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Queer monsters, and Bruno & his speaking queers

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QUEER MONSTERS,
AND
BRUNO & HIS SPEAKING QUEERS

A Thesis

by

CHARLES R. MCGREGOR

Submitted to the Graduate School of
The University of Texas-Pan American
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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May 2015

Major Subject: Creative Writing

QUEER MONSTERS,
AND
BRUNO & HIS SPEAKING QUEERS

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May 2015

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ABSTRACT

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This multi-genre thesis spans across nonfiction (Queer Monsters), poetry (Bruno & His Speaking Queers), and fiction (A Queer Empire Named Eden) in an attempt to break down the categorical control the hegemonic powers like to assert over not only the arts, but gender and sexuality as well. The creative pieces are unapologetically polemic tackling queer issues and the newfound surge in acceptance for queers across the United States. The creative works question how far queers should assimilate into a hegemonic system that was built with heteronormativity enshrined as one of its cornerstone pillars. The nonfiction piece tracks the author's own coming out narrative, the poems wrap themselves around the persona character Bruno and his attempts to assimilate into the queer community, and the fiction piece serves as a warning about how opportunists can capitalize off of the queer movement.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to closeted queers participating in the journey towards revealing their real identity.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to my thesis chair, Emmy Pérez, for giving me extensive feedback on the creative writing portion of my thesis. The time she spent commenting on my work went well beyond what was required of her as a thesis chair. Her guidance made me confident that I am presenting something worthwhile. I am also grateful to my thesis committee members: Dr. Jean Braithewaite, and Dr. José Antonio Rodríguez. Their feedback on the craft of my work will ensure that I am presenting quality pieces of creative writing.

I would also like to acknowledge the influence Dr. Mary Pharr, a literature professor at my undergraduate alma mater Florida Southern College, has had on my work. Dr. Mary Pharr's literature courses instilled a passion in me for relishing in the historical epochs that each literary movement belongs to. Most of the historical references in my creative writing are greatly influenced by the holistic approach she brought to teaching each age of literature

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CHAPTER I

CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

Rationale for a multi-genre thesis

The MFA Creative Writing program at the University of Texas-Pan American is unique in how it allows its students to dabble in multi-genre workshops and form & theory classes. In my own particular case, I have participated in nonfiction and poetry workshops and am including both of these typically distinct genres in my thesis. The diversity of genres in this thesis is a testament to the university's allowance for genre experimentation. If I were limited to crafting a single genre thesis I do not feel like I would be expressing the full spectrum of the body of work I have created during my time in this program.

My attempt to break down barriers in genres is not an unprecedented fight in the field of creative writing. C. W. Truesdale's in his "Publisher's Preface" to *The Party Train: A Collection of North American Prose Poetry*" (1996) compares the struggle between prose poetry and poetry with the early twentieth century struggle with free verse and traditional verse and how "many people (most of them editors of magazines, unfortunately) thought free verse merely a bastardized prose that had no place in the world of 'poetry'" (xix). This precedent is not only limited to in-fighting within poetic circles, but from forms of poetry (i.e. prose poetry) crossing the borders of prose and visa-versa (i.e. flash fiction). Walt Whitman felt this disdain for genre border crossing in his own work and called for an end to the manic ghettoizing of genres in his

essay “Notes Left Over” (1892): “In my opinion the time has arrived to essentially break down barriers of form between prose and poetry” (143).

Whitman and other queer poets have a particular stake in resisting a hegemonic canon that is bent on categorizing not only genres, but every aspect of our lives. This issue extends beyond literature and seeps into problems with queer issues and society’s obsession with categorizing gender and sexuality—an exercise in futility since both gender and sexuality can be fluid (often on a minute by minute basis) and extend into infinite possibilities. The inclusion of multiple genres is my way of revolting against this idea that we must define and concretely categorize genre, gender, sexuality, or any other areas of our lives that are prone to exploitation. If artists and queers adhere to wearing visible badges about every aspect of their lives, then the ruling class will always know where they stand under the construct of the “superstructure.”

Genre, gender, and sexuality all fall under this umbrella of the “superstructure” in the Marxist literary criticism tradition; therefore, all three categories run into similar problems when at odds with the ruling class’s definitions for the “superstructure.” Renowned Marxist literary criticism expert Terry Eagleton in *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (1976) describes the “superstructure” as the method the ruling class uses to exert power over the proletariat (5). Eagleton describes the “superstructure” as containing “‘definite forms of social consciousness’ (political, religious, ethical, aesthetic, and so on)” (5). The designation of genre and where it can and cannot go falls under the designation of “aesthetic”; the designation of gender and sexuality, and what it is and is not, falls under the designation of “ethical,” and this designation is further influenced by “religious” and “political.” Gender and sexuality are legitimized only by what the ruling class deems as ethically palpable during their governance (which is why, for example, workplace protection for gays and lesbians currently has more political thrust than that same

protection for trans people, intersexed people, or other hard-to-define genders/sexual orientations). Fluid definitions of genre, gender, and sexual orientation are not ideal for ruling through Eagleton's idea of "social consciousness" since the ruling class has difficulty pinpointing where to begin their control on the conversation. As a result, resisting concrete definitions in genre, gender, and sexuality is important to me as a writer in my attempt to move beyond a hegemonic-controlled discourse.

While the structure of multiple genres in this thesis is politically motivated, the two genres also unify through the content of the pieces where I address what José Esteban Muñoz in his book *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (2009) terms as the problematic "here and now" issues within the queer movement (n.pag). Muñoz suggests we take a more "then and there" approach that looks forward to a queer futurity and counters the "devastating logic of the world of the here and now, a notion of nothing existing outside the sphere of the current moment, a version of reality that naturalizes cultural logics such as capitalism and heteronormativity" (n.pag). Religious oppression, coming out, and problems with the conservative notion of "traditional family values" are all themes in my opening nonfiction piece and the first section of poems, which are Muñoz's "then" problems that we must reimagine when looking forward to a future queerness. The pieces move on to problems with queer assimilation into a system that wants to profit off of queer identity; a system that has an unhealthy view of the body and is obsessed with branding personalities. These latter issues are encountered in the last two sections of the poetry collection. They act as warnings against Muñoz's idea of being stuck in the "here and now" of queer issues.

The problems of “here and now” queer issues

The queer issues I tackle in my works not only take aim at critiquing the typical hegemonic structures that oppress queers, but also warn about assimilating into “here and now” queer politics when the inherent system needs to be restructured. As Muñoz in *Cruising Utopia* notes, the problems in the system will merely reinvent themselves around the integration of queers without addressing any of the system’s inherent problems: “Straight time tells us that there is no future but the here and now of our everyday life. The only futurity promised is that of reproductive majoritarian heterosexuality” (n. pag). Judith Halberstam gives an example of this problem in her book *In a Queer Time & Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (2005) in relation to hate crimes by white males and how they are depicted by the media “as random acts by disparate individuals” without considering the problem of “the construction of adolescent white hetero-masculinity itself” (126). Effective queer futurity would deal with a particular hate crime case by looking beyond the “here and now” politics of the immediate situation (i.e. gun advocacy, availability of mental health services, etc.) and dissect the idea of the problematic construct of the hetero-masculine male.

An example of a “here and now” issue in my creative thesis is marriage equality. This is not to say that marriage equality is not an important issue as it affects a lot of queers in significantly financial and emotional ways. The poem “Bruno Speaks: Dynamics and the Right to Fail” ends by reaffirming this position reminding the reader that even though the marriage fails between the two characters, they still should have the right to participate in the sheer act of a failed marriage:

The cathartic divorce
and ink on paper.

The breath in

and the breath out
knowing he was a marble David
and what followed paled.

A refund on the funeral plot—
an exercise in the right to fail.

This poem laments everything that went wrong between Bruno and the twink during their marriage from the first stanza up to the penultimate stanza. However, the final stanza is a slight shift in tone from the rest of the piece as Bruno takes refuge in the fact that they are able to participate in the failure of marriage like everybody else.

While queers should have the right to marry, I do feel that the queer movement should not be overinvesting in an issue where the very nature of the institution is a state construct, flimsy, and falls apart more times than not (legally and/or emotionally). Marriage through the state is a hetero construct that has benefited the white male for the majority of the institution's history. The very power dynamics of a state sanctioned monogamous relationship leaves open the possibility that one person will be in control over the other person if the disadvantaged person feels like they are not an equal to their partner (physically, intellectually, financially, and/or emotionally). Only less than half of the states currently have what is called a "no-fault divorce" law. Divorce attorney Caroline Choi in her *Huffington Post* article "Divorce Confidential: A Cheating Heart and Its Role in Divorce" (2015) talks about how in a no-fault state like California "a spouse seeking a divorce has no obligation to prove that the other spouse did anything wrong" (n.pag).

In my nonfiction piece, I note how Momma "began shrewdly documenting the handful of times he'd [Vincent] visit me" mounting a case for child abandonment. The sheer fact that my mom was obliged to document her case instead of having the freedom to leave him through a "no-fault" claim shows that marriage is still not a desirable institution to blindly assimilate into.

My mom was not permitted personal and financial autonomy from my dad until she could prove that she had a right to leave the institution tilted in favor of my dad's situation—a situation tilted in favor of the white male that still on average makes substantially more money than males of color and females. “Here and now” is questioning the right to marry; “queer futurity” is reimagining the inherently heteronormative institution of marriage and amending the power levers that are built into the current setup.

The futurity of queer oppression

Christianity is a big theme of the early sections of my creative thesis. Christianity has been a source of how I learned to interact with community, yet is the force that made me delay and feel ashamed about displaying my sexuality. Natasha Trethewey's book *Native Guard* (2006) is a good example of a collection of poetry that deals with a culture the author is a part of (and reveres at times) in Mississippi where the history has been blatantly stacked against her through systematic racism. In the poem “Pilgrimage”, the speaker visits a Confederate battlefield and describes this uneasy dance with her homeland: “In my dream, the ghost of history lies down beside me, / rolls over, pins me beneath his arm” (34-5). On the one hand, she lies down with the history in a very intimate way, yet is pinned down by it feeling its oppression.

Trethewey's complex relationship with the South parallels a similar sentiment I feel with Christianity. I am repulsed and indignant in my nonfiction and poetry about the harm its homophobic doctrine has done to me and continues to do to me. However, Christianity is still part of me; it is what I grew up with and is where I learned how to build community relationships. In fact, I take a little pity on religion in the poem “For the Loss of Hymnals”, which is one of my more confessional pieces. In this piece I lament the fact that I have become a non-believer without an alternative: “to sing again, to really sing and not be indebted / to a

university that spoiled the ending / and dropped me off at firehouse steps.” I miss the community aspect of religion and, as this piece indicates, the safety of believing in something that takes care of my afterlife.

At the same time, my poetry does not permit Christianity the gravitas that it demands from others. The opening poem, “The Sermon of Endurance”, includes homoerotic overtones foregrounding the conflict of an adolescent queer stuck in a conservative church. In the poem, Bruno recognizes that the idea of queerness is labeled as wrong in the community not so much from a scriptural standpoint, but from how it clashes with the hetero-masculine culture of the church:

He can't place the sin,
but knows he is wrong. Perhaps that *pansy*
quarterback on the other team? The vehemence
is pungent like Sunday barbeque sauce.”

My attempt to rework religion into my queer poetry takes its cues from poet D. A. Powell. In an interview, conducted by poet Christopher Hennessy, Powell talks about why he inserts Christianity into his poetry: “I realized one could project into the Gospels just the way one could project oneself into a film scenario, for example.” (145). In the same way, I write Christianity into my works by using its iconography as an extended metaphor for the struggles and desires of the speaker in “The Sermon of Endurance.” I utilize the parts of Christianity that I find useful to fit my own queer agenda much like conservatives and homophobes use the Bible to fit their own particular agenda.

Family and their fervent hope to keep me (nonfiction) and Bruno straight is a symptom of Christian oppression and is something my works explore. In the nonfiction piece it comes with the duality Christianity forces us to think of in terms of good or evil not permitting the gray area of fluidity. My father's closeted queerness is certainly at odds with what is expected in a good

versus evil Evangelical worldview where any shade of queerness finds itself cast as evil. The following passage from my nonfiction piece is my explanation of why I think my mother reacts the way she does when shades of queerness invade her space:

One night Momma came home from work. Vincent was in Momma's white wedding dress passed out on the couch. I imagine Momma cried. I can't imagine anyone not crying if they were told one thing about the natural order of life most of their life by a composed priest or pastor, and it ended up being wrong.

The church reinforces this dual ideal that is at odds with the fluid reality of sexuality and gender. Alison Bechdel in her graphic memoir *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* (2006) notes the reality of this fluidity and how it applies to her and her father's notions of queerness: "It's imprecise and insufficient, defining the homosexual as a person whose gender expression is at odds with his or her sex. But in the admittedly limited sample comprising my father and me, perhaps it *is* sufficient" (97).

In my poems, the fluidity of Bruno comes with guilt and secrecy that forces my speaker to hide from himself. CA Conrad in *The Book of Frank* (2009) does something similar with the interactions with family and his persona character in the collection, Frank. In the following untitled poem, Conrad shows how Frank's exploration of sexuality conflicts with the mother's conception of sexuality:

"Mother!" he yelled
"why don't you
teach me to dispose
of my shell like
other healthy young birds!"
"because you're a boy!" (14).

In these persona poems, Frank is dissatisfied with one gender/sexuality. Young Bruno and Young Frank have a similar outlook when considering the battle between what is prescribed vs. what they feel. In my poem titled “Living Room Refuge”, Bruno experiences the same curtness when interested in domestic work that the conservative family structure does not prescribe to men: “The men scatter swatted off with indignant bellows from the kitchen—the joke turns earnest / when addressed to Bruno.”

Repurposing the current hegemonic structures that have plagued me throughout my childhood allows me a space to imagine a future queerness that intersects with religion and family—my particular queer vision and not the vision of what this means in the old structures. I have identified these obstacles in my nonfiction piece and the first section of my poetry with the hope that one day I will be able to repurpose religion and the conservative notion of “traditional family values” into my own queer future.

Resisting assimilation

The second section of poetry is where I deal primarily with issues of assimilation into a problematic system. The poems are meant to be cautionary tales showing the importance of not allowing identity to be defined by outsiders, well-meaning liberals, and/or financial opportunists. Janet Mock in her memoir *Redefining Realness: My Path to Womanhood, Identity, Love & So Much More* (2014) talks about how her dad is marginalized when other groups take over his identity process:

He was no longer just our father; he was his own person, with an identity and label and body separate from his relationship with us. He was someone who was judged outside of the lens of fatherhood, outside of our connection. When he was in the streets, he was not Dad. He was Charlie the crackhead. (56)

In the case of Mock's father, the identity slipped out of his hands and was formed by this familiar trope the hegemonic system perpetuates about the black, inner-city father. Mock recognizes that owning identity is not only important for queers, but for non-queers of colors, like her father, that have been marginalized by the oppressive cataloguing of identities. Queers and other marginalized minorities need to make sure we avoid these constructed tropes and own our conversation about identity not allowing it to be limited, categorized, or chosen for us. We cannot take for granted that what others say exists and take into account that there is a spectrum of infinite possibilities for our identities that we may not have encountered yet. The following sentiment that Walt Whitman's speaker expresses in this excerpt from "Song of Myself" is still the type of fresh perspective we should be looking forward to when considering identity: "You shall no longer take things at second or third hand, / nor look through the eyes of the dead, nor feed the spectres in books, / You shall listen to all sides and filter them for yourself" (35-7).

In the third section of my poetry Bruno is no longer content cheering for his queer community or waiting on what he should be cheering for; his discontent with American liberals is his discontent with intellectual oppression. The second and third sections of my poetry relate to what Muñoz is talking about in *Cruising Utopia* and why we should not overinvest and mindlessly cheer for the "here and now" of queer politics. My pieces in the third poetry section attempt to show why we should be finding Muñoz's idea of utopia and the futurity of queerness for ourselves instead of buying into the talking point laid out for us.

Queer topics in film and television are examples of how the superstructure is trying to take over queer identity. The result of the superstructure owning these storylines is non-queers talking on our behalf, or queer identities speaking on behalf of other queer identities (i.e. RuPaul Charles, a self-identified male crossdresser, speaking about trans issues). Even if their intentions

are good and how they articulate the issues are helpful, we cannot allow the discussion to fall into the hands of non-queers. Queers as far back as Oscar Wilde knew the power of the celebrity in any medium of art. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the painter, Basil Hallward, points out in the following passage how art and branding the artist's personality are essential in Western culture: "I sometimes think...that there are only two eras of any importance in the world's history. The first is the appearance of a new medium of art, and the second is the appearance of a new personality of art" (9). Once a celebrity is branded as a queer character, it is hard for the general audience to find any fault with their stance on queer issues. An example of this occurred when celebrity personality RuPaul defended his use of transphobic slurs on his popular reality television series *RuPaul's Drag Race*. On comedian Marc Maron's *WTF Podcast*, RuPaul had the following to say about trans people enduring the transphobic epithets from his show: "But don't you dare tell me what I can do or say. It's just words. Yeah, words do hurt... You know what? ... You need to get stronger. You really do, because...if you're upset by something I said, you have bigger problems than you think."

In most cases, the superstructure's spokespeople on these issues are not going to be this blatantly antagonistic. Nevertheless, our obsession with celebrities does mean that older queer characters in film and television are more than likely going to be played by straight actors and actresses since open queers were barred from Hollywood as late as the latter half of the last century. Furthermore, Hollywood is still having problems branding queer actors and actresses. According to a survey conducted by M. V. Lee Badgett, Jody L. Herman, and the Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists union (SAG-AFTRA), 45% of lesbian and gay respondents believe that studio executives are of the opinion that lesbian, bi, and

gay performers are less marketable than heterosexual performers in both hetero and queer roles (7).

The few queer actors that are branded well are typically white males and are about their relationships with each other, hetero females, or hetero males. Halberstam in *Queer Time and Place* talks about the dynamics of the queer male with others in television and how such scenarios have not been explored in the same way with lesbians:

New bonds on television between gay men and straight men (*Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* and *Boy Meets Boy*) only solidify a general recognition of the important contributions made by gay men to popular culture. Still, there is no such recognition of the influence of lesbian queer culture, and there is no relationship between lesbians and straight men. (125)

While white male queers have the privilege of integrating their experiences into current mainstream media outlets, the same opportunity does not exist for female queers considering the current entertainment industry has been built on primarily showcasing the male experience or satisfying the male gaze.

Many of my later poems tackle problems with others branding queer issues. In the poem “A Divergent Queer: Behind the Dancing Shadows”, the character Bruno speaks directly about the idea of losing control of queer identity:

All I can see
is the shadow of people

dancing in film
projected on cave walls
until I forget who I am.

A comedian? A victim? A photo-
shoot? The gays
are so shady—

we have to be. This image
is a symmetrical brand

The reference to Plato's *The Republic* where film is being projected off of cave walls to its citizens suggests that we are being told what the debate is. The tropes of queer topics filter through the mediums of comedy and/or spokespeople with the "ideal" body. The latter is problematic considering the current ideal image for heterosexuals and queers is an unhealthy standard physically and mentally. Assimilating into this culture is destructive for queers that are and will be killing themselves (figuratively and literally) to reach this ideal. In the poem "The Entrée", Bruno experiences his own image crisis after realizing in "Beautiful People" that his queer community is very image-centric. The omniscient speaker of the poem acknowledges Bruno's epiphany in "The Entrée": "Before the restaurant opens, Bruno must learn to be attractive by creating favorable odds / to be selected over the other menu items." The idea of Bruno and his queer counterparts being compared with cuts of food takes cues from twentieth century feminist artists, like Carolee Schneemann in her iconic visual piece *Meat Joy* (1964), that draw the comparison that body is a mere commodity reduced to satisfying the appetite of the male gaze. If queers assimilate into this culture and a multiplicity of queer identities become desirable, then the mainstream gaze will be looking to consume destructive straight and queer body images.

The evolution of voice

The queer characters from my stories experience varying degrees of how their stories are told. In the overall arch of this creative thesis, the queer narratives begin with queers not owning their story. This fact is certainly true in the nonfiction piece where Vincent has no control over how his queer narrative unfolds. From a practical standpoint, this is because Vincent is dead and

no longer has a literal voice to contribute. However, the idea of his queer narrative being constructed by others is a process a lot of queers have had to endure. Gossip is the primary construction of Vincent's queer narrative—gossip from me, gossip from Momma, and gossip from Gabriella (my girlfriend during that time). The following passage is an example of how one of Vincent's potential queer experiences comes to life in the nonfiction piece: "Gabriella told me that Momma told her about a time Vincent's sexuality could be questioned. I always wondered why Momma felt compelled to tell Gabriella about this—perhaps a warning of what to look out for?" This experience goes from Vincent to Momma, Momma to Gabriella, Gabriella to me, and me to the reader. Along the way there is the distinct possibility that this story got altered. I purposefully include Gabriella's version of Vincent's experience to show the reader how a problematic construction of a queer narrative takes place when it slips out of the hands of the original queer.

In the poetry collection the voice switches from third person omniscient to first person. The third person omniscient voice is very prominent in the religious poems of the first section as it is purposely godlike when dictating the action. In the second section, the third person omniscient voice is also included in the poems where Bruno is dealing with a crisis in body image and contemplating marriage. All these third person poems include moments where Bruno is not in control, whether it be in the Evangelical community or in his new queer community that he is attempting to assimilate into. An example of the latter occurs in the poem "Beautiful People" where the narrator relays the shame Bruno has in a very absolute way: "Bruno thinks of his sugar heart thumping / in his neck. He is ashamed / to be searching for his toes." The narrator is relaying the feelings of Bruno in a very abstract and distant way not indicating what specifically Bruno is thinking, but telling us about the abstracted feeling of shame he is feeling as

a result of this crisis in body. Bruno is still not in control of his own queer narrative as an outside force is telling the reader on his behalf.

In all of the sections there are poems that include first person narration from Bruno or other queer characters. In the first section, the voice arises when Bruno's exploration of sexuality conflicts with his Evangelical community's ideals. In the second section, the voice arises when Bruno's idea of queerness conflicts with queer community's assimilationist ideals about queerness. However, the first person voice in the third section is where Bruno's own ideas about queerness become very apparent—he becomes resistant to the talking points of queer politics and takes aim at his supposed allies. The following passage from “The Audacity of Demands” is an example of how Bruno's voice really starts taking ownership of his idea of queerness and becomes unabashedly polemic:

Acceptance is the new oppression. A mouthing cock,
a party favor. In ribbons and bows we pop
out of plastic closets. They exclaim satisfaction, a

I've always loved the gays. They're so adorable.

In this passage, Bruno notes how assimilationists are falling prey to allies profiting off of our narratives. He also mocks the allies proclaiming how they have always been in support of queer issues considering that supporting queer issues has only recently been a chic cause in the mainstream. This new first person voice of Bruno is much more forward and confrontational than the other sections where Bruno is still figuring out how to make sense of his queerness.

The importance of accessibility and interpretive potentialities

The poems in this creative thesis are very polemic when dealing with queer issues. As a result, the poetics in this creative thesis tries to balance containing a degree of accessibility while allowing the reader to experience interpretive potentialities. These two qualities seem to be at

opposite poles, but I hope my poems can find a middle ground as both qualities are important for marginalized groups to experience in literature.

Language poets are an example of a group of poets that offer their readers full liberty in experiencing unlimited interpretive potentialities, yet sacrifice accessibility in the process risking alienating the populist audience that it attempts to reach out to. *Poets.org* in their article “A Brief Guide to Language Poetry” (2004) talks about how the poetics of the language poets attempts to “involve the reader in the text, placing importance on reader construction” (n. pag). As poets we must keep in mind that didactic poetry does have dictatorial tendencies. Value exists in allowing a reader the opportunity to construct meaning from a text—a liberty that can be very disorienting for them in literature, yet allows them to come to interesting solutions that we may not even had intended to write. I believe there are many paths towards marrying accessibility with interpretive potentialities, but in my own particular case I achieve both by writing as a lyrical poet with narrative tendencies. I believe the cadence of the lyric and the vehicle of narration provides access towards interpretive avenues that audiences may not normally be willing to venture on.

An example of this occurs in my poem “Bruno Begs For His Submission.” In this poem I end with a line that borders on being opaque or full of interpretive potentialities. After seeing the photo taken of him, Bruno’s twink responds by saying, “*No, that is not the picture I want of me. Not at all.*” The intention for this line is as a metaphor for the twink to resist Bruno’s construction and ownership of his image, thus resisting being objectified. However, the line does not say this overtly and has the potential to go somewhere much more interesting than my original intention for it. While this line has interpretive qualities to it, I have worked hard to make sure the reader is completely orientated with what is going on up to this point in the poem. However, if I were writing in the spirit of the language poets, I might try to attempt to convey

this feeling of being objectified by the twink outside the realm of a linear construction of narration. Instead, I would be presenting the language and rhetoric around this idea of objectification and allow the reader to make what they will of it. I like the intention behind this idea of liberating the reader, yet sacrificing accessibility bars a reader used to the conventions of a linear narrative to ever arrive to the idea of objectification existing within the queer community. While language poets will tell you that their work is accessible, sometimes their poetry cannot be fully appreciated if the reader is not aware of the movement's intended purpose, the study of linguistics, the study of rhetoric, and other subjects stewarded by the intellectual elites at universities.

Furthermore, unabashedly proclaiming my opinion on political issues in a clear and forward way exposes potential readers/writers to the idea that their own experiences/opinions are worthy of study, which is particularly important for readers/writers belonging to marginalized groups to see examples of. I reject the notion that I cannot say anything because language belongs to the hegemonic powers. I have strong opinions about the direction of the queer movement and there are times where I need to express these feelings in a very forward way through whatever vehicle of language we all have access to. An example of this occurs in the previously mentioned poem "The Audacity of Demands" where I open the poem with the following line: "Acceptance is the new oppression." This line is an idea that I do not want to be interpreted in multiple ways because the problem needs full exposure.

Raising these issues of queer assimilation has value in directly accessible ways and through interpretive potentialities. While seemingly opposing qualities, I believe the two can and must intermingle in activist poetry.

Resisting blind assimilation

In conclusion, all the pieces in this thesis reflect the concerns I have with queer issues that I have faced and will have to face. They begin with my struggles of coming out and growing up in an intolerant system that represses my expression of sexuality. The recent shift in how the mainstream views, treats, and thinks about queer people is encouraging. However, assimilating into a problematic system built with the cornerstones of intolerance, elitism, sexism, racism, and homophobia is not something we want to blindly dive into. I hope that my works raises awareness for the need to question how far we are willing to integrate into a system that was and still is stacked against us.

CHAPTER II

QUEER MONSTERS

The authorities said Vincent's corpse ballooned and yellowed after lying on the floor in his den over the weekend. Vincent was my biological father. They advised us to do a closed casket ceremony. I went to his house to collect important documents after they hauled him away. The mini-fridge in his den, to my disappointment, did not have a twenty-four pack of Natty Light.

On his cedar desk was a yellow-paged Bible. Old coins about to be sold on eBay were scattered across the floor. A table was overturned as if Jesus had just visited the temple.

His dog was not there. Vincent had found the dog at his work. He named him Snot. Snot had cancer and was about to die, but Vincent couldn't put him down. The authorities told Vincent's father, Roger, that they picked up Snot earlier and if somebody was interested they could pick him up. Nobody was interested. I think Vincent probably couldn't take another loss and needlessly prolonged the dog's life. A year earlier his second wife (not my biological mom) died. He called and asked if I'd come to her funeral. In the message he said she thought a lot of me, or something cliché like that. She did treat me well on my bi-weekly visits to their house, but I didn't return his call. I didn't go.

Momma sees the best in most people. "Nice" is her favorite adjective to use. Just like her, I don't believe in monsters. I slept with Momma until I was twelve, so I had no need to. I told a

cynical friend of mine that I didn't believe anybody could be a monster. He laughed and cited Stalin, which is to be expected. I couldn't respond to him. I didn't know Stalin.

After the funeral in Trinity, FL, Momma and I drove down to Ft. Myers, FL to spend time with her family, the Monahans. I'm not sure why it was so important at the time, but I felt like I should prove to Momma that Vincent wasn't a monster during that car ride. They had been divorced for twelve years in 2012, the year of his death, so I was closer in memory to the good in Vincent than she was.

I believe I could have made the case for Vincent after long, serious discussions with Momma. Our ritual of taking out the old floral china for every Sunday meal would be comforting; one of the purple flowers swirling around the trim would make a good focal point for me to focus on. Yes, taking the time to build a case for Vincent would be the reasonable thing to do, but during our trip to Ft. Myers I felt opportunistic. I was at the height of being a sympathetic figure and believed that the car ride would also be the right moment I could come out. I could couple my queerness with Vincent's own repressed sexuality.

Momma is a nice person. She'd probably cry if I came out. Perhaps there would be a surprise visit from Pastor Ramsey holding an armful of literature shortly afterwards. However, a shunning wouldn't happen. Ties cut from my financial safety net probably wouldn't happen. Momma is a nice person. Vincent wasn't a monster and deserved to be remembered better; we could play the role of sympathetic figures together.

Vincent drank a lot.

Vincent also did cocaine. I tried cocaine. I liked it. I astutely pointed out to my friend Joe that it was the epitome of capitalism. He nodded. I felt like he didn't understand. I said it makes

you want more. I figured he could fill in consumptive behavior between the lines. He nodded. It wasn't that good a metaphor.

I went to Hooters after they hauled Vincent away. Vincent and I went to Hooters a lot. In New Port Richey, Florida there is a Hooters that is built on the docks of Tampa Bay. If New Port Richey had money there would be yachts in this dock. If New Port Richey had money there wouldn't be a Hooters at this dock.

During one particular evening at our Hooters I was dating someone I love at the moment, but resented at the time for being my beard. Her name is Gabriella. She is big, strong, and muscular. Big, strong, and muscular women are hard to come by. I liked to be held by them, but Gabriella preferred to be held. Vincent met Gabriella during one of my biweekly visits. The idea of me having a girlfriend always shocked and unsettled him. Perhaps he didn't like the reminder that he was missing out on another major event in my life, or perhaps the idea of me dating a female didn't seem natural to him. After meeting Gabriella he gave me some advice at our Hooters. I recall a big breasted woman swishing past us in her orange nylon shorts as Vincent said the following:

“Chuck, you are young. Meet a real babe. I mean a *real* babe.”

Vincent had been drunk for sixty-two years. That probably isn't true because he would've been dead a lot sooner. If I had to guess how long he had been drunk, maybe it was a fifth of that time. Still, that was a long time. He drank Natty Lights like tap water.

My first blow job came after throwing up once from overdrinking. His name was Joshua. He was a Christian. He asked me about AA again. He wasn't out either. He was crying because my head was in his toilet bowl again. He was also drunk. He reminded me of Vincent, who also

cried a lot when he was drunk. Joshua vowed I would be alright. I don't remember the blow job too well, or how I was clean enough to receive a blow job. Perhaps Joshua bathed me and then blew me. I haven't been drunk as long as Vincent, but I'm catching up.

I felt anxious to get to Ft. Myers. I imagined peace on the other side of this trip. I imagined losing the weight of the millstone and bringing boyfriends over for coffee in china. I'd love to have the extra company on those Sunday mornings while preparing lunch for Momma while she is in church. After lunch, Momma would mock protest about clearing away the dishes like she always does, but my beau and I would take care of it. Then we'd break out the old purple floral china cups and tiny saucer plates for coffee and desserts. I would still eat off the one with the chip in it—the only one visibly distinct from the rest of the set. I always think of the china as the ideal silverware for my coming out narrative—those familiar, fragile childhood pieces that have never shattered.

At these lunches Momma and I like retelling stories we both already know. Memory reruns are a comforting fire to curl up next to. However, the car ride revealed the surprise of a new formal complaint filed by Vincent about me to the McGregors.

Vincent complained a lot about me behind my back. Once when Vincent and I shared the same cell phone plan he figured out how to listen to my messages remotely. He told Momma that one of my friends called me “the herb man” and he knew what that meant. Perhaps it was true, but I have never been called that, nor have I ever heard anyone I know refer to it as herb. Maybe he never really figured out how to listen to my messages remotely.

During the car ride Momma was telling me about how Step-Grandma Ginger, Grandpa Roger's second wife, conveyed to her the last lament Vincent had about me while he was alive. This didn't start my case on behalf of Vincent very well.

"I told Ginger, 'Well, Chuck gets a little annoyed because his dad drinks.' And she goes 'oh, because he was making it seem like he didn't want to [visit].' And I said, 'No, he doesn't have the time.'"

"Well, I didn't want to either to be quite honest." This was true. I hadn't willingly wanted to visit Vincent in a long time. I'm not sure how Vincent sensed these things remotely.

"Well I was pretty honest with her. I told Ginger that there are times when Chuck was a little annoyed because his dad was drunk. Then she goes, 'Yeah, well, we don't hear that part, do we?' Then she goes, 'Not right now, but I'll talk to Roger about it and let him know.'"

The gossip was an equally comforting fire to curl up to, but in the back of my mind I knew I had to get to business. If I quickly talked about my mixed feelings about Vincent and then quickly made the parallels about our sexual orientations, then I would be able to sleep for the rest of the trip. It just felt good to get a few shots in on him before I began that dreary business.

Gabriella told me that Momma told her about a time Vincent's sexuality could be questioned. I always wondered why Momma felt compelled to tell Gabriella about this—perhaps a warning of what to look out for? Maybe.

Momma married Vincent. They are Christians. One night Momma came home from work. Vincent was in Momma's white wedding dress passed out on the couch. I imagine Momma cried. I can't imagine anyone not crying if they were told one thing about the natural

order of life most of their life by a composed priest or pastor, and it ended up being wrong. I don't remember if Gabriella told me that she threw out the wedding dress, but I'm guessing that Momma probably did.

After a weekend visit with Vincent when I had still felt obliged to visit him in the years before his death, I broke up with Gabriella. I don't remember if it was because of the talk at Hooter's, but I recall feeling like I must leave Gabriella after I left Vincent. She wasn't having it. I tried picking her up out of my house and putting her in her car. Gabriella is strong. She is stronger than me. We settled on a temporary separation. She asked if we could see other people. I said no. I didn't like the idea of her sleeping with someone else while we were attached. A week later I met a guy on a website that Momma's Pastor Jack would call filth.

Vincent cheated on my mom. Some would argue about the true practicality of a monogamous relationship, but, again, the Roman Catholic Church and the Evangelical Church asks its followers to buy into it. I came home with Momma once and we found a cigarette butt in the toilet. I asked Momma who smoked in our house. She said, "Probably Dad, or one of his friends." Vincent didn't smoke. He was too concerned about keeping his teeth white.

"The nerve of him, of all things, to complain about that," I told Momma in the car.

"I know," Momma exclaimed with exaggerated pronunciations. "He's got nerve. Does he not have nerve," Momma asked rhetorically. "How many times did you wait on him and he didn't come?"

"Yeah." I put my phone in the compartment to my left and leaned forward in an attack position.

“I don’t know if you remember this, but there was this guy I saw a few times. His name was Rodney. Remember him?”

“Yeah, he took us to Steak N’ Shake,” I said hoping she’d repeat the story anyway.

“Yeah, because *Dad* didn’t show up. Remember?”

“Uh-huh.”

“Remember we went through the drive thru and got the milk shake ‘cause his ex-wife used to work there and you had to tell them you wanted it made with just ice cream. Remember? That was like really good.”

“Yeah, it really was.”

“And he was really nice ‘cause him and I, I think we were going to a movie or something, and he didn’t have any kids, and he was really nice, and he said, ‘Let’s take Chuck to Family Fun Center.’”

I remember wanting to stay home. I don’t really think it bothered me as much as Momma thought it did. I liked it when Vincent stayed away and I could finish watching the baseball game that was on every Friday. I don’t believe I wanted to go, but Rodney was one of those big eyed, handsome country bumpkins that you felt obliged to keep happy. Yes, I’m pretty positive I didn’t want to go. I was a teenager and the last thing I wanted was to be seen with Momma and her beau out in public at the town’s local arcade.

“I don’t remember Family Fun Center,” I fibbed to keep the story going.

“Oh we did. We went through the drive thru, got a milk shake, and went to Family Fun Center ‘cause he felt bad for you. Is that my church! No.”

On our way down to Ft. Myers we had always passed this old red bricked church with an iron bell tower. Momma liked its rustic look and said every time we passed it, more as an

afterthought than anything, that we should take a picture of it. This time she was very determined to stop and take a picture by it. I've passed by it since, but we had just seen a procession of mortality and we felt like it could be the very last time we would ever pass it.

“But anyway, what happened was, Rodney was like six one or six or something and was kinda on the cowboyish side, and, um, your dad had no idea nobody was there, so he got real cocky on the phone and I said, ‘Listen, I’m ready to send Chuck to bed.’ And you were upset. And he goes, ‘I can’t help it!’ And he started yelling and stuff. So Rodney and I watched a movie on TV and I figured Vince wasn’t going to show up...and all of a sudden he came, and it was like 12:30 or something. So I got the door and I said, ‘Chuck’s already in bed.’ And he like started mouthing off. I don’t know if Rodney’s truck was in the driveway, but I don’t think Vince knew anybody was there.”

“Uh huh,” acknowledging I was still with her.

“And [Vince] just like started getting pretty loud and saying stuff like, ‘I don’t wanna hear about it!’ I think he was doing it as a defense, you know?”

“Uh huh.” Vincent never liked to be reminded of how he squandered his time with me. Perhaps he really had to work late in this case.

“And Rodney got in-between us and just stood there and stared Vince down and Vince was like really nervous.”

I laughed.

“He was. Because, you know, I think Rodney probably would fight. And [Rodney] just looked at him, and [Vince] goes, ‘Well, Linda, could you go get Chuck for me?’ And Rodney wasn’t letting him come in.”

I laughed a little more.

“Yeah, I know. He was really scared. Then he acted real tough on the phone later and asked, ‘Who was that big guy?’ But I think he was really scared. I think, and I told Rodney he was probably drinking or something, but I think [Rodney] would’ve hit him. You know?”

“Yeah.”

After the story ended I felt guilty. I indulged myself and couldn’t see a way to begin what needed to be begun. I believe the cathartic adrenaline from the funeral was beginning to wear off as well. A few minutes ago I would have had the nerve to blurt out, “I loved my father and I’m queer just like he was.” Then again, maybe not. I have felt that brave before without leaking revelations.

Vincent apologized to me a lot after the divorce. He cried. He was a very sentimental person. I wish I remember the apologies better. I think I don’t because it was embarrassing—I wanted the moment to pass and they lost effectiveness from overuse. He would apologize for everything. For not being there. For not treating Momma right. For drinking. They became annoying bi-weekly rituals. There was a time when I really liked Vincent. From the time I had memory until after I had to visit him every other weekend was our honeymoon period. Perhaps I just liked the idea of him because he would visit only a handful times a year, but I did like him.

Immediately following the divorce Vincent attended one of my junior varsity football games—something he hadn’t ever done before. I remember him standing in his blue collared warehouse uniform at the chain linked fence behind the end zone. Behind him was a parking lot full of pickup trucks. Momma was upset. He had been making lots of threats about taking me away from her through the courts—truly preposterous threats since child abandonment charges could’ve been easily proven because of Momma shrewdly documenting the handful of times

he'd visit me. While I played football Momma would help out in the concession stand—a hot, box-shaped trailer with a big fan blowing the perspiration off of Momma's face. Momma told me that her female friends that she worked with crowded around her when he arrived. Julie—a big, strong country woman that shod horses for a living—held Momma's hand and said, “You stay strong, girl.”

I had a strong urge to go over to him in the end zone and hug him. I had an urge to go to his home, which was in an unknown location. However, something held me back. I had a football game to play and didn't want to upset Momma, but aside from that going with him would've been like walking past a cliff's edge—an attractive idea for the sheer thrill of it, but not an option grounded in reality. I looked away listening to something coach was saying. When I looked back Vincent had broken down crying. Even though he was a small figure in the distance, especially in comparison to the titan sized pickup trucks, his red eyeballs shone bright in the Florida sun. He then turned and walked away. I didn't see him after the game. That was the last time I felt pity for him while he was alive. I have grown increasingly fond of him after his death. He was the unruly child in my life that you have to love.

“I can't believe Vince did that while I was sleeping in bed,” Momma said staring at the road in front of her.

This sounded like the familiar story I needed to relate my own experience with his, but I hadn't been listening. I pressed record on my phone hoping to capture a word-for-word transcription of my coming out.

“What did he do?”

“He was on the computer and he said he was doing some stuff for work. And Pastor Mike said he was on two very bad porno sites. Very bad. One was called hardcore, um, bisexual something, and the other one was, but he said they were both filth, but the other one he said was even worse.”

Then there was a pause and an opportunity to speak up. I look at it now and see something cinematic. All I had to do was blurt out the line. It would be a bit jarring, but not completely out of context. “I loved my father and I’m queer just like he was.”

I don’t believe there are monsters in this world. I do believe we must create monsters for our own protection. How can a mother and a son survive on their own in a world with gray morals? In a world without the knowledge that there is good and there is evil? In a world where those on the wrong side of the fence don’t get punished? I know better though. Momma is nice and smart and she knows better too; we’re addicts for those old stories.

“I remember waking up and thinking I saw some weird stuff on it and he kept telling me to go back to sleep. And then the next day I kept thinking, ‘What was he looking at?’ And it was totally a God thing ‘cause I would have never done this, but I felt like the Holy Spirit told me to pick up the keyboard and I couldn’t figure out why, and the pamphlet with the web address was under there.”

I had run out of time to interject my own story. We had arrived. Momma shrieked, “There’s my church!”

I stopped recording on my phone and made my way to the front of the gravel parking lot to take a picture for Momma. The church is old. It has red bricks at the base. The white steeple has a black bell inside that is quietly keeping time between the tops of the hours. The sky in the

picture I took is blue. A very pure blue. A very nice blue. Little clouds that look like cartoonish joints are floating by. Momma said it looked good enough to be on a postcard. Momma probably could describe it better—she has been instructed by priests and preachers on how to describe the church a lot longer than I have. This is what good burying evil looks like. It is an ugly business—a business that asks Momma not to put out floral plates for queer monsters at her table.

CHAPTER III

BRUNO & HIS SPEAKING QUEERS

First Bruno: Compliance and Secrets

The Sermon of Endurance



*In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea,
With a glory in His bosom that transfigures you and me.
As He died to make men holy, let us die to make men free,
While God is marching on.*

The purple robes close their mouths. Choir folk—the power
lines that distract the journey
to sermons. Singing summons heat
before endurance comes on Bruno

quick, steps up to the podium.
Pews straighten his spine—
thick wood in his palms,
his fingers tense red.

Bruno's Achilles heel
echoes against the kneeler,
against the preacher's words,
Momma's endurance.

Bruno's fingers snatch the holes
of her cross-stitched sweater.
He presses tight against her bosom,
arm stiff, keeps broken concentration away.

Endurance has no imagination—
it's distracted by the words of free men.

Bruno wonders? Do they ever
acknowledge the tiny seraph wiener?
Surely they know Michael's chest—
the cardio kissed pectorals

slicing old sin. Endurance is a convenient
quality. Bruno is an obedient Christian,
but he can't ignore Michael's bouncy skirt
and the idea of God's breeze blowing

Bruno a peek. He can't place the sin,
but knows he is wrong. Perhaps that *pansy*
quarterback on the other team? The vehemence
is pungent like Sunday barbeque sauce.

Jesus should fight his own battle,
tell Bruno he is wrong. Bruno promises
to be better behaved—maybe embrace
the idea of endurance, embrace the march:

Glory, glory, hallelujah!
Glory, glory, hallelujah!
Glory, glory, hallelujah!
His truth is marching on!

Living Room Refuge

The men scatter swatted off with indignant bellows from the kitchen—the joke turns earnest when addressed to Bruno. Sitting on his hands, he learns baseball on the couch and how to stare at the advertising that makes the game possible. The kitchen breathes a sigh.

Today Bruno sits in the kitchen with his girlfriend and everybody is relieved he's gone this way this time. The big handed mom looks in the kitchen for conversation. Bruno asks if she needs help. She says she needs something heavy from the freezer outside—something she wouldn't ask him to do.

Bruno Sneak Peeks Sister Maggie's Sympathy

She's the girl that likes the titan swings,
ballerina curveballs and the next hologram hero—
a tragic Gehrig. They pick the motion picture
with the heaving breasts
and Bruno wonders if she caught him staring
at her paunch. Bruno nods
at the popcorn kid's *just the soda, fella?*
Bruno is angry
because she calls the popcorn kid sir
and laughs when the kid says *your ten looks mature.*
In the theater she calls the kid entertaining—
probably a queer—
but deserves of forgiveness. Coming attractions
deceive Bruno—revelations
of the best possible moments—
a hate the sin, not the sinner sentiment
over a shared box of rainbow gummies.

The Boys That Don't Know

Bruno's tongue is the musk of masculinity—a scent that keeps him safe on the hardwood floors of the gymnasium.

Bruno calms the nerves of the boys that don't know—his well-placed *fudge packer* taunt, the *you would know*

response. Bruno doesn't need to remind them—the basketball leaves his palms down the arc of dominion. He can't extinguish the extra flare

of his flicked wrist, but like all good boys Bruno can masque in sweat seamlessly—it's the Christlike effort that counts.

Sneaker squeak sirens summon Bruno's desire—he longs for his place with the boys that don't know. There are other boys

and they know how to find him. One catches Bruno's gaze before he hits the hardwood floors. The boy's cheek slides

into Bruno's chest. Bruno grabs his wrists and pushes him. The boy smiles: *I hope you're good at this game.* He walks by with dramatic hips

away from the court and the boys that don't know.

Bruno Speaks: Twink Chaser

I.

He is a violin serenade man. Roses were in my future. He was sweet. I knew what convenience meant—a sort of back seat privacy. The next town over has palm tree boulevards and bridges to

islands. I didn't recognize anybody there. The odometer turned 100,000 on our last trip.

I felt every mile. I know he did too. I felt embarrassed riding that long. I never felt like I was

really there. Monotonous car rides are moments when the weight of air reads the seconds aloud. I felt guilty, but liked the attention. When his ultimatum popped I wasn't ready for revelations.

II.

Shopping malls store the town's gossip. Shelves are adequate barricades—they reinforce the ideal of specter queers touching our boys. She—the one I bring around my parents—talks about

him and his boys. How he buys them comfort and performs. I laugh. He could be listening on the other side of superhero abdomens. I feel the miles.

III.

Nuclear arrangements offer me privileged comfort. Dinner is made. My clothes are washed. I have a good job. Mental health is insured. My smile is white and pure. Antiquated

responsibilities are alluring and pretty. I mow the grass. I trim the bushes. I don't play music. My children do. I encourage brass. I have a car, but my children tell me it is old—they will be lease-

to-lease adults. I slip and think back to the slow power lines that dipped and rose—that moment when the meaning of silence was as recognizable as the taste of salt. What muddy thoughts. I

know comfort without him. He made things so easy, but the light of revelations almost penetrated the town. Before I lifted my palm out of his hand he said everything was okay. He

gave one last squeeze before he let go. Secluded highways is the understanding of stars and stripes consciousness. Jesus died in a thin loin cloth. He must pity the boys looking up at him.

Bruno Speaks: Chivalry Lingerin



His tilted ear began falling off
when I kissed him to extend the night
until last call. I wanted to paint
my lady boys dropping the midnight ball.
They'd pick me to tornado rhumbas
and we'd make post-chivalry romance.



Eleven constellations

drinking barley

made lady

One of the lady

serene. Lady

swear. Then

and flared a hand

broke blue drapes

on village grids.

boys beam,

boys swirled blue—

boy blue shadow

a black knight

and sparkled at men

Stuffy clouds

twinkle even.

the effect was

chose me, I

stamped his foot

erect. The lady
boy twirled into
him. He twirled lady
boy blue across the dance
I swirled into a corner.
floor. Golden with rage,



Actually, Amerika was on the dance floor. The English, the bass, the men palming the air, the women bent over buckling their knees. I was startled when I saw chivalry still next to me. He presented two choices for me—a threaded needle in one hand and a knife in the other.

Bruno reveals love and abuse—

two little tufts of carpet sticking out
from the rest of the strands. He can see
them waving when he looks over his shoulder—
the caress of his cheek, the blood
sliding down his leg. The only remedy
is flattening the strands, but he can't
install new floors. The carpet is too shabby
for others to see, for others to know
which two little tufts are waving him over—
revelations of the kind of company he keeps.
Sometimes he imagines big clouds of eyes blowing
by into his nest of fibers. The secrets of abuse
would be revealed, sure, but they'd also know love
exists among their boys that can't hold hands
in wooden pews. Safety and violence is a choice—
the clandestine abuser or the Sunday male.

Bruno Chooses Bisexual

Bruno pictures skin collisions.
He looks at gold, ebony, spotted pale—
 he has no manners leaving his gaze out
unzipped, unbuttoned—declarations
 of who his gaze desires, yet he chooses
bisexual missing out on creations
 that can feel the cyclical cycle
of genders owning what the inner voice—
 a god as some know it—
say about righting displacement.

Bruno is lured by their stare into the struggle—
their unwillingness to ignore.
 To collide with skin close to the voice—
he shudders at the final duality
 of the bisexual.

Bruno Looks For Pansexuality

Reflections come too easy on a dripping porch
where everything falls in patterns. A plastic bottle
clatters down the road and Bruno would like to go with it
so he can feel the mist and do the right thing.

She used to ask questions without answers. She is a
why do people even recycle if they stack them on top of the bins?

He wonders if there is an in-between for him—a lust
for hairy armed women. How many bins can Bruno stuff
and what would be left for the others? He can't decide—
the tidy rain, the rancorous bottle?

Does everybody fit into a priori patterns?

Bruno Speaks: Trapping a Princess Toad

I licked a toad with a wart to the left of its large rubber mouth. It turned into a princess with Virgin Mary white wedding garments—a veil, an ankle length dress, and no shoes. Her grape toes had yellow nails. She used to be a frog in a swamp after all. I lifted the veil.

What's the matter, sweetie?

I'm the fattest princess ever.

I think you're the prettiest princess ever.

What do you know? You've never been with a princess before. She hissed like a reptile instead of an amphibian, which croaks baritones of disapproval.

I told her I love her. She sighed placing the veil back over her face.

Shall we? I smiled. She nodded. I grabbed her webby fingers tight and tugged. I had to act quickly.

We shuffled down the middle aisle of the courthouse towards the judge at the front.

I don't find your gesture heroic, she whispered.

I love you.

You'd love any princess.

That's not true.

Before her I'd lay in my bed at nights and dream. I'd clutch my pillow running my fingers through phantom hair as slot machine windows spun faces in my pillow. Lucky Robin. Lucky me.

Our judge was curt. *The court notes that there is no villain or meek, pathetic protagonist in this room. This is probably just a display of almighty God's wrath for committing premarital decadence. Shame on both of you. Let's move on, we're very busy. Do you take her?*

I do, she croaked.

And you?

I do, I crooned.

Any objections? The empty courtroom ticked time away. *You may kiss.*

My lips landed, parted open, to the left of her rubber mouth. My tongue licked counter-clockwise around the princess's red wart. I had made it in time. I was royalty.

Realizing Sexual Identity Constructs

I.

The Moment doesn't reappear to Bruno every day, but when it does he imagines going back and asking her what to do. The beginning is like all beginnings. There is clean air, water. None of us know what to do with it yet. He sits in dead foliage; he sits by the grass—the sun is out.

II.

There are far worse elements than flame, which promises a new beginning. Bruno didn't know what to do with her, so he didn't do. Chemicals were ingested and waste expanded. Bruno puffed his chest out; he told her they weren't a union anymore. It was already understood.

III.

In *The Moment* he sat in clean air and water. He ripped up damp foliage and pulled up green grass on the banks. Bruno memorized definitions of identity. She came over and asked. This was an unfortunate coincidence. With all his prescribed logic his best answer was yes. Bruno put his hand in hers. She felt like sugar. Sugar swam through his veins. He knew he made a mistake.

IV.

Years after the discovery of chemicals, after the chest puff, she'd come over to his desk held together with metal nails. They didn't talk about it. They laughed. Things were constructed. Objects had definitions. She held no grudges. They both recalled elemental purity. They knew what flames could do. Things were already constructed. Objects already had definitions. That's what warm air falling off lips tells Bruno. That's what ink on paper tells Bruno.

Bruno's Observed: Only Attractive Revelations Permitted

Brother Julian Ponders Incest

Julian bragged of tolerance, enlightenment,
how one could evolve from dust and ribs

and accept people in their form. The waitress
looked at her watch. She told him *you talk an awful lot*

like my professors. Julian smiled believing
this to be a compliment. He was happy to supply

his morality for a sweaty mug. He continued—
You know, I wouldn't have minded if he

*would've come out earlier. The present
is just such impeccable timing with this renaissance*

of acceptance and all. You know? The waitress looked
into the mug aiming her rag for drawn out

spit. Julian's eyes—marble spheres—
peered just above his mug like a perfect bust.

His forehead wrinkled as if trying to understand
all his theories for the world in one sitting.

We were awfully close, though.

Beautiful People

Rich the Jet Ski Man is bright today.
He has a saying—an inspiration of abs—
 beautiful weather brings out beautiful people.
There is no reason to believe otherwise—
 convex villains live in the rain.
There is no chance for the rain. No chance for the rain.
 The lean hand in their boating tests.
Rich corrects their answers and slaps the spaghetti strap
 on his bare thigh. He smiles at the fat pile and winks at Bruno.
Bruno thinks of his sugar heart thumping
 in his neck. He is ashamed
to be searching for his toes.

Fantasia's Hyacinth Hippo; Bruno's Fantasy

*I am beautiful with an unhinged jaw and a tale
rippling edible waves. If I twirl and pretend
to be in isolation you will gaze
and won't be embarrassed—I don't sing
about my suitors. Climb on me and I will flutter
lashes. Give me a dance and my folds will consume
scaly prints. Hold me up, twirl me, take me
to the crescendo with weak alligator knees.*

I want to be just like Hyacinth. Comfortable
in a tutu. I wouldn't have to worry
about my razor burnt testicles, stray hairs,
my stretchy epidermal overcoat. I looked for the ideal
of my shape—fingers rustling through the back,
a face bristling across the belly button, the smell
of open pores. My form has never been
in attendance. Not one stray follicle, not a single fold
in that white marble Athenian cemetery—those castrated
athletes looking off into the distant sunset
matching sublimity's thin ideal.

Bruno the Age Defector

Receding hairlines, expanding paunches—traits
that make twinks think of Bruno's headstone.

Bruno came out too late. His ghost is in Athens
with the defeated athletes, with the Spartans

snapping his marble cock. The hair is lost—
how unseemly to resurrect follicles.

Twinks are versed in the tricks of the age defectors,
yet there is hope in the paunch. Bruno remembers the paunch's

genesis—the leather couches pinning him to their surface.
He'd recline dreaming of giant scissors clipping the excess.

He already knew nail clippers leave behind pink clouds.
No, he needed a god's hand wielding a steak knife—

he'd have the privilege of closing his eyes
to the glimmer ready to reduce his person.

The Entrée

Before the restaurant opens, Bruno must learn to be attractive by creating favorable odds to be selected over the other menu items. His Athenian marble body is molded by Photoshop pectoral splendor, his razor burn bumps are badges of labor towards an adolescent texture, his buttery aroma includes hints of musky precision, and he is garnished well with a polka dot bow tie—a talking point for those dull lulls with consumers. Sometimes the attraction doesn't include crystal ball compatibility—the carnal flame may only ignite red cheeks. There will be a lot of head nodding and synthesized opinions to birth mutual agreement, but Bruno's subtle flattery for his consumers will beat the other menu items. Tofu goes well with the politically conscious; other choices include fish with the cultural elites, steak with the hedonists—they're all very telling. Match the color of wines to food—these chic choices make winners. Consumers make one decision and own it—the other choices won't experience the thrill of consumption. Once selected, Bruno wonders if his spice will become the routine of salt—the same bump on the tongue aroused for the rest of his patron's life.

Bruno Begs For His Submission

Bruno's twink eats salads out in public,
but there wouldn't be an oasis in his cheek

if he weighed any less. Bruno's twink calls his smile
handsome, not beautiful. The smile's unaware

of the capture. Looking up begs for submission—
the neck turns, black eyes up (fountains of youth

never spill their wealth). Sometimes teeth, like water,
are clean without being obscene. Bruno is bloated

with pictured ideals, but his twink's vitality quenches
scorched throats. Bruno squeezes his hand and shows him

the photo on his phone. The twink shakes his head—
No, that is not the picture I want of me. Not at all.

The Twink Speaks: The Log Cabin Couple

There wasn't much to talk about, so we slipped
the barista a dollar tip in exchange for my black coffee
and Bruno's vanilla latte. If he stood silent
we appeared masculine. When he thanked her,
the barista smiled. Her assembly line
greeting over-foamed with emphatic gloating
at such a queer find. I wanted to cry, but Bruno
would've consoled me. Instead, Bruno and I limped
into another conversation about queer marriage—
our talking point arrangement, our regurgitated matrimony
we must hear all about from our allies.

Holding Hands

Bruno holds hands with a boy like me. The boy looks happy reaching up, looking into Bruno. Bruno tugs. He looks scared. I am tugged by father—told to look away.

Bruno Speaks: San Antonio Displacement on the River Walk

A cardinal hops down the stone steps. It leads me to the brown river failing to turn plastic green.

A big ebony man kisses the neck of a white female in his lap. *Go on through. Nothin' is stoppin' ya.* I accept his invitation.

A white baby girl runs to the river to meet a floating Mallard. Her dad snatches the bag of brown pellets. *One at a time. The ducks will get greedy.*

A golden girl with a pink backpack is startled when I brush by her. Pieces of ripped Cypress Tree bark—a currency I am unaware of?—spill out of her Ziploc bag.

A big man in a cowboy hat bows to a Helen of Troy next to him. *Well, you're gonna spoil me now, ain't 'ya?*

A golden girl in a white wedding dress walks barefoot across the stone sidewalk. She complains about cold feet to the girls lifting her train.

A lesbian couple holding hands bumps into the golden bride. They click their tongues winking at me as they pass by.

The golden bride climbs atop a stone staircase. Her eyes look down at her big, illuminating hands.

A silver haired woman sits next to me on a concrete bench. I hide my bridal magazine. I tell her when our wedding date is. *Oh honey, you're a long way from home. Thanks for visitin' anyway.*

An Exhibition: Queer Marriage

In playhouses the announcement comes with a curtain raised.

In movies the announcement comes with the free market's temperature.

In poetry the announcement comes with leaves of grass.

In universities the announcement comes with ivory tower last names and theory.

In coffee shops the announcement comes with beans screaming chic declarations of support.

In bars the announcement comes with tequila.

In fine restaurants the announcement comes with a salad toss diversion and Bruno's unobserved freedom to kiss the groom.

In cubicles the announcement comes with *who's the lucky bride?*

In jewelry stores the announcement comes with flowery bands and gender clarification.

In social security offices the announcement comes with special forms.

In Ma's kitchen the announcement comes with scriptures.

On courthouse steps the announcement comes with jeers and gold crosses.

During the wedding reception the announcement comes with speeches of triumph—the spectacle of *I do*.

City Night

“Starry Night”
pretty sky
swirling blue
on a golden moon

[The fast food joints eject light
up up up
into the stratosphere]

Glowing signs
with pretty
colors mold
the sky into its own city night

What a nice
place to raise
a surrogate
family off city lights

[The glowing night sky creates a new yellow
off the city lights
corporate signs]

Dangerous blue
disappears from
Van Gogh’s “Starry
Night” city bright swirling skies

We are all safe
in the city
lit dim skies
without a swirling sky horrific night

[The sisters brothers mothers fathers sleep tight in their
city bright night sky]

Frosty nights
city bright
flakes flutter
flutter over the clandestine moon

Sleep tight
angel of light
city bright

triumph of street lights vehicle headlights

[Floating dreams carry through the city night into the next
hot sunny day
sun bright]

Vroom vroom
sound the automobiles
to the workplace
pale white cubicle bright

Nothing makes me
feel more safe
than a bright
city day
 evening bright
 vibrant city night
 sleeping tight
 no Van Gogh
 swirling “Starry Night”
neurotic types

Next day
wake up at dawn
by pale city sun

[...sometimes I still *briefly* picture that “Starry Night” without a
city bright night]

Bruno Speaks: The Facts of Monogamy

When I control you it's a shrug,
a heavy sigh, a head on the pillow, my tongue
 curled for bed—I won't have to talk to you.
There is a mismatch and you will be the one
 swinging your arms through threadbare sheets.
I am the rib and the dirt—I'll sneak the apple
 and blame the world on you.
No one will cast the first stone
 on an unheeded Dorian Gray warning.

My ruby lips will prevail.
 Kiss me when I feel like it. Offer me a chase—
the world loves a good beginning
 where I'm left to wonder how you feel,
but you can't help flashing flushed aces.
 I'll never recover my dream for you—
the chase, the reluctant kiss,
 the roses behind my back,
my bruised knee, my cheek
 dripping with your saliva, my prayer
for one more successful conquest.

Bruno Speaks: Bourgeois Arson

Precision is a torch.
Yellow omelets.
Coffee in teaspoons.
Pastel houses in rows.
My home on the heap (they won't climb as smart as me).
Plastic ticks and sixty seconds.

What is my signature fire?
A cigarette in brushless grass?
Clothespins and fabric softened sheets?
Gunpowder discovering domestic utility?
A slow burn I could afford?
A bang I couldn't buy?

Bruno Speaks: Dynamics and the Right to Fail

I. Crescendo

The anticipation of the good journey
and the watch that ticks.

My glassy eyed groom
and our special license.

His veins in latex
and the release.

The crescendo,
and what follows?

II. Decrescendo

Our plastic wedding presents
and saving a house from clutter.

Observations about the rainy weather
and his wandering mind.

Lying in a hammock
and longing to get off.

The first taste bud stimulated
and the other forgotten bites.

III. Perdendo

The tangerine ball sliding into the ocean
and our short attention span.

The cathartic divorce
and ink on paper.

The breath in
and the breath out
knowing he was a marble David
and what followed paled.

A refund on the funeral plot—
an exercise in the right to fail.

Bruno Speaks: Ennui in Mission, TX

I didn't want the Whataburger to end my night, but gas station merlot couldn't keep me home.

Instead, I blink at loitering boys with puffy jackets bouncing on the hoods of cars as they wink and nod at a stout girl with a checkered scarf. She raises her lip and snarls through her nose. They shove her shoulder and break her coquettish pout.

My gaze is broken

by a lachrymal man as he walks
through the W shadow
sniffing and heaving down a dark road.

I follow him.

He winces
at the touch of his left shoulder.

“What’s the matter?”

He shakes his head not comprehending what I’m saying. He walks on and I feel like he wants me to follow. A lust for confrontation, knowing all my possessions are locked away, propels me forward.

In the darkness the earth clicks and croaks at the lachrymal man and I.

A pale orange light gives us a glimpse of a small house made of damp wood. Next to it is a field of neatly plowed columns. Clouds of bugs hover above creating a new troposphere around shrubs I’ll never name or plant. I want to be in that world where I’m in possession of calloused hands and a damp house.

Grandma Figueira rocks in a wicker chair
and points at me.

“Ennui! Ennui!”

I can shake my head.

“No, Grandma. No ennui. See?”

I present my hands as proof.

My smile is broken by the lachrymal man’s rough hand guiding my lower back towards a gray minivan. The shards of glass on the driver’s seat manifest in ultraviolet nano-flashes. The lachrymal man heaves and reanimates the scenes with elastic waves from his right arm. He ends and assumes I’ll provide him with a companion answer.

I nod and smile.

He becomes distraught
shaking me hoping he’ll rattle out the correct response.

I frown.

I am afraid.

Then he sticks his pinky and thumb out putting what is left of his fist to his ear.

“Cellular! Cellular!”

I shake my head.

“No. No. Not with me.”

He groans falling back into the van. I shrug and look back the way I came.
Grandma Figuera will be there on my return journey. I tell myself
just be polite and wave.

Bruno speaks: Merlin's blue hat

bent over in strawberry fields
while I lounged in a wicker chair
and felt pale.

Stained baseball caps
and Merlin's blue hat
stood up and bent forward, stood up and bent forward.
I sipped lemonade
in a wicker chair
and felt pale.

While the cool porch
with Spanish tiles
was making more
lemonade, I strolled
towards Merlin's blue hat,
felt conversational and asked:

Do you enjoy your work? Do you like picking strawberries?

She didn't understand. I ran
back to the porch.
I felt pale—parched
for more lemonade.

Bruno Speaks: Friends and Resistance

Grandma's Ft. Myers Beach

1. You just know

Grandma smiled like an alligator. Her charcoal skin
filled with chocolate cherry sun spots
greeted you every summer on her wooden patio.

You can fancy Grandma all you want. Go
to the beach shack. Feel
the sea breeze steal up your nose. You
cannot touch her anymore.

2. You dream

You believe that Grandma is a three-hour drive down Alligator
Alley. Along the way ashly cane polls
dip into the highway waters of the Everglades.

“Take off your clothes, Bruno.”

Grandma is prepping you for the beach. You loathe
the greasy lotion and her slimy hand waxing your body. You are
annoyed, but don't realize you shouldn't be.

3. You walk with Grandma

The beach is not far. You should
exit the pebbled driveway,
take a right at the house
with the peeling Geo Storm,
pass the 7-Eleven
with prism colored Slurpees,
cross the two lane street
in front of the pastel souvenir shops
with the puffy shark floats
standing erect
in the hemp baskets. Then you will
smell the saline wind,
hear the waves crash
and feel the bleached sand
scorch your feet.

4. You feel Grandma in the ocean

Grandma opens her folding chair and sits
atop the waning dolphins. You spread your towel
and sit beside her sipping an off-brand
of diet orange soda. The sun tickles your skin.
The sun stings. You escape

sprinting into the ocean with Grandma
by your side. She floats
over the Gulf of Mexico
while you swim under her head
and come out of her feet
blowing bubbles along her back because she says

“it feels like a Jacuzzi.”

Your legs slide across her butt and thighs
before you gasp for breath above. Her skin
is tender and thick as the blubber
of a rubbery porpoise. You would
willingly touch her only under the Gulf.

5. You never want to see the sun set

Most of the time we would
leave before the tangerine sun
would set over the moldy pier
to our right. She
wanted to stay. You
wanted to go. We
hardly ever stood
long enough. You
just didn't know. You
didn't know.

Angel Speaks: Angel at Night

I. Bedroom: Angel's Morning-After Musings

Those clearance cherry heels
you said were pretty
are one size too tiny.
You couldn't see

the gaudy lipstick
and stained panties
in the waxing light.
I create an illumination

next to meteors crashing
into our grateful laps.
I can't look away either—
their audience is so beautiful.

II. Dance Floor: Last Night

The plush bass
etherized Angel's soul.

Eager eyes driveled
from the purple dance floor.

My empty hips bounced
to pitch perfect voices

'till your calloused palms
lead me off.

III. Bedroom: Reflections

We leave our rubbers
on the dresser. I look
into my mirror

and reflect the stars—
doodled winks, penciled shadows.
I can't look away

and neither can you.
Next time we'll both be voyeurs—
soon with a proper reflection.

AIDS Speaks

Bruno says I'm pretty—
the noble sentiment he must make.
My bravery resides in hospital curtain
resurrections. I'm still here
and I must listen to Bruno now. He talks
with a swollen bird's chest—warm air
about ignorance
and so on. Then sympathy is paused
with each enlightened thrust
positioning the rump just so
as if glass will suddenly overflow.
Afterwards I'm still pretty
and he's on his backbone
inaudibly hailing Marry. I'm cursed
to gum thrown bones the rest of my life. There was a time when sheets bled

and their only concern
was if I was hurt. There's a first
and a sudden last for everything
and the world's cadence becomes
he was so young
for the man still in the room—a corpse
cursed with ear drums
as Bruno rattles on
about ignorance:

And see? I just did it with a condom. Why can't they?

Orlando, Florida's Parliament House: An Exhibition of Crossdressers

Visiting liberals sit at their roundtables ready to consume
Southern Gospel Saturday. Revelations burst open their heads
as red robed Miss Darcel Stevens swings the Word
in her left hand; right palm is erect in the air. Not ready for wigs
and heels in the nineties, consumers crave fourth wall
penetration. Whitney falsettos bite the air as a man rubs
Miss Darcel's fishnet thigh—his golden fingered female giggles
in open prayer hands. The man makes his own revelations—
This feels better than I thought it would. The wife grabs his hand
as if remembering to clutch her purse. Visitors feel generous
about being patrons—about picking up the moral slack
for the rest of the country. Saturday night
is a thin fabric between American eagle churches
and visiting liberals—the latter an Orlando International flight
away from their fabric softened landscapes—
their distant fourth-walled homes.

A Divergent Queer: Behind the Dancing Shadows

There is nothing to do/For our liberation, except wait in the horror of it.
—John Ashbery, “They Dream Only of America”

I want it slant.
All I can see
is the shadow of people

dancing in film
projected on cave walls
until I forget who I am.

A comedian? A victim? A photo-
shoot? The gays
are so shady—

we have to be. This image
is a symmetrical brand
putting boys in their cubbies,

girls in their cubbies—
build more cubbies.
They’ll play along

with fluid genders,
it’ll just be a lot
of restrooms. I don’t like numbers.

How dull to be convergent
folding yourself into a hole—
that splendor of a crevice

with its rococo statues
and the presumption
that I will be lavish.

I will slip into lisps, gaze
at furniture, know wine too well
to fit inside the cis male bust—

a Roman precision,
an aggressive empire.
My brand

was given to me—
an activist pacifist, a holo-
-gram of the man.

Bathhouse Daddy Issues

*Great laws tower above us, reared on high
born for the brilliant vault of heaven—
Olympian Sky their only father.
—The Chorus, Oedipus Rex*

I. Dads are good

It was a dad, it was a dad, it usually is a dad.
I'm envious of dads. They look good when they appear
to fit the mold. Look good in yellow eggs, inky fingers, Goodwill

suits. There's no fashion anymore. Church is dad in jeans—
a please come in and give. There's the Pharisee, the angry Jesus,
the bloody Jesus, a Greco palace to worship, the rich

walking through the eye of a needle. Daddy wears a gold cross,
leaves wads of cash on the dresser of his six hour room.
Works hard for me, fucks fucks fucks—a real babe

in his comfort machismo get-up; he's a man
that knows bathhouse convenience.

II. Dads fuck great

God is on your side, Daddy Machismo. Ask for forgiveness
when you get a chance. Until then, fuck fuck fuck this twink—
fuck my razor burn skin. Be the bucking bull.

Toro on through the fabric softened mound. Embrace
the dirty laundry scent of my popper—a legal substance,
Daddy Machismo, and you would know it

if you didn't have to sneak down the halls—
the grunting halls, the halls where love is present,
love is temporary, love won't find a witness, love is dimly lit,

clandestine twinks chorusing *you a top, baby?* Soft lips for us,
soft lips for their "Mary Had a Little Lamb" daughters.
Lies and fucking, dads aren't all the same, but Goddamn

there is a lot of them that won't fit this mold,
this peephole meant for a Puritan
mob. Men that want me in a dress, want me as their maids,

want me as smooth as their wives. I'm not a girl, I'm not a girl,
but I can play that corset-bound girl, baby. Let's look for five minute love together in this God
forgiven bathhouse.

The Audacity of Demands

Acceptance is the new oppression. A mouthing cock,
a party favor. In ribbons and bows we pop
out of plastic closets. They exclaim satisfaction, a

I've always loved the gays. They're so adorable.
A kiss on the cheek, peace sign tees,
flower power gun barrel posters,

Hirojima buttons (or was it Nagasaki?), straight-
-jacket activism that gums tossed bones
in the name of their appeasement.

Cis concessions produce out-of-the-closet galas
orchestrated with a digestible queer
until queer is no longer homeless, but spewed

on sandwich boards shuffling to the howl
of muffled cash register bells.
I don't ask for a return

to squatters
and straitjackets
and electrotherapy evenings
and black eyes
and mock bass voices
and conversion summer camps
and the old guard of red, white, and blue.

I will demand an end to a commodity of cis concessions—

to their rib thin queer's magazine inspiration starvations,
to their thespian queer—the *realness* of being RuPaul fodder,
to their family sitcom queer branding a nuclear arrangement,
to their comedy queer fourth-walled-in from their straight audience,
to their martyr queer—their permission for a black eye passive resistance—

it's a prayer for a marble queer, a eunuch queer, a toothless queer
that will only gum resistance to a new frontier of profit—their *new*
MADE IN AMERICA brand of the ancient West's persuade or obey.

From McAllen to Austin Metronormativity

Some queers need to leave home in order to become queer, and others need to stay close to home in order to preserve their difference. (27)

—Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time & Place*

Small town boy with a degree, small town boy that wants to leave
wears busy skinny jeans, a headband colored with hippie spittle.
He asks the assumption: *So, when you headed to Austin?*
Praise be to cosmo queer paradise, an ivory tower blessing
for the suburban gay boy that won't imagine cul-de-sac transformations.

I think Austin boys—they rub my furry fingers, talk bars
and Bronze Age bathhouses and lament suburban martyrdom—
the hetero scene we're plagued to navigate. There's the McAllen gay bar
safely off of the 17th St. strip. McAllen boys think old men—
bunker queers watching midnight drag hump the floor, bite the air.

The small town boy talks of the mentality of ghetto queer bars
facing off against cis suburbia. He will head to Austin,
student loans subsidizing in his tiny back pocket,
looking for that like-minded spirit. Queer studies knows branding—
the escape of white flight suburbia in this Chican@ town—

the urban paradise of Austin. The cloth expressing identity,
the bars wasting boys that leave a nest that needs fixing,
needs the local queer to negotiate the new suburbia.

For the Loss of Hymnals

I want to believe
that my outpouring is taken
care of—stored up like weekly tithes.
Glory, glory, halleluiah! I have seen the watch fires
of leather offices and would give twenty percent
to sing again, to *really* sing and not be indebted
to a university that spoiled the ending
and dropped me off at firehouse steps.
His truth marches on anyway
in the care of black boot televangelists
living to tell men they're free,
while subsidized loans compound interest
and remind me not to sing.

The New Southern Belle

Coffee shops are for hopeful berets tilted in makeup mirrors. We must give her a name and I've always liked Delma—a demure, waterfall pair of eyes name. She makes waves with her hands, elastic head nods, crooked smiles—she is careful not to put lipstick on her teeth. Old metal cars make me think of boats, and then of the navy and close quarters and worrying about erections. This one fellow from church said that men fell overboard in the war.

The skinny jean boy is too perfect of a fit for Delma. She rubs his shoulders. On cue for me to write, he wears whip cream on his nose. The espresso beans grind and the wand whines. Southern boys in jeans have everything, so he sighs when Delma's drink is up. I don't think he likes her lengthy conversation with the barista issued with corporate berets.

I imagine walking out with the skinny jean boy and wonder what Delma would do—only I know. The shock in the South hits straight girls hard; they are brought up to believe it can't happen around them. Beret church girls at coffee shops may be more open minded—or like the idea of being open minded. To be punched by a navy man. To be in their arms and carried off against my will. But what would Delma be left with? She didn't write the sermon belabored to her weekly.

There is a new Southern Belle and she likes them on television, in boisterous conversations, at drag shows where the skirts and wigs are unassembled at the end and she goes home with her hand snugly in the back pocket of his jeans.

The Queer Nursing Home

I don't know where the dignity of wrinkles go—
into a Roman bust? The white tunic is a bit flamboyant
in Southern Avenues where boys throw footballs.
St. Augustine is a fountain of youth away.
Miami is plastic surgery, North Florida
is where the queers don't get married. It won't matter—
I'll just watch youngsters frolic
in Bathhouse pools, swim in petty cash. Cuba
is a revolution's throw away,
but Key West will still stroke my crevices,
remind me where the old queers and the sea
go looking for tangerine suns setting in the ocean
reflecting on restrictions—the closets,
the skin we long to remove,
the assimilation into sublimity's beauty.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

In three years (2012-2015) Charles Roger McGregor earned a Master of Fine Arts degree in Creative Writing and a graduate certificate in Mexican-American studies from the University of Texas-Pan American. His thesis specialization spans across nonfiction, poetry, and fiction. In four years (2006-2010) he also earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in English with a specialization in writing, and a minor in Philosophy from Florida Southern College.

Mr. McGregor's professional background includes teaching ESL in the country of Turkmenistan through the United States Peace Corps (2010-2011). He has also taught four semesters (2013-2015) of composition courses at the University of Texas-Pan American. His poetry can be found in the following literary publications: *Cantilevers*, *Xenith*, *Enhance*, *No Infinite*, *Boundless* and the *Portland Review*.