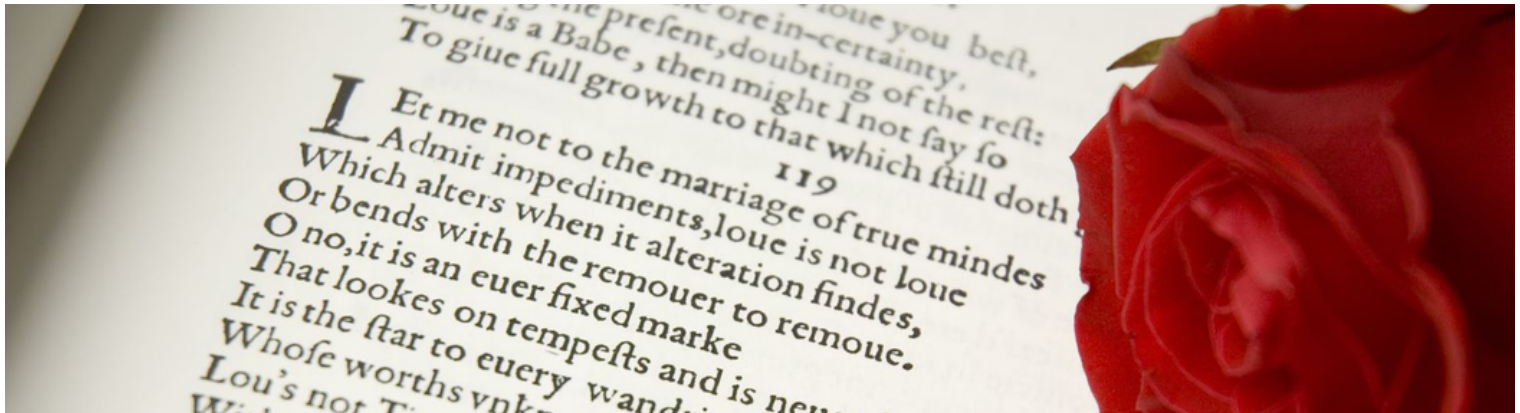


CULTURE VULTURE

Pride edition



'My lovely boy': Shakespeare's sonnets and sexuality

Mrs Ramsay researches the mystery of Shakespeare's male muse in the British Library online archives

He is one of the most famous writers in the English Language and studied across classrooms and in university lecture halls across the globe but, despite over 400 years of discussion, rumour and speculation persist when it comes to his sonnets. The identity of the 'dark lady' and the 'fair youth' for whom the sonnets were written, and Shakespeare's own sexuality, have been a matter of great debate.

The sonnets were first published in a quarto edition in 1609 and believed to have been circulating in a manuscript form as entertainment prior to that for Shakespeare's inner circle. Scholars have pored over the title page's signature, T.T, and the dedicatee, Mr W.H, like cryptic crossword fanatics. Puns in the wording as well as other dedications have suggested two possible young men: William Herbert or Henry Wriothesley - both young earls. Oscar Wilde believed a young actor, Willie Hughes, was the fair muse.

Whichever individual is suggested, one thing is known, Shakespeare addressed the same young man in the first 126 of the poems. The term Shakespeare uses, 'fair youth', has been argued by the poet Don Paterson, to be a 'sly euphemism' for a male which allowed Shakespeare to desexualise and romanticise the relationship. The first 17 sonnets were believed to have been commissioned by the young man's mother and focus more on him procreating to continue his line of descendants. Yet, sonnet 18, possibly one of the most famous of the sonnets, 'Shall I compare thee to a Summer's Day' is more blatant - here Shakespeare seems to fall in love with his addressee. He immortalises the young man and preserves him in the lines for all eternity.

The sonnets that follow from 19 - 126 builds on this intimate and vibrant relationship. By the final sonnet of this sequence, 126, the male narrator is shown as a vulnerable lover addressing 'my lovely boy' and the poem itself is missing a couplet suggesting the relationship has ended too soon.

Modern readers will not find it problematic that Shakespeare was writing most of the sonnets as a male speaker addressing a male lover, and yet at the time it was. In 1640, John Benson produced a new edition of the sonnets misgendering many of the lines; for example, 'sweet boy' becomes 'sweet love'. These amendments remained until 1780. Sonnet 2 became a popular conventional love poem about seducing a woman and featured in other poetic collections with some altered words. Oscar Wilde, who was imprisoned for his homosexuality in 1895, was fascinated by the identity of Shakespeare's young male muse. He wrote a short story based around the relationship as he saw it, with betrayal and suicidal feelings within the narrative. When his publisher expressed doubts about the publication in the Victorian age where to be gay was a taboo, Wilde said, 'you may be right...the English public would have to read Shakespeare's sonnets' rather than his story.

Whether Shakespeare's sonnets are an intimate autobiographical series of love letters or just an artist crafting lines at the highest level, we will never know. What we do have is a beautiful series of poems that explore love for both a male and female desired by the male narrator that have survived for centuries. Definitely worth a read!



The Stone Wall Riots and Marsha P Johnson

Grace Jappy recounts the story of legendary figure

June is Pride Month, where people all over the world come together to celebrate the LGBTQ+ community and raise awareness for inequalities that still stand today. Marsha P. Johnson was a trans-rights activist who played a big role in important moments for the LGBTQ+ movement, such as the Stonewall protests. Immediately after graduating from high school she adopted the full name Marsha P Johnson, the P standing for 'pay it no mind' a phrase that later became her life motto. Marsha's life changed when she found herself engaging with resistance at the Stonewall inn on June 28th 1969. In the early morning hours police raided the bar and began arresting the patrons, most of whom were gay men. There are many competing stories about what Johnson did during the raid on the Stonewall inn but it is clear that she was on the front lines. Marsha resisted arrest, but in the following days, led a series of protests and riots demanding rights for gay people. A month after the protests, the first openly gay march took place in New York - a pivotal moment for the gay and trans community everywhere. Even though the Stonewall riots kick-started this wave of support for the LGBTQ+ community, there was still a lot of discrimination against them. It was common for young gay and trans people to be kicked out of their family homes by their parents.

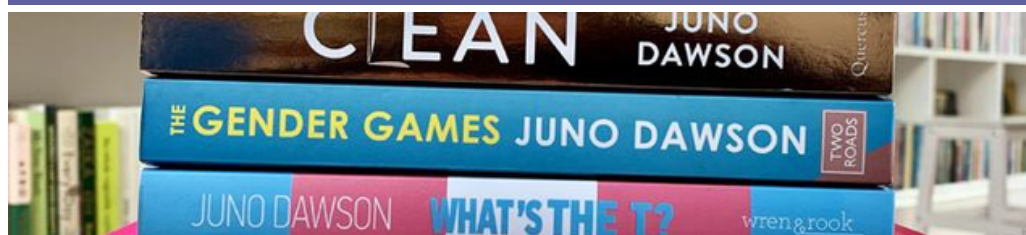
Marsha and good friend Sylvia Rivera, who was also an activist, founded STAR - Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries - an organisation to support gay and trans individuals who had been left homeless. Much of Marsha's life was dedicated to helping others, despite suffering several mental health issues. Marsha was nicknamed the "Saint of Christopher Street" (where the Stonewall Inn is located), because of the generosity she had shown towards people in New York's LGBTQ+ community. Unfortunately, Marsha went missing in 1992 and six days later police found Marsha's body. They said nobody else had been responsible for the death, but many friends argued this ruling at the time, saying attacks on gay and trans people were common. Others said they saw Marsha being harassed by a group of "thugs" a few days before they died. Twenty years later, in 2012, campaigner Mariah Lopez was successful in getting the New York police department to reopen Marsha's case as a possible murder. After the NYPD reopened the case, the police reclassified Johnson's cause of death from "suicide" to undetermined. Marsha's legacy lives on today in organisations such as the Marsha P. Johnson Institute, which says it "protects and defends the human rights of BLACK transgender people". In February 2020, the Mayor of New York renamed the East River State Park in Brooklyn, The Marsha P. Johnson State Park and announced there will be a statue created in honour of Marsha, to be unveiled in 2021.



LAST WEEK'S SONNET:
We are the Champions -
Queen

Can you guess the pop
song from the
Shakespearean sonnet?
Correct answer in next
week's Culture Vulture!

By heaven, this was not a plan of mine -
it was no plot or predetermined act.
With courage steel'd by an excess of wine,
I did away with my accustomed tact.
Unbridled curiosity prevail'd;
it bade I peer into a world I'd miss'd.
Of this auspicious moment I avail'd
myself, and I another woman kiss'd.
And such a kiss! The taste of cherry balm
upon her lips was one I'll ne'er forget.
A whirlwind of emotion: crazed, yet calm -
and hoping my admirer's not upset.
But O! the wond'rous truth I'll not avoid:
her kiss was one I truly well enjoy'd.



Dawson's hard-hitting and honest novels and non-fiction

Miss Ramsay looks into Juno Dawson's success in non-fiction and recommends some of her favourite YA reads

In 2014, Juno Dawson shot to fame with the release of her book *This Book is Gay*. The non-fiction work featured testimonials from across the gender and sexuality spectrums. In 2021 Dawson released the enlightening companion to her first non-fiction work in *What's the T?* - featuring advice from leading trans and non-binary figures, as well as first hand accounts from Dawson herself, who transitioned in 2015.

But Dawson didn't stop with non-fiction. Most of Dawson's fictional works are aimed at a young adult audience, where she became famous for her hard-hitting, real world writing. Her 2018 publication *Clean* looks at drug addiction in teenagers, following young socialite Lexi Volkov. In *Meat Market* (2019), Dawson takes a deep dive into the modelling industry. Published at the height of the #MeToo and #TimesUp movements, this book follows Jana Novak's journey into the toxicity of fashion culture. 2020's *Wonderland* is a stylish and important take on Alice in Wonderland as Alice looks for her friend Bunny at a hedonistic party. The book becomes a haze of gender, privilege and mental health as Dawson shocks and entices the reader with her jam-packed storyline.

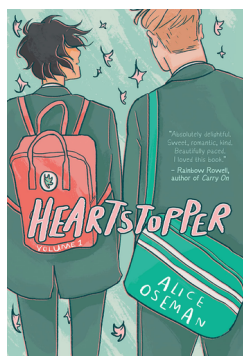
All of Dawson's writing has been carefully thought out and structured. She sees the importance of creating relatable characters for her readers, using a sensitivity reader (someone who reads the book first and offers notes on the representation of marginalised groups or elements that could cause offence) for her teen fiction, as well as being a sensitivity reader for other authors in their representation of transgender characters. Her novels are certainly worth a read (if you haven't already done so!)

Recommended by a student:

Heartstopper - Books by Alice Oseman. Series on Netflix

"The Heartstopper series and most other books by Alice Oseman. They are really well written and her art is amazing."

Heartstopper became a hit series on Netflix, with season 2 set to release on 3 August. It tells the story of Charlie (Joe Locke) and Nick (Kit Connor) navigating first love, sexuality and friendship in secondary school.



Soundtrack to the week:

This week's soundtrack to the week has been built by editors and readers. If you would like to have your say, follow the QR code on page 5!

MONDAY:

We fell in love in October - Girl in Red



TUESDAY:

Heather - Conan Grey



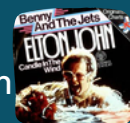
WEDNESDAY:

Pegasus - Arlo Parks



THURSDAY:

Bennie and The Jets - Elton John



FRIDAY:

VULGAR (Explicit) - Sam Smith, Madonna



SATURDAY:

Industry Baby - Lil Nas X, Jack Harlow



SUNDAY:

July - Noah Cyrus



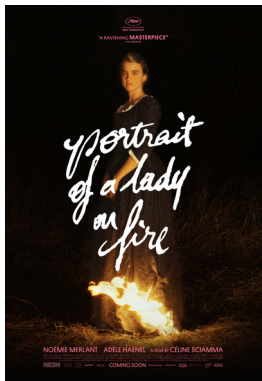
Best Queer Stories Told in Cinema.

Molly Shillinglaw reviews quintessential queer films for pride month



1. Mysterious Skin; Gregg Araki, 2004

Entails the journey of two teenage boys as they struggle to cope with their shared childhood trauma. Starring Joseph Gordon-Levitt and Brady Corbet.



2. Portrait of a Lady on Fire; Celine Sciamma, 2019

Follows the struggles of two, star-crossed lovers - a female aristocrat in an arranged marriage, and the artist commissioned to create the wedding portrait.



3. Happy Together; Wong Kar-Wai, 1997

A gay couple travel to Argentina in search of a new beginning but instead find themselves trapped in a cycle of loss and regret, manifesting itself in the form of their unsalvageable relationship.



4. Brokeback Mountain; Ang Lee, 2005

Two modern cowboys meet in the summer of 1963, falling into a powerful summer affair that contrasts to the lives they are meant to be living.



5. The Handmaiden; Park Chan-wook, 2016

Involved in a plot to steal her fortune, a handmaiden grows unexpectedly close to a Japanese heiress and begins a romantic affair with her.



6. The Rocky Horror Picture Show; Jim Sharman, 1975

Credited with being the first musical to portray fluidity within sexuality, RHPS details the interaction between a traditional conservative couple and a mad scientist transvestite.



7. Milk; Gus Van Sant, 2008

Tells the story of Harvey Milk, the first openly gay politician to be elected to public office on the U.S and how he advocated for gay rights and became an inspiration for many.



8. Pariah; Dee Rees, 2011

A black 17 year-old attempts to embrace her identity as a lesbian around the glare of her disapproving mother, a relevant film that explores the relationship between both black and queer culture.

WANT TO GET INVOLVED?



If you would like to make your own creative suggestion, or have a piece of work that you would like to see in the next magazine, scan the QR code. Alternatively, if you would like to contribute an article, film, album, book or podcast review, or have an itching to write a features piece about a current cultural affair, email aramsay@gordanoschool.org.uk with your idea.

Make sure to encourage your tutors and friends to get involved, and let's make creativity central to the Gordano Sixth Form experience!

