

POETRY WALES

Growing Up Queer — A Zuihitsu

According to NASA, the Hubble telescope shows and tells my birthday as *the sharpest image ever taken. The arms of the grand design are filled with young, bluish, hot stars.*

I heard that the birth of new stars turns a galaxy pink, and my family thought I was going to be a girl. They were so certain that they had to rush around for my names. I never got the Manx middle name of my brothers, like Grenaby, the farm where our father was born, and Douglas where three of his children were. They picked it because my brother Paul wanted to call me Richard, and did, but only for twenty-four years.

When I was five or six, we met an estranged auntie at Christmas, she gave us two blue presents for my elder brothers and two pink ones for my sister and the other one she thought was a girl. Everyone laughed. Well, I say everyone. There was a dog in the room.

Ocean Vuong wrote, *If you must know anything, know that you were born because no-one else was coming. The ship rocked as you swelled inside me: love's echo hardening into a boy. Sometimes I feel like an ampersand.*

Franklin D Roosevelt wore a dress aged two-and-a-half with a hat, marabou feather and shoulder-length hair. Before the nineteenth century, it was common for boys and girls to wear the same attire until they were six years old. Eighty years later, that was taboo. Fifty years earlier, boys wore pink. In the nineties, lads in pink T-shirts were a sure sign — but now we can only tell by where their eyes linger.

Neil Bartlett wrote, *He was worn out, worn out with his own personal brand of window shopping; all that staring and never buying anything.*

I wandered with fear and excitement when I circled department stores as a teenager — passing the same male posters, the same shop-boys, that compelling fellow customer, maybe older — pausing slightly in my stride wondering whether I'd be caught for the shirt I was lifting.

Richard Scott reminds us,
people say shit like *it gets better*
but what they mean is *there'll always be haters*
only you'll be older

P O E T R Y W A L E S

This beautiful galaxy is tilted at an oblique angle onto our line of sight, giving us a birds-eye-view of the black hole, which is fifteen times the mass of our own.

The Milky Bar Kid was a dream come true — the boy who can't go wrong. The comfort of creamy chocolate and my own cowboy suit — watching tv with Dad, and shooting caps like John Wayne.

James Baldwin said, *It comes as a great shock to see Gary Cooper killing off the Indians and, although you are rooting for Gary Cooper, that the Indians are you.*

Years later, I discovered John Wayne was really named Marion and called Midnight Cowboy *a story about two fags.*

In hindsight, I should have known when I was seven years old that I didn't want to buy the underpants and swimwear in my mother's mail order catalogue.

At six, I was handed down my five-year-older brother's swimming trunks. Like a hermit crab, it would have been preferable to hang out on the beach until approached by a bigger boy — whose fitting was constrained rather than floppy — and we could have swapped our trunks. Instead Paul, and our brother David, chased me and pulled down my over-large green trunks, considering this a great sport with a splash of comedy. So, I smashed Paul over the head with my yellow plastic spade, and it went red at the end. I jumped into a deep sand pit and kept digging. It took me forty years to climb out.