



The Queer Foundation Scholar

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From the Editor's Desk Welcome to Dr. Jon M. Wargo.

This issue will be my last as editor. After eleven years, the time has come for me to retire, letting someone younger, with more vigor than I have, and with new ideas to help QF confront the challenges of a new era. So as you can see in the column to the right, our editorial offices are moving from Portland, Ore., to Chestnut Hill, Mass.

I'll still handle the Publication Awards, at least for 2019-20, giving Dr. Wargo time to transition into the position. Dr. Joe Dial and I are still looking for someone who would be willing to assume the responsibilities of the Director of our Mentorship Program. If you are interested, please contact me or Dr. Dial at the email addresses above.

I do hope to have a little more time to contact QF Scholars and Special Mention students, so I may still write an occasional piece highlighting their continuing achievements. I do have some final words starting on page 12. For now, I wish Dr. Wargo my best.



Dr. Wargo will assume responsibilities for *The Queer Foundation Scholar* beginning with the Winter 2019 issue.

Dr. Jon M. Wargo is currently an Assistant Professor of Literacy in the Lynch School of Education at Boston College. Located at the axis of educational anthropology and literacy studies, he interrogates how writing *moves*. From nuancing the particulars of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) youth lifestreaming to examining how sound is used as a technology and tool to 'hear' and work against injustice, Wargo has explored digital media and the material technologies of schooling through longitudinal ethnographic research, single and multiple embedded case studies, as well as design-based research across sites of learning. Although situative and sociocultural theories of literacy serve as starting points for his work, conceptual orientations from other fields - from sound studies to critical geography - help Wargo attend to larger issues concerning educational anthropology. Dr. Wargo's broader research agenda asks questions that attend to both practice and theory. At the practice level, Dr. Wargo is curious how children and youth leverage digital media to design more just social futures. At a more theoretical level, he is curious in developing new methods and modes of inquiry to trace the relational process of literacy across learning dimensions. Wargo is a native Hoosier, born and raised in Indiana, and received a Bachelor's Degree in Gender Studies and English at Indiana University - Bloomington. After, Wargo moved to Denver, CO and taught Kindergarten and 1st grade. His interests outside of work and research include running, cooking, and exploring the sounds and sights of his new home, Boston, MA.

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QF Scholars and Special Mention Students

Please add Dr. Wargo's email to your email list so any emails he may send out in the future don't automatically end up in your junk mailbox.

Ideas and opinions expressed in *The Queer Foundation Scholar* are those of the respective authors and not necessarily those of the Queer Foundation.

HOT OFF THE PRESS!

https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/pride-and-prejudice-lgbt-life-in-the-uk-2018_uk_5be1a91ae4b04367a880c505

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from the Desk of the Executive Director

I am pleased to announce Queer Foundation's 14th Annual High School Seniors English Essay Contest and Scholarships Competition. Three \$1,000 scholarships are available for studies in queer theory or a related field at the U.S. college or university of the recipient's choice. Examples of related fields are queer medical, legal, or social issues. Applicants must be 18 or under; they need not be U.S. residents.

Application deadline: February 14, 2019

Winners will be announced in May.

Please help us get the word out.

The scholarship application Submission Form—with contest rules and complete instructions—is downloadable at

<http://queerfoundation.org/docs/2019EssayContest/SubmissionForm.rtf>.

Those who prefer can download the PDF version at

<http://queerfoundation.org/docs/2019EssayContest/SubmissionForm.pdf>.

As Queer Scholars, young writers can positively affect the conditions of their fellow LGBTQA students and other queer youth. Collected, their writings can become queer-the-curriculum materials that schools and teachers can use for positive change. Examples of their writing are posted on our webpage at

<http://queerfoundation.org>.

For further information about QF scholarships, contest rules, queer-the-curriculum materials for use in schools, or general information about the [Queer Foundation Effective Writing and Scholarships Program](#), please visit <http://queerfoundation.org>; or write to me at jdial@queerfoundation.org. I look forward to your thoughts.

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“Harpoon Sonnet”

By **Elijah Punzal**

University of California, Irvine

Characters:

GUSTAVO - Gary's father. A hardworking handyman. Hard-headed. 53 years old. GARY - Gustavo's son. An aspiring lawyer. Acts younger than he is. 24 years old. TRENT - Gary's best friend. Likes to go fishing. Bright. 26 years old.

Setting:

2016. Texas. On the way home.

SCRIPT

Lights out. In the darkness, the sound of a car revving begins. It gets louder and louder until, suddenly, a crash. As the stage begins to become slowly lit, the shadow of an overturned truck comes into view. Smoke billows from offstage as police lights flash faintly and the sound of an ambulance siren echoes distantly. As more of the stage comes into view, GUSTAVO and GARY walk in through the smoke, faces stark and unmoving. A white light appears on the other side of the stage. They move towards the light like silhouetted ghosts, and as they reach center stage, the light flickers. The two freeze. The light flickers until it dies out. Then, the world becomes close in an instant: the stage is lit with an afternoon glow, the sirens blare as if right in front of the audience. GARY clutches his chest and crumples to the floor. He is moaning with pain. GUSTAVO does not feel anything. He turns around to look at his son.

GUSTAVO: Gary.

GARY: It hurts.

GUSTAVO: Gary.

GARY: (*Turned away*) It hurts, it hurts, it hurts!

GUSTAVO: What hurts, *mijo*?

GARY: (*Crying in pain*) Ahh! It hurts! IT HURTS!! (*GUSTAVO kneels beside his son and puts his hands on GARY's*)

GUSTAVO: *Shhh...it's okay...it's okay...*

GARY: *Dad, I'm scared.*

GUSTAVO: *It's okay, mijo, I'm here, I'm—*

GARY: I'm scared, I'm scared, I'm scared!

GUSTAVO: Stop crying.

GARY: I can't! I'm scared, dad.

GUSTAVO: What are you scared about?

GARY: I don't know! (*A burst of pain*) AHH! Dad, it hurts! It hurts!!

GUSTAVO: Calm down!

GARY: I can't. It hurts too much. (*He tries to curl up into his father's arms*)

GUSTAVO: You're acting like a child. (*He lays GARY down to the floor. GARY lies facing up, hands clutched to his chest*)

GARY: Don't leave me.

GUSTAVO: I'm right here, Gary.

GARY: Why are you leaving, dad?

GUSTAVO: I'm not.

GARY: You are.

GUSTAVO: I'm not.

GARY: You are. I...I can't feel you.

GUSTAVO: What do you mean?

GARY: I can't feel you! (*Suddenly*) Oh my god.

GUSTAVO: Gary?

GARY: Oh my god, it hurts.

GUSTAVO: Gary, I don't know what's happening I—

GARY: Can't you feel it?

GUSTAVO: Feel what?

GARY: The pain.

GUSTAVO: *Mijo*, what are you talking about?

GARY: The pain. (*GARY struggles to sit up*) Tell me you can feel it.

GUSTAVO: I can't.

GARY: You can.

GUSTAVO: I can't.

GARY: You can. Please. Tell me you can.

GUSTAVO: *Ay mijo*. (*GUSTAVO goes over to attempt to pick up his son*).

GARY: No, I can stand up.

GUSTAVO: Gary, I can—

GARY: No, I said I can stand up by myself. (*GARY gets up slowly, still clutching his chest with one hand. He turns around as if something beckons his name. He closes his eyes and looks as if listening intently to a voice only he can hear*) Yes...you're right. It's time. I can't—I can't be scared. Not now.

GUSTAVO: Gary? What are you—

The stage freezes except for GARY. He is panting, breathing heavier and heavier.

GARY: (*He looks to the sky*) Okay Gary. Be brave. (*He looks at his hand resting on his chest*) Be brave, be brave, be brave. (*With sudden strength*) Take us back nine years. To that summer. (*He looks at GUSTAVO*) I hope I have enough time...

The stage begins to shift as GARY runs off stage. Everything unfreezes. The sound of reversed laughter, talking, and music reverberates across the stage as the lights shift from day to night. The smoke has stopped and the shadow of the overturned truck disappears. As GUSTAVO passively looks around at the changing environment around him, a small wooden dock appears. There is now the sound of a summer swamp buzzing with life. GUSTAVO finds himself drawn to the edge of the stage, off to the side, as if he were watching the scene unfold alongside the audience. Entering now is TRENT, a boy not so much taller than GARY, with a fishing pole and camping gear. As he sits on the wooden dock, he whistles across the stage. GARY, now dressed in his summer clothes, runs with a cooler and his own fishing rod. He appears much younger and is beaming with a bright smile.

TRENT: Ta-da!

GARY: This is your special fishing spot?

TRENT: Why can't it be?

GARY: This is basically a puddle in your backyard.

TRENT: Is not! (*Pointing upstage*) The river diverts and lets in a small stream just big enough for fish to swim into the pond. And since it's pretty shaded, it's the ideal place for fish to, you know, make more fish!

GARY: That's basically cheating.

TRENT: It's called *strategic* fishing. Besides, I just let them go after I catch them.

GARY: Why don't you eat them?
TRENT: They're not big enough to eat.
GARY: So then why do you go fishing?
TRENT: I don't know, why did you decide to go fishing with me then?
GARY: Because you invited me, stupid.
TRENT: Because I knew you wanted to spend time with me, stupid.
GARY: (*Playfully*) Shut up. (*They sit in silence for a little bit*) Jesus, I'm sorry for being awkward.
TRENT: You're not.
GARY: I totally am.
TRENT: It's better than fishing with my dad, trust me.
GARY: I'm sorry I called it a puddle; It's a nice fishing spot.
TRENT: It's okay.
GARY: I'm sorry.
TRENT: Dude, stop apologizing.
GARY: Okay. (*Pause*) I'm sorry.
TRENT: You're doing that to piss me off, aren't you?
GARY: (*Under his breath*) No, I'm, uh, I'm...sorry. (*TRENT laughs*)
TRENT: Maybe you can fish and I can do the talking.
GARY: I don't even know how to fish, Trent.
TRENT: Your dad never taught you?
GARY: My dad's always busy—building this, fixing that.
TRENT: What about, what do you call 'em, your *abuelo*? He never taught you how to fish?
GARY: Both of them are back in Mexico with the rest of my family.
TRENT: Have you ever been?
GARY: No...I mean, I'd like to visit. But if I go, I can't come back.
TRENT: Ah, I see.
GARY: If you could, you know—
TRENT: I got you, I got you.
GARY: Okay thanks. (*Pause*) God, I made it awkward again.
TRENT: Hey hey hey, I'm the one doing the talking, remember?
GARY: I know.
TRENT: Don't apologize.
GARY: I know.
TRENT: I can feel you wanting to say it.
GARY: I know! It's hard not to, okay?
TRENT: Okay, okay. (*Pause*) You look cute when you apologize.
GARY: What do I look like?
TRENT: Just cute. (*They stare at each other for a moment, then turn away*)
GARY: So when are we going to fish?
TRENT: (*Teasingly*) Someone seems flustered.
GARY: Not even.
TRENT: Are you nervous?
GARY: No.
TRENT: You sure?
GARY: Yeah. (*A pause*)
TRENT: Gary, what are you nervous about?
GARY: I don't know, fishing.
TRENT: Is that all you're nervous about?
GARY: I don't know.
TRENT: Gary. (*He turns GARY to face him. He leans in ever so slightly, but after a fleeting moment GARY abruptly turns away*) Ah, sorry. I'm stupid. I should have—

GARY: No, you're okay. You're okay.

TRENT: I didn't mean to—

GARY: It's okay Trent—

TRENT: God, I'm so stupid.

GARY: You're not.

TRENT: I am.

GARY: Okay, fine, you are. (*TRENT punches GARY's arm playfully and they laugh. Then, a pause*)

Trent...I haven't kissed anyone before.

TRENT: It's okay...Neither have I.

GARY: Oh. Okay.

GARY turns around to face TRENT. There is a brief suspension of time as TRENT tenderly holds the side of GARY's face. They slowly inch their faces closer to one another until their lips meet. The kiss is gentle, but ultimately awkward. GARY pulls away first; TRENT lingers.

TRENT: What's wrong?

GARY: (*Covering his face with his hands*) I'm sorry.

TRENT: (*Smiling*) Why are you sorry?

GARY: I'm sorry that was such a bad kiss.

TRENT: I can't hear you when you're covering your face, you know.

GARY: Oh my god, that was so bad.

TRENT: (*Laughing*) Gary, hey, listen to me. (*He pulls GARY's hands away from his face. He quickly pecks him on the cheek*). That's for apologizing. (*He quickly kisses GARY on the lips*) And that's for thinking that that was a bad kiss.

GARY: (*Stunned, a bit head over heels*) Okay...Sorry.

TRENT: If you apologize, I'm just going to have to kiss you.

GARY: (*Can't contain his smile*) Okay...

The two of them stare at each other for a moment until TRENT passes GARY a fishing rod. GARY stares at the fishing rod a tad dumbfounded, and TRENT starts laughing. As the two continue to poke fun at each other, the sound of the swamp begins to swell until the two voices are drowned out. From there, the cycle repeats as night turns to day and the sound of reversed laughter, talking, and music plays once more. TRENT kisses GARY once more and exits, soon followed by GARY. As the wooden dock is taken away, GUSTAVO moves towards center stage. The shadow of the overturned truck returns though the smoke and sirens have stopped. GARY re-enters dressed as he was before, but there is an air of relief, if not anxiety. His hand still rests over his chest. GARY's eyes eventually meet GUSTAVO's.

GUSTAVO: So.

GARY: Yes.

GUSTAVO: Are you...?

GARY: (*Hesitantly*) Yes.

GUSTAVO: How long have you known?

GARY: Almost my whole life.

GUSTAVO: Oh. (*Pause*)

GARY: Dad—

GUSTAVO: Gary.

GARY: I needed to tell you, I—

GUSTAVO: Gary.

GARY: I couldn't just—

GUSTAVO: Gary.

GARY: It's not fair—

GUSTAVO: Gary.

GARY: I was supposed to introduce you to him, and I—

GUSTAVO: Gary.
GARY: You were going to meet him, and then I—
GUSTAVO: Gary.
GARY: You wanted to be an *abuelo* so bad and I—
GUSTAVO: Gary.
GARY: I love him, *Papá*.
GUSTAVO: Gary.
GARY: I love him, I love him, I love him.
GUSTAVO: Gary.
GARY: And there's nothing that—
GUSTAVO: Gary.
GARY: He makes me happy, *Papá*.
GUSTAVO: *Mijo*. (*He tries to speak, but he fumbles with the words*)
GARY: It's okay. You can say it.
GUSTAVO *sighs*. *He takes a good look at GARY. He walks over to GARY and cups his face. He kisses his son on the forehead.*
GARY: Dad.
GUSTAVO: *Mijo*, I'm not mad. (*He smiles*) Look at who you are. Look at who you've become.
GARY: Dad.
GUSTAVO: You are successful—
GARY: Dad.
GUSTAVO: You are happy—
GARY: Dad.
GUSTAVO: You are going to make a beautiful family—
GARY: Dad.
GUSTAVO: You are someone to be proud of.
GARY: Dad.
GUSTAVO: Tell Trent that I—
GARY: Dad.
GUSTAVO: —that I give him—
GARY: *Papá*.
GUSTAVO: Tell him that I give him my blessing. (*GARY begins to cry*)
GARY: Dad, you don't have to go.
GUSTAVO: *Ay mijo*.
GARY: I can still bring you back.
GUSTAVO: It's my time.
GARY: No! It's not! You can still stay here with us. Keep fighting. Please. (*The white light begins to flicker faintly offstage. GUSTAVO faces behind him as if something beckons him. He closes his eyes and listens*)
GUSTAVO: You hear that, *mijo*?
GARY: *Papá*, I can't feel you.
GUSTAVO: It's your *abuela*, my mother...
GARY: *Papá*, I'm scared.
GUSTAVO: I can smell the *caldo de pollo con arroz* right now.
GARY: I'm scared you're not coming back.
GUSTAVO: My sisters, your *tías*, they're calling to me.
GARY: *Papá*, it hurts.
GUSTAVO: It's my time, *mijo*.
GARY: You deserve to be a part of my family.
GUSTAVO: *Mijo*, I already am. *No hay mal que cien años dure*.
GARY: *Papá*, no más.
GUSTAVO: (*Facing back towards his son*) I know you've been holding onto it. I can take it back.
GARY: No.

GUSTAVO: You've been so strong—
 GARY: I'm not giving it back.
 GUSTAVO: You need to go back, Gary.
 GARY: I'm not going back.
 GUSTAVO: It's not your time yet.
 GARY: It hurts.
 GUSTAVO: It hurts because it's mine.
 GARY: I'm not letting go.
 GUSTAVO: You have to.
 GARY: I'm not letting it go.
 GUSTAVO: You have to let go.
 GARY: I'm not letting you go.
 GUSTAVO: I will always be with you. In your heart. Now you need to give back mine. (*GUSTAVO opens his son's hand. A small red stone representing GUSTAVO's heart is unveiled. GUSTAVO takes back his heart.*)

GARY: *Papá*, I need you.
 GUSTAVO: You need to go back, Gary. Your mom is waiting.
 GARY: She's waiting for you to come home too.
 GUSTAVO: It's okay, she'll know.
 GARY: Dad.
 GUSTAVO: Gary. (*GUSTAVO holds his son close*) Go now. Live to see another day. *Te amo.*

GARY's body is seized with fatigue, and he collapses into his father's arms. GUSTAVO holds his son for a moment, and for the first time in a long time he is vulnerable—tender even. Afterwards, GUSTAVO picks GARY up and cradles his son, bringing him offstage. As he exits, the white light gradually appears on the other side of the stage and a low fog begins to roll in. When GUSTAVO re-enters, he crosses towards the light in a trance similarly to before. As he makes his way across the stage, the environment around him darkens except for the white light. GUSTAVO stops on the edge of the stage as the white light shines intensely. He looks up. The intensity swells; the light is almost too bright for the audience. GUSTAVO looks head-on, unfazed, until:

Blackout.

2018-19 Publication Award

Recipient

Elijah Punzal should be familiar to most readers of *The Queer Foundation Scholar* since “Harpoon Sonnet” is his third QF Publication Award. His past submissions, going back to his high school senior essay, included a piece dealing with his fascination with video games and their significance in his life as a gay youth, an interview with a transgender poet on the UCI campus, and as here, a one-act play.

Theatre, in all of its aspects, is his great love which is why I paired him with Alexander Gallagher, a 2018-19 QF Scholar, this past spring. Gallagher, a freshman at Bennington College in Vermont, would like to be a playwright. Punzal has thought of becoming a professor of theatre arts at a university. Perhaps one day, like James Ivory and Ismail Merchant, they may

collaborate on a theatrical production—not that I'm trying to play matchmaker!



Special Mention

We welcome the individuals below, representing those semi-finalists in the Effective English Writing Contest for High School Seniors, who have consented to having their essays posted on our website. You'll find them at www.queerfoundation.org.



TENA GORDON

Tena is a nonbinary student at Florida International University, majoring in gender studies and Latin American and Caribbean Studies. Tena also plans to become an active member of the Caribbean Student Association, the Black Student Union, and the Stonewall Pride Alliance.

Among Tena's many extramural activities in high school: co-founder and council member of the Everyone Acceptance League (Genders and Sexualities Alliance), volunteer at Project Response (an HIV testing and case management center), president of the school's National English Honor Society chapter, coordinator of the Me=You Sexual Violence Awareness; and treasurer of the Nguzo Saba Collective (a panAfrican cultural organization that organizes Kwanzaa events). Zhe was also a violinist in the school orchestra and captain of the intramural flag football team.

Among Tena's long-range goals: "to end the gender binary and liberate queer people of color. I want gender marks to be inclusive and ultimately removed from identifying documents. Among zhe's career goals: to be a professor, researcher, expert witness, and consultant. Zhe intends to live openly as a gay trans person.

ZOE HADLEY



Zoe is a student at Ithaca College. She has not yet decided on a major, but she is leaning toward sociology, with a minor in gender studies. Although her career goals remain somewhat hazy, she is "striving toward a career that helps others, whether that's through counseling" or work with a non-profit. Zoe enjoys working with children and teens, so "a form of education is in the picture."

In high school, Zoe was heavily involved in the music program, participating in marching band, pit orchestra, and pep band. She was a member of the varsity cross country team, and an active member of the school's GSA. She intends to maintain her "identity as a strong activist and continue to advocate for queer rights."

JAMIE MARRARA



Jamie is a student at Yale University. She is considering two widely different career options. On the one hand, she is considering neuroscience with a focus on research. On the other, she is also interested in Film and Media Studies with an aim "to write, direct, or produce media."

Her academic interests are equally broad, ranging from debate, drama, philosophy, astronomy, writing (essays and poetry), politics, and literature.

In high school she was involved with the Technology Student Association, National Speech and Debate Association, Drama, Business Professionals of America, National Honor Society, and the National Technological Honor Society. She also founded the school's Equality Club for LGBTQ students.

Jamie was involved in many community projects, but her favorite was Oologah, "a service to interview local community members and share those stories with the Library of Congress via StoryCorps."

[Editor's note. All twelve semi-finalists were invited to join our growing family of Special Mention students. Invitations were sent out in May and again in September. We wish all of the semi-finalists would accept our invitation because, frankly, evaluation of the fine and performing arts, including writing, is subjective, and jurors don't always agree. When one has a contest, there has to be "winners" and "losers," although I convinced Dr. Dial to drop those terms. We have three scholarship recipients. Period.

All the semi-finalists are winners. Indeed, even those who don't make the first cut are often winners. For many entering the contest is a first step in their coming out process. A process that still remains very difficult for the vast majority of LGBTQ+ youth.

Indeed, it may often be more painful now than it was 20, 30 or 40 years ago. I'm not referring to danger posed by the current WH occupant, although he is not contributing to a climate of acceptance. I'm talking about how the growing divide between LGBTQ+ youth who gain virtually total and immediate acceptance, approval, and support from family and friends, and the many who risk being thrown into the street where they face daily violence and abuse, often having to turn to prostitution to survive, or risk being sent off to a sexual conversion therapy camp if their parents find out.

"What's the problem? Why don't you just tell them?," said a group of her liberal and Christian friends to a young Muslim lesbian.

That's an extreme example that faced one of our students. But not a year goes by that I don't communicate with several students who are still terrified that their parents will find out and disown them. I don't care if you come from a functional or dysfunctional family, everyone seeks family ties and breaking off is very hard to do.

So, please take a few minutes to read what these students have written. Again, www.queenfoundation.org . Scroll down to Special Mention. Students are listed alphabetically by their surname.

Ray Verzasconi, editor]

From the editor's desk Continued from page 1.

- Yes, the midterm elections were encouraging in many ways. From one report almost 400 candidates were openly LGBTQ and slightly more than 100 won. Most were down ballot (school boards, city councils, county boards, etc.) which will help in the continuing struggle for equal rights because the battle is far from over.



An LGBTQ activist group has taken aim at the largest and wealthiest anti-gay organization with a giant billboard in Times Square that went up November 6 and is slated to remain up until February.

The Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF) -- their freedom to discriminate against us - has been involved in many court cases that aim to limit or eliminate rights of LGBTQ people. It is involved in many of the "religious freedom" cases that would allow anyone with "deeply held religious beliefs" to discriminate against us. It is also now deeply committed to cases arguing that gender is not a protected class. Their aim is to delegitimize the very idea of gender.

See,

<https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/activists-takes-aim-anti-lgbtq-hate-group-alliance-defending-freedom-n936391>

- They never learn, do they? Gays who marry women, have children, get elected to office, usually spouting hatred for the LGBTQ community. And then get caught having sex with a man. Two new "victims" recently came to light.

Wes Goodman, a Republican state representative in Ohio, promoted himself as a staunch supporter of Focus on the Family, one of the most anti-gay organizations in the U.S. Focus on the Family keeps alive the pernicious lie that gays are all pedophiles who use public schools to recruit children. Goodman resigned his position this past spring when someone apparently walked into his legislative office and found him having sex on his desk with, horrors, a man! You can't make this stuff up!

Ralph Shortey was convicted of sex trafficking in 2017, and sentenced to 15 years in prison this past January. Shortey, 35, is married with three children. An Oklahoma Republican state senator, he was first elected in 2010, and re-elected in 2014. He campaigned as a staunch Christian and a family values man. Oh, until his arrest he was also Trump's campaign manager in Oklahoma. In March 2017, police found Shortey in bed in a motel with a 17-year-old lad. A grand jury charged him with four felony counts; in a plea bargain, he pled guilty to one count of sex trafficking. In exchange, the other felony counts were dropped. Sex trafficking can mean several things, but it usually implies that he use used coercion to get the young man in bed. The young man or his family owed Shortey a favor which could only be repaid if the young

man had sex with him.

- The Last of My Movie Reviews.

Saturday Church (USA, 2017) is probably this year's most underrated queer film. A 14 year-old-Black youth, Odysseus (Lukas Kain), struggling with the death of his father, bullied at school for being effeminate, eventually kicked out by the religious and homophobic Aunt Rose, seeks solace at New York's Saturday Church. There, transgender women, drag queens, cross-dressers (none is hung up on categories), and others introduce him to a world of fantasy where he can finally find his true passion.

Love, Simon (USA, 2018). Another sweet, feel-good, made-for-teenaged white audiences, *Love, Simon* might have been a better film if it had not used a very canned storyline: the male teenager who betrays all of his best friends, but they eventually all make up, and they all set out to help make his dreams come true: only here, Simon is gay, and his dream boyfriend turns out to be a Black Jewish lad (the pandering is almost insulting). Okay, it has a happy ending, and Nick Robinson as Simon is great as a quick change artist in terms of facial expressions and body language to convey a wide range of meanings.

I was fascinated, though, by an online review by a young lesbian who said no one in her family had talked to her since she came out a year earlier, but her mother did go see *Love, Simon* with her.

When her mother saw how difficult it was for Simon to come out to his parents, she started crying, and suddenly her mother has become her daughter's staunch supporter. Is that really true? *Love, Simon* can turn homophobic mothers into fairy godmothers "just like that!?" Is it possible that a homophobic mother would even go see something as sweet and innocent as this film? They don't even kiss until like the last ten seconds of the movie.

Alex Strangelove (USA, 2018). Alex Truelove (Daniel Doheny) is the senior class president, a rather handsome kid, and about as boring a person as I can imagine meeting. To say he's a nerd is an insult to nerds. I thought movies about really dumb nerds went out in the 1990s when masturbating in apple pies came in? Anyway, another canned script: Alex is straight; Alex is still a virgin; Alex spends weeks preparing to sleep with his girlfriend the night of the senior prom, even consulting what must surely be an ancient sex manual, but ah, wait. Alex is really gay; he just hasn't figured that out yet. *Alex Strangelove* may appeal to white, gay 'tweens. Okay, watch it with your 'tween or even little brother. It's okay to be gay, even if you're a bit weird, and there's only two guys dancing at the prom at the very end. Not even a kiss!

The Wilding (Australia, 2012). Malcolm, serving time in a juvenile detention center, is offered the chance to have his record expunged and to be set free, but he faces a difficult choice. Gav, the teenage lad he is very much in love with, isn't capable of defending himself against the center's homophobic bullies. Indeed, they have

beaten Gav before. A clean slate and freedom, or stay to defend his boyfriend and have his criminal record stay with him for life. *The Wilding* is less about problems inherent to juvenile detention centers and prisons in many parts of the world than a character study: of Malcolm, so hardened by events in his young life that he has anger management problems, yet who has a tender and caring side as well.

A 12-minute preview is available on Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/37372168>. The complete film is available on several streaming services.

The Miseducation of Cameron Post (USA, released 5 August 2018) and *Boy Erased* (USA, released 4 November 2018). Could the timing have been more appropriate? Homophobic groups like The Family Research Council were livid: two films which lay bare the sham of conversion therapy, the first involving a teenage girl and the second a teenage boy, open just weeks or days before the midterm elections. Okay, such groups already hate Hollywood, so Hollywood could care less. But relax, dudes. I don't think anyone who sees either of these films isn't already convinced that conversion therapy is harmful to one's physical and emotional health. I'm sure ministers who believe in conversion therapy were already telling parents not to let their teenagers see these films.

With Nicole Kidman and Russell Crowe playing the Baptist parents who force their son into conversion therapy, *Boy Erased* is getting far more publicity than did *The Miseducation of Cameron*

Post, evident in a considerably higher box office income on opening weekend, but critics generally prefer *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* perhaps because it focuses on Cameron (Chloë Grace Moretz) and leaves her guardians pretty much out of the picture.

Although I doubt either film had any impact on the midterms, now that Democrats have picked up seats in a number of state legislatures, and at least eight governorships, perhaps the films will convince a few more states to ban conversion therapy at least for anyone under 18.

Thirteen states now ban conversion therapy for minors, and New Hampshire will become the 14th when its state statute goes into effect on 1 January 2019. Washington D.C. and 47 cities (roughly half in Florida) also do so.

Unlike same-sex marriage, conversion therapy is going to be fought state by state until the composition of SCCOTUS once again favors a liberal view of social issues. There will always be a few deeply conservative states whose legislatures will never ban it, and as long as they exist anywhere in the U.S., LGBTQ youth who grow up in ultra-conservative religious denominations will be at risk. Orange County, California (where five progressive Dems just flipped five long-held Rep seats in California's most conservative county...until now!) is often seen as the home of conversion therapy. However, the very idea that sexual orientation can be changed goes back much further. Gay magazines as far back as the late 1950s published horror stories of survivors of sex reorientation clinics in Utah. Were the stories true? Who

knows. But they would not have existed were it not that someone had already conceived of a problem (teenaged gay people) and a solution (torture).

You'll find a list of more 2018 queer cinema at these sites:

https://www.imdb.com/poll/gbgxy-BOF7c/?ref=tt_po_i1

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hNtcWkoDmOo>

Even if you receive this newsletter after Thanksgiving, if you've never seen *Home for the Holidays* (1995), it's my favorite holiday film. Yes, about a totally dysfunctional family, with Robert Downey, Jr., as a closeted gay son, out only to his little sister who has more problems than he does. *It's long been required Thanksgiving weekend viewing in our home. We aren't the only dysfunctional family in the world.*

Ave atque vale ...

To our QF family of young scholars, be sure you include my email address in your address book, so you don't miss future announcements from QF or my continuing efforts to convince you to toot your own horn. I wanted to feature a short write-up about Jason Quackenbush's performance as Will Parker in Rider University's production of *Oklahoma* last month. There's a totally rad photo

of Jason on the Rider University website, but I can't use it. I hoped that perhaps Jason's younger brother would take a photo of Will Parker and Ado Annie that I could use without going through the often complicated process of acquiring the right to reprint a photograph. But, alas, my email likely ended up in Jason's junk mailbox. That junk mailbox, I suspect, partly explains why a few students invited to let QF publish their essay on the website as Special Mention never respond, and why we lose track of other students. Where oh where is Skailer Rae Qvistgaard? A QF Scholar and several times a recipient of a QF Publication Award, whose blog was on the QF website site, and someone I really did depend on to teach me about what it meant to be a trans man has vanished.

I've often wished I had more time to keep in touch with all of you. I joined the QF team, so to speak, only after reading about it in *The Advocate* some 12 years ago. It has been a marvelous learning experience. Young scholars have taught me a great deal—mostly about the benefits of learning from each other rather than engaging in acrimonious generational finger-pointing.

I'm not going away yet, so for now, stay strong, stay healthy, and stay in touch.

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