to ask the guy from my class if he wants a lift home. He says no. Plan A has failed. I can't weasel the details out of him in the car if he's not in the car.

Not to worry.

This tall, hippie-looking lad asks if I could drive their equipment back to his flat; schemer (Gemini) on opportunist (also Gemini) violence (politely using someone else to make life easier).

Of course, I say, if we're invited to afters.

Three months later, he's staying with his girlfriend at my family home back in Austria (I'd spoken to her once); three months after that, I'm staying with her and her family in Italy where we (Gemini enabler, Scorpio enablee) decide on a whim she should finally move out of her nasty, nasty flat and live with me until she graduates.

I can't imagine life without any of them.

I suppose therein lies my advice – you'll meet people and no matter how hard you try to win their love, they won't care and it will hurt. But you can't let that discourage you from getting back up and getting yourself back out there, it could literally kill you..

Trin's five commandments:

1. Don't give up on making friends at uni, even if it takes a while
2. Don't waste your love on people who don't return it just throw them into the ocean
3. The harder you search for something, the longer it'll stay hidden (e.g. remote, keys, the audacity) so close those eyes <3
4. Buy a car so you can live, laugh, l-acts of service your way into having friends
5. Punch transphobes on SIGHT

In the end, your loneliness will pass. You'll find your people, I promise you this, but you might be surprised when they find you first – they'll love you as fiercely as you love them and they won't care if you're weird or intense, if I know anything they'll probably be just as insane as you. Just don't settle for being unknown. Hold onto your hope.



ST ANDREWS PRIDE, 1 April 2023

Photography by Trinity Görtschacher, shot with a Minolta Maxxum 7000, bought in 1988, on Kodak Ultramax 400 35mm film.

Dissecting Conversation

M. J. M. NORWOOD

The pressure gauge entered green and Harriet closed the hand pump to keep the flight bladder inflated while she measured its diameter. Setting the callipers aside, she made a note of it in her lab book, then took out her scalpel and carefully began cutting out the dragon's ignition organ to weigh it and record its length.

The door opened just as she was writing out her measurements, and she jumped. One of the cleaners had entered and was eyeing her lab bench with a raised eyebrow.

"Oh, I—I'm sorry." Harriet hastily began gathering up her dissection kit. "I must have lost track of time, I didn't realise it had gotten so late—"

"Get absorbed, did you?" said the cleaner, with an amused smile.

"Yes, I was trying to get my samples done, and—"

"It's quite all right, I understand how it is with final projects. I'll do the other benches." The cleaner went to the other side of the room to light the gas lamps, then started scrubbing the benches with vinegar.

Harriet collected the scraps from her dissection into a waste bucket and made sure the pump and callipers were set out neatly, then went to the sink to clean her dissection tools.

For a while, the only sounds were splashing and scrubbing, then the cleaner spoke from behind Harriet,

"Thank you for tidying your bench. Makes it much easier for me."

Harriet finished putting her dissection kit back in its case and turned around. "Dissections are messy work, isn't it just common courtesy to tidy up?"

The cleaner laughed. "You'd be surprised how many people leave a complete mess."

"Well, I apologise for the rudeness of my peers." Harriet stripped off her gloves to put in the bucket that would go to the laundry. She hung up her lab coat, then had to adjust her shirt, which had gotten rucked up to hang awkwardly off her corset.

"What's your project about?" asked the cleaner, as she eyed the flight bladder in the waste bucket suspiciously.

Harriet was taken aback. She had never really exchanged more than a few words with the cleaners and hadn't expected a conversation.

"I'm looking at the relationship between the size of the flight bladder and the ignition

organ,” she said, coming to stand next to the other girl. Her speech grew louder as she explained; it was hard to contain her enthusiasm. “It’s long been thought that dragons’ fire breathing is partly a mechanism to release excess gas from the flight bladder, but there hasn’t actually been much study on it, so it’s quite exciting! Of course, I have to think about factors like how frequently they flame as well.”

The other girl blinked. “Well, I think I understood that, though I must confess that biology has never been my strong suit. I study library science myself.”

“You’re a student, too?” Harriet blurted in surprise, then continued, embarrassed, “I’m sorry, I just didn’t think—”

“You didn’t think a cleaner would be studying at a university like this?” said the other girl, raising her eyebrow again.

“I... Yes. That was dreadful of me, wasn’t it?” Harriet bit her lip.

“A little. You’ll find that cleaners do have rich inner lives, you know.” The girl gave a wry smile. “Even the ones who aren’t also students.”

“But must you work? Don’t your parents help out?”

A second raised eyebrow joined the first, and the girl stared at Harriet for a little longer than was comfortable before speaking. “My parents do not ‘help out’, as you say. Certain fundamental aspects of my nature do not align with their views. So, I pay my way here with a scholarship, and by working.”

Harriet looked at the girl, and felt a sudden sense of... familiarity was the only descriptor that came to mind. She thought she knew what those ‘fundamental aspects’ might be, and, though she had made a habit of ignoring it, she thought she might share them. She wanted to say something, but all that came out was, “I’m sorry.”

“You say that a lot, don’t you?” said the other girl. She turned back to the bench, setting out her cleaning bucket. “Now, hadn’t you better be getting home? It’s late.”

“Yes, I...” Harriet trailed off, opened her mouth again, then gave up and went to get her coat. “I suppose I’ll see you around here again.”

“I dare say you will.” The other girl didn’t look up from her cleaning.

Harriet reached for the door handle, then halted, and turned around, taking a deep breath. “I rather think I’ve made an ass of myself in this conversation. If you would be agreeable, I should like to try again. Perhaps over tea?”

The girl frowned, and Harriet thought she was going to say no, but then she looked over.

“I think I would like that.”

Harriet let out a relieved sigh. “Thank you. I’m Harriet, by the way.”

The girl smiled, and the warmth of it washed over Harriet, making her cheeks flush.

“I’m Evelyn.”

Author’s note:

This story is the first of a series following Harriet and Evelyn throughout their lives. Each instalment will work as a standalone, but they will come together to form a richer picture of this queer couple’s life than can be captured in just 800 words. If you enjoyed meeting these characters, look out for them in future editions, as their relationship develops, and we see where the world takes them.

A Letter to my Ma

ANONYMOUS

Dear ma,

The other day, you told my sister I had a boyfriend. You said I was dating my friend who, unbeknownst to you, is one of the most stereotypically gay guys I've ever met. Before that, you thought I was dating first, my coworker, and second, my friend who you met at the train station, without knowing that they are both bisexual golden retriever guys with girlfriends. And before that, you thought I was dating my (also gay) male friend merely because I'd said we went for a sunrise swim together (I didn't mention we'd painted our nails together a few days earlier.)

Every time I so much as mention a male-presenting friend you make these assumptions. And I get why you're so desperate for me to have a boyfriend, but how do I tell you that you're fighting a losing battle?

I've not always been the perfect daughter, but I learned quickly how to play the part. I didn't stay out late, I didn't do drugs, I didn't drink alcohol. I achieved top grades. I wore dresses, apart from when I played sports – then I would wear a skort, just like you. I would take your criticisms until you had nothing further to say, and then I would know that your silence signified your approval. But it's getting more difficult to maintain this role when I know the logical next step is, according to you, securing a boyfriend.

My girlfriend and I would disagree.

I never meant us to get this far. I'd suppressed my love for women because I'd decided I was one of the 'lucky' queer Asian girls who could live my life happily with a man. I could have familial approval, no cultural stigma, no societal discrimination – all I had to do was marry a man. I didn't take into consideration, though, that being bisexual doesn't mean I can control who I fall head-over-heels for. I spent too long hoping in my deepest, darkest thoughts that my girlfriend would do something awful, purely so I would have an excuse to break up with her and I wouldn't have to even consider telling you. But I know now that I love her, more than life itself, and I want to be with her forever, and I want to tell you – I just don't know how.

It's the small moments that hurt me the most: when my girlfriend's parents don't bat an eye when we hold hands, when I gush about my girlfriend over the dinner table to my best friend's whole family, when I go on tangents and witter away to random professors about my supportive, beautiful girlfriend. And then when I contrast this to my determination to talk about her as little as possible in front of you. Your repeated calling her the wrong name to her face. My launching myself off the bed when I hear the slightest noise just in case you walk in and see us cuddling.

It isn't easy. I know you understand difficult love; I know that your parents weren't happy that you married a gweilo. I just don't understand how, even after you jumped the racial hurdle, you're still so opposed to me breaking free of heteronormative standards. If our beautiful culture was misused to trap you, why must you continue to hold it against me? Why must you hate the concept of queerness when you know how it is to be judged for who you love?

This is me telling you without actually telling you: I am both bisexual and a person of colour (and I am no less Asian due to my sexuality) and, even though theoretically I could love men, right now I am hopelessly devoted to my girlfriend. Please respect that and love her; welcome her into the family as gladly and warmly as you would if I brought home the 'perfect' well-mannered, wealthy man.

Lots of love,

Your golden child xx

‘MY GIRLDICK ISN’T DESTROYING THE COUNTRY’

The Machine Gun Corps Memorial, Hyde Park Corner, London, UK.



On Being Coloured in a Colourful Place

H . B .

This summer, I returned home to India after 12 months in Scotland. Something about being away for such a long time highlighted differences in the two starkly different lives I lead. One such difference – largely cultural – has to do with how I express sexuality in my identity. I've been thinking about the intersection of race and sexuality: my journey through it, and how various spaces I've interacted with have affected it.

Though the idea that I might not be straight always loomed over me since I was twelve, it almost always took a backseat. I came to university from a conservative family, just out of a heterosexual relationship. Before then, part of me didn't really need to think about what life might be as a queer person in India, the other part of me didn't want to.

Race and sexuality: it felt like I had inwardly boxed them as two separate aspects of my identity that were constantly at odds with each other. At first the reasons seemed evident – India is conservative in its norms and being gay was criminalised for a vast majority of my life. The answer seemed obvious – if much of this friction had to do with the geographical space that I was in, all I had to do was leave? Surprisingly enough, that hadn't worked. A lot of what defined me as an Indian once I arrived in a foreign land also drove me away from my queerness. I continued to struggle with accepting my identity in Scotland. The disconnect was as intrinsic as it was extrinsic – I rejected my queerness because I was brown, and I rejected by brownness because I was queer. For the longest time, I truly believed that

this was a me problem. In first year, someone once asked me to close my eyes and envision a person that represents my ideas of queerness. At first, I thought it was a silly exercise. But in the vast spectrum of people I pictured, no one looked, dressed, or spoke like me. Outside of the occasional YouTuber, my ideas of queerness had, for better or for worse, been shaped by my social and representative interactions at St Andrews. And during those initial months at St Andrews, I did not feel that there were sufficient spaces, cultures, or discourses in place to help me interact with or be represented by other queer people of colour (QPOC). This most definitely worsened the friction that I felt.

That is not to say that this problem is specific to St Andrews. Queer aesthetics, culture and expression in general are quite whitewashed and Eurocentric. But in my eyes, two issues exacerbate this problem within our community. Not only is the St Andrews body infamously and overwhelmingly white; but it is also a very small social bubble which makes it extremely difficult to explore and come to terms with your identity on your own terms. For example, social circles sometimes appear to be quite demographically monotonous and insular from the outside. This overwhelmed much of my socialising in first year. The circles I interacted with were either one or the other, meaning that in my social interactions, I was always either brown or queer, never both.

In May of 2023, India's Supreme Court heard a series of petitions looking to legalise same-

sex marriage over a 10-day period. Unfortunately, the court decided to reserve a verdict, stating that this would constitute legislation which fell outside of the remit of a judicial body and would have to come from a legislative body. A notoriously backward parliament means that victory is nowhere in sight. This defeatist atmosphere felt heavy in the Indian queer community, especially during pride month. While under exam pressure, I was constantly and anxiously checking Twitter for updates on these hearings. I was diligently taking all my study breaks on social media. I was going down rabbit holes of twitter threads anonymously bashing and dismantling queer existence. This hearing was a landmark case for the queer community in India. While in Scotland, I felt helpless, distant, and disconnected from home. To state it quite bluntly, I felt disappointingly unsupported and unacknowledged. Had I dealt with something like this as a fresher, I would have struggled a lot more than I did.

Cultural change is initiated and driven by political and representational change. Hence, when seeking to represent the voice of a student body as international as ours, student organisations like Saints LGBT+ must tread lightly and constantly reflect on potential blind spots and systemic issues that might cause them.

That's not to say that I expect those on the committee of Saints LGBT+ to be informed on everything LGBTQ+ around the world. Rather, it is an example of what is missed when diverse voices are not represented. I don't think that this necessarily comes from a place of intentional exclusion. To me, it perhaps comes from not entirely understanding the depth and range of responsibility it has. To many people, Saints LGBT+ is a celebration of their queer identities. And I think on this front, it has made tremendous strides – especially with work like periodic meetups, glitter ball, and pride walk. But to many like me, Saints LGBT+ was an introduction to our queer identity – the very first place we turned to for guidance on

learning about sexuality and identity. In my first year, I don't think I had the vocabulary to explore or express how I felt and how I loved. Non-binary, pansexuality, asexuality – were all novel concepts. Immediate structures and spaces around me severely lacked in providing me with relatable mentors or role-models that I could look to for guidance. Hence to me, both social and Saints LGBT+ events were equally daunting places.

I suppose my words might be taken with a grain of salt - this article is merely a part of my story. One that wasn't always positive. But I like to believe that our story ends well. It has taken some time, but I have managed to muster a strong circle of supportive peers – many QPOC. They have been vital in helping me make conscious efforts to seek out people, places, and media that allow me to explore South Asian queer histories – warts and all. I do wish it hadn't taken me a whole three years.

I cannot claim to have all the answers. The way that I see the St Andrews queer culture changing for the better is perhaps slow and gradual. It must start from a place of acknowledgement that the current systems we have in place are flawed and that they overlook an important voice. Representative structures need to change proactively, not just tokenistically. Introducing a position explicitly working towards QPOC interests should be a first step, not the last. People need to see representative structures as accessible despite (not because of) the way that they look, feel, or sound. Active efforts must be made to seek out multi-racial perspectives in the smallest activities of organisations like Saints LGBT+. There needs to be an intentional effort to ensure that QPOC narratives, experiences, histories, and cultures are being learned, heard, and celebrated. In doing so, I'm certain that many “baby queers” (like myself three years ago) can hope to marry two defiant parts of our identity and seek out spaces to celebrate who we are in the comfort of our own skin.



a r t i s t s

Music:

‘Manic’ – when an artist makes an album for themselves

ASHVIN GUPTA

Halsey is an artist who needs little introduction, as the virtual owner of 2016-era Tumblr culture, they have had a career comparable to some of the greatest Indie/pop artists: Melanie Martinez, Troy Sivan, and Arctic Monkeys. The artist’s 2020 album – *Manic* – was a remarkable reinvention on the already remarkable artist, with the abandonment of the “cursive singing” style which they came to be infamously associated with. However, the way in which Halsey remains true to their songwriting skills is the true showcase of an artist who has not yet surpassed their peak, with her storytelling being on par (or, in my opinion, better) than the projects which made Halsey a household name. The album tackles the artists’ experience with bipolar disorder, (the title referring to the manic phase which inspired the album) as well as struggles in their personal life.

The album starts off strong with the *Ashley*, a song reminiscent of Halsey’s debut album – *Badlands*. Halsey states that the song was a “cautious goodbye” as well as a “comfortable entry point” for listeners. The song highlights how Halsey is a person beyond being just an artist, a sentiment expressed by naming the song after Halsey’s real name. Fans will immediately identify the synths from *Badlands* songs such as *Castle* and *Roman Holiday*, but upon listening more closely it’s evident that Halsey is telling us something more than just a story. They are carefully introducing us to the theme of the album – a vulnerable and deeply personal record which goes beyond the comparatively superficial references to the artists’ mental health in previous projects such as *Alone* and *Strangers*. *Ashley* ends with a

spoken outro, “I’m just a fucked-up girl who’s looking for my own peace of mind, don’t assign me yours”. It feels like the perfect way to end a song which chronicles her battle with identity and creative motivation. Throughout the song Halsey emphasises how they were unsure of how much more music they can make. The song shows a battle between Halsey’s desire for writing music, and the fans’ expectation of this happening, as well as dwelling on the possibility of them stopping making music. Ashley’s outro is thus a stinging reminder from Halsey to Halsey – they are overwhelmed by fame and making music and aren’t sure of how long they can continue for. This sentiment – that Halsey makes music because her fans depend on it – is also echoed in other songs throughout the album, with 929 saying that a fan told her to not kill herself, because “we need you”; the artist beautifully portrays how she feels at least slightly personally responsible for the wellbeing of her fans, but also knows that her own mental health comes first.

The album bounces between songs charged with unfiltered and raw energy – I HATE EVERYBODY, killing boys, Still Learning, Alanis’ Interlude, Dominic’s Interlude, and most notably 3am – and songs of a mellow and grounded sound – Ashley, More, Suga’s Interlude, 929, clementine, Graveyard, You Should Be Sad. Listeners will go from listening to lyrics such as “if they laugh then fuck em all, caught you off your knees put you right back on your feet just so you could take advantage of me” in the hit Without Me, to witnessing the artist’s vulnerability as they sing “I’ve never seen a mouth that I would kill to kiss, and I’m terrified but I can’t resist, beautiful stranger” in the melodic and ballad that is Finally//Beautiful Stranger. This is definitely a conscious decision by Halsey – a perfect depiction of swinging between manic and depressive phases of their condition. The fact that 3am – with lyrics an eerie hyper-ness that brings you to the edge of your seat and makes you want to sprint across the street with lyrics such as “my self-preservation and all of my reservations are sittin’ and contemplin’ what to do with me” and songs such as More with lyrics like “a couple years of waiting rooms, finding god and lose Him too” and “they told me its useless there’s no hope in store” can exist on the same album, and tell a beautifully coherent story of a person’s identity and fears is testament to Halsey’s talent.

Manic’s songs constantly swing between pop-punk (the album was indeed followed by If I Can’t Have Love, I want Power – a record produced with Nine Inch Nails) and Indie ballads make it hard for this album to fit into any one box when it comes to genres, but it is undeniable that Halsey attempted and succeeded in cementing her place in the hall of fame of legendary artists with this album. the album is a love letter from Halsey, but the most important thing is it is addressed to Halsey as much as it is addressed to the fans. Manic is where Halsey finds comfort in their fears and their wellbeing, and Manic is where Halsey’s fans are made aware that the old Halsey isn’t coming back.

Literature:

A review of 'Dancer from the Dance' by Andrew Holleran

JACK TRAVERS

First semester of first year, some 3 years ago, I took a gamble with a friend and picked up a mystery book from Toppings' 'blind date with a book' shelf. Wrapped in brown paper and tied with string, with a simple clue of the book's contents, I hurriedly bought it, taking it home with me over the holidays for the long coach journey home and the Covid chaos that occurred that winter. That book which I excitedly bought lay unread, moving from my bedside table, to my desk, to my bookshelf, and back, getting no further than the first 20 dogeared and scuffed pages. It was summer 2023 when I finally gave it the attention it deserved, from the beginning, no stopping, no giving up. Boy was I in for a ride.

Dancer from the Dance opens as an exchange of letters between friends, one living a glamorous life in 1970s New York, the other living a more secluded life following years of Manhattan mania. These letters tell the story of a group of friends, falling in and out of love and back again, with all the parties, cruising, violence and heartbreak the author could cram onto the book's pages.

Andrew Holleran's novel is centred around Malone, a young beautiful lawyer who, fed up with living in the closet, moves from a small town to New York. It follows his embrace of the city, the scene and his pursuit of love. Holleran writes from a third person narrative,

dipping in and out, immersing you in the group of queens, headed by Sutherland, who take Malone under their wing and through everything the New York scene throws at him.

Holleran creates a sense of collective identity in his use of 'we' when describing Malone, and New York, forming a group of friends, a wider collective gay community, inviting, and even enticing, the reader to long for love, to wander the streets of New York, soak up the atmosphere, meet Malone in the little neighbourhood park at 4am. This style takes you and immerses you in 1970s New York, showing the allure that brought gays from across America to its famed streets, and makes you want to join them.

This sense of entrapment goes beyond the narrative, but extends throughout Malone's story. Holleran presents a city characterised by urban decay- the lofty warehouses, the back streets and alleyways, the hidden clubs, bars and baths. However, the city isn't only one of decay, but of sexual liberation, with this contrast emblematic of what was seen as a decaying moral order caused by homosexuality across the States.

Holleran's entrapment shows you the addictivity of the scene - to bathe, to club, to do drugs and drink, to cruise, to fuck, to sleep (barely), and repeat - a cycle both thrilling and disappointing, one which abandons Malone on his quest for love despite everyone wanting him. The book discusses community, hookup culture, addiction to sex, body image and identity in detail, highlighting the problems faced by the gay men of 1970s New York, many which continue to be relevant themes today. Written pre-AIDS, and with the readers foresight, the future for Malone, Sutherland and the city which you are tranced by throughout the novel becomes apparent, and in the end the book ends with a loneliness and longing for a love which cannot be filled, searching for that release and escape, surmising that 'the greatest drug... was the city'. It's a heartbreaking book of self discovery, loss, identity and love, and the messiness of queer life, and is definitely worth the read.

c u l t u r e



David by Michelangelo. Composition by Jack Travers.

Agony Uncle: September's Edition of Gay Angst

Dear Agony Uncle,

I've been dating a guy for a while and have dated mostly men but I've got a feeling that I'm actually just a lesbian. I've dated both men and women before and there's a guy waiting for me back in town who knows I'm bisexual but nothing more than that. Should I wait until I get back to St Andrews and give things a go or should I just tell him now that I'm gay?

Signed

Anonymous

Dear Anonymous,

This will be a difficult decision and I'm not gonna sugarcoat that. The fact that you're conflicted about this shows that you care for your partner and are probably worried about hurting his feelings. You're probably also worried about jeopardizing this relationship and whether or not you should voice your feelings at all because of those worries. However, this is a place where communication, with both him and yourself, is your best friend. If you've dated him for a while and still have that feeling that you're gay, you should tell him.

You've dated both men and women and have had some time to explore your sexuality, which is important. You've known yourself and how you feel in those relationships. This feeling that you're a lesbian isn't coming from nothing. The biggest thing to remember here is that you know yourself better than you think you do. Those gut feelings matter, especially when you're facing a dilemma like this. Make the decision that feels most right to you, even if it's a difficult one. You are important and you always deserve to express your beautiful, dynamic self.

This holds true to anyone considering or reconsidering their sexuality; listen to yourself. Talk through your feelings with yourself. Reflect on your feelings from your past relationships or how you want to feel in your future ones. Remember that your sexuality is never set in stone, and it is up to you and you alone whether you label it or not.

Anonymous, you've got this. An open and honest conversation about both yours and your partner's feelings will be the best course of action here. I hope he understands and supports you in coming out to him because you deserve nothing less than that.

Love,

Your Agony Uncle <3

Horoscopes; Western Star Signs

JACK KENNEDY

♈ Aries

(21 MARCH - 19 APRIL)

Embrace this thrilling new chapter Aries. Whether you're fresh on the St Andrews scene or coming right back to it, knowledge and future success is coming your way. Get ready to pave the way for what is going to be a truly awesome year.

♉ Taurus

(20 APRIL - 20 MAY)

Long lasting connections are going to be forged this month Taurus. Friend to foe, foe to friend, lovers to enemies, or enemies to lovers, it is time for some new arcs. Your future is being shaped this month. The month is play-do in your hands.

♊ Gemini

(21 MAY - 20 JUNE)

Embrace the opportunity to expand your intellectual horizons this month Gemini. Connect with like minded individuals, use that brain, and maybe try to get to that 9am at Buchanan. Go on, you know you want to.

♋ Cancer

(21 JUNE - 22 JULY)

Thrive or survive this month Cancer. You are either going to give it your all and do incredibly well or just scrape by. Embrace these challenges and find the balance that works for you to make this month your own.

♌ Leo

(23 JULY - 22 AUGUST)

Leo, in the words of the mighty Rihanna: shine bright like a diamond. Embrace the world of St Andrews with passion and enthusiasm and get ready to make your mark. Try not to blind anyone when you shine bright.

♍ Virgo

(23 AUGUST - 22 SEPTEMBER)

Virgo, I know this month you are going to cross all of the t's and dot all of your i's. Maybe this is you tidying your room and getting yourself ready for the year. Maybe this is your meticulous nature and desire for perfection coming through. Really, it is you planning your path ahead.

♎ Libra

(23 SEPTEMBER - 22 OCTOBER)

A harmony of your social life and studying will come through this month Libra. Make sure the harmony does not become discordant and keep playing the right notes. This might involve some fine tuning. Find your rhythm this month.

♏ Scorpio

(23 OCTOBER - 21 NOVEMBER)

Delve into the depths of knowledge and self-discovery as you navigate the realm of university, harnessing your intense passion and determination to achieve your academic goals. Or don't. If you're in sub-honours you'll be fine.

♐ Sagittarius

(22 NOVEMBER - 21 DECEMBER)

Ignite your adventurous spirit as you embrace the joys of higher education, exploring new ideas, and perspectives that broaden your horizons. Make sure not to get burnt by this blaze and leave time for some social activities. Why don't you check out what Saints LGBT+ is doing this month? Please it would be so funny if an event was attended by only Sagittarius signs.

♑ Capricorn

(21 DECEMBER - 20 JANUARY)

Ambition is only one step away from Capricorn's arrogance. I believe you can reign it in and keep things under control but do not let external influence knock you off course. Stay true to yourself and your path this month.

♒ Aquarius

(21 JANUARY - 18 FEBRUARY)

Explore all unconventional and innovative aspects of your life. Whether it is a life hack or something you do a little differently, embrace your quirks and your meaningful impact on this small coastal Scottish town. You rock Aquarius.

♓ Pisces

(19 FEBRUARY - 20 MARCH)

They say that the transformation from a caterpillar to a beautiful butterfly can be difficult. This month Pisces that does not apply to you— your transformative chapter is just around the corner and growth is coming your way with ease. Profound personal and academic growth with no chrysalis involved!

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