Title
“What's Murder Got to Do with It?”: A Black Man's Quest For Love

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“What’s Murder Got to Do with It?”: A Black Man’s Quest for Love

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Master of Fine Arts in Theatre and Dance (Acting)

by

Xavier Clark

Committee in charge:

Richard Robichaux, Chair
Eva Barnes
Ursula Meyer

2020
The Thesis of Xavier Clark is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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Chair

University of California San Diego

2020
DEDICATION

For Dale Lee Clark, my superhero, I hope you are resting easy.

For Hatice Clark, my beautiful and resilient mother, who taught me to always pray for those who have been unkind to me and wish them well.

For Sukran Aslan, my bundle of joy grandmother, who taught me to dream big.
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File 1. *Man in Love* Photo 1, Clark_ManInLove_Photo1.jpg

File 2. *Man in Love* Photo 2, Clark_ManInLove_Photo2.jpg

File 3. *Man in Love* Photo 3, Clark_ManInLove_Photo3.jpg
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to start by thanking Stephen Buescher for putting your trust and faith in me to be your leading man with Paul Pare Jr., for treating me with tenderness, care and unwavering support, for exemplifying how to lead a room with grace and specificity as a Black man in a predominantly White institution. I will forever be grateful for the experience of *Man in Love* that you provided for me.

Thank you to Ursula Meyer for her detail oriented support as my vocal coach in helping me find sophisticated and layered vocal choices that helped me fill the gigantic Weiss Theatre night after night. I have to extend my acknowledgements to other faculty and mentors who have helped to shape me into the artist that I am today: Major thanks to Kim Rubinstein for reminding me that I am enough, to Richard Robichaux for teaching me to ‘really do what you are doing for real’, to Wesley Fata for always asking ‘who’s going to give me beauty today?’, to Allan Havis and Deborah Stein for helping me unlock my voice as a creator across mediums, to Betsy Parrish, Alithea Phillips, Alice Saltzman and Paul Takacs for helping me trust my instincts and always strive for the truth, to Mike Skillern and Abby Cate for making me see my potential as an artist in the long run, and to Ergun Keskin for recognizing an awkward eight year old boy with talent and his desperate need to dance, to perform, to create. I would not be where I am today without her. Thank you to Marybeth Ward for always looking out for me and never letting me sink, to Andrea Abello, my rock, for keeping me grounded and sane for my entire duration of grad school, to Hannah Finn for all the laughs and spaces we held for each other, to Aslihan Tark for being my sister and chosen family since second grade, and finally, to my 2020 War Buddies--Kichi, MR, Rara, Daveed, Mikey, CPeezy, and G—you are the fabric of my time in grad school, through thick and thin.
ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

“What’s Murder Got to Do with It?”: A Black Man’s Quest for Love

by

Xavier Clark
Master of Fine Arts in Theatre and Dance (Acting)
University of California San Diego, 2020
Professor Richard Robichaux, Chair

In scene eighteen of Christina Anderson’s play *Man in Love*, Paul Pare Jr., a twenty-five-year-old African American librarian, has a full-on conversation with the dead body of a woman he has just murdered. He begins to rummage through the victim’s belongings and stumbles across her wedding ring. In observing the wedding ring, he says, “I wish I loved somebody this much.” This brief, private moment was the a-ha moment for me, as an actor, where I felt I had unlocked the most vulnerable parts of this character, a character who on the page can easily be taken as a stereotypical monster. It was in the distance between his acts of murder and his reveal of how, just like all humans, he wants to fall in love, that I discovered a soul connection between myself and Paul Pare Jr. After that, Paul Pare Jr.’s journey became one that was a quest for love in all the wrong ways, rather than a sadistic serial killer with unpacked childhood trauma.
In working on developing Paul Pare Jr.’s character, I watched interviews with notorious serial killers; Jeffrey Dahmer, Ted Bundy, Ed Kemper, and what struck me was realizing how they didn’t look, act, or sound any different than folks in my inner circle. They were all incredibly intelligent, articulate and charming. There wasn’t a series of physically identifiable personality traits for me to potentially wear as a mask in portraying Paul Pare Jr., but what they did have in common was a deeply rooted desire to love and possess other humans and their bodies. This discovery, combined with my a-ha moment when reading scene eighteen, allowed for me to bring my full self to the table in portraying Paul Pare Jr. and utilize my artistic tools that I’ve gained from the classroom to stand in my truth as a Black man on a quest for love.