

ACT CUTE

ANDREW SUTHERLAND

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YEAR LEVEL: Y10–12

ABOUT THE BOOK

Act Cute is the second poetry collection from Queer Poz (PLHIV) writer and performance-maker Andrew Sutherland.

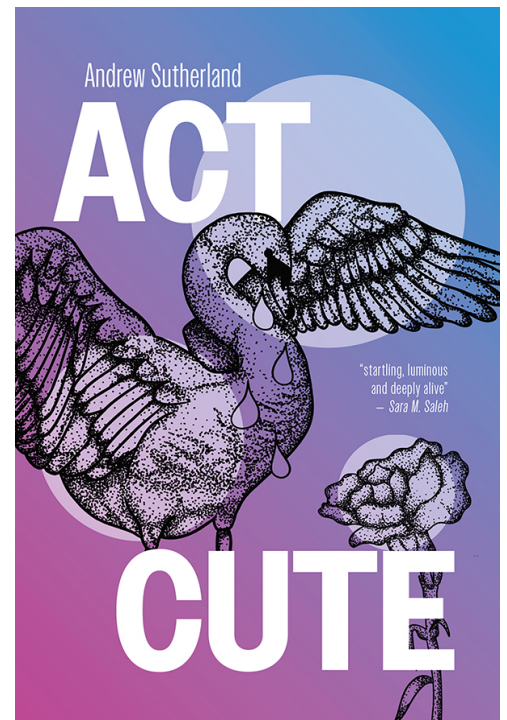
In *Act Cute*, the poet addresses the gap between memory and the present, and asks how to perform a coherent self, amidst the forces of nostalgia, institutional entanglements and reckonings, and queer desiring.

Shifting between autofictive address and canonical personae, the structural codes of romantic drama uneasily frame the poet-as-actor through five sections, titled 'Audition Sides', 'you stop me at the airport and tell me that you love me', 'twink death in Europa!!', 'Wedding Scenes' and 'forgiveness'.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Andrew Sutherland (he/they) is a Queer Poz (PLHIV) writer and performance-maker from between Boorloo (Perth) and Singapore, currently based in Naarm (Melbourne) on the unceded lands of the Kulin nation. His work draws upon the viral instabilities of identity, pop culture and the autofictive self. Andrew's debut poetry collection *Paradise (point of transmission)* was published by Fremantle Press in 2022, and shortlisted for the Small Press Network's Book of the Year prize. Andrew was the scholarship recipient of the Faber Writing Academy in 2022 and a Wheeler Centre Hot Desk fellow in 2024. Their publication history includes *Westerly*, *Best of Australian Poems*, *Australian Poetry Journal*, *Overland*, *Suburban Review*, *Cordite*, and *EXHALE: an anthology of Queer voices from Singapore*, among numerous others.

Andrew holds a BA (First Class Hons) in Acting from LASALLE College of the Arts in Singapore and works in the performance space as collaborative maker, playwright, director, performer, dramaturg, arts educator and mentor. He has been part of the creation of dozens of new performance works across the independent sector, particularly in Western Australia. Andrew has been an arts educator for Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts, WA Youth Theatre Company, Black Swan State Theatre Company, Perth Festival, Centre for Stories, Australian Theatre for Young People, and SingLit Station, among others. They are a current PhD candidate at the Victorian College of the Arts, pursuing practice-as-research surrounding the 'haunted repertoires' of the HIV+ undetectable status.



THEMES

- Nostalgia
- Identity
- Adolescence
- Queerness
- HIV+ status
- Pop culture
- Whiteness
- Colonialism
- Time
- The performative self
- Writing the self

AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM OUTCOMES

Y10–12 English

Y10–12 Literature

Y10–12 Philosophy and Ethics

Y10–12 Health and Physical Education (Mental Health and Wellbeing)

USEFUL WEBSITES

- Author's website: andrewsutherland.cargo.site
- centreforstories.com/stories/backstories-2021/andrew-sutherland/
- co3.org.au/person/andrew-sutherland/
- www.instagram.com/spandyandrei/?hl=en
- healthdirect.gov.au/hiv-infection-and-aids
- www.poz.com/tag/lgbtq
- rainbowhealthaustralia.org.au/
- theconversation.com/how-autofiction-turns-the-personal-into-the-political-192180#:~:text=At%20its%20most%20basic%20level,is%20not%20strictly%20%E2%80%9Ctruthful%E2%80%9D.
- theconversation.com/the-end-of-eddy-and-why-writing-about-life-can-be-a-dangerous-game-72211
- poetryfoundation.org/collections/101691/queer-love-poems
- google.com/search?q=autofiction&rlz=1C5CHFA_enAU939AU939&oq=au&gs_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUqDggAEEUYJxg7GIAEGIoFMg4IABBFGCcYOxiABBiKBTIGCAEQRRg7MggIAhBFGCcYOzIGCAMQRRg8MgYIBBBFGDwyBggFEEUYQTIGCAYQRRg8MgYIBxBFGEHSAQg0NzQ4ajBqNKgCALACAA&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:775e0847,vid:pQc8GC4Evo4,st:0

CLASSROOM IDEAS

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss the notion of nostalgia. What do you understand of the idea of nostalgia?
2. Nostalgia and Cuteness:
 - a. Discuss some examples of 'cuteness'. Do cute memes, objects and videos contain a kind of nostalgia?
 - b. Cuteness is one of the most culturally pervasive aesthetics of the new millennium. Do you think that the proliferation of 'cuteness' in social media and online is related to political and/or economic instability in the world? Why or why not?
 - c. Discuss the rising popularity of 'cuteness' in relation to environmental instability, climate change and loss of habitat worldwide.
 - d. Ask students to choose a particular poem and discuss the author's intention. Can 'acting cute' serve as a metaphor for survival, both in a challenging world and with the challenges of a chronic illness such as HIV?
 - e. Discuss the notions of 'nostalgia' and 'cuteness' in relation to the idea of romantic love.
 - f. In the prologue to the book, the author includes a quote by Sianne Ngai. Ngai is 'haunted by an image of failure that the experience itself seems to generate, the aesthetic of cuteness seems paradoxically coupled with an inability to carry out its own agenda.' Discuss the notion of cuteness and failure.

Language and Text Analysis

1. Autofiction.

In autofiction, the character's narrative trajectory is based upon the author's own experience. Canonical concepts are concepts that have wide currency within particular communities, such as the canon of anime or the canon of football. How does setting a personal story within cultural canon adds to its effectiveness?
2. Comprehension strategies to model and practise.
 - a. Ask students why the author uses the technique of crossing out particular words such as 'time', 'cute', 'act'? Have students practise with existing texts to explore how redacting or crossing out particular words can change or enhance the meaning of a text.
 - b. Ask students to summarise a particular section of the text.
 - c. Ask students to identify key ideas/themes.
 - d. What conclusions can they draw from the text?
 - e. Ask students to keep a reading journal in which they record particular quotes, personal reactions, and any questions or discussion topics they may wish to talk about in class. Have the structure the journal as a response to the poems, because keeping a reader-response journal will enable students to map out their responses to essay questions.

Creative Writing

1. Have students write an autofictive poem or short story about a memory of change or transition in their own life. Ask them to include (either within their piece, or as a

supplementary paragraph) the way they felt about themselves and how they managed the change or transition.

- a. Have students brainstorm all the words they can think of to do with nostalgia or cuteness, and try to use some of them in their creative piece.
 - b. Invite students to try the techniques of redacting words or crossing them out to direct the meaning of their creative piece.
 - c. Invite students to try out other poetic techniques such as found poems – created from text that they see around them in the school or out in the community, and cut up poems, where they collect text from other sources, cut out particular words and use them to form a poem or story on the page.
 - d. Ask students to write about a memory or transition in their life without naming it, but using the five senses to show and not tell about the experience.
2. Invite students to read their creative pieces to the class or in small groups.

The Arts

1. Working in small groups of three or four, ask students to devise a scenario at school in which 'acting cute' helps a character or characters survive a difficult personal change or transition.
2. Students can choose how they depict this scenario.
 - a. Create a poster, comic, drawing or painting;
 - b. Create a short performance to be presented to the rest of the class;
 - c. Write a song;
 - d. Create a short video.

Health and Physical Education

1. Ask students to research how the HIV virus works within the body. How does the virus attack the body, and what are the effects?
2. What are some of the impacts on the individual living with HIV in terms of mental health, physical health, social and economic status?
 - a. Divide students into small groups to research and discuss the impacts of living with HIV.
 - b. Each group will report back to the larger group on their findings.
 - c. Ask students to research and discuss the transmission of HIV in Australia.