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CAMPY MUSICAL BLACK QUEER FORMS: FINDING UTOPIA IN LIL NAS X'S
WORLD OF MONTERO

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by

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Date Approved _____

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ABSTRACT

CAMPY MUSICAL BLACK QUEER FORMS: FINDING UTOPIA IN LIL NAS X'S WORLD OF MONTERO

Jaymi Leah Grullón

Lil Nas X, a breakout music star has broken into the mainstream and has stirred up controversy and moral panic among conservative Christians as well as those who are not in support of over Black queer representation in media. Moreover, I am interested in which ways he queers the forms of pop, hip hop and camp through his music videos, “Montero (Call Me By Your Name),” “Industry Baby,” featuring Jack Harlowe, and his performative skits. In my first chapter, I will be laying down the theoretical framework that I will be connecting from various scholars to define campy musical Black queer forms using his lyrics, visual aesthetics, and various performances. In my first chapter, there will be a focus in how he queers origin and black femininity in his music video, “Montero (Call Me By Your Name)”. In the second chapter, I will discuss the ways in which he queers masculinity by eroticizing the masculine hip hop subject in a homoerotic way. Lastly, I will conclude with my own poetry to enter this conversation of Black queer form through poetic intervention.

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INTRODUCTION

There has been a recent turn to formalism by some scholars in the field of queer theory and ethnic studies to look how art from minoritarian subjects engage with form. Marginalized art is more than just “raw”, “authentic, or “all content but no form.” (Amin, Musser, et. Al, 233). I initially felt gravitated by Lil Nas X’s Tik Tok presence by his ability to appear relatable to his audience showing up as his supposed “authentic self.” However, camp sees everything in quotation marks, as noted by Sontag’s from her work “Notes on Camp” (Sontag, 56). Lil Nas X’s musical art, trolling tactics on twitter, and dance performance pokes fun at the unstable formations of “authenticity” and who is the real and who is the copy. His deployment of Black Queer forms is neither new, nor original, and yet it is also a departure from the normative portrayals of pop stardom in the music industry. My aim in this project is to analyze the forms and formation of Queerness as an identity, performance, and as a sensibility using the lens of camp. More specifically, I want to investigate in the ways he queers his music lyrically and sonically through the blending of various music genres and the queering of pop and hip-hop.

As noted in “Queer Form: Aesthetics, and the Violences of the Social,” aesthetic form is crucial for queer artists, artists of color (Amin, Musser, et. al., 227) however, they may not render visible because “For white audiences, the artist’s performances of racialized abjection were too close to racial “fact” to be interpreted as commentary, while the literality of her brownness seemed to preempt formal mediation. (Amin, Musser, et. al., 234). Although there can be elements of camp found his single hit, “Old Town Road,” featuring Billy Ray Cyrus, I am more interested in analyzing where forms of blackness,

queerness, femininity, and masculinity meet, collide, and converge in his music video “Montero (Call Me By Your Name),” “Industry Baby” by Lil Nas X & Jack Harlow, his campy skits “Industry Baby (Prelude),” and “Lil Nas X Gives Birth.”

Lil Nas X’s campy queer music videos are an unstable force that not contained by the enclosures of straight forms, or straight time. Straight time¹ I would define as a normative temporal order repeated across institutions and public spaces. As a normative shared temporal experience, straight time is oppressive for those that don’t follow the rhythmic patternings of straightness. Caroline Levine in *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* complicates how forms can both give order and meaning while being both constraining and oppressive by bring Munro’s account of music being used by African enslaved people to cope with the violence of slavery, but also music as a tool the enslavers used to control the enslaved population (Levine, 49). What this demonstrates is that music can be both liberating and oppressive.

These queer configurations don’t come in a vacuum, but from the passing of these knowledges cultivated by Black LGBTQIA+ people through these queer kinships and networks. Black Queer literacies are often erased and made invisible in history because they are not accepted by heteronormative white society, and according to Eric Darnell Pritchard, a Black queer person’s relationship to literacy normativity is having to oscillate between invisibility and hypervisibility (Pritchard, 16). Similarly, in the introduction for *Trap Door: Trans Cultural Production and the Politics of Visibility* the editors acknowledge this similar paradox specifically for Black trans women, “We are living in a

¹ I borrow the term straight time from Jose E. Muñoz *Cruising Utopia* combing meanings with Levine Caroline’s definition of rhythmic forms as enduring and repeating across institutions. Straight time is institutional, and some examples of experiences that are markers of queer time include having a crush, going to prom, getting married, going to college, etc.

time of trans visibility. Yet we are also living in a time of anti-trans violence (Gossett, Stanley, etl. al., xv).” This paradox of acceptance responded by violence could be now seen with the rise of queer representation in media. Lil Nas X is the first Black queer music artist to break into the mainstream in such a disruptive way. He has broken the record of the longest number 1 hit song with “Old Town Road” surpassing the former number one spot, Boyz II Men. At the same time currently, there has been a rise of anti-gay legislation such as the “Don’t Say Gay” bill signed by Florida Governor Ron Desantis.² It is very evident that we do not live in a queer world yet.

Imagining Utopia Outside of Straight Time

Queerness as a form is a desire to queer form itself or have a special kind of relationship to form (Gonzalez, 274). In the case of Black queer artists like Lil Nas X, this structured mode of desire is a temporal experience tied to resisting the enduring forms of whiteness which enmeshed with heteronormativity. Nevertheless, Lil Nas X’s artistry introduces the possibility of what Black queer music in the music industry could look like in the future, or in connection to Jose E. Muñoz’s *Cruising Utopia*, the future of queer pop and hip hop are just above the horizon. Muñoz defines queerness as a “Structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present.” (Muñoz, 25). Furthermore, queerness is a utopian because it constructs and participates in collective queer desire to create other worlds (Munoz, 47).

² Although this only applies to elementary public schools, I am drawing the connection between the ways queerness is erased both in the music industry and the education system and how these kinds of erasure of mention queerness is heteronormativity itself.

I would like to bring this into conversation with Caroline Levine's concept of formalism to tie in queerness as a form that has shapes and rhythms that transgresses hierarchal forms of gender. Levine argues that institutions themselves are composed of various contending rhythms, and "The heterogeneity and endurance of social rhythms thus invites a new kind of sociocultural analysis, asking us to reimagine the social landscape as characterized by contending rhythms that extend forward and backward in time," (Levine, 52). Forms are constantly contesting for power, and no single one reins ultimate dominance—this includes whiteness. Since institutions are not static structures but relatively consistent reiterations of norms and practices, they necessarily follow temporal rhythms.

Forma De Ser: Forms of Being

Before I begin to draw the connections between queer formalism, and blackness in relation to straight time, I would contemplate on the Spanish translation of form. *Forma*, the Spanish translation of form, appears in various phrases my mother would say to me growing up. As a Dominican Afro-Latinx person, I have learned in which the ways I am connected through blackness though not within the U.S., but the larger Afro-diasporic context. Like many queer scholars, I will also mesh my own personal narratives and offer queer my own queer poems. In the article, "Tragic Queer at the Urinal Stall, Who, Now, Is the Queerest One of All? Queer Theory |Autoethnography | Doing Queer Autoethnography," the authors argue in his autoethnography how even just using personal experience is a queer act in itself (Adams & Bohens, 105). Such that, to inject personal narrative into critical analysis queers the distance between the author, their argument, and their audience to create a different type of intimacy.

As a bilingual speaker, I will be drawing in from my own localized literacies to invoke a non-western conception of form. *Forma de ser* is phrase I hear my mother use when describing someone's character, personality, individual habits, or in literal translation 'way of being'. For example, I detest my father sometimes for the certain beliefs he tries to persuade as ultimate truth. Su forma de ser es bien rígida, y él quiere las cosas en su manera. When he wants things done, he wants them done on his terms. I would lament and complain to my mother about my father's idiosyncratic viewpoints on vaccinations, religion, and world despite having PhD in Spanish Literature. She would respond and say, "Bueno Jaymi eso es su forma de ser." That is *his way of being*. *Ponerse en forma*, another phrase I heard often whenever my mom felt I was slacking off. To put myself into form was an act of discipline, or 'straightening' to repeat these temporal experiences such as attend my studies, dating men, going to prom, and try to live a respectable life to bring their American Dream to fruition. Yet, these ways of being were constraining to me.

The word 'apocalypse' came from the Greek word "apokalyptein" which means to uncover, to disclose, or reveal. Up until roughly the 18th century, the word meant the disclosure of truth. For my father, this meant that the apocalypse was a good thing. It was like he was an oracle, telling me the secret fate of the world as he called the 'end times'. Similarly, in the introduction to *Black Speculative Life and the Music of Other Worlds*, Brown writes about how her interest in utopias emerges from her father apocalyptic visions in which he wrote them down though the end of his life in prison (Brown, 2-3). Similarly, I remembered sitting in his car taking long drives and crossing the Queensboro Bridge, and he would talk about the terrors of this world and that the world was going to

be fixed through the destruction and the second coming of Christ. As a child, I was quite terrified because I liked my life. I had friends, and we played games together. Outside my window the sky was dark. It seemed like a big storm was coming. I imagined a giant green monster outside the car window moving through the sky ripping through buildings and smashing them like toys. I imagined the rapture to be something like that. My father's way of being, is far from how I imagine living out my days. He continuously told me about the end of the world whether I wanted to or not. Natural disasters, war, disease, false prophets. Most often time, it is seen in evangelical Christian literature that acceptance of queer sexuality is a sign of, 'the end times' as sung in MONTERO (Call Me By Your Name) "/>A sign of the times every time that I speak/" (Lil Nas X, 1:27). What Lil Nas X describes is the moral panic that ensued on twitter when Lil Nas X is explicit about his sexuality.

Initially, I believed my father, and thought God instilled me this knowledge for a reason, that there was a teleological destiny waiting for me. Sometimes I am fourteen again and it still hurts me that I had to reject his beliefs and everything he thought he knew about this world. My fate was sealed the moment I could not fit into the daughter he wanted me to be. Sometimes I still see him as the little boy by the mango tree, desperate to find answers from a higher power to help him climb out of the destitute of poverty. The pursuit of knowledge was his labor of love, but these ways of knowing were not enough to address this present moment. I had to reject a predetermined destiny and accept a new life within myself. To experience queer time is to reject everything that you have learned up until the moment you "awaken" In similar fashion to how Straight people throw gender reveal parties to announce the gender of their baby, I must announce this

queering transformation. To come out to western society is something queer people have to repeatedly do in heteronormative spaces. To coming out is to announce my deviancy to society, to mark myself a freak, a queer, a dyke.

In some ways, this may be why I am wary of coming out to my dad. No matter what I say, he will find my sexuality unintelligible. His utopia was my dystopia, and vice versa. My body is only meant for procreation and for the will of God. My sexuality is a deviancy, an error, a temptation, a sin. Yet, I would like to believe that his intentions come from goodness and ignorance. That he too is attempting to formulate a critical hope of a better tomorrow. However, it does not negate the impact that Christian conservative evangelicals that have harmed the LGBTQ community from a place of hatred, fear, and misunderstanding. Straight time, which is bound with the institution of religion, limits and constrains the type of lives Black LGBTQ+ can live. Lil Nas X's debut album is one remedy and is inviting Black queer people to embrace their deviancy in spite of the angered reactions from conservative. There is an invitation to play into the part of the sexual deviant in a campy, ironic way to mimic 'life as theater'. I am interested in studying the ways he queers campy musical and aesthetic forms in a black racialized male body that embodies both the feminine and the masculine in his performance. He makes the artistic decision to proudly claim: Yes, we are deviant and so what?

Defining Black Queer Forms

I would like to argue and define that Black queer form is a distinct sensibility i.e. *habitual way of being* that intersects with the temporal experience of being locked inside straight time while racialized Black. For Black LGTQIA+ people to survive, they must

step outside of straight Time and homonormative ways of being that white cisgender gay men have assimilated into, and they must “fashion a life that is aberrational to the dichotomies imposed by normativities,” (Prichard, 16). Though, in *Fashioning Lives*, Eric Darnell Pritchard talks more about how literacy normativity in Literacy Composition and Rhetoric studies can be constraining in the types of knowledge building that appears in nonnormative subjects, I would like to extend the concept of Black LGBTQIA+ people fashioning themselves as a formal queer practice.

Queerness is a form is a yearning to rebuild outside of the timeline of what was lost or repressed in childhood. Lil Nas X tries to imbue this kind of yearning to his letter to his 14-year old self which explains that, “Montero (Call Me By Your Name),” was based off a guy he met last summer. Our structured desire to decide who and when we get to love outside the temporality of straightness is what creates queer form. To extend that to specifically Black queer forms, it is the restructuring of desire, palette, and taste that fall outside the lines of heteronormative temporalities within forms of whiteness. Moreover, camp as a “way of being” and sensibility as defined by Sontag, can be used as a queer utopian fashioning of form that Black LGBTQIA+ people deploy to resist the temporal repression and oppression of straight time, and the illogical fallacies of conservative moral panic, homophobia and heterosexism.

Black Queer Forms: A ‘Doubling of Excess’

When queerness, blackness, camp, converge in performative acts, there is a doubling of excess. In the article, “Camp Revival, Or the Sissification of the Black Church,” E. P. Johnson connects the forms of camp to the theatrical expression of the Black Christian in the Church. This scholar highlights, “How performance rituals within

the black church are imbued with the theatrical excess associated with camp such that the church becomes a site of non-normative performances of black masculinity such that all the men are queer, all the women are butch queens, but some of us are just “in the spirit.” (Johnson, 30). This doubling can make Black queer people come off as excessively performative when using Black queer vernacular which is often appropriated in mainstream gay culture. When Black queer forms become visible in the mainstream, they become excessively viral and hyper visible. When these memes and Tik Tok sounds of black queer vernacular are retweeted and used by non-black users, these hyper visible camp’d up black performances are reduced to virtual caricatures. When one accounts that when a body is racialized both Black and queer, camp as a form mirrors the way Black people are seen as more animated and expressive than their white counterparts in comedy, satire, and dance performance.

If excess and theatrics can be found within Black traditions of practices and the Queer community, we can rethink camp canon more than just Jon Water’s famous films featuring Divine. By ‘camping’ up Black queer forms, there is doubling of excess in Black queer art. Historically, practitioners of camp were seen as only to be performed by the white cis gay male subject. This same queer subject that is ‘all too gendered, all too raced, all too specific, while claiming to include that otherness which nevertheless excludes,” (Cleto, 18).

In my first chapter, I will be discussing the way in which Lil Nas X queers a desire for form in the music video, “Montero (Call Me By Your Name)” in its full, amateur, campy, fabulous fashioning of queer forms. In Lil Nas X movements between and across gender through drag, the pole ride dance results in Black femininity that

counters the negative images that are often imposed onto cis and trans Black women. In my second chapter, I will highlight the ways in which he queers Black masculinity using hip-hop aesthetics and blurs the lines of the types of queer black male performances in “Industry Baby,” by Lil Nas X & Jack Harlowe. Black queer forms borrow, collide, and rupture while exposing the contradictions of rhetoric that queer people shouldn’t “show of” their sexuality. That even to say the word gay in Florida for the children is too excessive. While at the same time, heterosexual parents bombard their kids with sexualized heterosexuality imagine their 4-year-old boys as up and coming ‘womanizers’. There is a formal and performative transformation within his music videos from *bad* and *bad*. To queer form politically is an alchemy queer people craft to counter the normative literacies that seek to erase them from history. In the third chapter, I will present my own afro-queer poetry in which I respond to these concepts in poetic form.

CHAPTER 2

It's groundbreaking the fact that Lil Nas X had decided right in the height of his career to come out as openly gay Black man. Historically, the act coming out was a huge risk to one's career and there was legislation that had allowed the entertainment industry to force queer people to stay in the closet to maintain their "image". Lil Nas X acknowledges this sentiment that black queer people feel the need hide their full self when he tweeted a letter to his 14 year old self, "I know we promised to never come out publicly, I know we promised to never be 'that' type of gay person, I know we promised to never come out publicly, but this will open doors to many other queer people to simply exist," (Lil Nas X).

"That" gay person" that Lil Nas X tried to repress is what is manifested in his song, and he ends up playing into the part of the theatrical, campy black queer self in the music video, "Montero (Call Me By Your Name)." This unapologetically Black queer campy performance is a refusal to accept the limitations of how queerness can be represented in heteronormative public spaces such as the music industry. Camp as a sensibility plays into the performance of being "too much" or excessive. I would argue that camp creates a doubling of excess when it is performed by black queer subjects. He performs his songs performance artistry a type of queerness that refuses to sanitize itself to please the heterosexual majority in the pop music industry. This is an album that was made for queer people of color by a Black queer man.

I would like to argue then that his internet-breaking music video "Montero (Call Me By Your Name) was the moment in which Lil Nas X broke from his image that

straight audiences had of him. This metamorphic glitching of queerness marks a rebirth in the possibilities in what a pop artist can do. He creates a speculative, utopian world named after himself, *Montero*. These disruptive acts of Black queer forms that he employs in his lyrics, visual aesthetic, and music video through ‘camping it up’ creates an exaggerative performance that is doubly excessive because of how Lil Nas X inhabits a body that is both Black, queer and male.

Reimagining the Black Queer Male Aesthetic Form

Historically, Black men and women were seen as deviant from normative sexualities because of White supremacy. Black men when masculinized are seen as over aggressive, and if they do not affirm their masculinity by claiming to be ‘a man’, then they are dismissed in “their dialogical efforts to engage in hegemonic Black male identity” (Smalls, 89). So, by Lil Nas X embodying both masculine and feminine aesthetic forms, he deviates the norms of the dominant aesthetic form of the pop artist, and the hip hop artist in the music industry while moving across and between these two genres sonically.

His album cover for *Montero* shows a luscious utopian landscape borrowing Greek & Roman architecture mixed with fantastical dreamscapes. *Montero* is both a place, the object of study in the music video and the study, the place being named after the artist’s legal name, Montero Lamar Hill. This excess of citationality being both a reference to the novel *Montero* and his own name is one textual way of signaling the queer trace of camp in his song lyrics and music video.

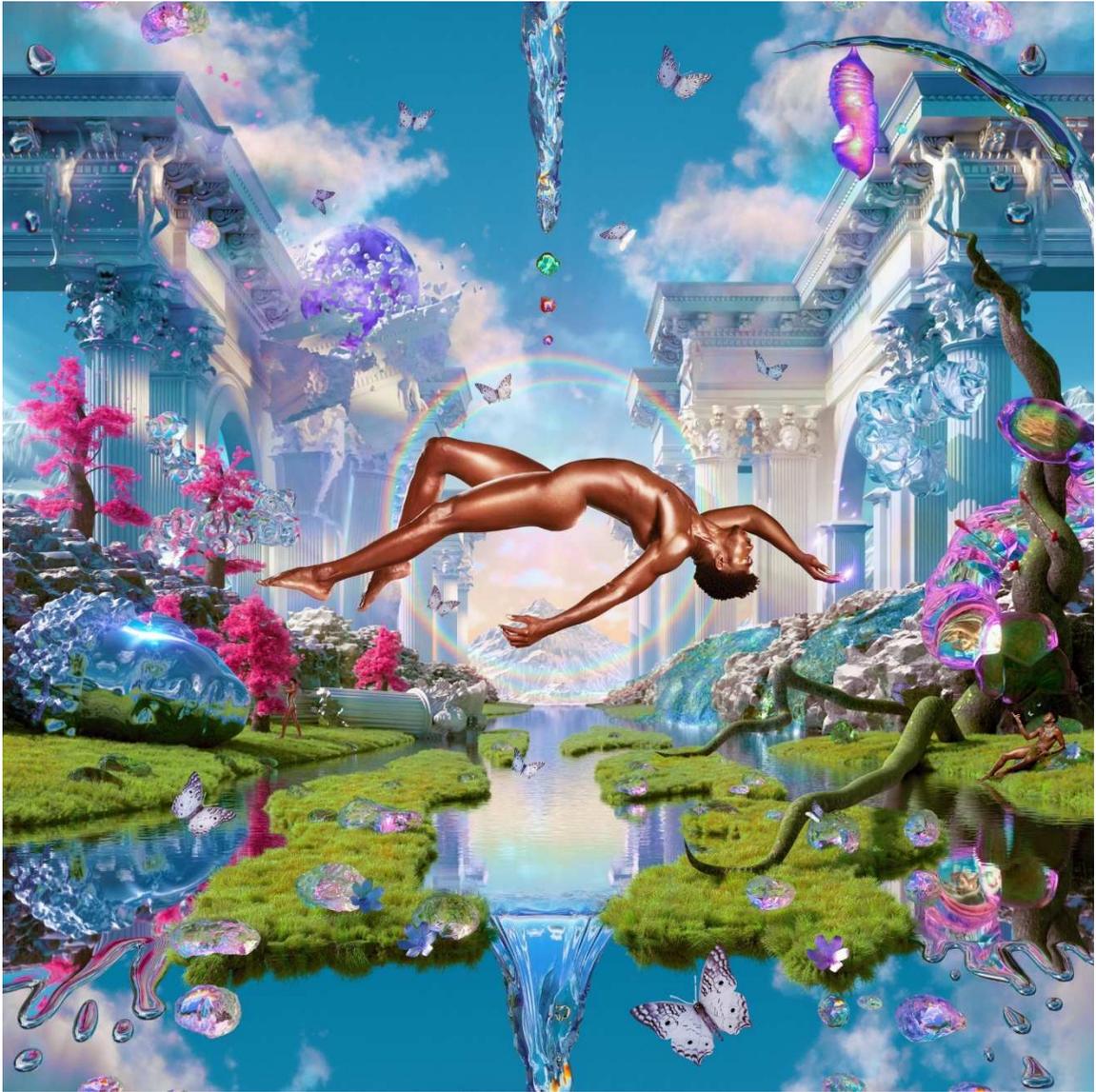


Figure 1: *MONTERO* Album Cover

The cover art of the album *MONTERO* reimagines the aesthetic forms of the Black Queer male body, and where they can exist. Black men are often oversexualized or seen as an aggressor in sexual acts. However, Lil Nas X removes the focus on the phallus and eroticizes other areas of the body such as his legs arms and his whole naked body.

Peter Rehberg argues when discussing the pornographic photos in the magazine *BUTT*, “the pictures in Butt insist on the sexual value of the male body while simultaneously imagining new correspondences for its parts and forms beyond a rigid style of masculinity.” (Rehberg, 168). Moreover, moving away from eroticizing the phallus to other parts of the body not only “opens up space for a different perspective on the body, not so much as an alternative masculinity, I argue, but as a form of male becoming.” (Rehberg, 172). Alternative forms of Black queer male becomings are crucial especially where the pop camp subject is often seen as White queer man, and hip-hop has been historically dominated by straight cis Black men. These rigid formal political boundaries erase the existence of Black queer people just as Lil Nas X who fits neither nor in his genre of music.

He has a build that is masculine, but he wears both feminine and masculine clothing and has openly called himself a ‘power bottom’ in his tweet reply to Kevin Abstract, who both are now confirmed dating (Lil Nas X). This artificial unity of the feminine and masculine I would argue brings a restorative black trans performance of femininity in his fashioning of drag and feminine gestures in his song confessing his love to someone in, “Montero (Call Me By Your Name).” Moreover, I would also like to examine his performative art of trolling in his skits after the Satan Shoe’s Controversy, and his campy rollout and livestream of his debut album *MONTERO*. Performative black queer movements with the destabilizing mode of camp reverses the hierarchy of taste and power, a utopian glitch into alternative new way of beings for gender non confirming individuals.

Lil Nas X represents a queerness that is politically and formally against heterosexual forms—a refusal to participate in the institution of Straight Time. The plenitude of intertextuality in his music videos are never quite unified because it is constantly referencing to other contexts. Levine refers to Derrida to describe this process of his famous concept *differance*, “No work of literature can ever achieve a closed unity, since each word takes on its identity in and through its relation to other traces or marks that are not in fact contained in and through its relation to other traces or marks that are not in fact contained in any given object,” (Levine, 25).

Moreover, I would like to identify the music video, "Montero (Call Me By Your Name) a formal rebirth, or new beginning in which Lil Nas X parts ways with homonormative forms of queerness that is respectable in heteronormative spaces of the music industry. What Lil Nas X reveals about this twitter confession is that queerness is still not acceptable to be displayed publicly in fear that we are “showing off” our sexuality and this may pose a potential threat to children that we may be exposing sexuality to them early. However, the irony is that heterosexual sexuality is heavily present in pop and hip-hop, and it is seen as normal without question in text, visual aesthetic, and performance.

According to *Cruising Utopia* “The parenthetical remarks communicate a queer trace, an ephemeral.” (Muñoz, 69-70). The parenthetical (Call me By Your Name) is formal queer trace that There is something more than just what is present in the here in now. In order to see queerness, one must look beyond the text into potentialities of queer expression/ His hit single is named after his real legal name, but the parenthetical suggests, “Call me By Your name” to call him by your name. The ‘you’ in this title

suggests a possible romantic partner that Lil Nas X is speaking to. Moreover, the journal article “Only Here To Sin” highlights how the parenthetical phrase is a callback to “An allusion to the gay novel by Andre Aciman,” (Carman, 1). This excess of citationality is one feature of camp that I would like to point to. To camp it up means to amplify queer forms to the point of exaggeration.

Although we could sonically suggest that the album is a pop album, we must acknowledge the emerging trend of hip-hop bleeding into the mainstream and becoming popular. The form of a mainstream pop song featuring a rapper can be seen repeated across plentiful of billboard top 100 hits in the last decade or so, and Lil Nas X takes advantage of this with guest features such as Meghan Stallion, Doja Cat, and Jack Harlowe. I will discuss more on Jack Harlowe’s verse in “Industry Baby,” more onto to the next chapter.

The Queering of Origin & Desire: Genesis & the Myth of Narcissus

The music video, “MONTERO (Call Me By Your Name),” queers the story of Genesis within the Afrofuturistic Utopian landscape of this speculative paradise of Montero. I would like to argue there is no distinct origin of a queer identity nor is there an authentic performance of sexuality, but rather a queering of one’s own origin and life story. Even the discrete categories of Gay Lesbian Trans are artificial categories to describe the heterogeneous forms of queerness. Queer form, or the desire to queer form is the intervention that Lil Nas X makes in his letter to himself, in the song lyrics, and music video.

“Montero (Call me By Your Name),” the music video begins with a monologue narrated by the artist himself: “In life, we hide the parts of ourselves we don’t want the world to see. We lock them away. We tell them no. We banish them, but here we don’t. Welcome to Montero.” (Lil Nas X, 00:00-00:15). The ‘we’ that Lil Nas X is referring to is specifically queer people, but most especially black queer people & queers of color. The ‘here’ is what we can call the “not yet conscious” an alternative reality in which queer people don’t have to repress their desires. This is a song about his sexual awakening and escapade with a romantic lover. In the present reality, Black queer people are only allowed to express and perform their sexuality in the private sphere away from public heteronormative and homonormative spaces. Montero is a alternate reality in which heteronormative rules do not apply.

Elan Justice Pavlinich writes in the journal article, “LNX's Acid Trip from Creation to Doom” how Montero, the setting of the music video is a Queer utopia. There is a queering of the narrative story of origin within the Biblical story of Adam and Eve played by a medieval bard and lustful snake. In their words, “But it isn't exactly the Garden of Eden. The inhabitants are not naive and inexperienced. The world is not new. In fact, the landscape is marked by ancient ruins, signified by off-kilter columns, crumbling aqueducts, and two toppled temples that resemble the forecourt of the Pantheon.” (Pavlinich, 1). Queer form draws from archival potential past and uses its gaps and indeterminacies to create utopian possibilities. The uses and meshing of Greco-Roman and Medieval aesthetic forms with fantastical Afrofuturist aesthetics destabilizes the linearity of the history of humanity to a queer time and place where both the past and future can exist simultaneously in this speculative plane.

The alternative origin story of man- using European artifacts and retwisting them into his own liking is how aesthetically there is a queering of the ordering of origin. The bard begins the song with a two chord beat with his pink bedazzled guitar under a tree,

“I caught it bad yesterday/
You hit me with a call to your place/
Ain't been out in a while anyway/
Was hoping I could catch you throwing smiles in my face/”

(Lil Nas X, 00:21-00:30).

What Lil Nas X means by “I caught it bad yesterday,” is that he has caught the love bug, i.e. he has falling head over heels over a person of interest. His lover booty calls him, “You hit me with a call to your place.” Lil Nas X expresses he has nothing to do anyways and he “was hoping I could catch you throwing smiles in my face.” Although there, this is not much textually that signals to queering yet, the music video aesthetics of the blending of Afrofuturism, queerness, and camp show otherwise. You have been an identifier that queer people have used in place of a gendered pronoun to not explicitly disclose the lover. However, as we see further along the music video, Lil Nas X is not interested in coding queerness, but rendering queerness visible beyond the political heterosexual matrix. This structuring of queer desire is not simply a dismantling of heterosexual form, but a transformative form that is beyond the reductive way of looking at Black Art of just simply repeating enduring forms.

The queering of origin begins when the bard is sexually awakened by the serpent in which the kiss that awakenings the bard, played by Lil Nas X, seals his fate. A Greek quote that appears on the tree burns. This is an allusion to Plato’s Symposium which reads when translated, “Now when our first form had been cut in two, each half in

longing for its fellow. Elan Justice Pavlinich gives context to this quote with Greek mythos:

The reference is to Aristophanes' recounting of the mythological origins of love in *The Symposium*, where he posits that humans were originally created as round bodies with two sets of faces, arms, and legs. Because the gods felt threatened by these creatures, Zeus decided to cut these early humans in half, leaving each bisected part to search for the severed partner. This origin narrative of love accounts for diverse sexual preferences, as each subject desires the gender to which they were bound in the early days.

(Pavlinich, 2).

There is a queer gravitation for Greek mythology especially when these stories offer a queering of origin of an alternative structured desire. Aristophanes' recounting of the origin of love opens up to a queering the story of the Bible by making it an allegorical narrative plot of coming out. This allegorical coming out story queers the origin by changing the beginning of queer life for Black gay men not just when one comes out to the closet, but when one is sexually awakened and then introduced to Black Queer formal practices. Another queering of origin story that Jose Munoz points of us too in *Cruising Utopia* a queering of the story of Narcissus and Orpheus. It is well known that Narcissus is punished by falling in love with his own reflection when he rejected the wood nymph. However, what the heteronormative would conclude is this is one form of narcissism, a way of being when one is self-absorbed and obsessed. Munoz, however interprets this as a performance of great refusal to participate in a heterosexual marriage (Munoz, 161). Black Queer performances are acts of great refusal.

Speaking of the uses of self-absorption and narcissism as a form of making fun or displaying mockery, Lil Nas X plays all the characters in this narrative plot of the music video, "Montero (Call me By Your Name)," as well as the skits. This theatricality of

playing all roles in a performance act evokes an affect of silliness and amateurism, but in a way that is purposeful for ironic humor. In the trial scene, Montero is both the judge, jury and executioner (Lil Nas X, 1:15-1:45). Two police officers, played by Lil Nas X are wearing feminine vibrant blue wigs, makeup, and clothing that mimics the aesthetics of bourgeoisie Western European society. The officers escort Lil Nas X, the person set for trial or judgement, is wearing a pink sash shirtless with shorts onto the stand. To have the police in blue while dressed femininely with Lil Nas X, himself in pink reflects the structural incongruity of when a pop music video is queered and ‘camp’d up. Moreover, because Lil Nas X is playing all parts, and he is racialized Black, race intersects and disrupts and transforms the possibilities of what kind of movements a gay black man can perform in a pop song with hip-hop elements.

‘TRANS’-GRESS: MOVING ACROSS AND BETWEEN GENRES AND GENDER

Animated stone versions of himself yell and throw various of items to the accused, one of them being a butt plug (1:43-1:46). These stone versions of himself represent the self-judgement that occurs when one internalized white cis heteronormativity. The butt plug is a utopian glitch in which it disrupts a scene depicted someone being punished in a public space and creates comedic relief. Before the butt plug silences him, he cries out “I want to fuck the ones I envy, I envy.” (1:46). The persona is playing into the idea that queer love is about desiring the self in the other. When Lil Nas X knocks out, his corporeal body is lifted into heaven in which he looks as an angel in the sky.

However, the audience realizes that who Lil Nas X desires is the one who lives in hell, Satan. This transgression creates a moral panic for conservatives as it is ludicrous to think one may want to give a lap dance to the devil. Yet, the Internet Maestro, Lil Nas X is committed to this bit to ‘camp’ up Black queer aesthetic forms and performances. Camp is not only a formal gesture, but also a survival strategy, camp plays between the various elements includes, “Aristocratic detachment, theatricality, ironical distance, parodical self-comitment, sexual deviance, etc.” (Cleto, 6).

. This performative act of pole riding to hell is an allusion to the famous pole dancing sequence in FKATwigs in “Cellophane” in which she performs a pole dance as more of gestural falling to reflect the pressures that she faced when dating actor Robert Pattison. Pole dancing, as an art form is metaphor for the temporal experience of falling in love. This intertextual conversation in the ways that both artists use pole dancing as an expression of their sexuality makes it clear that this is a queering of a love story since FKtwigs is talking about black female sexuality from a straight relationship.

FKtwigs’s performance reveals an affect of pain, loss, and confusion in which FKtwigs moves down the pole in a falling motion in the second act. On the other hand, the affect that Lil Nas X is evoking with this pole ride, is bold, shameless acceptance of one’s own queerness. His hair transforms into a fiery red cornrow, black latex thigh high boots, booty shirts and no shirt with solely tattoos (1:57). The etymology of transgress can be divided up with ‘trans’- meaning across, and ‘gress’ means to step or move. Moreover, His fashioning of feminine hair, nails, while also having a masculine build is his most demonstration of moving across and between gender. As he is riding down to hell in drag he sings,

Call me when you want, call me when you need/
Call me in the morning, I'll be on the way/
Call me when you want, call me when you need/
Call me out by your name, I'll be on the way like/

The repetitive use of the phrase “call me” emphasizes his obsessive desire for his new lover, and that he will do anything to see him. That whenever his lover will call, he will answer even if means riding the pole down to hell. This repetition and excess of the phrase ‘call me’ makes it at the center of his song—his queering of desire. The ‘you’ is a destabilized form that queer people encoded or have identified with to not disclose the gender of the song.

THE ART FORM OF CAMPY TROLLING IN DIGITAL SPACES

I would like to also focus on the reactions, backlash, and memes that were created in response to the music video MONTERO and album rollout. The creation of memes following this viral moment is also mimetic to the ways that call and response function for queer people of color. As I watch showing my cousin, a trans woman this music video she clapped with her acrylic nails “Que perra!” which may translate most closely to “What a Bitch!” Although this may sound insulting, it is actually a term of endearment to signify that they are being *that bad bitch*. This reversal and resignifying of hierarchies of palate taste and power occur with the uses of phrases of “werking” “slaying” to play into the ideas of being artificial, copy, and “Passing and failing to be straight.” These are elements of camp that play into the uses of black queer vernacular.

In black queer campy fashion, Lil Nas X announced the release of his album by doing a photoshoot and releasing photos of his “pregnancy,” and the baby is the album itself. His immaculate conceptions reflect the way he queers pregnancy and queering the idea of immaculate conception. Thinking about this impossible birth echoes to the notion that Mary was conceived while still maintaining her virginity. Lil Nas X is both the father and the mother of this album reflecting the embodiment of the divine feminine and masculine. The incongruity of the possibility male pregnancy is both real and not real: Lil Nas X is not actually pregnant with a baby, but this gender non-conforming performance reflects a material possibility of trans men being able to become pregnant. Although there was criticism about him on twitter not being entirely sensitive to that and treating it more as a costume.

This meta-awareness that this sequence is not real can be seen during the clip “Lil Nas X Gives Birth,” moments before he goes into labor, he expressed pain and that he is going through labored contractions. Abruptly, Lil Nas X makes eye contact with the camera winks while does the “renegade” dance (Lil Nas X, 0:11-0:14). This interruption and pause of acting to talk with the audience themselves could be interpreted as a queer interruption, in which Lil Nas X invites the audience to be in part of the joke. This pause reflects and makes obvious that he is simply acting and playing the role of pregnant Seahorse Dad that is about to give birth to his album. These are outlandish claims, and the outlandishness is part of the bit. The Seahorse Dad represents this impossibility that is also real because trans men could get pregnant.

Before the official release of Lil Nas X’s debut album *MONTERO*, he has been building anticipation of his most ambitious work yet with the release of his singles,

“Montero (Call Me By Your Name)” and “Industry Baby.”. Moreover, his literacies and savviness with social media were mediums in which he was able to market his music video using trolling tactics, and theatricizing his life using camp forms and aesthetics to “make his life the theater stage” This meta-awareness of his artistic persona allows him to poke fun at the hypocrisies and inconsistencies with angered Christian conservatives and homophobes.

CHAPTER 3

In this chapter, I will be focusing on the ways in which Lil Nas X queers the lyricism and performance of hip-hop aesthetics and masculinity while encountering the institutional form of Straight Time. I would like to focus on the queering of Black male masculinity and how Lil Nas X's performance in conjunction with Jack Harlowe's feature demonstrates how present Straight Time and heterosexuality is formally in rap lyrics, and performance. Not only is Black queer forms borrowing and collides exposing the contradictions of heteronormative rhetoric that queer people shouldn't "show of" their sexuality. There is bad and *bad*. To queer form is an alchemy belonging only to queer people that goes against homonormativity and makes the visible queer and in opposition with heteronormative forms.

In, "Montero (Call Me By Your Name)," Lil Nas X was poking fun at the conservatives with his campy whimsical pole ride down to hell. In, "Industry Baby," Lil Nas X is interested in talking to taking shots at the 'old heads' of hip hop who only imagine limiting aesthetic forms of hip hop that mimic hegemonic heteronormativity within the Black hip hop culture. Moreover, to queer the form of hip-hop is a different kind of transgression that Lil Nas X is playing with. What makes the hip-hop community afraid of Lil Nas X is not his proximity to femininity, but his proximity to masculinity. According to Khadija Mbowe in her video essay, "Who's Afraid of Lil Nas X," he turns the trope of the hardened criminal on its head (Mbowe, 14:28-14:36). As mentioned in my previous chapter, Lil Nas X, is forming a new type of male becoming that deviates from the typical representations of Black gay men in pop culture and media. The Black gay male form is stereotypically seen as just effeminate, and flamboyant but Lil Nas X

embodies an alternative Black gay male becoming that step away from the typical representations of Black gay men in media. In other words, he is the verse power bottom we have been waiting for.

Camp'd Black Queer Forms in Industry Baby (Prelude) & Music Video

In the video, "Industry Baby (Prelude)", There is a repeated occurrence of a camp'd up black queer performance similar to the skit "Lil Nas X Gives Birth," and the music video, "Montero (Call me By Your Name)". In the PRELUDE which the scene begins with the title "Nike v. Lil Nas X July 19, 2021" Nas X reenacts a dramatized camped up performance of the controversy and outrage of his infamous Satan Shoes. In queer campy style, Lil Nas X plays all major characters: the judge, the defendant, and the lawyer. What makes this scene ironic, satirical and campy formally is through imbuing the queer sensibilities with camp as "life as theater" by based real events reimagined a fictional skit in order to market and promote his songs and album.

Doing skits, twitter performances, in his musical artistry to market his upcoming album and song releases affords anticipation and repetition in which the audience's attention has now been hooked as algorithms design users to respond to conflict, anger, or things that are generally offensive. The plaintiff interrogates and questions the defendant when they get on the stand, "Ladies and Gentlemen of the Jury. This is about more than just shoes Mr. Nas X, Are you gay?" (00:33-00:41). When Lil Nas X nonchalantly says yes, the jury gasps and he is later sentenced to Montero state prison.

This mocked reenactment of his infamous Satan Shoes controversy as well as his Twitter performance responding to the haters, homophobes, and angry conservative Christians using Black queer forms in the digital space camping it up created a doubly

excess, revealing how ridiculous to be punished in the eyes of law simply for being gay. This satirizing of questioning whether he is gay on the legal stand exposes what the controversy was about. It was not about the shoes, it is about the people's reactions to *who* made the shoes that are outright ridiculous, outrageous. Outrage is something that camp uses as strategy to get the attention of those they are making fun of too. The use of the theater court room can be similarly seen to the John Waters film featuring Divine, in which she shamelessly confesses to murder (Baume, 16:15- 17:06).

The Jail Cell as Enclosure, Queerness As Escape

The music video, "Industry Baby," represents how heterosexual forms i.e. Straight time functions as enclosures signified through the jail cell in the music video, and its narrative plot offers a queer campy escape within these repressive ways of beings. Using forms of camp in conjunction to queer hip hop aesthetics lends song and music video the ability to poke fun in the fear of Cis straight Black men that queer hip hoppers contaminating hip hop as space and expression Black male authenticity. I would like to extend the notion of queerness to denote any nonnormative subject of hip hop. This includes categories such as White male, women, and queer subjects. I would like to focus how Montero Prison as place in which reimagines the ways heteronormativity within hip hop constrains and limits the possibilities in which Lil Nas X can be as an artist. His campy musical black queer performance within the space of the prison demonstrates his refusal to accept what genres Lil Nas X can engage with sonically, textually, and visually.

One element of camp that is heavily visible in the music video, “Industry Baby,” is in its ability to be theatrically, extraordinary, and to be playful in its non-serious tone. With the last 15 seconds of the Prelude playing prior to the commencement of the song, it signals to the audience there is a continuity of narrative in these skits that form his various musical portraits into a cohesive, artificial, chronological work. Lil Nas X does not actually go to jail for his controversy, but he reimagines an exaggerative conservative outrage in which he does go to prison.

Lil Nas X’s prison cell in “Industry Baby,” is a citational landscape of allusions from his rise to fame in the music industry. There is a poster of his BET performance of, “Montero (Call Me By Your Name),” which he performed a kiss onstage, a performance of Black male queer desire. There is also his two Grammys from his single hit Old Town Road. Although many thought after his viral hit Old Town Road he would be just a one hit wonder. He addresses in the song when he sings, “Funny how you said it was the end, yeah/ Then I went did it again, yeah/” (Lil Nas X, 00:27-00:33). However, with the success of his previous hit single, MONTERO he reasserts that his music career has only just begun. He raps about the amount of success he has already obtained and have been recognized by the industry (an enduring institutional form). He raps,

Baby back, ayy/
Couple racks, ayy/
Couple Grammys on him/
Couple plaques, ayy/

(Lil Nas X, 00:10-0:16)

He brags and boasts about he is back better than ever and has managed to rack up achievements and accolades despite this being an “industry baby” in the music industry. This bravado of bagging and boasting of one’s achievements using their pen game is very

notably in hip-hop song lyrics, and he is playing into a type of queer black masculinity that embraces both the feminine and masculine, which transgresses the normative hip hop aesthetic form. Khadjiah Mbowe, in her video essay “Who Is Afraid of Lil Nas X” observes this incongruence in gender performance when calls Lil Nas X putting on a straight’ costume which includes, his grills, tattoos, and his black masculine build, but he is using dance movements like Beyonce would (Mbowe, 15:08-15:25) A queer phallic trace could be found when he grabs the pockets of another prisoner and pulls it inside out (Lil Nas X, 0:20-0:22), as well as a dance number in which Lil Nas X dances butt naked in the shower with his backup dancers (Lil Nas X, 0:34-0:46). The purposeful failure of passing straight in this hyper male aesthetic form is emblematic of his campy overtones of the several dance sequences that occur. When Lil Nas X allows a dancer to twerk on him and /throw it back aye/, in that he treats men in the music video the same way that straight male rappers treat women.

Textually, song INDUSTRY BABY offers a possible window of future alternative queers black masculinity that does not have to subscribe itself to hyper black masculinity, nor is constrained in musical form by homophobia or the rejection of one’s femininity. In the second verse, as he is pumping weights, a masculinized performance saying all the albums he needs to get done

Need me like one with Nicki now/
Tell a rap nigga, "I don't see ya", ha/
I'm a pop nigga like Bieber, ha/
I don't fuck bitches, I'm queer, ha/
But these niggas bitches like Madea/
(Lil Nas X, 1:06-1:14)

If a Black man were to be a Nicki stan such as Lil Nas X, their sexuality would automatically come to question, so by making the claim through his lyrics that he desires

to collaborate with Nicki Minaj rapping, ‘I’m a pop nigga like Bieber, ha/ I don’t fuck bitches I’m queer, ha/. These lyrics positions himself first as a queer pop icon who also meshes rap. One thing to note, the music industry has a tendency to lump Black artists as either into R&B, or Hip Hop hop when that is not necessarily the main sonic element of this album (this happened particularly with Tyler the Creator’s album Igor). In sum, Lil Nas X is queering pop by embuing hip hop aesthetics and musical forms in a way that is not appropriative, but transformative. It is not simply repetition, but a new syncretic artistic sensibility that Lil Nas X has formed which is huge departure from OLD TOWN ROAD.

On the other side, I would like to examine this in tandem with Jack Harlowe’s feature in the song, and his awkward, straight aesthetic form. When Black Queer forms encounter Straight Time, there is a reversal as to what is seen as normal. Because Jack Harlowe is the only white male in the music video, he stands out amongst the rest of performers. In the music video, he is in his own prison cell with the female police officer as he is caressing her body.

Compared to the shock value we received from the shower scene; this is pretty tame. Yet, this inclusion of this section describes the ways that heteronormative sexualities are deemed normal and not questioned as transgressive to the mainstream. Many of the typical responses of moral panic is “what about the children?” Yet heterosexuality is never questioned when it is overtly shown to kids. Although Jack Harlowe is not the ideal representation of the hip hop subject because he is White man, I would like to position Jack Harlowe as both a queer and straight subject. He is queer in the sense that he is queering the possibilities of what hip hop performers could look like

while he is simultaneously, he is reproducing Straight Time through his expression of heterosexual sexuality.

While Lil Nas X seduces a White cop to allow the other prisoners to escape, Jack Harlowe seduces the female cop to get the keys out of his own prison cell. He raps, “And these girls know that I’m nasty (mm)/I sent her back to her boyfriend/With my handprint on her ass cheek”(02:15-02:18). In some way, this queers the genre of hip hop because it allows both kinds of sexualities to exist in the same space, which is MONTERO prison. Not only that, but Straight men like Jack Harlowe, by collaborating with queer artists, affirm that letting queer hip hop express their art doesn’t threaten their own sexuality. All sexualities are accepted in Montero State Prison, and in this place, Straight men can wear pink and be feminine too.

Before this grand queer escape, this final scene is camp’d up through the final dance number in the chorus (02:56-3:21). In no prison escape would there ever be a flash mob dance number. However, here in this utopian prison, There are no cops to stop them from doing a dance sequence with all the other prisoners putting in the *werk*. Here, escape is performed as a celebration and that the victors have won. The police, who are metaphorically supposed to discipline them have no control of the situation. The power of these containers is revealed as fake or not serious as it was quite easy for Lil Nas X to end up escaping by the end of the music video. Neither the hegemonic forms of hip hop nor pop as musical forms will contain him as he moves across and in between these cultural spaces.

CONCLUSION

The future of queer pop & queer hip hop is on the horizon. For Lil Nas X, his career has only just begun. To make such a queer departure earlier in his careers Queers when Queer Time can begin. Although in this work I attempt to define Black Queer forms, I would like to come back from Susan Sontag, when she claims that to talk about camp, it is also betraying it. I want to imagine the possibilities of Black queer formalism as limitless because of the heterogeneity of queerness, camp, and blackness in lyrical, visual, and performative expression. By uncovering the possibilities of who can be the camp subjects, it also opens up the ways in which blackness as a performance can also be an expression of camp because of the ways black queer men are racialized on social media. Although in the beginning of my research I was unsure exactly why Lil Nas X was an artist so captivating to me. I wanted to figure what made the palette of camp so tasteful and also offensive. For whom does it make these campy black queer expressions uncomfortable, and for whom does it give them safe harbor?

For my final chapter, I would like to conclude a reflection on my journey as a poet throughout my academic career and track how many poetry changed or 'queered' throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. I have grown up listening to artists such as Lady Gaga, Beyonce, Nicki Minaj as pop icons, my K-pop stan phase in middle and I have also discovered hip hop later in high school such as Kanye, J. Cole. In each of these scenarios, I have had to negotiate aspects of my identity, yet with Lil Nas X, there is no negotiation between audience and performer, but an affirmation of my own queer Afro-Latina temporal experience coming out during the pandemic. Although Lil Nas X and I have

different gender presentations, I connected in which the ways he presented a restorative Black femininity in his drag fashion and performance.

Moreover, because I had the time during lockdown to think about the possibility that I may have suppressed my attraction to women from a very young age, I wanted to find out once and for all. I had needed to know if this attraction was only theoretical, and to my surprised, I had found a new kind of joy that I am now experiencing for the very first time. I think in listening and entering the utopian world of *Montero*, I felt like there was so much this artist is tapping into, and there are still areas in which I would explore more, which would include the rest of his songs on his album, and the ways that queers genres specifically in his country pop hit OLD TOWN ROAD. This thesis focused more on the departure from this song.

To conclude in this section, I will be presenting poems that I have written throughout my time at St. John's along with new poetry in which I had begun and embraced my queer desire in a shameless way. Much of my earlier work was grounded in social justice from my experience in being in slam spaces which are bound in political activism. This departure and my deliberate decision to try to articulate my queerness reflects what the purpose of my work is. I was very much fascinated by Lil Nas X' fantastical entrance in the music industry. In similar ways I have been called extra, and excessive, 'too much' but there is something healing about engaging with the mode of 'life as theater' as an audience member.

Fragmented Selves

My professor asks me
on how I negotiate my identities
on this campus.

I pause.

I make an observation

Although we are living in one of the most diverse campuses in America
the faculty is still predominantly white

She nods

She then asks
how does that affect or compromise your identity

I divert the question the second time

I did not want to talk about the White elephant in the room
excuse me,
the White professor in the room

I respond
I'm simply making an observation here

Italian girl says it doesn't matter who teaches

since by the third generation
her ethnic group has already achieved being on the Whiteness scale

Now isn't that the American dream?

My real question here
is if you
are my ally
or are you just appropriating activism

It's just so weird
the way you talk about racism

taking the words right of my mouth so all I do is listen,
and teach me about my father's diaspora
'cause what's the harm in having her

speak on behalf of the life I lived
the life my parents left behind
 It's not like they have been doing it
 for the longest fucking time

Like,
 the Constitution?
 % compromise much?

Like,
 Lyndon B. Johnson all about this great society but loved to call the negro with the
hard R

It's like they want to give fancy new words
to describe the oppressor
like heteropatriarchy

Do not give me fancy words
for hurt

I am not impressed by how much you know you are privileged
I do not want to hear your White guilt
I just want to know if we're on the same side

Pretentious white professor at orientations blabs
about how they're hiring more PoC in the English Department
Recommends a class comparing how Trump is as a fascist

as if seeking for Brown seal of approval
like he only sees how Brown I am

Somewhere in this blood there still a reminiscent of a conquistador
For every language class in my highschool we had to draw a picture of a country, or a
particular landmark.

I chose my parent's homeland
La Republica
I chose to draw el parque Colon, still standing en la capital
with the statue of Columbus and Tainos
the Tainos below him
reaching out out to grab him
and there Columbus is
pointing in a direction
like he found something
all I discovered
that my country has not yet unlearned its own oppression.

Do not look at me as if I have no color all

then again, in a canvas painting without color
the canvas is still White
to describe a colorless painting
as
this whiteness takes up all this space

but,

where is there room for my anger?

For you...

I fall in love on my knees
 as though you were a shrine.
I bring apples and my soft neck
 an offering for you to take the first bite.
I will move mountains to see you
 to find my way back to your lips.

And so when I bend down to kiss them
 I will pray
there will be more days like this.

For me,

You are the sun
 when the sun is not around
You are the moon
 that pulls me like water on high tide

Here. Let me show you how I want to be held.

You bring out the pen in me
You bring out the child in me.
The poet in me.

Universe In Flux

It was summer.

The night was young
hungry and restless.

We looked at her popcorn ceiling
as if they were the stars.

Alex scurried from the kitchen
clamored her observation
each fly had a name
with their own distinct movements.

We are small as specks of dust
and as large as galaxies.

Summer had to go home
and leave New York City.

A single red leaf appears
hung by a maple tree.

The grass shivered
when windy days came.

The squirrels bury their nuts
beside a mushroom family burrowed
under a tree.

The bumblebees came to finish the last of the nectar.

The cicadas came to fuck themselves senselessly.

Hurricanes fumbled toward us
yet no trace of disaster.

Life will persist throughout winter.

The Earth is sure to outlive us.

If I can close my eyes tightly
I can hear the native Lenape
traveling through the marshes of Queens
in the 16th century.

Before their disaster came.

Oh, where did the Lenape seek refuge when disaster came?

Oh, where did the Lenape go?

Oh, what seeds they hold.

If We Were A Movie

Sometimes

I think the world was built for us
so let our bodies hunger for each other.

I kissed plenty of bodies
yet the the first time I kissed *you*
I was fourteen again in another life.

Let me enter you
and breathe inside your skin.

We'll interstellar travel into Van Gogh's starry night
and make the moment last eons.

Tell the stars we were here.

To love you, is to love myself a thousand times over

Oh Sunflower

Oh Sunflower
sweet delight

sunday mornings
golden sun

big eyes
wide leaves

Oh sunflower

more days to come

I miss your blonde petals
you hold seeds
a new beginning

Autumn comes
and you droop
but don't fret!

I've come to water you every day
through the winter

Notes on Form

No, I don't want this

White form
this broad form
absent and too general form
abstract form
"universal" form
let's all sing kumbaya form
the form to supposedly sum up all forms

a form in which my tongue
can only fit through
by slicing itself in half

A form I'm tempted by and
"A form": that I cannot see

Birth Day

I was born from the cracked skull of my father
coming out in full fledging armor³.

No womb.
headache

A splitting

painful enough for a God to call the doctor⁴.

To first become alive means to bring forth pain and labor⁵.

Out I came from someone who wanted my destiny swallowed.

Yet I defy the very laws of nature

with my war cry and sword⁶

as a fully grown adult.

³ It was a snowy evening. A long cold night. A cyclone bomb of a snowstorm.

⁴ I wonder how the cold felt like when she was in labor.

⁵ It was probably sharp, reactive, and painful.

⁶ I didn't ask to be born, but I kicked and screamed my way into this life.

Self Portrait of Sappho c. 1895

One hand clutches the heart,
the other on a harp.

Music alone cannot suffice
the utterances of desire.

Is this what they meant by butterflies?

She struggles to articulate
a womanish gaze.

A mouth is more than just a mouth
in the middle of the night.

It is a cavern of echoing voices,
to get their tongues lost.

The poems she plays
does no justice to describe their soft, supple face.

The night was forever,
and now it is just a memory.

Maybe the pained expression is from the longing,
or the fact that

She will never see her again.

Notes On Pandemonium #1

Once I stopped believing the myth
Of the nation-state
Of our “great country”

The artificial drawn boundaries started to dissolve
Formless

There is no country
The U.S. has abandoned our people
since its conception
the birth of a nation
meant the death and erasure
of my ancestors.

They claimed a land
that was not theirs to take

Land is not a property,
but it is a relationship between
us and
Mother Earth

This institution has sentenced us to s l o w death.

There is no kingdom of the sick and healthy
Only dying.

Metamorphosis

Queerness is an alchemy
of colors, shapes, sizes
bodies, thighs, lips, other lips... (I digress)
A fashioning of unlike things

Seeing beauty in the ugly
and transforming the beast into beauty
duckling into swan

It is the transformation
from being bad
to being *baaad*.

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