

SUN GOES DOWN

Analysis and information



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U3BVFY9wnTw>

Lil nas X

Lil Nas X (real name Montero Lamar Hill) is an American rapper/artist (and former internet personality). SUN GOES DOWN (stylised with all caps) was a single release from his first album (Montero, 2021).

The artist came out as gay in June 2019, shortly after the release of his EP “Panini”. Although the majority of his fanbase responded positively, there were negative and homophobic reactions.



From Wikipedia...

Montero Lamar Hill was born in Lithia Springs, Georgia, on April 9, 1999. He was named after the Mitsubishi Montero. His parents divorced when he was six, and he settled in the Bankhead Courts housing project in the Bankhead neighborhood of Atlanta with his mother and grandmother. Three years later, he moved in with his father, a gospel singer, north of the city in Austell. Although initially reluctant to leave, he later regarded it as an important decision, "There's so much shit going on in Atlanta—if I would have stayed there, I would have fallen in with the wrong crowd." He started "using the Internet heavily right around the time when memes started to become their own form of entertainment"; about when he was 13.

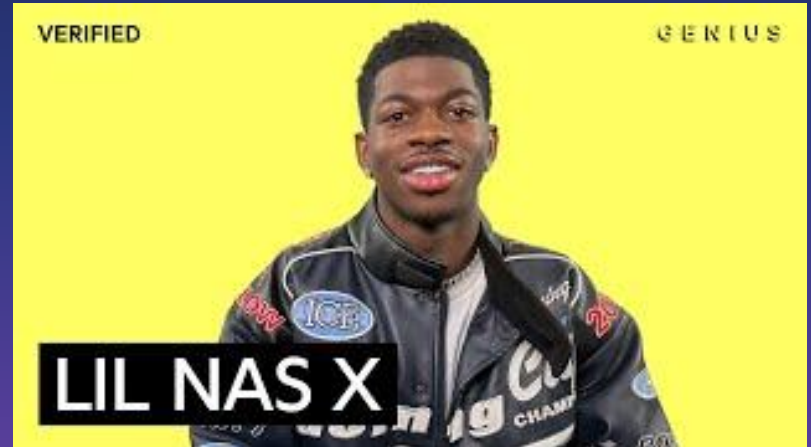
He spent much of his teenage years alone, and turned to the Internet, "particularly Twitter, creating memes that showed his disarming wit and pop-culture savvy." His teenage years also saw him struggling with his coming out to himself as being gay; he prayed that it was just a phase, but around 16 or 17 he came to accept it. He began playing trumpet in the fourth grade and was first chair by his junior high years, but quit out of fear of looking uncool.

Hill attended Lithia Springs High School, from which he graduated in 2017. He then enrolled at the University of West Georgia, where he majored in computer science, but later dropped out after one year to pursue a musical career. During this time, he stayed with his sister and supported himself with jobs at Zaxby's restaurants and the Six Flags Over Georgia theme park. In September 2019 he revisited his high school to perform a surprise concert.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=21xP5U8xHVA>

https://youtu.be/DxZ-R3jfedc?s=i=q2E7B_bpPVCxK3k



SUN GOES DOWN

The video for SUN GOES DOWN was **directed by Lil Nas X** in collaboration with LA-based production and management company **Psycho Films**. The single preceded the release of the album and followed the release of the single *Montero (Call Me By Your Name)*, the video for which caused some controversy due to its explicitly queer themes and religious iconography. SUN GOES DOWN was made available on YouTube in May 2021.





Lil nas X - visual motifs

The video includes some of the visual **motifs** typical of Lil Nas X videos (for example, **the creation of CGI worlds; the artist as a fantasy version of himself**) but these are low key when compared to some of his earlier work since the artist wanted this video to feel “very real”. Discussing the video during an interview with Rolling Stone magazine, he was quoted as saying: *“My visual aesthetic is always changing. But a re-occurring theme in my work would always be **Surrealism**, or **Futurism**. I really love to mix reality with imagination—I guess that’s my ‘thing’ ... [in the music video for] ‘SUN GOES DOWN,’ I kept that kind of feeling to a minimum, because I wanted it to feel very real. But you still have me in a meditative state, where I go to this purple world where it’s like my future and past all existing in one place. I fly through that and go to my past me, and I’m trying to uplift him.”*

FUTURISM

CURIOUS
MUSE

WHAT
INSPIRED
SURREALISM?



**AFROFUTURISM IS
NOT JUST BLACK SCI-FI
INVERSE**





What Lil nas X says about the video

Lil Nas X posted a message for his younger self on Twitter in the February before the song was released:

Although referring to the single released before SUN GOES DOWN, the themes of both song and video develop the ideas in the tweet (and indeed those of the preceding videos).

Shortly before the video was released, Lil Nas X posted:

*“Dear 14 year old Montero, I wrote a song with our name in it. It’s about a guy I met last summer. I know we promised to never come out publicly, I know we promised never to be ‘that’ type of gay person, I know we promised to die with the secret, but this will open doors for many other queer people to simply exist. You see this is very scary for me, people will be angry, they will say I’m pushing an agenda. But the truth is, I am. The agenda to make people stay the f*** out of other people’s lives and stop dictating who they should be. Sending you love from the future.”*

“in the “sun goes down” video i go back in time to visit a younger version self who’s struggling inside, hating himself, & doesn’t want to live anymore. i try my best to uplift him. can’t wait to share this song and video with you guys on friday. this one is really special to me.”

Overview...

The video juxtaposes a stylised, futuristic version of the Lil Nas X of 2021 (who has embraced his sexuality) with his younger (2017, according to the prom poster) self, who is struggling with his identity. Both the song and the video deal with themes such as bullying, self-hatred, and contemplating suicide before ending with hopeful imagery depicting Lil Nas X transforming into his current identity.





Sample exam question:

‘Explain how representations in music videos are chosen to promote the artist(s). Refer to one of the music videos you have studied to support your answer.’

Communicating meanings:

- How can we see what Lil Nas X wants us to see in the video? What codes does he use to put his meanings across?
- What type of narrative is it?
- What meanings are created here:







Time for a textual analysis...

4 areas to analyse:

- Cinematography (camera shots, angles and movement)
- Editing
- Sound
- Mise-en-scene (colour, lighting, props, costumes, make up, acting, SFX)



Genre Codes and Conventions:

- SUN GOES DOWN fits into the broader category of music video as a form, as well as performance/narrative video as a genre.
- The video clearly shows the standard relationship between music and images (for example, the shot of Lil Nas X looking at his lips in the mirror as he sings the line, “Always thinkin’, Why my lips so big?”)
- There is a clear narrative through-line which could be considered in the context of other narrative videos (as well as Lil Nas X’s earlier output).
- However, some of the lyrics (particularly the
- lines which seem to relate to suicide) are presented in a more expressionistic or ambiguous manner; reasons for this might be explored.

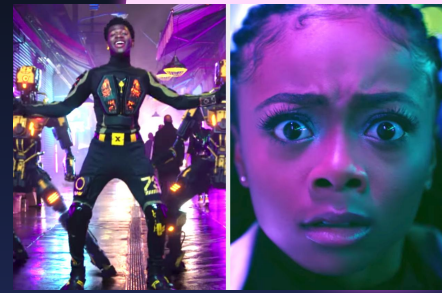
The video plays with a range of genre conventions, which are hybridised within the video. These include:

- science fiction/fantasy
- (queer) coming of age drama
- teen/school drama
- magical realism.



Intertextuality

- Lil Nas X scrolls through a number of his past videos and settles briefly on Panini. This was the track he released just before he came out in 2019; the video includes his character seemingly wooing/stalking a female character (as well as including a far more confident/arrogant version of the artist than is seen in this video).
- The use of “prophet eyes” may link to several characters, although it is a typical trope to connote mystical or magical characters.
- The mention of Nicki Minaj, which refers to Lil Nas X’s pre-fame life when he ran a Nicki Minaj fan account on Twitter as well as a brief interaction the two had in 2020, when Minaj reacted to Lil Nas X explaining why he had denied being a fan of hers – “People will assume if you had an entire fan page dedicated to nicki u are gay. and the rap/music industry ain’t exactly built or accepting of gay men yet”.
- The scenes set in the school and the prom are archetypical for many American teen/school/coming of age dramas, while the final “feelgood” dance section fits the climax of such films.
- The notion of an angelic figure saving a desperate man from suicide is the basic plot of *It’s a Wonderful Life*.





Representations

What are they?

Do they feel realistic?

What social contexts are affecting the representations?

Are there stereotypes?

Are there specific social groups represented?



How does
the audience
respond?