

Stories of a Queer Femme

by Parker Jones



Running on the beach for my graduation photos. By Kayleigh Morrison.

Senior Capstone

English Studies

Creative Project

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School of Humanities and Communication

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Capstone Proposal

Name: Parker Jones

Area of Concentration: English Studies

1. Project Description

I would like to write a collection of poetry based on my experience as a queer non-binary person, including iconic queer and trans allusions within it. This would bring curiosity to some hidden queer histories while being in a digestible, creative format, as well as inform people about the problems and joy of being a non-binary person today.

2. Alignment with Common Theme

I believe the queer and trans spectrum is full of inquiry and hidden histories, our semester's theme. I myself had to discover and learn so much before putting a label on myself, and many choose to never label themselves. Additionally, I'm hoping this collection will cause others to inquire about all of the queer histories that have been erased, as well as what problems queer and trans people face everyday for just being who they are.

3. Purpose

In comparison to the amount of straight, cisgender writings available, I believe this collection would contribute to the public's knowledge, including that of CSUMB's. This campus has a long way to go in terms of queer and trans inclusion and I believe my years here have revealed some of the places that require improvement. Additionally, by including allusions to LGBTQIA+ history and culture, untold histories are brought to light, not only for straight and cisgender people, but also for those in the community who might not be familiar.

4. Format Rationale:

Poetry is the best way to show the experience of being who I am as a trans person, and my connection to the queer pioneers who have made my life possible.

5. Capstone Title:

Stories of a Queer Femme

6. Working Summary:

This will be a decently long collection of poems (ideally at least twenty five pages, depending on the variety of length). I would mainly like to focus on queer joy, simply because it is so lacking in media, but the acknowledgement of current laws repressing queer and trans people should also be included. I've recently been reading a lot about queer culture and the history of that culture, so those allusions are something I would like to add in almost every piece. Paying homage while also being informative is my main goal with this project, as well as to expand my own knowledge of those who paved the way for me.

7. Expectations

I will need to have a finished digital collection of poetry by the end, complete with at least eight poems (although I believe I will have around ten fully developed pieces) that inform and emotionally affect the reader.

8. Skills/Tools Required

I will need to write poetry for this project, something I am very familiar with. I have submitted (and been accepted in) multiple publications for poetry and have always been a creative writer. Additionally, being a Humanities and Communication major with a concentration in English studies, I have had much in-class experience with writing both research and creative works.

9. Next Steps

I will need to follow my timeline (listed below) and make sure I leave enough time for peer reviews and my own reviews.

10.

Because poetry productivity varies depending on the writer's mood and inspiration, it is difficult to create a super strict timeline, but I would like to write at least two poems a week. This way, I am forced to have a collection started and can choose whichever ones I believe are of high enough quality and effect for this project. I have already read a few books to gain information for a couple poems.

FAIRIES (*i thought i'd find them, but they were me*)

Have my shoes ever fit?

Were these sweaters always threadbare? Moth-eaten? Short on the arms, tight on the neck?

I can't remember when my hands weren't calloused, rough, nails bitten down. Sometimes, I pick at my cuticles until they bleed. Tear the loose skin in lines to my knuckles. I pretend the tips of my fingers are the rings of a tree.

How has that maple grown so much? Planted in the 1st grade at my elementary school, I've gone back every year in every season. We thought the oak in the middle of campus was dying. We should have known, we thought;

*we dug around the thickest roots, close to the trunk,
homes for the fairies that lived in the leaves,
chairs & beds & tables made of twigs and*

*grass and
acorn caps.*

My sister's tee-ball game. I hid in those boughs and eavesdropped on the couples that'd pass on the walkways below. I hoped I'd read all the books in the little library they'd see before me. I remember looking at the fractalled branches above, bluest baseball-sky, knowing there'd never be enough time.

Five years old, sitting on the porcelain tub in the house that my father built & I still call home. My first loose tooth. I cried on the tile, ruddy chubby cheeks and corn-silk hair, knowing I'd never be the same.

Where'd I put my favorite toy? A stuffed cat I named after my mom's first pet, still buried in the yard of her Cardiff home;

we visited her childhood best friend who lived across the street, eating donuts from the shop we've always gone to. The lines are long; we get there early and eat them at the beach as the sun heats up.

I had a scar on my neck until I was thirteen; I think the water from the public pool washed it away. *Small-town-public-school-education wasn't good enough to tell me what was true or not.*

When did I learn I'm not a band-aid, a piece of tape? *The more I'm used, the less I'm wanted.* Sex-ed was called "health"

“ *masturbation releases chemicals you need to save for your husband and your baby .*

you won't connect with your child if you touch yourself “

sex was too dirty a word and three girls got pregnant before graduation and I was asked what I'd say if my mom had aborted me and the only way not to get pregnant was abstinence and I wanted to ask if fucking girls

counted.

When has my hair been shorter than this? I thought golden and long and tan and skinny made me pretty. My grandma cut it to my shoulders with kitchen shears and I screamed at her.

I wanted bangs and my aunt is still a hairdresser (*like her mom and her daughters*). I remember my face in the mirror. Leah threaded them
into the rest of my hair.

Older, I've cut my own short/ I've cut my own bangs/ I've added tinsel/ I've dyed it blue and
pink and red and brown. Summer days used to turn me honeyed.

My best friend's mom told me I was the perfect girl.
I'LL BE A HOUSEWIFE!
I thought I'd be. Four boys I'd known since kindergarten rotated through. Two blue-eyed children. In high school, a boy (*whose name I kept as my iPod4 password in 7th grade*)
said his dream was golden retrievers and marriage and white fences and six figures.

*(I knew I was queer. HA!
I laughed behind his back.)*

Our hand-me-downs his sister's whole life
I remember her stumbling toddler/pink CD player/first boyfriend
She returned the favor in our teens with
Crop tops and sundresses and daisy dukes

My mom has my baby clothes in a box in the basement
She'd take my toys to the swap meet;

A stuffed horse;
she didn't ask.

A collection of crochet crafts from a friend who told me about sex before my parents did.

“you wouldn’t believe what my mom just told me.... ”

They told me Santa wasn’t real
And what the middle finger meant
And the plot to *Monty Python*
And that being gay was ok.

“I hope you know I miss talking to you.”

It felt good when boys my friends liked said I was pretty,
asked me to dance when my mom was the
chaperone,

...

on a field-trip, my friend in love with the blond/blue-eyed/tall/thin/white guy
braiding my hair to keep down the fly-aways; a girl two days older than me said we’d look cute
together. I tried to feel bad and didn’t answer. I liked her fingers on my scalp, threading a French
braid,
Fishtail,
Dutch,
More
than kissing him.

When did my skin get so pock-marked,
When did I stop wanting to hold hands,
When should I have gone on meds to feel normal?

When did I start thinking about girls,
When did I stop loving my parents,
When will I stop growing up,

When
will
the
moths
[be] pinned to my wall
repelled by the cedar chest

fall dead on the shag rug //?

CARNATION

My birth flower is the carnation.
I've always loved the resilience of it:
Prod the petals open with your fingers
To make it fuller,
Go deeper,
Make it seem more alive.
Prodprodprod.

Oscar Wilde with his green carnation,
Stuck in his lapel.
I wonder if the pin ever
Drew blood,
If it was tipped in pearl.
If Dorian would earnestly approve.

Elliot Page, Met Gala 2021.
I think only trans people "got it".
Of course, I got it,
The higher fashion.
Too obvious?

The accessible flower,
A dollar at the market.
The symbol of queers.
Of course, I get it.
I was born to love it,
See it, buy it.
January.

A dollar at the market.
Cover a drop of blood
With the dead petals you can peel
From the edges.
Peel away
The rot.

Telling My Father I'm Trans

When I came out to my father

{although my mother told him, I asked her to}

He yelled in the kitchen that it was
just something I'd seen on the
Internet.

Which is true.

I didn't have the words
To say I wasn't

daughter,
girl,
woman

And I didn't know
there was another
option.

Raspberry bushes

Run your fingers down my thighs,
Candle-flicker brushes and fire-burn grabs,
cupping my hips and my skin in
greedy handfuls.

I'm a flower with peach fuzz and
beetle antennae *(and you suck until I'm dry
and nectar is always sticky and
my hair gets stuck to your mouth).*

We'll be naked on the lake side,
goosebumps and skipping
water-smoothed stones and rubbing
sand on our faces.

Have you seen the berry bushes under the willows?

I'll make a beard from honey and you'll lick it off,
hair sticking in strands like it's mine and yours
and hours of sunlight.

*Raspberry bushes prick fingers
and bruises on collarbones
and swollen pink mouths.*

Bit tongues and weather vane exhales,
I can still put my hands between my legs and be a boy,
laying in dry grass and hearing the crows;

Fruit juice and butterflies while
I sigh into myself, I can be a sequoia with you
and sap and sweet acorns and pine fragrance.

I can be churned butter and rock salt on sourdough and
stick your fingers and your mouth
in raspberry and apricot jam.

Let me lick your palm and make me

rugged woodman and syrup flapjacks & berries and cream
on French toast.

MILK AND MELANCHOLY

Milk and melancholy,
The milky white haze of people on the street.
Waiting.

I wonder who had to clean up
The blood.
And if they wore a mask.

The Mortician in San Francisco by
Randall Mann;

(a much better poem than this one)

Funny how the queers clean up
Straight messes and murderers.

I like to picture the blood of Dan White
Drained through the clear tubes,
Replaced with
Formaldehyde.

And I think I would have cheered,
But I doubt the
People on the street
Had the energy or the
heart.

Like the cops that cheered
when Milk was killed.

midnight with a not-girl

It's a big beautiful room, but I want the lights off.
I would look at you forever, but I can't see myself in the mirror,
in the polished silver pitcher, on your phone screen.
With the shades closed I can picture myself as a
big strong farmhand, or maybe an icy mountain climber with
a rough russet beard.
You're a half an inch taller, but I can throw you
against the old oak door and feel your breath catch

and almost forget how long my hair is when your hands are through it
and forget there's nothing hanging when your hands
follow the heat.

I forget how often I'm called "*girl*" in our pregnant twilight pauses,
laying with you in a navy haze,
palms touching.

Who do people love when they think they love me?

I

Who do people love when they think they love me?

I don't know
if they'd see me as a girl
and if that would matter.

II

And
I wonder
if I wasn't myself,
if I would think I was

A woman,

And I wonder, if I look in the mirror
do I see myself at all?

III

My bones have become flower gardens
and my chest is a field of gardenias
and my temples sprout clovers and cardamom

And I wonder, is this who I am?

Tar

I told my roommates
from my first year in the dorms
that I loved them
and they said it back //
they said it first...

{I tell them I'm trans.}

They called me "it"
and poisoned my plants
and I cried in my best friend's car
and she told me not to let it get to me
and I couldn't make her see that the hate
was
tar in my bone marrow
and I couldn't stop crying whenever I saw them
on my way to class.

Sure I'm Trans

I'm sure I'm trans when I am happiest,
And I've been happiest at college

Where I only have to remind my friends
A few times a week
And they loudly correct the people around me.

Not very poetic.

Most of the time my life is metaphors
And daydreams and voice memos and
Stanzas in my notes app...

Nothing more sobering than someone
Not knowing who you are.

But I'm sure I'm trans and I'm sure I'm
Happiest and I'm sure I'm in college and I'm
Not sure if I'll be as certain when I have
to leave.

Trans and holy.

What is being trans but cold winter waters over smooth river stones,
peachy sunset storm clouds,
and dry prairie brush.
My skin is opal and thunder when
you touch me and

call me '*baby doll.*'
I'll be trans in an underwater cave
and we'll be naked and stare at the stalactite ceiling,
covered in glow worms and lichen.

I'll be a silver geode with tits
and you take to me with a diamond-tipped chisel
and you watch for an opening.

I'll be trans and an orange canary
left in a gold mine to
warn the workers
when I stop singing.

I've always been winged and
beaked. I've heard the blue in peacock
feathers is a trick of the light.

We can be rainbows through glass and
the white daisies out the window.

We can pull down the yellow silk curtains and
stick them to me like a chrysalis from
the *Barbie* movie and I'll put on
my rouge and diamonds and plastic-bead-bracelets when we go out.

I'll be trans as you stick your hands under my cashmere sweater
and call me handsome and call me pretty.
Brush a finger over my eyelids,
leave gloss from your lips on
my stomach and call me big.

I'll be Ophelia in the river, hands picking irises, palming up roots
and looking for rings and terra cotta on the shore.
Digging never felt so holy and eating berries never felt so
water-soaked.

Digging never felt so holy,
shovels made from mahogany and iron,
and red painted nails get chipped.

What is being trans but French tips
and lying on cotton sheets and holding on
to thighs and getting sand in your hair,
blue flame and red sequoia and
peat-rich soil with yellow/purple pansies.

I liked pansies before I knew I was less Lady Guinevere and
more *Excalibur*, before I knew you were petal-soft,
before Morgana became kissing Morgan then Anna
in a high school bathroom.

What is being trans but *P+?* graffiti in stalls and
fingers down low waisted jeans and
hands on *Sharpie* butterfly back tats.

What is being trans
than holding you in one hand and a fresh lemon
in the other, making candles
from oranges and carrot cake with veggies from
our garden.

What is being trans but turning angel
as we sleep with the mushrooms in the moss [?]

Red foxes can find our bodies and untangle our arms and
fingers and mouths and
digging never felt so holy.

Reflective Essay

The purpose of this capstone is to make people aware of the complexity of the queer and trans experience. Many of my poems are conversational, which makes it easier to empathize and to respond internally to any of the questions or situations that are presented. The role of the audience is meant to shift depending on the poems; in some cases, the reader is simply listening to a story, whereas others allow for a dialogue between myself and the reader.

Additionally, the intended audience varies depending on the poem. Poems such as “*Raspberry Bushes*” and “midnight with a not-girl” reflect on the sensuality of queer and trans people, whereas “Telling My Father I’m Trans” and “FAIRIES (*i thought i’d find them, but they were me*)” are more straightforward in their portrayals of singular and universal queer experiences. There is supposed to be discomfort within the fluidity and freedoms that are expressed. This is the queer experience, and I tried to imbue both joy and pain into every poem in the collection.

Meanwhile, “CARNATION” and “MILK AND MELANCHOLY” can be viewed from a historical and allegorical perspective, while still allowing for personal queer connection to be made by those more familiar with queer culture. Common experiences and interests that queer people share bring us together, so it was important to me to include at least a few bits of queer history that have impacted how I connect with other queer people, either with past (like Harvey Milk’s assassination) or present (such as Elliot Page’s recent transition) histories. When much of your history has been suppressed and kept from you, you have to keep it alive between those who have experienced it. The LGBTQ+ community has this incredible ability to find examples of ourselves everywhere, and we rely on each other to act as those examples for future generations of queer people.

There are so many aspects of being queer and trans that it was relatively easy to come up with the themes I wanted to include throughout the poems. I especially wanted to focus on some of the positive aspects of being trans, of which there are many: it is only a lack of acceptance that creates the pain and suffering queer people are so accustomed to. There are so many pieces that make up a trans identity and it was a unique and fulfilling experience to express what it's truly like to live outside of the gender binary.

Unfortunately, the process of discovering being trans and coming out has its flaws, and it was an artistic challenge trying to explain the complexities of bigotry so many queer people experience. The poems that express pain, like “**Tar**”, are mainly stunted and curt. Not only is this to prevent prolonged focus on queer pain, but the combination of rambling stanzas with short lines, in addition to very short sentences, is an expression of the numbness and anxiety that comes with experiencing transphobia firsthand.

As for my process, once an idea is partially formed, I begin to decide what format I think will best express that idea. A lot of this starts with the title. I had to decide which poems I wanted to allow the reader to come in with a preconceived notion about the poem, and which ones I wanted to allow a little bit of freedom and almost confusion at first glance. These titles are fluid and usually change after the poem is finished, but they allow me to set the tone for the reading of the work. The majority of the titles in this collection allude to the fact that I am queer and trans, with three poems explicitly having the word “trans” in the title. I knew I didn't want to shy away from my identity: this is meant to reveal hidden histories after all.

I also see being queer and trans as a very natural part of the world, so nature themes are very prevalent in the titles and within almost every poem in the collection. I try to balance my connection to nature with my own physical experiences in order to create a reprieve from either

topic that keeps the reader from feeling like the work is redundant. This also allows the reader to connect their own experiences with the world to my experiences of being queer in a more digestible way. I've always loved turning hyper-specific emotions into something tangible. For example, in "FAIRIES (*i thought i'd find them, but they were me*)" I describe the experience of losing my first tooth as a reflection of losing my youth and my view of who I was at that moment. By comparing myself to a dying canary in a mine in "*Trans and holy.*" I am trying to make the reader see me as something trapped, used only to allow others to find something more valuable than I am, then being left to die.

Not all of these lines and comparisons are exclusively how I feel about my trans and queerness. However, I am always trans and I am always queer and these are my experiences while being in this body. While being queer and trans is the main point of these poems, they're also written to be universally understood by anyone who feels deeply. I feel deeply about being queer. I feel deeply about being trans. I am also human. Familial problems, uncertainty, and the process of finding yourself are all universal experiences that I hope will come across in a way that allows the reader to feel themselves within the poem while still understanding my own experience.