



**COLLECTIVE
ENCOUNTERS**

The Sage by Moon Rice

Inspired by Julie Callaghan:

No doubt Liverpool has achieved many LGBTQIA+ landmarks (the first UK city to have a 'gay quarter', first nonbinary priest ordained by the Church of England, longest running LGBTQIA+ arts and culture festival in the UK (Homotopia), longest running LGBTQIA+ youth group (GYRO) in the UK, and so many more), but is it truly an inclusive city?

Well, to this neurodiverse trans enby, if it is, I wonder why have I felt so isolated from my supposed 'community'?

Is it that I struggle so much with noisy venues like pubs and clubs? That I hate people gossiping and being bitchy, more willing to tear others down than lift them up? Or was it that I have disabilities, grew well past my twenties and overweight?

Unfortunately, though, this isn't the first time I've felt isolated. I grew up in Thatcher's Britain, under the restrictions of Clause 28: The legislation brought in to shut down even the mere mention of homosexual relationships (let alone transgender ones). So, as puberty struck, I had no one to ask about the thoughts and feelings overwhelming me. My conclusion was that I was a monster with no place in society.

Thankfully, there were lights in the darkness like News From Nowhere trying to make life better for people like me. They were part of the 'Stop The Clause' campaign against Section 28. But their activism didn't stop there. For fifty-one years they've been information activists, disseminating the world's knowledge long before the internet.

In my artwork, working with The Sage archetype, I have focussed on Julie Callaghan (pictured) of News From Nowhere. I have done so because, during the 'Stop The Clause' campaign, Julie stated 'young people should know about all kinds of sexualities and genders', indicating they know knowledge is power (Scientia potentia est). I have shown Julie as the Roman goddess Minerva (as depicted in the statue that crowns the town hall), who was the goddess of

wisdom, art, poetry, justice, and strategic warfare. It is because of people like Julie, I now know I have 'an inalienable right' to be me. I have shown Julie with a suffragette flag as News From Nowhere is proudly a women's cooperative. In my living memory, the flag has had a positive association with the campaign for women's rights. Regrettably, this association is becoming polluted by those who now use the flag in their campaign against trans rights.

In the UK, trans rights has been misinterpreted as being against women's rights. This resulted on 16th April in the UK Supreme Court deciding trans women aren't really women. To me, the parallels with Section 28 are all too painfully clear. However, knowing Julie's aforesated views on gender (and also helping me to locate a nonbinary pride flag), I suspect she does not support the court's judgement. So my depiction of her with the suffragette flag is meant to convey it's historic positive associations rather than the new one that reduces a woman to her body parts.

A more positive result of the campaign against trans rights is that it's brought trans people and their allies together, stronger, in community. I'm relieved and gladdened to find Women In Action (WIA) as part of that community. I may transcend the label of 'woman' but, all the same, from day one I was made welcome. It also gladdened my heart to find I was not the only trans member of the group. In fact, WIA had worked on several gender inclusive projects before I even joined. I was also involved in the group's performance at Pride last year in a piece about the policing of gender. (Who would've guessed then that, less than a year later, the nightmare scenario we were depicting would become reality?) I was also involved in WIA's production of Auntie - a play in which we looked at the BBC's depiction of women and the evolution of women's rights since the 1960s. Being asked to play both male and female roles, I felt my enby identity in some way validated, and was pleased that it



Julie Callaghan, depicted in binary - the fundamental language of computing

also questioned the BBC's narrow definition of women in not including trans women (amongst others).

Being part of WIA has increased my confidence and lead to taking part in all kinds of things outside of the group I never imagined (many here at the Unity Theatre) like speaking at a trans rights protest in front of approximately a hundred people, becoming a clown (which has given me a philosophy to resist the daily challenges I face) and becoming a drag king with The Merseyside Kings (which has allowed me to further explore and question gender identity).

In so doing, I have reconnected with the LGBTQIA+ 'community' I once felt so unwelcome in and found it has improved beyond measure in going out of its way to make people like me feel included.

Working with The Sage archetype for this project has allowed me to gain a deeper insight into Liverpool's and WIA's history and gain greater awareness that knowledge doesn't only come from textbooks. It can be delivered in a multitude of ways: via a piece of theatre, a flag's colours, a statement on social media, what someone shouts at you in the street, etc. Information is all around us. We are saturated by it. The challenge these days is not too little information but being able to sift through it and find what's relevant and true. Therefore, this is an age where the wisdom of The Sage is invaluable.

Some Key Words:

Neurodiverse: Neurologically atypical (includes autism, ADHD, dyslexia, etc)

Trans: Short for transgender - a person who identifies as a different gender to the one they were previously assigned, typically at birth.

Enby: (Alternative of nonbinary) A person who doesn't identify within the traditional gender binary of male/female.

