

# There Was a Queer Guy: A Performative Poetic Inquiry Into Heterosexism

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Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies

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## Abstract

At a time when hate crimes related to sexuality and gender identity are increasing and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ+) youth are disproportionately more likely to attempt suicide, this critical poetic inquiry revisits our shared history of heterosexism. Specifically, through the methodology of performance autoethnography, I explore some of the processes through which heterosexism, homophobia, and heteronormativity have operated within British culture across my own life course. I reimagine a well-known traditional rhyme with the aspiration that this accessible poem be used by others as a component of their activism and teaching on diversity and LGBTQ+ rights.

## Keywords

heteronormativity, homophobia, LGBTQ+ experience, performance autoethnography, poetry

## There Was a Queer Guy

There was a queer guy who swallowed a lie  
You might think you know why he swallowed the lie  
Perhaps he'll die

There was a queer guy who swallowed a threat he was fed  
“You're either straight or you're bent, in which case you're dead”  
He swallowed the threat along with the lie  
You might think you know why he swallowed the lie  
Perhaps he'll die

There was a queer guy who swallowed a fraud  
His kind were diagnosed mentally disordered at the time he was born  
He swallowed the fraud to explain the threat  
Which festered and burned, before making him wretch  
He swallowed the threat along with the lie  
You might think you know why he swallowed the lie  
Perhaps he'll die

There was a queer guy who swallowed a law  
Being gay was illegal in Scotland when he was four  
He swallowed the law to defend the fraud  
He swallowed the fraud to explain the threat  
Which festered and burned, before making him wretch  
He swallowed the threat along with the lie  
You might think you know why he swallowed the lie  
Perhaps he'll die

There was a queer guy who swallowed a fib told at home  
“You must be with a woman, or you'll be alone”

He swallowed the fib because of the law  
He swallowed the law to defend the fraud  
He swallowed the fraud to explain the threat  
Which festered and burned, before making him wretch  
He swallowed the threat along with the lie  
You might think you know why he swallowed the lie  
Perhaps he'll die

There was a queer guy who swallowed a drill he was told  
“Shower naked with your teammates, but don't take a-hold”  
He swallowed the drill to keep up the fib  
He swallowed the fib because of the law  
He swallowed the law to defend the fraud  
He swallowed the fraud to explain the threat  
Which festered and burned, before making him wretch  
He swallowed the threat along with the lie  
You might think you know why he swallowed the lie  
Perhaps he'll die

There was a queer guy who swallowed a ruse  
“Don't look at a guy, you'll get a thump on the nose!”  
He swallowed the ruse to hold down the drill  
He swallowed the drill to keep up the fib  
He swallowed the fib because of the law  
He swallowed the law to defend the fraud  
He swallowed the fraud to explain the threat

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Which festered and burned, before making him wretch  
 He swallowed the threat along with the lie  
 You might think you know why he swallowed the lie  
 Perhaps he'll die

There was a queer guy who swallowed a cock  
*Is it really so wrong, for a guy to suck on a dong?*  
 He swallowed the cock to sweeten the ruse  
 He swallowed the ruse to hold down the drill  
 He swallowed the drill to keep up the fib  
 He swallowed the fib because of the law  
 He swallowed the law to defend the fraud  
 He swallowed the fraud to explain the threat  
 Which festered and burned, before making him wretch  
 He swallowed the threat along with the lie  
 You might think you know why he swallowed the lie  
 Perhaps . . .  
 it's time  
 to stop  
 before any more queer kids die.

### Acknowledgments

This poem utilizes the form of the traditional rhyme *There Was an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly*. It was inspired by Bryant Keith Alexander's invitation to participate in a panel at the 19th International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry and Meredith Tax's (1970) illustrated poem *There Was a Young Woman Who Swallowed a Lie* accessible at <https://idn.duke.edu/ark:/87924/r39t17>. Thank you to Lorena Lozano-Sufrategui and participants

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### Note

1. In some Scottish dialects, "nose" is pronounced "nuse"

### Author Biography

**David Carless** is a researcher-writer-musician immersed in interdisciplinary projects across social science, mental health, and physical activity. His arts-based, autoethnographic, and narrative collaborations are available online on YouTube and have been published as journal articles and book chapters. He is with the Faculty of Health and Human Sciences at the University of the West of Scotland and is an honorary professor in the Centre for Creative-Relational Inquiry at the University of Edinburgh.