The Cambridge Prowler is back!

Queer History lesson: Greek and Roman love

Debate: Gay Activism in the UK

A Knight out with Ian McKellen
Welcome to the new issue of No Definition, Cambridge University’s only LBGT magazine, supported by CUSU LBGT. We’re the new editors, Zhiying Tsjeng and Chloe Wong, and we’re pleased to make your acquaintance! Hopefully, you’ll find the re-designed and revamped magazine to your liking. The theme for this issue is ‘Old and New’, and we’ve got contributions from all over Cambridge on a whole range of related issues. Ranging from historical overviews of homosexuality in Ancient Japan, Rome and Greece; a debate piece on gay activism, to an article on growing old. The piece that takes the prize for ‘most tear-jerking’ has to be Arthur Asseraf’s article on how he came to terms with his gay identity. It’s like a coming-out story for the new millennium, and it’s surprising how much (and at the same time, how little) has changed over time.

The newly formed team has definitely outdone themselves. Well, mostly after plenty of badgering on Facebook and diplomatically phrased reminders to hurry the bloody hell up. If you would like to contribute to [nd], get in touch with us at editor@cusu-lbgt.com. No previous writing experience is required, and if you’ve got a good idea for a story, we’re open to any suggestions! We also accept creative submissions. The theme of next term’s issue will be ‘Media Media’ - we’re taking a look at the relationship between the LBGT community and media, be it print, film, art, TV or even advertising. More information will be available on our Facebook group [no definition] - join, invite all your friends, and keep in touch! Finally, feedback on this issue is more than welcome either via email or commenting on our Facebook group. Welcome either via email or commenting on our Facebook group.

The Team
Zhiying Tsjeng & Chloe Wong
Editors

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Letter from the Editors
I’m delighted to see this first edition of No Definition published since the new LBGT Campaign Executive took up office in January. My thanks go to the editorial team of Zing and Chloe as well as the efforts of the art director, Sven, in putting together such a diverse and refreshing magazine. I do hope you enjoy reading it.

Last term saw the new executive devote a lot of time to finding their feet in their new roles, planning ahead for the future of the campaign and establishing links with other gay-focused organisations, both in Cambridge and nationally. The team is very enthusiastic and work well together.

We have launched Fusion, our new CUSU-managed club night on Tuesdays at The Place (formerly Club 22), which has been very well received and a great success. My thanks go to Carol Johnston, Josie Fielding, Alex Green and Michelle Dart of last year’s executive for the hours of work they put in to make the transition to Fusion so smooth. I look forward to seeing many of you there, and would welcome your feedback.

We provide the night for you – so if you’d like to see changes or have any suggestions, the Ents team of Dan Zamani and Sherron Albkar can be contacted at ents@cusu-lbgt.com.

Other social events, from the Film Nights to the Speakers Programme, will also be in full swing this term – check out the What’s On page inside for more details.

The future for the LBGT campaign looks promising. Our social team of the Adamson twins continue to provide a range of excellent weekend activities, Tony Hollands is available for advice or support as our Welfare Officer, and I’m so pleased we have Grad, Bi and Trans reps, ensuring as broad a spectrum of the university community is represented as possible. I hope to have some high-profile campaigns running very soon, challenging some of the prejudices that sadly remains in our society. We still need a Campaign Officer to carry the torch for us; far from Olympic commitment is required, so please get in touch if you’d like to do the job!

Finally, I’d like to wish you all the very best for the examinations that are looming for us all. Work hard, play hard and keep things in perspective! And once they’re over, remember that the future is bright.

The future for the LBGT campaign looks promising. Our social team of the Adamson twins continue to provide a range of excellent weekend activities, Tony Hollands is available for advice or support as our Welfare Officer, and I’m so pleased we have Grad, Bi and Trans reps, ensuring as broad a spectrum of the university community is represented as possible. I hope to have some high-profile campaigns running very soon, challenging some of the prejudices that sadly remains in our society. We still need a Campaign Officer to carry the torch for us; far from Olympic commitment is required, so please get in touch if you’d like to do the job!

Finally, I’d like to wish you all the very best for the examinations that are looming for us all. Work hard, play hard and keep things in perspective! And once they’re over, remember that the future is bright.

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Thank you

Subscription Information
If you wish to subscribe to [no definition], please e-mail editor@cusu-lbgt.com with your name, college and year of graduation (this is so we know when to stop sending you issues). Subscription is completely free and anonymous. All issues will be delivered to your college in plain CUSU envelopes.

With thanks to Luke Andrews, the CUSU LGBT Exec, and CUSU Printing Services.

Thank you

The Executive

He’s about that time that I introduced myself to you all as the new Welfare Officer for the CUSU LBGT campaign for the year 2008-09. In many respects Cambridge is a unique and completely new environment for many of its students, and so my role is to provide a point of contact and support for those trying to settle in and deal with any issues regarding their sexuality or other topics of concern. Many come to University having never been ‘out’ before, and need the support and reassurance so that this transition can be relatively stress-free within the University environment. Others are unsure about sexual health or how to fully integrate into the LBGT community. Whatever your concerns, I am here to help you overcome them in a relaxed, informal, friendly and welcoming environment.

I have been trained by the University Counselling Service as a Peer Supporter, which helps me to help you clarify your own situation and thoughts while providing a sympathetic, friendly and understanding ear. If required I can freely give you specific information or references to other social and health services and support available to you. It is important to remember that everything discussed will remain in strict confidence, unless you wish otherwise, and that I aim to be approachable and non-judgemental at all times.

Sexual health is also a prominent issue at University, and so you can receive free condoms and personal lubricants free of charge. Simply email me on the address provided below, and I will deliver the goods in an unmarked, non-descript envelope to your pigeon-hole. Simple as, no questions asked!

If you wish to get in contact for any reason, then please email me and I will be more than happy to provide my mobile number where required, or alternatively can arrange one-on-one confidential meets or even group coffee-breaks if sufficient demand is felt. Please don’t ever hesitate to contact me, however small or insignificant you think a concern is. The welfare service is friendly and here for you, so feel free to take advantage of it!

Anthony Hollands
welfare@cusu-lbgt.com

LGBT Officers

Executive

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In England, the penalty for conviction for sodomy is reduced from hanging to imprisonment.

The trial of Oscar Wilde results in his being prosecuted under the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885 for “gross indecency” and sentenced to two years in prison.

1897 George Cecil Ives organizes the first homosexual rights group in England, the Order of Chaeroneia.

1901 The Homosexual Law Reform Society is founded in the United Kingdom to lobby for the implementation of the Wolfenden Report’s suggestions. Its supporters included academics such as Isaiah Berlin and Bertrand Russell.

1957 The American Psychiatric Association removes homosexuality from its Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-II)

1982 Terrence Higgins Trust launched, named after the gay man thought to be the first to have died with AIDS in the UK.

1984 Chris Smith, newly elected to the UK parliament declares: “My name is Chris Smith. I’m the Labour MP for Islington South and Finsbury, and I’m gay”, making him the first openly gay homosexual politician in the UK Parliament.

1988 Section 28 of the Local Government Act is enacted as an amendment, which states a local authority “shall not intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality” or “promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality” or “promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality or ‘promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality or an pretended family relationship”.

1999 Bomb explodes in the Admiral Duncan, a London gay pub, the third in a series of bombs targeted at the gay community. There were two bombs. One was a hand grenade and another was a pipe bomb. The former killed 2 people and several were injured. Court of Appeal supports right to treatment for gender reassignment under the National Health Service. The Sex Discrimination (Gender Reassignment) Regulations made it illegal for employers to discriminate against people who intend to undergo gender reassignment; are undergoing gender reassignment or has undergone gender reassignment in the past.

2000 The last known execution for homosexuality in Great Britain.

2003 Discrimination against lesbians, gay men and bisexuals in the workplace is criminalised.

2004 The Offences Against the Person Act is amended to remove the death sentence for “buggery”. The penalty became imprisonment from 10 years to life.

2005 The United Kingdom’s ban on homosexuals serving in the armed forces is abolished.

2007 The Wolfenden Report, a government study, is published and recommends that ‘homosexual behaviour between consenting adults in private should no longer be a criminal offence’.

2008 Sexual Offences Act 1967 was passed. It maintains the general prohibitions on buggery and indecency between men, but provides for a limited decriminalisation of homosexual acts where three conditions were fulfilled: the act had to be consensual, take place in private and involve only people that had attained the age of 21.

2009 Adoption and Children Act. Same-sex couples are allowed to adopt under the law of England and Wales. Discrimination against lesbians, gay men and bisexuals in the workplace is criminalised.

2010 The United Kingdom’s ban on homosexuals serving in the armed forces is abolished.

2011 Age of consent lowered from 18 to 16, bringing it in line with the heterosexual age of consent.

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2012 First gay demonstration in the UK took place in Highbury Fields in Islington.

2013 The American Psychiatric Association removes homosexuality from its Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-II)

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2020 The Offences Against the Person Act is amended to remove the death sentence for “buggery”. The penalty became imprisonment from 10 years to life.

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2030 The United Kingdom’s ban on homosexuals serving in the armed forces is abolished.
The worst thing is the music and its small size. Cambridge LBGT scene? The best thing about the LBGT scene is the open atmosphere and the people.


How old were you when you realised you were l, b, g or t? 13 or so. My memory is vague of those times. If you could be someone for a day, who would it be? Jamie Welling. How was your first kiss? Incredibly exciting. What’s your type? Sporty. What superpower would you like for the day? Time travel. It’d be the most educational day of my life. What can you see yourself doing 25 years from now? I wish I knew. Best and worst about the Cambridge LBGT scene? Best: The feminist network. Worst: The music. I’d like to take this opportunity to put in a request for more drum and bass.

How old were you when you realised you were l, b, g or t? About 11 or 12 when I started fancying the boys in my class. If you could be someone for a day, who would it be? John Barrowman without a doubt! How was your first kiss? Sloppy, wet and messy. What superpower would you like for the day? Telekinesis, moving objects by thinking. I could have so much fun with that...

What can you see yourself doing 25 years from now? Maybe in government or working for charity - I want to do something that makes a difference. Best and worst about Cambridge LBGT scene? I love how easy it was to settle in, there is a good community and lots of friendly faces. The worst thing is that, although I love clubbing, it seems a bit over-fixed on that.

How old were you when you realised you were l, b, g or t? Fourteen. If you could be someone for a day, who would it be? Björk. Then I’d be able to speak Icelandic. How was your first kiss? Kind of sandy. What’s your type? Pisces. No really. What superpower would you like for the day? Perfect memory. What can you see yourself doing 25 years from now? Buying a robot dog. Best and worst about Cambridge LBGT scene? Best: The feminist network. Worst: The music. I’d like to take this opportunity to put in a request for more drum and bass.

How old were you when you realised you were l, b, g or t? I can’t really remember, probably about 13 or 14. If you could be someone for a day, who would it be? Einstein, so I could understand all this science nonsense. How was your first kiss? Can’t complain. What’s your type? I don’t really have a type as such, I suppose I go mainly for the more masculine type. I like rugby players as opposed to footballers. What superpower would you like for the day? Hmmm, I’d like to be able to teleport anywhere I wanted, so I could get up and teleport straight into lectures, although I’d probably still be late. What can you see yourself doing 25 years from now? I’ll be in Peru, re-united with my llama brethren. Best and worst about LGBT scene? Cliche, but the worst bit is how judgemental people can be. The best bit is being able to release your inhibitions about your sexuality.
When we first set out to cover the heroes and villains of LBGT history, we hit a pretty big roadblock. There is only so much people can read about how Oscar Wilde was a gay icon, and everybody knows about Alexander the Great’s proclivities. Instead, we set out to profile several heroes of the gay community that have thus far flown under the radar – and a couple of villains we’re sure you’d love to hate.

**Claude Cahun**
1894 – 1954

Cahun was a French photographer and writer whose works were politically and personally influenced. She played with conventions of gender, sexuality and identity in art and in real life, jettisoning her original name, Lucy Schwob for the more gender-ambiguous pseudonym Claude Cahun. With her lover Marcel Moore, she formed an active part of the Surrealist movement in Paris. Unlike the other Surrealists, who saw women as an isolated erotic symbol, Cahun’s work explored the possibility of a multiplicity of different female identities. They were also resistance fighters and propagandists during the Second World War. Her contribution to surrealist art has only just been recognised, with Cahun’s work now on display at the Tate Modern.

**Alan Turing**
1912 – 1954

Turing was an English logician, cryptographer and mathematician, acknowledged to be the father of computer science. During the Second World War, he was largely recognised as the key player in cracking the German Enigma code, and was awarded an OBE in 1945 for wartime services. He was gay at a time when homosexual acts were illegal in Britain, and in 1952 was charged, like Wilde, with ‘gross indecency’. Unrepentant, he chose to undergo hormonal treatment to reduce his libido, rather than go to prison. Two years later, he committed suicide, poisoning himself with cyanide-laced apple. The Turing Prize, the computing world’s equivalent to the Nobel Prize, was named in his honour.

**Desmond Tutu**
1931 – present

Tutu is the only straight person on the list, and he’s here for good reason: he has campaigned tirelessly for human rights and HIV/AIDS awareness, especially in Africa. Notably, he is one of the few South African clerics who have condemned Christian opposition to homosexuality, sensibly declaring that he is “deeply disturbed that in the face of some of the most horrendous problems facing Africa, we concentrate on ‘what do I do in bed with whom’?”. At a time when homophobia still flourishes within the conservative Christian community, his inclusive views are a breath of fresh air.

**Camille Paglia**
1947 – present

Paglia is an American social critic, teacher and writer, and is, by her own description, “a feminist bisexual egomaniac”. Her libertarian views on pornography, prostitution and fetishism have caused controversy; she famously campaigned tirelessly for the execution of homosexuals in concentration camps.

**Ernst Röhm**
1887 – 1934

Röhm was a German military officer and later the co-founder and commander of the SA, which used intimidation tactics to usher in the rise of Hitler. Despite being openly homosexual, Röhm was part of a sustained campaign of violence and terror against homosexuals. This included anti-gay Nazi policies such as strengthening Paragraph 175 (which criminalised homosexual acts), to the internment and execution of homosexuals.

**Jerry Falwell**
1933 – 2007

Falwell was an American Evangelical pastor and televangelist. He has been called ‘the founder of the anti-gay industry’ for his incendiary remarks, which included charming one-liners such as “AIDS is not just God’s punishment for homosexuals, it is God’s punishment for the society that tolerates homosexuals”. On the morning after 9-11, he accused a bizarre range of people who “allowed it to happen”: feminists, pagans, homosexuals, and, most strangely, the ACLU.

**Ewa Sowińska**
1944 – present

Sowińska is a Polish politician, and acts as the government spokesperson for children’s rights. She shot to international infamy after ordering psychologists to evaluate whether the children’s show Teletubbies is suitable for broadcast. This is due to her belief that Tinky Winky carries a handbag, and must therefore be a homosexual. In the past, she has also suggested that homosexuals should be registered with the government and banned from certain professions. Her comments have won her 2007 Idiot of the Year Bronze Medal from Washington Post columnist Emil Steiner.

**Beenie Man**
1973 – present

Beenie Man is one of the most popular reggae and dancehall artists from Jamaica. His songs are openly anti-gay, with lyrics such as “I’m dreaming of a new Jamaica, come to execute all the gays”. Jamaica is notoriously homophobic, with many members of the LBGT community facing direct threats of violence. In 2006, concert organisers pulled his act out of an HIV/AIDS benefit concert after protests by gay rights activists. Beenie Man has defended himself by saying, “I refuse the right to criticise any lifestyle I feel is not wholesome.” We say: we refuse the right to burn your CDs as we feel you’re a thoroughly distasteful individual.

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**Gay Heroes & Villains**

When we first set out to cover the heroes and villains of LBGT history, we hit a pretty big roadblock. There is only so much people can read about how Oscar Wilde was a gay icon, and everybody knows about Alexander the Great’s proclivities. Instead, we set out to profile several heroes of the gay community that have thus far flown under the radar – and a couple of villains we’re sure you’d love to hate.
rowing old. If there’s one thing that strikes fear into the heart of a young, carefree queer, it’s aging. It conjures up images the creepy old dude in the corner of the club, checking out the fit boys under twenty-five, and who wants to be that? Nobody, that’s who. So where do gay people go when they get old?

We’re stuck between generations: on one hand, we worship the defiant beauty of youth, its attendant blisteringly casual attitude towards sex and authority. On the other hand, we glorify quaint, aging, and utterly non-threatening matriarchs. Take Stephen Fry. The man’s a genius, but you wouldn’t want him on your side in a fight. It’s either that, or we block out the gumblings of old-fart activists who yearn for the old days of protest marches and torch songs and threaten us with “it was so much worse back in the day…”

In the process, we’re ignoring a whole silent majority – the ones who have not only lived through wars, but have also shook off the spectres of homophobia, Thatcherism, and AIDS. They’ve emerged at the other side of the new millennium, quietly triumphant, and more alive than ever. Are they celebrated like the survivors they are? No. We may glorify our war veterans, we may mourn our decorated heterosexual dead, but we are ignoring our gracefully aging gays.

In Britain, up to 75% of older lesbians, gay men and bisexuals live alone, compared to 33% of the general older population (ageconcern.org.uk). They are twice as likely to age without a partner; one in five indicate that they have no one to call in a time of crisis or emergency, a rate ten times higher than in the general older population. Does this shock you? It should. When you’re young, you never think there’s a possibility you would grow old alone, with nobody to turn to in times of need. Yet this is exactly the situation members of our community are facing.

True, the circumstances can be explained by the difficulties faced by previous generations of LBGT people in being accepted by their families, meeting others, and the general difficulty in leading a queer life in the face of a disapproving society. Thankfully, Britain is a much more tolerant place than it was several decades ago. The tragedy here is that while we may have it better than ever, we aren’t doing anything for our older counterparts.

There is an appalling lack of support for the older LBGT population. Most community groups are unevenly distributed and are excessively youth-oriented. It’s no wonder that a study by Nottingham Trent University found that a large number of older people felt alienated and ‘shut out’ from the LBGT community. As a result, many withdraw from support groups and clubs that usually act, if anything, as a lifeline. There are few, if any, communities or resources for older gay and bisexual men and women. Where these do exist, as in the case of Opening Doors, these are usually subsidiary programmes of more general age-concerns organisations.

We pride ourselves as belonging to a sexual minority that is vibrant and inclusive. We’re proud of our illustrious history, our celebrated ranks of poets, artists, leaders and thinkers. Now though, more than ever, we are shutting the door on the people who represent our past. Our identity means nothing without that sense of the past – a perspective we can only access by re-engaging with the older queer community. Failing to do this means consigning our history to the annals of dusty public record and detached analysis, and that disrespects the very real and recent memory of what our forefathers had to struggle for: Recognition, rights, respect. And that goes for all of us – young and old.
Same-Sex Love & Desire in Ancient Greece & Rome

James Williams explores the power politics behind homosexual love in Ancient times and why it drove Plato to ‘divine madness’

The tradition view of homosexuality in Greece is one dominated by ‘pedagogical pederasty’ - educational relationships between younger and older men. Modern scholarship has tended to identify a more diverse and complex picture than this. Nevertheless strict gender preconceptions, especially in Rome, could be very limiting to public acceptance of same-sex relations.

Vase and other ceramic paintings offer a wealth of evidence about same-sex relations in ancient Greece. The majority of this comes from Athens, although relations between men were often encouraged in Sparta, Elis, Chalcis and Thebes. The visual evidence also tends to focus exclusively on men, most of it dating from the fifth and sixth centuries BC.

A lot of visual evidence supports the view that same-sex relationships were typically between an older and a younger man. Often, a bearded older lover (the erastes) courts a younger, beardless man (eromenos). The respective roles in the transaction seem nearly defined. The older man appears to be flattering, caressing or even quite simply leering at, the younger man. The older lover might also provide his younger lover with career contacts and other material support.

But there is also evidence of relationships on a more reciprocal footing. In Elis and Thebes, men would fight alongside each other as partners, in the belief that a man would fight more courageously if observed by his lover. Around 378 BC, a unit of 300 soldiers called the Sacred Band was founded upon this coupling principle. Furthermore, a number of vase depictions show two young men of similar age, rather than an older and younger man.

Plato (424-348 BC) describes the ideal relationship - as demonstrated by Socrates and Phaedrus - as spiritually formative for both characters. Maximus of Tyre (c. 2nd AD) makes a retrospective comparison between Socrates’ relationships, and those of Sappho, the poet of Lesbos. ‘For to me they seem to have practised love each in their own way, she that of women, he that of men.’ Comparatively little of Sappho’s poetry survives, the only complete one is ‘Hymn to Aphrodite’. Her homoerotic poetry may well have been autobiographical, and both Alcmanes and Pindar give further evidence of romantic relations between circles of women.

In the Greek cities, though, same-sex relations seem to have been bound by relatively strict principles. For example, the passive, younger partner was not meant to enjoy the physical side of the relationship. And those older men who chose to take the passive role (kinainoi) were often subject to ridicule by sources such as Aristophanes. At the same time, in both Greece and Rome, men were expected to marry and father children - Socrates, for example, was married.

Roman literature provides the most consistent evidence to suggest that same-sex relationships were strictly defined by respective roles. It is important to recall that there was no Greek or Roman equivalent of ‘homosexuality’. Instead, Rome especially illustrates clearly defined concepts of manhood - ‘vir’ - and womanhood. The former denotes activity, not least in a sexual sense, and the latter passivity.

From early on in the Republic, sources repeatedly identify sexual relationships with relations of power. While Athenians ultimately accepted young male citizens having passive relations with another man, Roman public discourse was much more hostile. It was detrimental to masculinity to have relations with another man in anything other than the dominant position. Indeed, this highly physical, power-orientated interpretation of relations dominates Roman discussion on sex.

Since any attempt to seduce a male citizen into a passive relationship constituted the offence of stuprum (i.e. an illegal sexual offence), many sexual relations took place between masters and their slaves. This was generally accepted - the feminization of slaves in passive relations was a further aspect of their complete physical subordination. Seneca, however, expressed humanitarian disapproval at the cruelty of using slaves for sexual gratification. He describes slaves, called gladiator or delicati, as being kept in an effeminate state. The slave, ‘must dress like a woman and wrestle with his advancing years’ and must divide ‘his time between his master’s drunkenness and his love in the bedroom he must be a man, at the feast a boy.’

Where an adult citizen chose to have passive relations with another man, he risked social scorn. ‘Muliebra patri’ - an expression used when a man had ‘a woman's experience’ in sex - was a source of ridicule for powerful men. When Suetonius criticised Emperor Caligula’s conduct, he concentrated on the fact that he let himself take a passive role (stuprum a se) to a young man.

There is a striking similarity between these Roman critiques of conduct, and those of early Christians. In condemning malakoi (‘effeminate’) in 1 Corinthians 6.10, St Paul is using pre-established terms of criticism; where Paul arguably goes further is in criticising the active partners (around 16-20 years old) with military and gymnastic training. He might also provide his younger lover with career contacts and other material support.

Consequently, the landscape that defines modern Western understanding of human sexuality often owes more to 19th and 20th categories of sexuality and to open scrutiny of gender constructs than it does to Graeco-Roman prototypes. Same-sex relationships were often compromised because they were defined by strict gender preconceptions rather than by sexual orientation. In many historical contexts, being in a gay relationship was always going to be socially demeaning to at least one partner, who might be identified as a slave or as ‘unnmanly’.

Nevertheless, the importance of Greek philosophical and literary ideals for the early gay rights movement is undeniable. George Ives (1867-1930), an early campaigner, named the secret Order of Chaeronea society after the last battle of the Sacred Band. It was thought to number Oscar Wilde and A.E. Houman amongst its members. Plato’s explanation of love has become an indelible testimony to same-sex love through to the present day. Despite its ambiguities, the classical world still provides a considerable base of historical identity for the contemporary gay rights movement.
How important is your sexual identity to who you are? Is coming out as gay still such a big deal? Arthur Asseraf speaks up and gives a personal take on the issue.

We live in a wonderful world, a lot of people might say. Compared to the obscure ages that preceded us, things are now looking up for gay people. We can now make love to people of the same sex out in the sunshine and not in the stifling depths of the closet. These people are quick to claim that being attracted to someone of the same sex is not such a big deal these days, and that being gay doesn’t mean that much anymore. We’re all bisexual, in the end, aren’t we? “Gay” increasingly just sounds like a slightly quaint 60s slogan, along with other such bizarre words as “feminism” (who needs feminists these days?) or “freetlove”.

I beg to differ. I am not one of those people who like to pretend that they are straight men, I am gay, and being gay shapes who I am, how I live my life and how people see me. Maybe one day we will live in a world where “gay” will have effectively become a meaningless label, and where everyone will be comfortable with expressing their attraction to people of all kinds of gender expression, and we will live in a big post-gender paradise. But this is not the world we live in now.

Being gay meant that when I was 12, my vision of the future crumbled. I was bluntly shown how the world we are taught as children is simplistic, and that I did not fit into the fairytales of the charming prince and the princess, and their blonde children and their happily ever after. Of course, everyone has to grow out of fairytales, but when I discovered that I was attracted to men, I had to grow up quickly. The experience was much more radical than that of my straight counterparts. All those simple steps of life that everyone more or less consciously has in their head were obliterated, and had to be reconstructed. All reassuring gender roles became irrelevant.

I was forced to question exactly what I wanted and what society expected of me, something that most people only do gradually, if ever. All reassuring gender roles became irrelevant. I was forced to question exactly what I wanted and what society expected of me, something that most people only do gradually, if ever.

Being gay meant that I had no idea what my models were anymore. I did not know any gay couples, had never seen men kissing each other or holding hands. I had to learn, on my own, what it meant to be gay...

Being gay meant that I had no idea what my models were anymore. I did not know any gay couples, had never seen men kissing each other or holding hands. I had to learn, on my own, what it meant to be gay...
Gay activism has sought to establish equality and social progress for LGBT+ people. In terms of gay rights, the UK is indeed a leading example for the world, the majority of which still retain discriminatory legislation. There has never been a better time to be a gay person in the UK. We have achieved complete equality under British law, or at the very least, we are on the brink of it. We have the right to adopt children, to have a civil partnership; we are protected under the law and we enjoy the same rights as our straight counterparts.

Gay rights movements and activism have been central to the story of our success. The same can be said for other similar movements fighting for equivalent goals, such as the Civil Rights movement in America and the Suffragist movement in Britain. The 1967 Sexual Offences Act was an important breakthrough for gay rights in that it was the first act which criminalised homosexuality. The leading movements behind this act were the Homosexual Law Reform Society and the Gay Liberation Front, both of which rallied support from the public household names such as J.B Priestley and Bertrand Russell, and leading politicians. Gay activism was highly empowering for those who took part giving them the confidence to banish their internalised shame and to challenge all forms of homophobia. History has shown that the path to equality is an ongoing process that takes time to happen.

Today, the fruits of success can be seen more clearly. Stonewall, with its high profile campaigns, has been particularly successful. The most notable of which has been its parliamentary campaign to introduce the Civil Partnership Act, which was successfully passed in 2004. Early on in the decade, most gay couples never thought that they would be enjoying the same rights as their straight counterparts in a matter of years. Stonewall was also responsible for putting pressure on Parliament to pass the Equality Act of 2006, which protects us from discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation in the provision of goods and services. This was particularly important for gay couples seeking to adopt children from adopting agencies, some of which had strong links with the Catholic Church. Other important victories included the repeal of Section 28 in 2003, which has enabled us to tackle homophobic bullying in schools. Stonewall has also helped win important cases in which individuals were suffering from institutionalised homophobia – in particular the cases of Jeanette Smith and John Beckett, who successfully challenged the ban on gays in the military forces. Of course, one could go on about the achievements of gay activism in the UK, but that would be at risk of assuming that the absolute victory has been declared.

Through the efforts of gay activism, our lives are much more comfortable and we can pursue our dreams and ambitions without being held back by our sexual orientation. Nonetheless, there are still pockets of homophobia that needs to be challenged. This seems to be most concentrated in schools amongst children who use the word ‘gay’ as a common insult, and in our religious institutions that probably constitute the most outspoken pockets of resistance to our civil rights. One cannot afford to sit back on our sofas, patting ourselves on the back for our victories. It’s important for subsequent generations to maintain this success and to never forget what we have achieved.

Two men punched and kicked a gay barman to death like they were ‘trying to kill an animal’. A coalition of 40+ is fighting to stop a law against incitement to hatred of homosexuals. The government – just barely - stops short of deporting a young man to Iran, where he will almost certainly be executed for being gay. Does this sound like the Britain you know? No, of course not - but these are extracts from news stories reported from 2005 to 2008. In terms of legislation, the right of the LGBT community are better protected than ever, but society has yet to catch up. In some ways, things are worse off than ever. A study done by the Schools Health Education Unit for campaign group Stonewall found that almost two thirds of homosexual students in British schools have suffered homophobic bullying. 41% had experienced verbal bullying; 17% said they had received death threats.

Between 2004 and 2005, there was a 9% rise in homophobic crimes reported. While this can be partly attributed to the increased effort made by police to encourage victims to come forward, the charity Victim Support suggests that the scale of the problem is far higher than suggested by official figures. I had my own experience with hate crime in May. I was mugged in London and was sent to the local hospital by police for a check-up. While I was there, I encountered a group of badly shaken men - one of them was holding a bandage over his nose to keep it in place. They had been on their way back from a gay club on the bus, when a stranger began to verbally abuse them, culminating in punching one in the face before running away. My mugging rapidly began to pale in seriousness next to their experience. Most people are wary of muggings in London, but not of homophobic crime – of all places, vibrant, inclusive and gay-friendly London is not where you would expect it to happen.

It just goes to show that legislative protection does not equal complete protection. This is where gay activism comes in. We have successfully campaigned for full and just recognition in the eyes of the law - in the workplace, in the home and on the streets. But we have not yet succeeded in making sure that all these rights are recognised where they count – in everyday life. As long as gay people can feel threatened, alienated and excluded by society, gay activism has a place and a cause.

To some extent, this is a lengthy, complex process. Anything that involves raising and changing public awareness, that involves a complete sea change in the way that people view any kind of community, is going to be a hard road to follow. Society has yet to reach a stage where all gay people are accepted and embraced, where children are not bullied for something as immaterial as their sexual preference, and where people are not assaulted on buses just for being who they are. Nonetheless, we’re certainly doing our damned best to soldier on to that stage.

Gay activism is the one way we can ensure that we stay on that road. It’s the only way we can keep reminding people of the persecution some of us still face; not just persecution in Britain, but all over the world: in Iran, in Russia, in China. Gay activism hasn’t succeeded, because success would imply that it is obsolete. It would imply that gay people are no longer hounded, bullied, or attacked for who they are. That is, sadly and tragically, far from the case.
Homosexuality in Japan
past & present

Arthur Asseraf draws back the curtain on the gay history of the Floating World, revealing some surprising truths.

Japan is not usually associated with a big gay scene. Tokyo does not conjure the same images to gay people all over the world that names like Amsterdam, San Francisco or Rio do. Your average gay man might even wonder if there even are gay people in Japan. If there are, they seem to be keeping very quiet.

But Japan, far from being a closeted country, has a complex history of homosexual behaviour, one in which the present and past presents a striking contrast with the present. Up to the 19th century, before contact with the West, homosexual activity was not only common, but public and even celebrated in culture. The celebration of male love appears to have been originally imported from China, as was much of Japanese culture, around the 7th century, but sources are unclear. One of the first novels in the world, the Tale of Genji, written in the 11th century at one point portrays the hero, Prince Genji, being rejected by a woman and sleeping with her brother instead as he found him “more attractive than his chilly sister”.

Indeed, Westerners are often led to think, when they look at Japan before the 20th century, that it was a sexual paradise. In a non-Christian world, we imagine that everything was allowed, that sexual repression did not exist, and that people had wild gay sex out in the streets. This is both simplistic and unhistorical. Japan was not a sexual paradise. Japanese society resembles ancient Greece and Rome because it was a society not influenced by Christianity (or indeed any of the Abrahamic faiths). This does mean that sex was not morally condemned itself, but it does not mean that everything was allowed. Sex was not linked to sin, but it was linked to social status. A man of higher status (senior monk, samurai or customer) might penetrate their younger inferiors, but the opposite was taboo. Homosexual activity was only allowed with young men, while sex between adult men was severely frowned upon. What was praised in the literature and art of the period is not so much male love, as the beauty of youth. The Japanese were therefore not “gay” in any modern sense, nor even heterosexual, as they engaged in sexual activities with both sexes. In a society dominated by men, there is little historical evidence of female homosexual activity. Committed relationships between equals of the same sex on a par with heterosexual marriage, which is the ideal that we fight for now, was not an option.

Projecting our modern Western post-Stonewall vision of homosexual identity onto pre-modern Japan is a severe mistake. While we as modern gays feel the need for a historical precedent, we have to be willing to admit that there is not much there. Japan, much like ancient Greece and Rome, represents a society where the accepted spectrum of sexuality was more diverse and complex than it was in Victorian Britain or 1950s America, but this does not make it an ideal for us to look back upon. The cult of youth, for instance, often found its outlet in pederasty, and the Japanese did not, and in some cases, still do not see the problem with children as sexual beings. How this fits with the modern gay rights movement is unclear.

In any case, the “paradise” is lost. Japanese society underwent massive upheaval following contact with the West and the 1868 Meiji Restoration. The West was now the standard to imitate, and its values began to exert a profound influence on society. Public homosexuality disappeared. Sodomy was even briefly banned from 1873 to 1880. Homosexuality is now seen as something “foreign”, and is hardly as visible in modern Japan as it used to be. However, Japan has never known repression against homosexuality like most countries in the West have. Homosexuality is, legally, tolerated, but gay rights are not a prominent political issue. None of the main political parties are ready to discuss it. Coming out in the Western sense is not something common in Japan, though there is a large gay scene in Tokyo, and in other major cities like Osaka. Compared to neighbouring countries, Japanese gays benefit from a slightly better situation than South Korea, but less so than Taiwan, where the government discussed same-sex marriage and adoption in 2003, and where discrimination based on sexual orientation is against the law. The heyday of Japanese homosexuality seems far away.

However, culturally, there are some remains of Japanese sexuality that suggest that Western influence may not be as great as we think. The cult of beautiful androgynous young men continues in “yaoi” manga, which, though they are geared towards women, feature explicit homosexual acts and are extremely popular. Furthermore, the age of consent is 13 (lower than the British 16), and child pornography was only made illegal in 2003. Public baths are now sex-segregated, but in the family circle and in outdoor hot springs, public nudity still does not have the stigma that it has in the Western world. Whether Japan will embrace its complex sexual heritage and what direction modern Japanese gays will take, towards their own past or the new Western gay ideal, remains to be seen.

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**Sources**

- Male Colors: The construction of homosexuality in Tokugawa Japan
- Gregory Pflugfelder

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**Images**

- 01: Actors on stage and in bed: Young men from poor families often played female roles in kabuki theatre in the evening, and later on at night. They were painted by the most heterosexual and homosexual content, Erotic prints (shunga) portrayed both them from frolicking freely with their male sex with women, but this did not prevent Buddhist monks were not allowed to have for prostitution and samurai were known as “fly boys” were widely available slowly spreading to all classes of society. Associated with Classical Greece), before much like in Ancient Rome (where it was associated with Japanese culture, around the 7th century, but sources are unclear. One of the first novels in the world, the Tale of Genji, written in the 11th century at one point portrays the hero, Prince Genji, being rejected by a woman and sleeping with her brother instead as he found him “more attractive than his chilly sister”.

- 02: Love through a silk screen: Individual panel from an 18th century erotic silk painting, by Miyakawa Choshun

- 03: Beau du jour: 17th century print by Kitagawa Utamaro, depicting a frustrated customer with a male prostitute

- 04: Yamane Amano is the artist and writer of several hugely popular yaoi manga

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**Nanshoku Male Colours**
A Knight out with

Ian McKellen

I remember reading the Varsity interview with the famous actor himself on a Monday morning and I was shocked to discover he was going to give a talk that evening at St Catharine’s. After much last minute emailing and hastily formulated thoughts of bribery, I managed to snatch up the last spare seat. What followed was an exceptionally entertaining yet highly personal talk from the great man himself. The actor modestly said that there were only 2 things which he could claim to be an expert at - acting and being gay. We were even given the privilege of asking questions so long, he winked, as they weren’t “slanderous or filthy.”

He was born prior to the outbreak of World War II and he grew up in Wigan, near Manchester. His early fascination with theatre was encouraged by his parents, who took him out on regular outings to the local theatre, and by his teachers, who praised him for performances on the school stage. The turning point for his acting career occurred in 1957, when McKellan was offered a place to read English at St Catharine’s, Cambridge. He reminisced about the enchanting architecture and his memories of living with a family in his first year outside the college (he admitted that at the time, St Catharine’s was perceived to be the worst college (he admitted that at the time)! He was warned about a “certain lady” who might inquire about his performances received critical acclaim in the local press, even attracting the attention of several theatre companies. By the time he graduated, sans scholarship, Cambridge had ended up becoming a very effective drama school for the young budding actor.

His time at Cambridge was also a turning point in that it was the first time he met and socialised with other gay people. One reason he gave for joining the ADC society was so that he could “meet other queers... didn’t know where else to find them!” He briefly mentioned his first boyfriend, a beautiful young American, and he spoke about his crushes, in particular fellow actor and student, Derek Jacobi - which, unfortunately for him, was unrequited. Nevertheless, he did make gay friends which, for him, was a vast improvement from his lonely closeted school years. The only sex education he received there was when his class was warned about a “certain lady” and he was told to “be careful” and that concluded the lesson. There was no discussion of gay people, as if such things did not exist at the time!

Although at times poignant and serious, McKellan kept us amused with quirky, personal anecdotes. One of them involved Richard Gervais on the set of Breathe, when McKellan quipped about the script and asked why he had been given certain lines, Gervais joked, “I’m giving you these lines so that you’ll look crap and I’ll get the BAFTA!” This sense of unedited, personal honesty and openness was characteristic of the talk – and, it seemed of McKellan’s personality in general. At the end of the day, what was most striking about the talk was that Ian McKellan, the man who had played King Lear, Richard III, Magneto and Gandalf, talked to us not as the talented Hollywood star he undoubtedly is – but as if he were a fellow student at Cambridge.

You shall not pass: Ian McKellan in his younger days.
Lesbians in literature
A history of poetry

Amy Lesbian worth her salt...
The massive influx of lesbian lit is a delight – but an intimidating feat to anybody new to the genre. Josie Fielding trawls through the best and the worst, and makes her recommendations.

...will have read the Sarah Waters books, or at least seen the BBC dramatisations of Tipping the Velvet and Fingersmith. Her books richly bring to life the lesbian subculture of the past, but it is very much a subculture, and the characters are often afraid of being found out, taking great pains to keep their lifestyle a secret – as of course they had to do. As Helen reflects poignantly in The Night Watch (set in the 1940s), “For what was Julia to her, after all? She couldn’t lean to her and kiss her. What could she do, to say to the world that Julia was hers?”

But a few women, mostly upper-class and wealthy, were startlingly open about their sexuality and relationships as far back as the Victorian era. It is also possible to find a surprising amount of explicitly lesbian poetry, starting of course with Sappho herself, and moving on to Amy Levy, Amy Lowell, Gertrude Stein and Renee Vivien. These tender poems capture love between women that is beautiful, tragic and timeless. As my long-suffering girlfriend will know, I regularly fall in love with one or other of these pioneering lesbian poets, who gave voice to “the love that dare not speak its name”. Here are three of my favourite poets and their poems.

Amy Levy
Amy Levy was born in London in 1861, and was a well-educated Jewish feminist (which must have been fun). Reading her poems, it is possible to trace out an early, passionate love affair, cut short by the death of the girl she loved. Most of the rest of her poems explore her terrible grief from which she seemed never to recover.

She was the first lesbian poet I discovered. In my English Literature GCSE textbook sat the following poem, apparently innocent, but a revelation to the burgeoning baby dyke that I was at the time –

“In The Mile End Road
How like her! But ’tis she herself.
Comes up the crowded street
How little did I think, the morn,
My only love to meet!
Whose else that motion and that mien?
Whose else that airy tread?
I dare not let thee leave me, sweet,
For thinking of the grief in store
That we must dwell together.”

Amy Lowell
Amy Lowell (1872-1925) was a very gifted American poet who headed the Imagism movement. She came from an influential Boston family and was well-educated. After unrequited crushes on several actresses, she met the love of her life, Ada Russell, and they stayed together until Amy’s death. The lesbian content of her writing started off being fairly subtle, in deference to the social conventions of the time, but by the time of the following poem, which was written for her and Ada’s tenth anniversary, her poems had become bold, lyrical and unashamedly erotic.

“Decade
When you came, you were like red wine
And the taste of you burnt my mouth with its sweetness.
Now you are like morning bread,
Smooth and pleasant.
I hardly taste you at all for I know your savour,
But I am completely nourished.”

The poets I have looked at here were not political activists; they did not overtly campaign for groundbreaking changes like those of the 60s and 70s but the sheer existence, and visibility, of their lives and works had a deep importance in bringing about the freedoms we enjoy now. Their poems are not only a precious part of lesbian history, but the love and longing they describe still resonate today.

An excellent collection of historical (and contemporary) lesbian writing, as well as biographies of poets, can be found on the fantastic website www.sappho.com. It also has an entertaining collection of vintage photographs and postcards, including the frankly puzzling “Sometimes the girls kiss each other in Detroit...but it’s only between times”. Check it out.
Queer Film Nights at Trinity

As part of the new entertainment series ‘Queer Film Nights @ Trinity’, CUSU LGBT & Trinity College will be showing two fantastic LGBT-related films in Easter Term. The films will be shown in the Winstanley Lecture Hall at Trinity - they are free and there'll be drinks and nibbles provided. So come along, mix with other LGBT students, enjoy great movies and hang out with us in the College Bar afterwards!

Shortbus
(directors John Cameron Mitchell, USA 2006)
Sunday, May 4, 8pm
‘Let’s face it, monogamy’s for straight people.’

John Cameron Mitchell’s sex comedy is as controversial a film as could possibly be shown at the Cannes Film Festival. Critics have either rejected it as a piece of transparently veiled pornography, or celebrated the story as a refreshingly truthful inquiry into human psychology, sexuality and the variety of New York subculture.

James and Jamie (Paul Dawson, PJ DeBoy) are thinking about opening up their relationship, their sex therapist Sofia (Sook-Yin Lee) has never had an orgasm herself; and fortunately, New York is where everyone comes to maintain a normal relationship with anybody, let alone Strights.

Nothing could be a more appropriate opening for Neil Jordan’s glamorous comedy-drama than the Rubettes’ dashing pop hit ‘Sugar Baby Love’. Abandoned as a baby by his mother, secretly given to a unworthing foster-mother by his biological father, the uptight priest Father Liam (Liam Neeson), and tormented and bullied throughout school – to say that Patrick ‘Kitten’ Braden (Cillian Murphy) has a hard time growing up would be putting it lightly. It’s only reasonable Patrick decides to leave the troublesome political backdrop of Southern Ireland in the 60s to go his own way as a transgendered showgirl, trading in the prejudice and turmoil of his dead-end town for the bright lights of London. But young Kitten soon finds herself faced with the realities of life – and they are ‘very, very serious’, indeed. She’s got to survive on her imagination, a fabulous wardrobe, and the thought of a mother out there somewhere, who looks just like Mitzi Gaynor.

Adapted from the Booker Prize nominee novel, Breakfast on Pluto weaves the political discontent of the Troubles with gender bender humour, glamour and great pop music. An absolute must-see for film-lovers and all those with a healthy penchant for the glamorous!

‘Murphy’s turn as the irrepressible Kitten is simply mesmerising - outrageous, tender and full of the sort of deep pain that no amount of make-up can conceal.’ - Eye on Film magazine

Breakfast on Pluto
(directors Neil Jordan, Ireland 2005)
Sunday, June 15, 8pm
‘People, take my advice: If you love someone, don’t think twice.’

Women’s Film Nights will also be continued on Saturday nights. Last term, lots of new faces squeezed into Michelle’s room to watch great films like Tipping the Velvet and Bound, and of course, the ubiquitous The L Word. Here’s a quick run up of the films you lucky ladies will be treated to.

Fingersmith

Another BBC adaptation of a Sarah Waters novel, this is a dark and gothic tale of Sue Trinder (Sally Hawkins), a thief from London, who is involved in a plot to defraud the sheltered and aristocratic Maud (Elaine Cassidy) of her inheritance. The two girls slowly fall in love, but just as they are beginning to realise the strength of their feelings for each other, events spiral out of control...

Lost and Delirious

In an exclusive American boarding school, two girls (Paula, played by Piper Perabo, and Tori, played by Jessica Pare) struggle with their passion towards each other and the disappointment of society, with tragic consequences. This is a beautiful and haunting film, complete with a very cool falcon!

But I’m A Cheerleader

Megan (Natasha Lyonne) is a bubbly, popular all-American high school cheerleader. Her pious Christian parents suspect her of being a lesbian, and pack her off to ‘True Directions’, a sexual reorientation camp...which ends up revealing her true sexuality to her (with the help of Graham, played by the intriguing and attractive Clea DuVall). This is a funny and entertainingly silly film, satirising the ridiculous camp with it’s n’ hers blue and pink paraphernalia, and the fanatical camp leader whose own son is blatantly gay.

Requests are also warmly welcomed – email womens@cusu-lbgt.com to put in a pitch for your favourite gay movie.
What's on: this Summer

**Pride London Parade - Saturday 5 July**
www.pridelondon.org

Half a million visitors can't be wrong. Pride London (not London Pride, which is the beer) is the grand dame of UK Pride, with its history stretching back to the first UK gay protests in 1970. The festival event has something for everybody, from musical royalty like Andrew Lloyd Weber and John Barrowman, to indie DJ favourites from alternative clubs like The Ghetto.

**Stockholm Europride - Saturday 2 August**
www.stockholmpride.org

This year, Stockholm Pride joins forces with Europride, the international Pride event hosted by a different European city each year. Considering the fact that previous Europride events have attracted up to 1 million people and that Stockholm Pride is the biggest Scandinavian Pride event, this event should be massive.

**Brighton Pride Parade - Saturday 2 August**
www.brightonpride.org

First established in 1992 as a modest afternoon event, Pride in Brighton & Hove has ballooned to become the largest free pride festival in the UK. Each year, the Parade starts with a two-day street party and has been hailed 'the biggest and best Pride in the UK'. It's no wonder Brighton is considered the gay capital of the UK.

**Manchester Pride - 23 August**
www.manchesterpride.com

The birthplace of Queer as Folk is celebrating its 18th Pride birthday and promises to throw us the biggest party yet. The 78-hour festival party of The Big Weekend is the culmination of their Pride, attracting artists like The Gossip and Belinda Carlisle.

**Pride Glasgow - 30 August**
www.prideglasgow.co.uk

Pride Glasgow is the baby on the Pride circuit, having recently split from Pride Scotia to form its own organisation. Glasgow last hosted a Pride event in 2006, and vows to be back with a bang in 2008. At the very least, there's going to be a contingent of buff Scottish men in kilts. We don't know about you, but we certainly like the idea.

Want to be more than just a passive bystander at Pride this year? Most of the Pride parades are always on the lookout for volunteers at the event. Roles can range from being a fire steward to manning stalls. Get in touch with the organisers at their website and get involved. You can also contact your local LGBT community groups and ask if they’re entering the Festival; who knows, you might just end up dancing on a float yourself!
Beautiful, intelligent, captivating. A good friend. I’d loved her quietly, for months.

But that’s not me here — reluctantly
12:14

Here
Notice time elapsed
12:16

Nor there

Or there
01:09
01:43

Four girls in a night. I’m hardly surprised; that’s just how glorious, how amazing she is. She takes anyone she desires, and no one resists; no one wants to. I love her the more for it.
Still, watching her, I die a little inside every time.

But, the perfect irony. As we leave, she comes up to me.

“You OK?”
She hugs me in support.

“You know, if there’s someone you like, you should go for it.”

Hah. She reads my mind with the briefest of glances, because that’s just how she is — kind, perceptive.

And so unintentionally, unimaginably cruel.

A platonic gesture — that I know full well, all too well.

Still, all I want to do is kiss her.

But we’re friends, and I don’t want to lose her. Besides, I’d just be another girl, another kiss. And I love her more than that.

So I turn and kiss her... on the cheek.
A coward’s compromise.

Still, she pulls back, a little surprised.

“Hey, what was that?” A good question.

There were a thousand things I should’ve said there and then — “You’re beautiful,” or “Go out with me,” or maybe just “I love you.”

But not knowing what to say, I chose to say nothing at all. And now we’re still friends. If she ever asks, it’ll just have been a little drunken affection. All is good.

I still love her, though. And I dream about her, sometimes.

But you know, even then — she’s always with someone else.