

**‘NOTHING NEW UNDER THE SUN’: LITERARY ALLUSION,  
INTERTEXTUALITY, AND LYRICAL PERFORMATIVE STYLISTIC  
ALLUSION IN HIP HOP LYRICISM**

**Paul S. Adey**

**Thesis submitted to Nottingham Trent University  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**January 2023**

# **‘Nothing New Under the Sun’:<sup>1</sup> Literary Allusion, Intertextuality, and Lyrical Performative Stylistic Allusion in Hip Hop Lyricism**

**Paul S. Adey**

## **ABSTRACT**

This critical-creative thesis explores how several rap artists from key eras in hip hop culture have utilised the techniques of literary allusion and intertextuality to impact their work in multiple meaningful ways. The creative component of the thesis (comprising a trilogy of rap LPs) provides a template/framework for future research in these areas through a practice-based, creative-led focus on the use of intertextuality in rap to identify and artistically illustrate the sophisticated uses of these techniques. Case studies included in this thesis focus on: Nas’s use of creative patrilineage (Higgins, 2007) to form modes of lyrical transcendence, epistolary legacy, and religious and thematic allusion (Ch. 1); Kendrick Lamar’s engagement with intertextuality to explore loss and trauma, and his revision of the postmortem sampling trope (Williams, 2013) (Ch. 2); and the technique of lyrical performative stylistic allusion through the lyrics of J.I.D., Kemba, Saba, Earl Sweatshirt, and MIKE and Navy Blue (Ch. 3).

Whilst intertextuality in hip hop has been defined in recent years (e.g., Williams, 2013; Diallo, 2015), academic research into how it (alongside literary allusion specifically, and the innovative technique of lyrical performative stylistic allusion) is employed artistically to translate modes of vulnerability such as trauma and grief and affect methods of personal and communal catharsis is limited. Using my own understandings and experiences of loss and trauma, I extend this research by providing a critically-informed personal artistic

---

<sup>1</sup> Quote taken from Nas’s ‘No Idea’s Original’, *The Lost Tapes* (Ill Will, Columbia, 2002).

reflection into universal aspects of the male experience, men's mental health, and masculinity in contemporary society.

## Acknowledgements

To my father, Stephen ‘Steve-hammer’ Adey, and the city of Nottingham, for giving and taking away in equal measure. Without your tough love I would never have been able to create the music presented as part of this thesis.

My passion for hip hop culture and rap music was nurtured in an environment of friendship and independence that my mother, Linda Adey, enabled me. You instilled in me the gift of unconditional love, humour, camaraderie, and a spirit of creativity without prejudice that has remained with me to this day.

It started with a push in the right direction by my next-door neighbour, Denise Morris, who one day – after over-hearing my aspirations as a young MC – drove me to the ACNA Arts centre on Hungerhill Road, St. Anns, and introduced me to two of the most influential figures in Nottingham rap music and hip hop culture: Courtney, and Trevor Rose.

Throughout my career in music, I have been mentored and guided by several practitioners in hip hop, beginning with the Rose brothers, then DJ Styly Cee – later, to a lesser extent Joe Buddha – and finally, the P Brothers. These individuals taught me the meaning of homage, deference, hard work, and rigour when it came to making rap music on my own terms. Record labels, music producers, rappers, and other musical affiliates who have helped shape my career and to whom I am greatly indebted, are Son Records, Tru Thoughts (Zebra Traffic), Boot Records, KingUnderground, Village Live, Breakin’ Bread, Blunted Astronaut, and YNR Productions, Lee Ramsay, Tempa, Scor-Zay-Zee, Mr 45, Tower, Mr Brown, Scholar, DJ Excalibah, DJ Nappa, Mark Gamble, C-Mone, DJ Charlie Chase, Cyrus Malachi, Blue Eyes, Ringz ov Saturn, L Fudge, Jug-a-Naut, Vandal Savage, DJ Donnie Propa, and DJ Dan Rattomatic. A special thanks goes to the Herbaliser, and more recently, the Sleaford Mods, for enabling me to tour many parts of the UK and Europe with them, sharpening my performative skills along the way.

On deciding to follow my passion for Creative Writing as a mature student, I owe a great deal of thanks to Nottingham Trent University (NTU) for being home to my studies and research interests, and for housing a brilliant selection of thinkers who aided my academic trajectory every step of the way. Tutors and practitioners who shaped my critical thinking in the realms of English and Creative writing are Sharon Ouditt, Eve Makis, Andrew Thacker, Andrew Taylor, Pete Smith, William Ivory, Cathy Clay, Stephanie Palmer, Philip Leonard, Tim Youngs, Nicole Thiara, Sarah Jackson, Daniel Cordle, Rebecca Cullen, Annalise Grice, and Nahem Yousaf.

I want to thank Jenni Ramone (NTU), Sophy Smith (De Montfort University), and Matt Connell (NTU) for being on my supervisory team regarding my PhD journey, and I owe special gratitude to Rory Waterman (NTU) for his tireless support and guidance in developing and finalising this thesis.

An additional, special shout out goes to Dr Angela Martinez Dy (Loughborough University London) for her generosity and time in helping shape my initial proposal for this project, and to the Midlands4Cities organisation for accepting my proposal, and their generous support in enabling this thesis to exist.

For their pioneering work in the field of knowledge I now walk in, I owe a great deal to Justin Williams, H. Samy Alim, David Diallo, Adam Krims, Russel A. Potter, Tricia Rose, and Mitchel Ohriner, and many more scholars cited and referenced throughout this project.

A key player in the development of the creative component of this thesis is Pete ('1stBlood') Chilvers, an extraordinary studio engineer and musical friend, without whom the accompanying music for my trilogy would not have been brought to life so vividly. Instrumental contributors to my trilogy I would also like to thank for making this work so musically diverse are Sam Zircon, Theorist, Congi, Dr Zygote, and Kashmere.

To my aunty, Lesley Phair, and NTU Emeritus Professor Phil Banyard, thank you for your generosity and patience, unwavering support throughout this long journey, and for playing such a large role in instilling within me the confidence to study at a high level of education.

To Melissa Adey, my love, whose compassion, selflessness, and resilience has been a constant inspiration to me. It is to you and our children that I owe the most gratitude. Thank you.

I dedicate this project to Christian and Amelia Adey. You give me the strength to persevere and find joy and happiness in the actions I take on planet earth. I hope this work solidifies in you this one truth: There is a tremendous potential inside you to achieve great things, follow your dreams and make them happen!

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>CHAPTER ONE</b> 'Nothing New Under the Sun': Intertextuality in the Lyrics of Nas	<b>28</b>
<b>CHAPTER TWO</b> Intertextuality and the Articulation of Loss and Trauma in the Lyrics of Kendrick Lamar	<b>56</b>
<b>CHAPTER THREE</b> Lyrical Performative Stylistic Allusion in the Lyrics of Kendrick Lamar, J.I.D., Kemba, Saba, Earl Sweatshirt, MIKE, and Navy Blue	<b>87</b>
<b>PREFACE to <i>CAPSULE</i></b>	<b>128</b>
<b>CHAPTER FOUR</b> The Annotated Lyrics of <i>S.T.A.R.V.E.</i> , <i>Houses</i> , and <i>Uzumaki</i>	<b>136</b>
<i>S.T.A.R.V.E.</i>	<i>136</i>
<i>Houses</i>	<i>173</i>
<i>Uzumaki</i>	<i>221</i>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>266</b>

# **‘Nothing New Under the Sun’:<sup>1</sup> Literary Allusion, Intertextuality, and Lyrical Performative Stylistic Allusion in Hip Hop Lyricism**

## **Introduction**

‘The rap world, as an imagined community, “regards unconcealed intertextuality as integral to the production and reception of its artistic culture”’

— David Diallo, ‘Intertextuality in Rap Lyrics’.<sup>2</sup>

This practice-led, critical and creative thesis aims primarily to explore different ways in which rap artists utilise intertextuality and literary allusion in their lyrics, and then articulate this in my own practice. In order to emphasise reader engagement with my creative component, the thesis is structured into: three critical chapters exploring intertextuality and literary allusion in several different hip hop artists, transcriptions of the lyrics of a trilogy of original LPs accompanied by detailed gloss notes regarding intertextuality and literary allusion, and – as an appendix – the trilogy of music LPs from which the glossed lyrics are taken.

As a practitioner of hip hop lyricism who works in the rap vernacular tradition,<sup>3</sup> I liken rap music to a branch stemming directly from a tree of culture known as hip hop: an

---

<sup>1</sup> Quote taken from Nas’s ‘No Idea’s Original’, *The Lost Tapes* (Ill Will, Columbia, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> David Diallo, ‘Intertextuality in Rap Lyrics’, *Association Francaise d’Etudes Americaines*, 142 (2015), 40-54 (p.41).

<sup>3</sup> Mark Lamont Hill refers to artists who perform rap as practitioners of the ‘hip-hop vernacular tradition’. Others describe them as ‘rappers’, ‘MCs’ (or ‘emcees’), and ‘hip hop lyricists’. For this thesis, I will use all the above terms when describing rap artists. I do this as a means of reflecting the fluid use of nomenclature in the genre, and the continually evolving lexicon accepted as a natural part of hip hop culture’s discursive progression. Within the culture, no term for the rap artist is ideal or permanent, as language, terminology, and definition is always on the move. In fact, terms and definitions can often be interchangeable, subverted, and/or adapted to connote new meanings.

See Marc Lamont Hill, ‘Critical Pedagogy Comes at Halftime: Nas as Black Intellectual’, in *Born to Use Mics: Reading Nas’s ‘Illmatic’*, ed. by Michael Eric Dyson & Sohail Daulatzai (New York, NY: BasicCivitas Books, 2010),

artistic movement, lifestyle, and resistant mode of consciousness inherently linked with African American artistic expression, embraced by marginalised people since the early 1970s. First established in New York,<sup>4</sup> hip hop culture and rap was practiced by inner city and predominantly black and Hispanic communities throughout America, before rapidly becoming a global cultural phenomenon.<sup>5</sup>

As rap music became more widespread, so too did its lyrical sophistication develop. This shift towards a more technically complex, higher level of socio-political consciousness and self-awareness is, for example, clearly signalled by the early work of ‘God MC’, Rakim Allah during the late 1980s and early 1990s, a period often defined as a ‘golden era’<sup>6</sup> for the culture. Paul Edwards notes that ‘many MCs credit Rakim with the big shift toward more complex rhyme schemes and flows’.<sup>7</sup> As Planet Asia explains: ‘When you’re talking about Rakim, you’re talking about the next level, the shift, the literal shift [...]—no more simple rap. It upped the ante for lyrics’ (97).

This was a time when rappers such as Rakim, Big Daddy Kane, KRS-One, and Kool G Rap<sup>8</sup> began to showcase the art form as a legitimate platform for verbal dexterity in conjunction with unique, honest, and often harrowing narratives regarding experiences of inner-city life in contemporary America. Detailing this notion further, in her observations of

---

p. 113. For a detailed description of Hip Hop Nation Language, see H. Samy Alim, ‘Bring it to the Cipher’, in *Roc the Mic Right: The Language of Hip Hop Culture* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006) pp. 74-108.

<sup>4</sup> See KRS-One, ‘The Second Overstanding’ in *The Gospel of Hip Hop: First Instrument, Presented by KRS ONE for the Temple of Hip Hop* (New York: powerHouse (pH) Books, 2009), p. 123. Also, see Jeff Chang, ‘Making a Name: How DJ Kool Herc Lost his Accent and Started Hip Hop’, in *Can’t Stop Won’t Stop: History of the Hip-Hop Generation* (London: Random House Group, 2007), p. 67.

<sup>5</sup> For further information regarding the origins of hip hop, See Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1994).

<sup>6</sup> See Justin A. Williams, *Rhyming and Stealin’: Musical Borrowing in Hip-Hop* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2013), pp. 47-48.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Edwards, ‘Rhyme Schemes’ in *How to Rap: The Art and Science of the Hip-Hop MC* (Chicago, IL: Chicago Review Press, Incorporated, 2009), p. 97.

<sup>8</sup> See Edwards, *How to Rap*, p. 98.



rap's origin story, Tricia Rose states that 'from the outset, rap music has articulated the pleasures and problems of black urban life in contemporary America'.<sup>9</sup>

Whilst technical complexity and socially conscious subject matter in rap pre-existed this period,<sup>10</sup> rappers such as Rakim are critically acknowledged as individuals who made it possible for a sub-genre such as the one defined by Adam Krims as 'reality rap'<sup>11</sup> to flourish. Reality rap (as opposed to other modes or sub-genres such as 'party rap', 'mack' or playa rap, and 'jazz/bohemian' rap),<sup>12</sup> defined briefly here as 'any rap that undertakes the project of realism, in the classical sense', and which amounts 'to an epistemological/ontological project to map the realities of (usually black) inner-city life',<sup>13</sup> reached its apex in the mid-1990s, as artists such as N.W.A., The Notorious B.I.G., Tupac, Nas, and Wu-Tang Clan gave voice to the black male experience of inner-city America to a massive global audience.<sup>14</sup> If we flash forward to contemporary modes of rap, the informed observer will note that reality rap's influential dye runs through all aspects of the genre, making the employment of it a prerequisite for many rap artists when practicing the discipline.

Through reality rap's rise to prominence, and the exponential increase in technical complexity and emotional and intellectual resonance in rap lyrics since the mid-1990s, rap artists' use of intertextuality and literary allusion – among other techniques – has increased in prevalence. Over the past decade, leading practitioners and scholars have come to

---

<sup>9</sup> Tricia Rose, 'Introduction' in *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), pp. 2-3.

<sup>10</sup> See Melle Mel's 'broken glass, everywhere' verse on Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five's, 'The Message', from *The Message* (Sugar Hill Records, 1982).

<sup>11</sup> See Adam Krims, 'A Genre System for Rap Music', in *Rap Music and the Poetics of Identity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 70.

<sup>12</sup> See Krims, *Rap Music and the Poetics of Identity*, pp 55-70.

<sup>13</sup> Krims, *Rap Music*, p. 70.

<sup>14</sup> As of May 18<sup>th</sup>, 2013, Nas, Tupac, The Wu Tang Clan, The Notorious B.I.G., and Dr Dre (of NWA) have places on Erik Ross's list of 'The 50 Best Selling Rap Albums of All Time', *Complex* <[complex.com/music/2013/05/the-50-best-selling-rap-albums/](http://complex.com/music/2013/05/the-50-best-selling-rap-albums/)> [accessed 2 November 2021].

acknowledge these techniques as fundamental catalysts for, and vital components within, the functioning of the art form.<sup>15</sup>

As this is a creative-led, critical and creative thesis, before further discussing the above concept and related techniques used in rap, I want to introduce elements of my own practice that not only reflect my longevity and authenticity as a published practitioner within the field,<sup>16</sup> but also consider my perspective in relation to this investigation. As a hip hop artist and scholar of hip hop, I am *within* the art form, and therefore do not have a solely academic, or critical, viewpoint.<sup>17</sup>

## Establishing Critical Grounds

‘the text is a weapon against time, oblivion and the trickery of speech, which is so easily taken back, altered, denied’.

— Roland Barthes, *Theory of the Text*.<sup>18</sup>

‘I was in a mode of mastering how to be a rapper. Like a rapper’s rapper, using my tongue as a sword, a fuckin’ barbarian. That’s all it was about, slaying words’.

— Kendrick Lamar, ‘Writer at War’.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> For example, see Russel A. Potter, *Spectacular Vernaculars: Hip-Hop and the Politics of Postmodernism* (Albany, NY: State of New York Press, 1995), Williams, *Rhyming and Stealin’*, David Diallo, *Collective Participation and Audience Engagement in Rap Music* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), Mitchell Ohriner, *Flow: The Rhythmic Voice in Rap Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

<sup>16</sup> For further details, see Cappo, *The Codex EP* (Son Records, 1999); *Genghis* (Son Records, 2010); *Dramatic Change of Fortune* (YNR, 2016) <[discogs.com/artist/122088-Cappo](https://discogs.com/artist/122088-Cappo)> [accessed 2 November 2021].

<sup>17</sup> Here, by observing rap through what I deem a ‘unique’ lens of praxis, I hope to avoid what Russel Potter describes as a pitfall of ‘much scholarly writing about rap’, namely the ‘appropriation of its indigenous knowledges and practices merely in order to annex them to academic modes of knowledge’. Potter, *Spectacular Vernaculars*, p. 146.

<sup>18</sup> See Graham Allen, ‘The Text Unbound: Barthes’, *Intertextuality: The New Critical Idiom* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 61.

<sup>19</sup> Through his metaphorical use of words, Kendrick Lamar demonstrates concisely the agonistic and combative standpoint assumed almost universally by hip hop lyricists regarding their craft. This standpoint relates not only to imaginary and real life ‘opponents’ in the rap world, but also to language itself, as Lamar states his intentions of ‘slaying words’: literally, destroying language. The notion of ‘killing’ verses, or ‘destroying lyrics’, as with the act of likening oneself to a warrior, pugilist, or even a warlord, is commonplace in rap lyrics. See

Having long implicitly accepted the use of intertextuality and (often literary) allusion in rap music, frequently employing it to varying degrees before becoming aware of its definition(s), I reached a point in my career when I yearned to understand it as fully as possible, for practical artistic purposes. Utilising my previous blind acceptance of the concept (in both my music and the work of other artists), I chose to explore what fascinated me about uses of intertextuality and literary allusion in rap lyrics, and why its occurrence seemed to resonate so deeply with my own practice.

My first discovery of an in-depth study into intertextuality in rap was a doctoral thesis ('Musical Borrowing in Hip-Hop Music') completed at the University of Nottingham by Justin Williams in 2009,<sup>20</sup> and later developed into the monograph *Rhymin' and Stealin'*.<sup>21</sup> Alongside several other studies into similar areas of rap lyricism (see footnote 15), this text was foundational to my growing academic understanding of the concept. Williams's work concretises the notion that, since its beginnings, 'the rap world, as an imagined community, "regards unconcealed intertextuality as integral to the production and reception of its artistic culture"'.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, hip hop has intrinsically relied on the use of multiple (and often hybrid) forms of intertextuality as part of a quasi-symbiotic relationship integral to its fundamental progression, a sentiment echoed by Russel A. Potter: 'the fundamental practice of hip-hop is one of citation, of the relentless sampling of sonic and verbal archives'.<sup>23</sup> What Potter describes as 'citation' here, Williams terms as 'borrowing', a definition covering all forms of intertextual, referential, and allusive engagement in rap:

---

Kendrick Lamar, 'Writer at War: Kendrick Lamar's XXL Cover Story', *XXL*, 6<sup>th</sup> January 2015 <[xxlmag.com/writer-war-kendrick-lamar-own-words/](http://xxlmag.com/writer-war-kendrick-lamar-own-words/)> [accessed 12 November 2018].

<sup>20</sup> Justin A. Williams, 'Musical Borrowing in Hip-Hop Music: Theoretical Frameworks and Case Studies' (doctoral thesis, University of Nottingham, 2009).

<sup>21</sup> Williams, *Rhymin' and Stealin'*.

<sup>22</sup> In the quoted passage, Diallo cites Justin Williams, *Rhymin' and Stealin'* (p. 11) for his 'Intertextuality in Rap Lyrics' paper (p. 41).

<sup>23</sup> Potter, *Spectacular Vernaculars*, pp. 53-54.

Intertextuality in hip-hop recordings [...] can occur in the lyrics, the ‘flow’ of the MC, and the ‘beat’. Borrowing in hip-hop [pertains to] a vast network of processes, strategies, and modes of expression [...] Hip-hop embraces borrowing traditions from both African-based and European-based music, and yet is also a product of its socio-historical and technological situations. Hip-hop, like blues and jazz, is an ‘open source’ culture, and this particular character of these musical cultures is crucial to their aesthetics.<sup>24</sup>

As with many scholars in hip hop studies (and other fields), Williams uses the concept of intertextuality as an umbrella term encompassing various conceptual and literary devices. By overtly (and at times implicitly) drawing on (citing, sampling, quoting, alluding to and responding to, referencing, and calling out) multiple textural sources that enhance emotional and intellectual connections between themselves and their audience, rap artists garner further meaning and emotional understanding in their work. Building on a wide variety of scholars and experts in contemporary and classical music, media, linguistics, and hip hop studies (in the following passage, Williams references Richard Shusterman’s ‘The Fine Art of Rap’), Williams notes that ‘artistic appropriation is the historical source of hip-hop music and still remains the core of its technique and a central feature of its aesthetic form and message’.<sup>25</sup> He explains that ‘this practice fits within a long lineage of other musical genres and cultures, but appropriation in the digital era means that there are even more possibilities that hip-hop practitioners can utilize to create their music’.<sup>26</sup>

‘Artistic appropriation’ should be viewed here as a rapper’s ‘open source’ (270) method of drawing power and meaning from multiple artistic sources that in some way meaningfully relates to – and therefore, enhances – points being made in their lyrics, as a way of increasing the emotional/intellectual impact of their own work on the listener. For the purposes of my thesis, emphasis on the occurrence of intertextuality and allusion in the

---

<sup>24</sup> Williams, ‘Musical Borrowing’, p. 270.

<sup>25</sup> Richard Shusterman, ‘The Fine Art of Rap’, in *New Literary History*, 22 (1991), 613-632 (p. 617).

<sup>26</sup> Williams, ‘Musical Borrowing’, p. 39.

‘lyrics, the “flow” of the MC’ (270), and more specifically, how these elements affect an artist’s performance and their interaction with the ‘beat’ and their audience is essential.

## **Defining Intertextuality and Literary Allusion: The Widening Currency of Kristeva’s Intertextual Kaleidoscope**

‘Any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another’.

— Julia Kristeva, *Desire and Language*.<sup>27</sup>

Defining intertextuality is contentious, even when applying the term to artistic mediums often considered more concretely ‘literary’ than rap, such as the novel, poetry, or other forms of poetic language. As Graham Allen explains, with regard to modern scholars and critics’ ‘various’ uses of the term, it is now ‘in danger of meaning nothing more than whatever each particular critic wants it to mean’ (though he also ‘does not seek to rectify this confusion by uncovering a fundamental definition’).<sup>28</sup> Allen’s caveat here does not automatically equate to critics who study contemporary forms of poetic language like rap being somehow incorrect when it comes to comprehension and application of the concept. Rather, it is a call for us ‘to return to the term’s history and to remind ourselves of how and why it has taken on its current meanings and applications’ (2), in order that those who evoke intertextuality’s more recent developments speak of it in terms of its origins.

Engaging with Julia Kristeva’s original definition of intertextuality (in her ‘blending’ the theoretical groundwork of ‘Saussure and Bakhtin’) (6) requires an understanding that a

---

<sup>27</sup> Julia Kristeva, ‘Word, Dialogue, and Novel’, *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. by Toril Moi (New York, Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 37.

<sup>28</sup> Allen, *Intertextuality*, p. 2.

linear approach is never taken towards the interpretation of a text's content, and no 'singular' meaning 'uncovered'. Recognition of a text's content as 'dispersed, traceable to different points of origin; the final meaning of this content [being] neither the original source nor any one of the possible meanings taken on in the text' is paramount.<sup>29</sup> This leads to a 'continuous movement back and forth in the space between the origin and all the possible connotative meanings' in the active participator's interpretation of a text (191). Kristeva's ideas came to fruition in *The Bounded Text*,<sup>30</sup> which highlighted the manner in which a 'text is constructed out of already existent discourse. Authors do not create their text from their own original minds, but rather compile them from pre-existent texts'.<sup>31</sup> She makes clear in her work that 'the text is not an individual, isolated object but, rather, a compilation of cultural textuality', and therefore, 'all texts [...] contain within them the ideological structures and struggles expressed in society through discourse' (36). Through semianalysis, she sought to study a given text as a 'textual arrangement of elements which possess a double meaning: a meaning in the text itself and a meaning in [...] "the historical and social text"' (37).

In understanding modern literature (such as modern poetic writing) to be 'very fragmentary, very elliptical', Kristeva opens up the concept of intertextuality to encompass 'both novel and poetry, even if the novelistic element can be taken today in a very broad sense' (192). Widening the currency of the concept further, she asks that intertextuality be accepted as a term 'characterizing the experience of writing', and in so doing, observes that the concept 'concerns all contemporary writing' (192). In respect of Kristeva's understandings of intertextuality as occurring in all contemporary literature, and when

---

<sup>29</sup> Margaret Waller, 'Intertextuality and Literary Interpretation', in *Julia Kristeva: Interviews*, ed. by Ross Michael Guberman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. 191.

<sup>30</sup> Julia Kristeva, *The Bounded Text* (Columbia, SC: Columbia University Press, 1981).

<sup>31</sup> Allen, *Intertextuality*, pp. 35-37.

acknowledging rap as part of that ‘broad kaleidoscope’, intertextuality in hip hop lyricism is ripe for exploration (192).

In much contemporary criticism, the term has come free of the original moorings of Kristeva’s coinage, many scholars and critics using it to refer to various literary techniques outside of her original definitions. However, it can be argued that there are inherent problems with observing a wholly accurate use of such an innately contentious term that excuse these ‘common uses and misuses’<sup>32</sup> somewhat, as in a sense, intertextuality can be read in any text and at any given time. By (hyperbolic) extension, indeed, every utterance in every literary text might be deemed intertextual for, as Roland Barthes puts it, the ‘text is a tissue [a fabric] of quotations’, drawn from ‘innumerable centres of culture’.<sup>33</sup> This leaves a sprawling, insurmountable mountain to theoretically climb.

As such, a working definition for the term, as used in this thesis, is necessary. Thus, for the purposes of this thesis, I define intertextuality as a connection between one author’s work and another that may be deemed intentional or (as that is itself contentious ground) which has a direct linguistic connection to another previous text: when points of reference become overt and rely on another’s words, utterances, or performance to create a layered, deeper meaning. Wherever possible, I will use evidence to support these links, though the act of recognising intertextual links between artists is not always an exact science and, at times, when no official documentation is attainable, my own analytical intervention will be observed.

When defining literary allusion in rap lyrics, I draw upon J. A. Cuddon’s specifications that literature is ‘a broad term’ traditionally denoting a work belonging to a

---

<sup>32</sup> Allen, *Intertextuality*, p. 2.

<sup>33</sup> Barthes elaborates: ‘a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is a one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader’ (148). See Roland Barthes, ‘The Death of the Author’, in *Image, Music, Text* (London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 1977), pp. 146-8.

major genre such as a ‘drama’, ‘novel’, ‘short story’, ‘lyric’, or ‘ode (*qq.v.*)’.<sup>34</sup> Allusion is described as ‘an implicit reference, perhaps to another work of literature or art, to a person or an event. It is often a kind of appeal to a reader to share some experience with the writer [listener]’ (25). When utilising allusion, ‘a writer tends to assume an established literary tradition, a body of common knowledge with an audience sharing that tradition and an ability of the audience to “pick up” the reference’. However, the allusiveness of some authors, ‘poets’, rappers, etc., ‘might be considered to be more specialized, even deliberately esoteric’ (25).<sup>35</sup>

It is important to note the vast majority of allusion in rap music is from one artist to another within the same genre, as part of what Oliver Wang terms ‘internalized discourse’.<sup>36</sup> As hip hop has developed, ‘the music and culture had a long enough internal history’ that ‘references no longer had to bounce off people, ideas, and events outside of hip-hop; a writer could simply nod to someone or something within hip-hop, and readers understood’ (52). However, as analysis of each artist in the following critical chapters will reveal (and as my creative component will also illustrate), there are many sources referred to that function outside of the genre (particularly literary sources), that work to provide rappers’ lyrics and performances with a richer, layered complexity.

Whilst rap music is a performative mode of practice, it is just as much a literary genre as any other literary genre, some of which are performed and some typically not, such as stage plays, lyric poetry, performance poetry, novels. As such, it functions in similar ways to other forms of literature in some fundamental ways, especially regarding its connection with

---

<sup>34</sup> J. A. Cuddon, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition, rev. by M.A.R. Habib (Chichester, WSX: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), p. 25 and p. 404.

<sup>35</sup> See Chapter Three, pp. 112-117 for the occurrence of veiled, multilayered, and often highly subjective allusion as observed in the work(s) of Earl Sweatshirt.

<sup>36</sup> Oliver Wang, ‘Rapping and Repping Asian: Race, Authenticity and the Asian American MC’, in *Alien Encounters: Popular Culture in Asian America*, ed. by Mimi Thi Nguyen and Thuy Linh Nguyen Tu (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), p. 52.



aspects of the human condition, or potential commentary on behalf of the living soul, or *anima mundi*. The concentration of much of this thesis on the particular occurrences of literary allusion in rap is intended to highlight ways rap engages with other literatures of multiple kinds, in its quest for answers to everlasting human questions regarding mortality, morality, faith, and existence, that have inspired authors and poets at least since the earliest extant literary epic, *Gilgamesh*,<sup>37</sup> was written in Akkadian four millennia ago, and almost certainly long before. By focusing on these aspects in the work of hip hop lyricists, it is hoped that new analytical lenses with which to focus on rap lyrics might in future be utilised.

### **Re-perceiving Modes of Intertextuality in Black Literature**

The relative omission of pioneers such as Kristeva and Barthes<sup>38</sup> from conversations regarding intertextuality in rap is mainly due to a reliance in the study of hip hop on differing explorations into the multiplicity, or plurality, of discourse, specifically stemming from Bakhtin's 'dialogism',<sup>39</sup> and a predominantly black vernacular tradition that can be called Signifyin(g).<sup>40</sup>

In 1988, Henry Louis Gates Jr. re-established Signifyin(g), a verbal and literary strategy that encompasses much of the inner workings and functionality of intertextuality, as an effective mode of discourse and rhetorical expression used predominantly within African

---

<sup>37</sup> A.R. George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition, and Cuneiform Texts. Volume One* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>38</sup> Barthes's 'grain of the voice' concept is relied upon heavily during Chapter Three's concentration on textural allusion in rap. See Roland Barthes, 'The Grain of the Voice', in *Image, Music, Text* (London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 1977).

<sup>39</sup> See Allen, 'Origins: Saussure, Bakhtin, Kristeva', in *Intertextuality*, pp. 15-28.

<sup>40</sup> Henry Louis Gates Jr., *The Signifyin(g) Monkey: A Theory of African American Literary Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

American communities.<sup>41</sup> According to David Diallo, intertextuality in black culture is a term used

to connote a form of signifyin(g) that is established by interdependence between texts; cultural codes, allusions, references, and other rhetorical tropes shared between texts that stand in some relation to each other. Refers to the inclusion of inter texts within a text, to contracts that not only connect the author to the reader, but a text to all other texts, past and present.<sup>42</sup>

Further detailing the act of Signifyin(g) in relation to its obvious intertextual properties,

Claudia Mitchell-Kernan defines the concept as incorporating:

essentially a folk notion that dictionary entries for words are not always sufficient for interpreting meanings or messages, or that meaning goes beyond such interpretations. Complimentary remarks may be delivered in a left-handed fashion. A particular utterance maybe an insult in one context and not in another. What pretends to be informative may intend to be persuasive. Superficially, self-abasing remarks are frequently self-praise.<sup>43</sup>

Origins relating to the concept of Signifyin(g) often align with Bakhtin's earlier notions of a dual process that occurs in all communicative discourse, which he termed dialogism, or dialogic speech.<sup>44</sup> Summarising this idea in 1935, Bakhtin argued that 'the word is not a material thing but rather a materially mobile, eternally fickle medium of dialogic interaction',<sup>45</sup> further noting that 'it [the word] never gravitates toward a single conscientiousness or a single voice' (27). When applied in relation to Signifyin(g), especially as a way to alternate meaning and reception in differing environments, Bakhtin's notion still holds true:

---

<sup>31</sup> An early elucidation on the concept is observed in Zora Neale Hurston's 'The Characteristics of Negro Expression' (1934), in which she notes 'it has been said so often that the negro is lacking originality that it has almost become gospel [...] but if one looks closely its falsity is immediately evident.' What is now deemed as Signifyin(g) Hurston termed 'masterful revision' in her essay; a way of layering, reworking, or subverting previous art in an increasingly complex fashion. See Zora Neale Hurston, 'Characteristics of Negro Expression', in *Within the Circle: An Anthology of African American Literary Criticism from the Harlem Renaissance to the Present*, ed. by Angelyn Mitchell (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), pp. 79-97.

<sup>42</sup> Diallo, 'Intertextuality in Rap Lyrics', p. 52.

<sup>43</sup> H. Samy Alim, *Roc the Mic Right: The Language of Hip Hop Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 82.

<sup>44</sup> See Gates Jr., *The Signifying Monkey*, Diallo, *Intertextuality in Rap*, and Williams, *Rhyming and Stealin'*.

<sup>45</sup> Allen, *Intertextuality*, p. 27.

the life of the word is contained in its transference from one mouth to another, from one context to another context, from one social collective to another, from one generation to another generation. In this process the word does not forget its own path and cannot completely free itself from the power of those concrete contexts into which it has entered (27).

Strengthening the relationship of Signifyin(g) to dialogism, and highlighting its unique historical employment by African American communities as a means of subverting, resisting, and often disempowering Eurocentric meaning and value regarding discursive hierarchies in particular, it is important also to recognise W.E.B. Du Bois's concept of 'double-consciousness', namely 'the vast veil' he refers to in *The Souls of Black Folk*.<sup>46</sup> This metaphorical veil, used often during literary and verbal acts to highlight an individual's (subconscious or conscious) awareness of racial difference ('it dawned on me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others [...] shut out from their world by a vast veil') (4) between themselves and Western (white) counterparts, aids in clarifying the role of Signifyin(g) as an enabling discursive form of resistance to dominant ideological 'norms' taught and practiced in Western society. Black artists, including rappers, often lean heavily on Du Bois's idea of double consciousness in conjunction with dialogism as part of the act of Signifyin(g), as a means of articulating their unique perspectives during performance and writing.

Applying the above concepts to music, Williams notes, 'Signifyin(g), dialogism and intertextuality are crucial academic frameworks in which to understand hip-hop's borrowing practices more generally'.<sup>47</sup> As a means of clarifying this relationship, Williams draws on Samuel A. Floyd's observation that:

Musical Signifyin(g) is the rhetorical use of pre-existing material as a means of demonstrating respect for or poking fun at musical style, process, or practice through

---

<sup>46</sup> W.E.B. Dubois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Random House, Inc., 2003), p. 4.

<sup>47</sup> Williams, 'Musical Borrowing', p. 11.

parody, pastiche, implication, indirection, humor, tone play or word play, the illusion of speech or narration, or other troping mechanisms.<sup>48</sup>

Applying this understanding to hip hop and rap music specifically, Williams quotes Potter's understanding that:

Even in a track not explicitly identified as a 'payback' or 'answer' rap, the numerous instances of Signifyin(g) on previous rappers' turns of phrase, combined with the verbal 'shouts' thrown out to peers and heroes, continue to build a complex historical web of influence, confluence and effluence, it is not so much that hip-hop tells history, it's that it *is* history.<sup>49</sup>

Recent studies have focused on referential aspects of rhetorical expression (allusion, 'borrowing', and sampling<sup>50</sup>) in rap lyricism, with allusion in particular being recognised as a major intertextual tool, described by Diallo as the hip hop lyricist's 'Swiss Army knife' of literary or poetic devices.<sup>51</sup> Whilst the recognition of intertextually-related referential aspects of rap is essential in discovering the art form's function both internally (within its own 'imagined community')<sup>52</sup> and externally (as part of a globally-acknowledged cultural phenomenon), other areas of its impact are still to be addressed – in particular, an exploration into the subtle, more implicit, and often concealed forms of intertextuality in rap lyrics (in prior and current eras) that can be equally impactful to the culture's development and function. As a way of addressing this gap in research, this thesis often speaks to a niche aspect of rap that deals in *literary* intertextuality and *literary* allusion, drawing on the

---

<sup>48</sup> Samuel A. Floyd, Jr, *The Power of Black Music: Interpreting its History from Africa to the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 8.

<sup>49</sup> Potter, *Spectacular Vernaculars*, p. 117.

<sup>50</sup> See Joseph G. Schloss, *Making Beats: The Art of Sample-Based Hip-Hop* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2014), Mark Katz, 'Music in 1s and 0s: The Art and Politics of Digital Sampling' in *Capturing Sound: How Technology has Changed Music* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2010), pp. 149-150, and John Oswald, 'Plunderphonics, or Audio Piracy as a Compositional Prerogative', *Wired Society Electro-Acoustic Conference* (1985) <[plunderphonics.com/xhtml/xplunder.html](http://plunderphonics.com/xhtml/xplunder.html)> [accessed 27 December 2021].

<sup>51</sup> Diallo, 'Intertextuality in Rap Lyrics', p. 43.

<sup>52</sup> Employing a term coined by Benedict Anderson's writings on nationalism, Williams claims that the hip hop world is an 'imagined community': 'It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion'. See Benedict Anderson, 'Introduction', in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso Books, 2006), p. 6.

subconscious, or veiled psychoanalytical aspects, of the concept's occurrence in an emcee's lyrics, at times leaning on techniques developed by Kristeva's and Barthes, among others.

The research conducted in the critical elements of this thesis is reinforced by my own creative work, which draws heavily – and in several ways innovatively – from literature *outside* of the rap genre, in an attempt to expand the possibilities of intertextuality as a functional tool in rap music. Here, 'literary allusion' means referencing, drawing from, quoting, sampling, and/or 'borrowing' from fictional and non-fictional texts, religious tracts, films, and song lyrics – and, by extension, the music from them too, though where those come together in a hip hop track it can often spill into the territory of intertextuality.

As Williams notes, the use of intertextuality and allusion in rap as part of an overall communicative strategy deeply related to Signifyin(g) can help 'solidify communities' in a number of ways: 'it creates history and lineage, it immortalizes icons, it creates links with other genres, it forges links with an African-American musical past (in the case of jazz, for example), it solidifies subgenres'.<sup>53</sup> Most importantly (when speaking subjectively, from an ethnographic researcher-practitioner's perspective), I concur that 'borrowing' can help 'the hip-hop nation reflect society at large, with its members trying to make sense of a fractured world while simultaneously striving to belong to a community that will last longer than his/her individual lifetimes' (274).

Speaking personally, and as a hip hop artist and part of a nebulously-definable hip hop community, this idea of making sense of the world around me, through a process of ceaselessly drawing upon emotionally resonant aspects of other artists' work(s), and leaning upon artistic milestones of past and present individuals from multiple disciplines in order to further articulate my own perspective on complex aspects of the human condition, is what I

---

<sup>53</sup> Williams, 'Musical Borrowing', pp. 273-274.

wish most to espouse through this thesis. As part of this aim, and whilst nearing completion of my studies, I have become more aware than ever that this area of rap music is what I have always been drawn to, and what I continually strive accurately to reproduce/recreate in my own work.

### ‘Who am I? The MC’:<sup>54</sup> Considering the Hip Hop Lyricist

‘Hip-hop is a craft that involves innovation against and within prevalent forms as well as a pursuit of a certain style of expression and beauty. It also relies for its success on an intimate relationship with those of us who listen to the music’.

— Eddie S. Glaude, Jr., ‘Represent’.<sup>55</sup>

The artists drawn upon for this thesis not only employ intertextuality and allusion in multiple forms, they do so in innovative ways, often difficult to fully comprehend without considerable scrutiny and a developed understanding not only of the containing genre, but the musical history and culture from which it arises. After an intensive period of research into the careers of several prolific and prominent artists who specialise in intertextuality and allusion (Black Thought,<sup>56</sup> Talib Kweli,<sup>57</sup> JAY-Z,<sup>58</sup> and Pharoahe Monch,<sup>59</sup> to name a few), a handful of artists eventually stood clear of the pack regarding their use of the concept not only as a

---

<sup>54</sup> KRS-One, ‘The MC’, *I Got Next* (Jive/BMG Records, 1997).

<sup>55</sup> Eddie S. Glaude, Jr, ‘Represent: Queensbridge, and the Art of Living’ in *Born to Use Mics*, p. 189.

<sup>56</sup> See Mitchell Ohriner, ‘Critical Analysis: Situating Black Thought of The Roots within the Genre as a Whole’, in *Flow: The Rhythmic Voice in Rap Music*. See also ‘Black Thought Freestyles on Flex: Freestyle 087’, *Funk Flex Hot 97 Radio Show* (2018) <[youtube.com/watch?v=prmqgspv3fa](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=prmqgspv3fa)> [accessed 18 December 2021] for insight into Thought’s use of intertextually related techniques such as allusion, poesis, and antiphony.

<sup>57</sup> See Ohriner, ‘Flow and Free Rhythm in Talib Kweli’, in *Flow* for further details on Kweli’s performative technique that links his work with Chapter Three’s main point of focus, lyrical performative stylistic allusion.

<sup>58</sup> As one example of JAY-Z’s use of literary intertextuality, his *Kingdom Come* LP is framed around the premise of a Superman comic book mini-series of the same name. See Jesse Drucker, ‘Jay-Z’s Kingdom Come Turns 15’, *Albumism* (2021) <[albumism.com/features/jay-z-kingdom-come-turns-15-anniversary-retrospective](https://albumism.com/features/jay-z-kingdom-come-turns-15-anniversary-retrospective)> [accessed 18 December 2021]. JAY-Z also allusionally quotes Disco Dave’s lyrics from Cash Crew’s ‘High Power Rap’ (Sugar Hill Records, 1980) on ‘Girls, Girls, Girls’ (*The Blueprint*, Roc-A-Fella/Def Jam, 2001).

<sup>59</sup> See H. Samy Alim, “‘On Some Serious Next Millennium Rap Ishhh’: Pharoahe Monch, Hip Hop Poetics and the Internal Rhymes of Internal Affairs’, *Journal of English Linguistics*, 31 (2003).

tool of social resistance, but also as a means of achieving forms of individual and communal catharsis through the exposition of personal frailty, or vulnerability, previously uncharted in the often hypermasculine environment of rap. These artists display a kinship in literary, generational, and technical strategy. Moreover, due to the creative focus of this thesis, it was fundamentally important that the artists focused upon are ones with which my own developing work in the creative component of the thesis was in dialogue.

The first artist focused on in the thesis is Nas. Whilst recognised as an important black American cultural and musical icon,<sup>60</sup> Nas's contribution to the areas of study in which I concentrate has not been adequately explored in critical literature. Coming to prominence in an era of rap (the mid-1990s and early 2000s) that did not, generally, overtly praise wider learning,<sup>61</sup> Nas implicitly illustrated his intellect, and his sense of individual enlightenment as auto-didact, through complex and layered intertextual references, subtle technical and literary strategies, and insights into his personal life that traversed the rocky, hypermasculine landscape prevalent in the rap community he spoke to and represented. Chapter One observes multiple occurrences of intertextuality and literary allusion in Nas's earlier work that yield a deep, meaningful, and rounded illustration of the individual behind the complex rhyme schemes he created.

Several lyrics from the corpus of Kendrick Lamar are analysed in Chapter Two, in which links between Lamar – a recognised pioneer in contemporary rap music<sup>62</sup> – and his

---

<sup>60</sup> See *Born to Use Mics*, Matthew Gasteier, 33/3: *Illmatic* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 2009), and Dax-Devlon Ross, *The Nightmare & the Dream: Nas, Jay Z, and the History of Conflict in African-American Culture* (Jersey City, NJ: Outside the Box Publishing, 2008).

<sup>61</sup> Lupe Fiasco summarises this idea on 'Dumb it Down' (*The Cool*, 1<sup>st</sup> & 15<sup>th</sup>/Atlantic, 2007), during 'a sprawling polemic about the pressures to simplify one's lyrics to appeal to the mainstream': 'You going over ni\*\*\*'s heads, Lu (Dumb it down!)/They telling me that they don't feel you (Dumb it down!)/We ain't graduate from school, ni\*\*\* (Dumb it down!)/Them big words ain't cool, ni\*\*\* (Dumb it down!)'. Lupe Fiasco, 'Dumb It Down', *Genius* <[genius.com/Lupe-fiasco-dumb-it-down-lyrics](https://genius.com/Lupe-fiasco-dumb-it-down-lyrics)> [accessed 27 December 2021].

<sup>62</sup> See *Kendrick Lamar and the Making of Black Meaning*, ed. by Christopher M. Driscoll, Monica R. Miller, and Anthony B. Pinn (New York: Routledge, 2020), James Bungert, "I got a bone to pick": Formal Ambivalence and Double Consciousness in Kendrick Lamar's 'King Kunta', *Society for Music Theory*, 25 (2019), Casey Michael

lyrical predecessor, Nas, are drawn upon, demonstrating how both have utilised similar literary and technical devices to become cornerstones in the artistic development of the genre. In structural similarity to Chapter One, instances of Lamar's innovation in the field of intertextual and allusive technical employment in rap are detailed, before the focus shifts to how Lamar illustrates forms of personal trauma, and expressions of vulnerability, in novel ways. Due to the progressive efforts made by artists such as Nas in previous eras of rap, Lamar's freedom artistically to express trauma and vulnerability has enabled increasingly obscure instances of intertextuality and allusion to emerge, and in turn be embraced by a new generation of MCs.

As a bridge to my creative component, Chapter Three concentrates on voices from rap's 'underground',<sup>63</sup> exploring several emerging rap artists' work in the field of intertextuality and allusion as directly influenced by Lamar (J.I.D., Kemba, and Saba). Chapter Three uncovers an undocumented area of intertextual engagement in rap through observing recent scholarly work into areas of 'flow'<sup>64</sup> and identifying a discursive strategy called 'lyrical performative stylistic allusion'. This strategy consists of emcees 'borrowing' texturally from predecessors such as Lamar to communicate notions of past trauma, and to forge platforms for communal and individual cathartic release.

---

Henry, 'Et Tu, Too?: Kendrick Lamar's 'To Pimp a Butterfly' and the Revival of Black Postmodernism', *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 26<sup>th</sup> July 2015 <[lareviewofbooks.org/article/et-tu-too-kendrick-lamars-tpab-and-the-revival-of-black-postmodernism/](http://lareviewofbooks.org/article/et-tu-too-kendrick-lamars-tpab-and-the-revival-of-black-postmodernism/)> [accessed 12 November 2018], and Justin A. Williams, 'Intertextuality and Lineage in the Game's 'We Ain't' and Kendrick Lamar's 'm.A.A.d City'', in *The Pop Palimpsest: Intertextuality in Recorded Popular Music*, ed. by Lori Burns and Serge Lacasse (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2018).

<sup>63</sup> For further details regarding hip hop's 'underground', a sub-genre of rappers who often 'denigrate commercialism as an artistic and political sell-out' (Shusterman, p. 623), see Richard Shusterman, 'The Fine Art of Rap', Anthony Kwame Harrison, "'Cheaper than a CD, Plus We Really Mean It": Bay Area Underground Hip Hop Tapes as Subcultural Artefacts', *Popular Music*, 25 (2006), and Michel Maffesoli, 'Tribalism', in *The Time of the Tribes: The Decline of Individualism in Mass Society* (London: Sage Publications, 1996).

<sup>64</sup> Ohriner, *Flow*.



As will be noted in my choices of artistic research, a specific focus on the male canon is prioritised throughout this thesis, in order to explore aspects of male mental health and masculinity – and, particularly, to investigate how men express notions of vulnerability and trauma in contemporary male-dominated environments. In similarity to academic investigations into male mental health conducted by Rachel Hart<sup>65</sup> and Meredith K. Reffner Collins, et al.<sup>66</sup>, the critical element of this thesis aids in understanding how male rap artists have translated subject matter regarding mental health to their listenership.

In addition (and importantly), the creative component reflects movements such as Gemma Jennison's and Anthony Mackie's 'Man Down' programme<sup>67</sup> in establishing the ways in which rap artists express the complexities and singularities involved with mental health decline, particularly in reference to Moya Bailey's suggestion that, often, rap artists' overwhelming emotions cannot be expressed due to kyriarchal/patriarchal expectations perpetuated by cultural and social standards, leading to the experience of 'repressed and thus pressurized power' and an 'abjection of desire'.<sup>68</sup> Like the rappers researched throughout the above projects, I offer new artistic frameworks, or compositional methods, through my creative works that can aid in the articulation of repressed emotion.

The reader will also notice my critical research exclusively draws on men of African American descent. Whilst I am not of this descent, my choice of focus is mainly due to the fact that – as Michael Jeffries points out in *Thug Life* – 'black American men have dominated the landscape of commercially successful rap for the past two decades' (I contend the same is

---

<sup>65</sup> Rachel Hart, 'Man Down: The Evolution of Masculinity and Mental Health Narratives in Rap Music', *Reinvention: An International Journal of Undergraduate Research*, 12, (2019) <<https://reinventionjournal.org/index.php/reinvention/article/view/430/388>> [Accessed 30 May 2023].

<sup>66</sup> Meredith K. Reffner Collins, Daniel Riffe, Alex Kresovich, Francesca R. Dillman Carpentier, 'A Content Analysis of Mental Health Discourse in Popular Rap Music', *JAMA Paediatrics*, 175 (2021), 286-292.

<sup>67</sup> Gemma Jennison, Anthony Mackie, *Man Down Programme* <<https://www.mandownprogramme.com>> [Accessed 30 May 2023].

<sup>68</sup> Moya Bailey, 'Homolateral Masculinity & Hip Hop Culture', *Palimpsest: A Journal on Women, Gender, and the Black International*, Volume 2, Issue 2, 2013 (pp. 187-199), p. 188.

true of many other sub-divisions of the art form).<sup>69</sup> Continuing Jeffries's observations, this thesis recognises 'the influence of black artistic and cultural traditions on hip-hop', and that 'the dominance of Afro-diasporic speech, music, and dance patterns is distinct and empirically established' (p. 6). It is also certainly worth noting here that all of the artists critically explored utilise unique modes of intertextuality, literary allusion, or performative stylistic allusion to translate themes of trauma, pushing the envelope for future generations to tackle such subject matter.

On a personal note, I have a vested interest in discovering how rap artists – functioning in a genre that usually locates them in hypermasculine environments – express forms of psychological trauma. As a young male growing up in the wake of my father's suicide, rap music was the art form I most regularly turned to when in need of guidance regarding my own comprehension of modern society. My reliance on rap artists to inform me about how to negotiate themes not only of struggle such as mental health decline, latent grief, a lack of male role models, aspects of poverty, trauma, and addiction, but also themes of triumph such as fatherhood, professional conduct, artistic excellence, and equality, helped to push me in the direction of practicing the art form.

As a practitioner, there have been many times during my career when my peers and I have relied on an implicit understanding of how issues such as gender and race are negotiated amongst members of different cultures during practice/performance. In my practical experience, the depth of implicit understanding of these issues in the individual can have a direct correlation to a listener's/audience's response to the performing artist. Outside of academia, it has always been my conditioning to address matters of race, ethnicity, and gender in this way.

---

<sup>69</sup> Michael P. Jeffries, 'Introduction' *Thug Life: Race, Gender, and the Meaning of Hip-Hop* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), p. 7.

Nonetheless, in relation to the politics of race and gender, I acknowledge that misogyny is prevalent in some of the lyrics of the artists I critically examine (and present for artistic purposes early on in the creative component), and there may be times when readers may take offence at the views expressed. Of course, I have only utilised these elements of these artists' works when they are critical to understanding the functions of the literary techniques employed. Whilst acknowledging here that issues regarding misogyny and violence towards women, homophobia, and sexism are indeed unacceptable, I have made the decision neither to condemn nor condone while conducting my analyses of technique. I do this with an understanding of overt self-expression as an inherent trait in rap music: rap artists are often compelled to shock audiences by presenting character flaws front and centre, and use problematic and controversial language as part of a brutally honest process of self-analysis.<sup>70</sup>

It is not my intention for this thesis to become embroiled in already lengthy discourse either in defence or critique of rap music, or to engage in the ongoing debate of great art verses the flawed humans who created it. I again turn to Michael Jeffries, and accept, regretfully, that this thesis 'might be viewed by some as yet another example of the fortification of heteronormative masculinity, both within and beyond hip-hop communities'. However, as Jeffries goes on to note, I hope that 'the value of focusing on representations of men and presenting men's voices' is recognised as a method that 'affirms the importance of gender as a construct that shapes everyone's experience rather than just women's experiences'.<sup>71</sup>

---

<sup>70</sup> For a detailed analysis of gender politics, sexuality and hypermasculinity in hip hop, and the use of misogyny (framed through the notion of the 'virgin/whore paradigm') in commercial 'thug' rappers' music, see Jeffries's *Thug Life*, 'Thug Life and Social Death', p. 101.

<sup>71</sup> Jeffries, *Thug Life*, p. 9.

## An Artistic Illustration of Intertextuality in Hip Hop Lyricism

‘I listen to their style. I’m not trying to sound like anybody, but I’m hearing while they’re teaching—everybody’s teaching each other. There are mad different flows, and then you get your own. You see how everyone rides a beat, and then you see how you ride it. You put your whole heart into it’.

— Nas, ‘Street’s Disciple’.<sup>72</sup>

Following the first three critical chapters, I present *CAPsule*, a trilogy of music LPs, by means of a fully glossed set of transcribed lyrics that provide access to the intertextual and literary-allusive workings behind the music.<sup>73</sup> *CAPsule* showcases some of the lyrical complexity that can be involved in the production of rap, through an exposition of employments of underexplored modes of intertextuality and literary allusion unique within the artform. By presenting my work in transcribed form, with footnotes glossing occurrences of intertextuality and allusion, I spell out clearly and concisely my thesis objectives. Where relevant, of course, I draw attention to intertextual and allusive connections to the rappers focused on in the critical component, demonstrating their influence on the completed work. An alternative method would have been to present this research in a bridging chapter; however, that would not have allowed a reader the same access to the breadth of allusion and intertextuality in the creative work. Moreover, it is hoped that readers will read the lyrics and glosses alongside listening to the work in its completed aural form. For that purpose, the albums are also included as an appendix, and may be listened to in their entirety.

---

<sup>72</sup> Bobbito the Barber, ‘Nas: Streets Disciple’, *Born to Use Mics*, p. 230.

<sup>73</sup> As Chapter Four’s ‘Preface’ points out (p. 132), whilst being comprehensive in one sense, these gloss notes are not entirely exhaustive. This is due to my thesis’s strict requirements of recognising *lyrical* intertextuality only. Therefore, much of the sonic and visual aspects of *CAPsule* are either undocumented, or only touched upon whenever they overlap with a mode of lyrical intertextuality in some way.

The first LP in the trilogy, *Uzumaki: The Universal Thump*,<sup>74</sup> artistically highlights the trilogy's concentration on intertextuality and literary allusion, spelling out this objective in songs that illuminate the concept to a wider, potentially non-academic audience. As such, *Uzumaki* serves as referential text, or key, enabling a deeper understanding of the remaining two thirds of the project: contextualising the narratives they contain, and the trilogy's overarching purpose.

The remaining two thirds of the trilogy, *S.T.A.R.V.E.* and *Houses*, tell an intertextual and highly allusive story of 'P', a working-class male in contemporary Nottingham, England, at two pivotal points in his adult life. The first of these episodes, *S.T.A.R.V.E.*, uses intertextuality and allusion to explore the effects of social isolation and addiction as triggers for mental health decline. The second, *Houses*, focuses particularly on literary-intertextual engagement to explore a later version of the same protagonist, detailing the highs and lows of fatherhood, and his negotiation of economic, familial, and social constraints.

### **Further Terminology and Critical Methodology**

From the outset of my critical and creative chapters, the reader will note specific terminology in relation to intertextuality, literature, and rap music. Again, relying on Williams's work, I build on terms related to digital and non-digital sampling in music as classified by Serge Lacasse.<sup>75</sup> Williams notes:

to emphasize the difference between digitally sampled sounds and other borrowed sounds, I employ the useful distinction between 'autosonic quotation' and 'allosonic quotation' from Serge Lacasse. 'Autosonic quotation' is quotation of a recording by digitally sampling it, as opposed to 'allosonic quotation', quoting the previous

---

<sup>74</sup> Hereafter referred to as *Uzumaki*.

<sup>75</sup> Serge Lacasse, 'Intertextuality and Hypertextuality in Recorded Popular Music', in *The Musical Work: Reality or Invention?*, ed. by Michael Talbot (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000).

material by way of re-recording or performing (like a quote in jazz performance) rather than sampling from the original recording.<sup>76</sup>

As an example of these terms when used in my work (taken from the final chapter as part of the creative component of this thesis), I present an introductory passage from ‘Wi(n)dow’:<sup>77</sup>

### Wi(n)dow

*[cough]—I’m a little indisposed.  
But tomorrow I shall be the happiest man in the world.  
Tell her that from me.  
Say I’ll be coming tomorrow.  
I’ll be coming tomorrow...  
Very nice, eh? (Au, N-r).*

*‘Widow/window’ (repeated) (Au, R)*

Once again...(Al, N-r).

*Once again! (Au-R)*

Here, quoted passages on the right represent digital samples taken from secondary sources and layered on top of my own lyrics and music. The first ( *[cough]—I’m a little indisposed...*  ) is taken from a film adaptation of Knut Hamsun’s *Hunger*, labelled here as an autosonic quotation (Au) and layered in non-rhythmic (N-r) fashion over the music. The passage situated in the centre of the page is an additional autosonic quotation, although this time it is treated as part of the lyric to the song, due to these ‘vocals’, or words

---

<sup>76</sup> Williams, ‘Introduction’, *Rhyming and Stealin’*, p. 3.

<sup>77</sup> See *S.T.A.R.V.E.* LP, p. 152.

(*Widow/window* (repeated)) being part of the music sample chosen for the background track. Due to it being a digital quotation, and also being in rhythm with the track, it is bracketed with (Au, R): Autosonic, Rhythmic. On the left of the page ('Once again... (Al, N-r)'), I am quoting a phrase uttered by Mobb Deep's Prodigy.<sup>78</sup> Due to my quoting this lyric directly, I adhere to Williams's observation that 'many rappers will paraphrase a quote, or appropriate it for themselves'.<sup>79</sup> Without digitally sampling this quote from another source, and in reappropriating it for my own use in my own voice and in my own rhythm (Al, N-r: Allsonic, Non-rhythmic), this quotation is deemed allosonic. Immediately following this utterance (situated on the right of the page again), the actual phrase from Prodigy is digitally quoted in its original rhythm (*Once again!* (Au, R)).

There are further technical terms applied to the critical research undertaken throughout this thesis, and these terms will be defined during the chapters, as and when they appear.

In the critical chapters, I often outline the discussed artists' lyrics, quoting key passages for close reading purposes. For these exercises, and where officially-sanctioned lyrics are not available, I have relied on the lyric database Genius.com, the specialism of which was (at an earlier time when it was known as 'Rap Genius') 'the explanation and interpretation of rap songs'.<sup>80</sup> My use of Genius.com mainly derives from Diallo's observations of the site during 'Intertextuality in Rap', as he notes rap's relationship with intertextuality has become so complex that a requirement for a site dedicated to explaining 'its vernacular and its intertextual aesthetics' became paramount (44). An open-source media, mostly relying on 'user-generated content', Genius.com enables 'monitored contributors (rap

---

<sup>78</sup> Prodigy (of Mobb Deep), 'Drop a Gem on 'em', *Hell on Earth* (Loud, 1996).

<sup>79</sup> Williams, 'Musical Borrowing', pp. 70-73.

<sup>80</sup> Diallo, 'Intertextuality in Rap Lyrics', p. 44.

fans or ‘verified’ artists)’ to ‘transcribe rap lyrics and provide relevant explanations’ (44). It is not an infallible resource, but no third-party source for rap lyrics is infallible, and often lyrics are not available in liner notes or through official or specifically artist-sanctioned channels.<sup>81</sup>

### **Structural Considerations for *CAPsule***

By presenting my lyrics in transcribed form, and footnoting any and all occurrences of lyrical intertextuality and/or allusion, I hope to elucidate some of the literary strides that may be made by rap artists when taking into account their transference of huge amounts of emotional and intellectual information, and in the smallest possible space. As Mos Def, rapper from Black Star, explains: ‘Hip Hop is a medium where you can get a lot of information into a very small space. And make it hold fast to people’s memory. It’s just a very radical form of information transferal’.<sup>82</sup> Perhaps most importantly, the gloss notes featured in the *CAPsule* transcriptions serve to highlight these occurrences, detailing some of the depths of emotional complexity rap music can achieve, on a par with other literary mediums such as the novel, the poem, the film.

---

<sup>81</sup> The fact that Genius.com includes analysis from a broad swathe of knowledgeable rap scholars (see Professor of Griff Rollefson’s contributions to Genius as ‘@cybergriff’, for example), whose analysis is open to scrupulous (albeit non-academic) peer-review, leaves this work at risk of containing analyses that have already, to some extent, been undertaken. However, regarding the analyses conducted throughout this thesis, I have a singular creative and critical vantage point. For example, I turn first to my twenty-five years of experience as practitioner in rap music, and then to my more recent journey as academic scholar. Whilst taking nothing away from contributors to Genius.com with regard to their own practical or theoretical qualifications, I suggest here that my artistic experience, alongside theoretical study and research, allows me a unique perspective from which to evaluate and analyse the artists featured in this thesis, which is, moreover, subject to the rigour of academic peer review.

<sup>82</sup> Alim, *Roc the Mic Right*, p. 30.



Whilst the structure of Chapter Four enables an accurate documentation of the multivalent occurrences of intertextuality in my work, I recognise how it might inhibit access to the ‘true’ meaning of music for some. Echoing Guthrie P. Ramsay’s notion that ‘getting at the meaning of a piece demands taking into account the deeply personal ways in which listeners engage music’,<sup>83</sup> I understand this exchange as one in which the listener is free to take from the music what they will, when they choose. By providing gloss notes alongside my work, I do not wish to hinder this process, but to provide details that make the points of intertextuality and allusion as clear as possible. My music is to be heard, not read, and I hope the reader will choose to hear as well as to read; ultimately, indeed, I intend audiences only to hear and not to read the work. However, the development of my gloss notes has been an illuminating experience to me as an artist, and serves a necessary, digestible documentary function.

### **Meanings and Purposes**

It is important to recognise the significant differences between myself and the artists I creatively build upon in this thesis. These differences include not only technical and formal aspects of my musical and lyrical output, such as tempo, tone, timbre, rhyme scheme, content, and form, all of which will at times differ to some extent between any artists who are committed to originality, but also aesthetic and culturally-specific elements such as accent, location, origin, upbringing, class, race, and ideology. Whilst much of the cultural, political, and sociological aspects of *CAPsule*’s story differs vastly from that of all artists critically studied in this thesis, the aim of illuminating universal aspects of human struggle in order to reach a form of communal and/or individual catharsis through the use of rap lyrics is

---

<sup>83</sup> Guthrie P. Ramsey Jr, ‘Time is Illmatic’, in *Born to Use Mics*, pp. 62-63.

comparable. Further defining this aim, my trilogy (and the preceding critical chapters) unapologetically explores contemporary male experience, with a magnified focus on the expression of trauma and vulnerability through a male voice.

Attaching firmly to Potter's notion that 'even as it remains a global music, [hip hop] is firmly rooted in the local and the temporal [...] a music about "where I'm From," and as such proposes a new kind of universality based not on indifference but on assemblage of local and intercommunicating nodes',<sup>84</sup> *CAPsule* situates itself in the Midlands, England, worlds away from hip hop's Meccas. However, due to *Capsule*'s allegiances to various culturally-applicable tropes,<sup>85</sup> it, 'along with other vernacular media, needs to be seen as part of a new structural order which is both local *and* global at the same time' (146). Specifically, *CAPsule* reflects a growing awareness of mental health problems that transcend regional or national boundaries by addressing male, or masculine, mental health decline and its articulation. *CAPsule* provides insight into the question of how men might express their vulnerabilities in positive and progressive artistic ways. This is especially relevant for an individual and/or artist located in such a highly competitive, frequently hypermasculine environment as rap. I hope to add to the growing literature on this issue by critically and artistically illustrating ways that rappers do, and might, express their emotions through music.

---

<sup>84</sup> Potter, *Spectacular Vernaculars*, p. 146.

<sup>85</sup> A traditional rap trope exemplified on *CAPsule* can be noted as 'keeping it real'. Although deemed as 'corporate double-speak' by Adam Mansbach and Kevin Coval, 'reduced to irony by studio gangsterism and faux-reality rappers' (247), this term involves an individual's ability to retain a sense of their own reality, or place, regarding social status, environment, location, economic situation, lifestyle choices, etc., in light of other peoples' attitudes, understandings, and ongoing situations. To use a relevant example of keeping it real in my own research, I highlight here how Kendrick Lamar bases his *good kid, m.A.A.d city* LP around his upbringing in Compton, LA, depicting his own unique semi-autobiographical experiences whilst maintaining a grounded sense of reality during performances (at all times using his own vernacular, never standardising or altering language use, unless adopting a persona, see Chapter Two, pp. 57-58). In a similar fashion, I employ the same strategy throughout *S.T.A.R.V.E.* and *Houses*, as I illustrate (as authentically as possible) the experiences of a working-class male in the English Midlands.

Adam Mansbach and Kevin Coval, 'All the Words Past the Margins', in *Born to Use Mics*, p. 247. Kendrick Lamar, *good kid, m.A.A.d city* (TDE/Aftermath/Interscope, 2012).

Put another way, by making the ‘song cry’,<sup>86</sup> I aim to show that – as one of rap’s emerging talents, Navy Blue, puts it – ‘it’s beautiful to take tremendous pain and turn it into something powerful’.<sup>87</sup> Perhaps this is one reason why Nas suggests music as his therapy: ‘I probably don’t need a therapist because I have music’.<sup>88</sup>

Anthony B. Pinn and Christopher M. Driscoll inadvertently sum up what *CAPSule* attempts to achieve in their observations of a hip hop lyricist’s overriding artistic objectives: ‘the cultural worlds we create provide cartographies of our individual and collective anxieties, hopes, dreams, and perceptions about our existence’.<sup>89</sup> Further capturing my sentiment, and overall musical intentions for this project, they note that ‘in a general sense, all this points to our efforts to render life meaningful – to make meaning – and, thereby, develop orientation for navigating life circumstances. And those ‘maps’ have a hand in shaping our worlds too’ (1).

Subjectively, through the creation of *CAPSule*, I am confident that I have mapped out at least two distinct areas of personal and artistic growth, and reached a platform for catharsis in both. Whilst doing so, I have simultaneously added to a growing academic field of knowledge regarding rap, and answered Alim’s call in 2003 for ‘future studies’ into the ‘various literary techniques employed by Hip Hop MCs’<sup>90</sup> as a means of concretising rap as a highly innovative, technical artform. I believe I have made steps towards a paradigm shift not only regarding how rap artists might view their own awareness of, and engagement with,

---

<sup>86</sup> Expressing his own faith in music as a vessel for cathartic release, JAY-Z sings ‘I can’t see ‘em coming down my eyes/So I gotta make the song cry’ on ‘Song Cry’ (*The Blueprint*, Roc-A-Fella, Def Jam, 2001).

<sup>87</sup> Alphonse Pierre, ‘Navy Blue Needs to get a Few things Off his Chest’ *Pitchfork* (2021) <[pitchfork.com/features/rising/navy-blue-sage-elsesser-interview/](https://pitchfork.com/features/rising/navy-blue-sage-elsesser-interview/)> [accessed 20 December 2021].

<sup>88</sup> Gerrick Kennedy, ‘Nas: I’m Trying Not to Feel Bad About Being Happy’ *i-D/Vice*, 14th December 2021 <[i-d.vice.com/en\\_uk/article/dypp3y/nas-interview](https://i-d.vice.com/en_uk/article/dypp3y/nas-interview)> [accessed 20 December 2021].

<sup>89</sup> Anthony B. Pinn and Christopher M. Driscoll, ‘Introduction: K.Dotting the American Cultural Landscape with Black Meaning’, in *Kendrick Lamar and the Making of Black Meaning*, p. 1.

<sup>90</sup> H. Samy Alim, “‘On Some Serious Next Millennium Rap Ishhh’”, pp. 81-82.

intertextuality and allusion in their lyrics, but also regarding how academics might view rappers' engagements with the concept.

Finally, regarding the chosen format for my creative component, I would like to equate a notion presented by Ralph Ellison to my own narratological employment during the *CAPsule* LPs. Ellison discusses novels here, but the same can be applied to LPs:

the primary social function of the novel is that of seizing from the flux and flow of our daily lives those abiding patterns of experience which [...] help to form our sense of reality, and from which emerge our sense of humanity and our conception of human value.<sup>91</sup>

Whilst acknowledging the importance of scholarly work on rap focusing on socio-political agendas, it is worth noting that I share the perspective of Eddie S. Glaude, Jr. that 'when we listen to [or read] hip hop as only a sociological or politically driven account [...], we often miss the beautifully constructed word portraits, lyrical wonderment, and rhythmic timing that define the genre at its best'.<sup>92</sup> These portraits of wonderment, and performances that illustrate a remarkable employment of lyrical technique and timing that provide rap with so much of its power, are the elements of the artform I concentrate on whilst exploring the inner functions of intertextuality and literary allusion in rap lyrics. This thesis engages with the artform of rap music unapologetically, taking inspiration from scholars such as Glaude, Jr. and Potter as well as rap authors like Lamar and Nas, in viewing hip hop and rap music as a 'radical form of postmodernism'<sup>93</sup> that, although it is bound by matters of race and identity, politics and society, chooses to allow a 'universality' (21) or visibility of the human experience as valid within its ever-evolving cultural sphere and lexicon.

---

<sup>91</sup> Glaude, Jr, 'Represent', *Born to Use Mics*, pp. 185.

<sup>92</sup> Glaude, Jr, 'Represent', *Born*, pp. 186.

<sup>93</sup> Potter, *Spectacular Vernaculars*, pp. 21-22.

## CHAPTER ONE

### **‘Nothing New Under the Sun’: Intertextuality in the Lyrics of Nas**

Since the beginning of his musical career, Nas’s unique utilisation of the process of repetition and revision in rap music, and his awareness of its relation to the concept of intertextuality, has markedly influenced the craft of hip hop lyricism and situated him firmly within hip hop’s canon. Hailing from the Queensbridge housing projects of Queens, New York, during ‘the death knell of the crack trade’ in the 1980s and 1990s,<sup>1</sup> ‘the words and music composed by Nas [...] invented a truly black noir narrative form [...], one bent on exposing an American underside where the nation’s swarthiest Others define normality’ (238).

Recognised for the critically-established pedagogical and socio-political implications of his work as a contemporary urban griot, black public intellectual, and cultural advocate,<sup>2</sup> his lyrics have made him an ideal subject for analysis in hip hop studies. Intertextuality in Nas’s lyrics has been recognised and documented since 2009.<sup>3</sup> Primarily, studies of Nas’s lyrics have highlighted a consistent use of allusion through overt referencing techniques such as ‘allosonic’ and ‘autosonic’ quotation (Williams, 2010, Lacasse, 2000).<sup>4</sup> For instance, Marc Lamont Hill, analysing one of Nas’s earliest works, ‘Halftime’ (1992),<sup>5</sup> observes Nas’s use of allusion as a means of illustrating a ‘commitment to political subject matter’<sup>6</sup> whilst

---

<sup>1</sup> Gregory Tate, ‘An Elegy for *Illmatic*’ in *Born to Use Mics: Reading Nas’s ‘Illmatic’*, ed. by Michael Eric Dyson & Sohail Daulatzai (New York, NY: BasicCivitas Books, 2010), p. 238.

<sup>2</sup> Marc Lamont Hill, ‘Critical Pedagogy Comes at Halftime: Nas as Black Public Intellectual’, in *Born to Use Mics*, pp. 97-117.

<sup>3</sup> See Matthew Gasteier, *33/3: Illmatic* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 2009), Michael Eric Dyson and Sohail Daulatzai, et al. *Born to Use Mics*, and Justin A. Williams, *Rhymin’ and Stealin’: Musical Borrowing in Hip-Hop* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> See ‘Introduction’, pp. 20-22.

<sup>5</sup> Nas, ‘Halftime’, *Zebrahead (Soundtrack from the Original Motion Picture)* (Ruff House, Columbia, Sony, 1992).

<sup>6</sup> Marc Lamont Hill, ‘Critical Pedagogy Comes at Halftime: Nas as Black Intellectual’, in *Born to Use Mics*, pp. 113-114.

combining contextualised humour with subtle artistic critique. Lamont Hill quotes the following lyrics from ‘Halftime’:

You couldn’t catch me in the streets without a ton of reefer  
That’s like Malcom X, catchin’ the Jungle Fever  
King poetic, too much flavor, I’m major  
Atlanta ain’t braver, I pull a number like a pager

And in the final verse of the song:

And in the darkness, I’m heartless like when the narcs hit  
Word to Marcus Garvey I hardly sparked it.

Here, as Lamont Hill explains, Nas gives ‘historical nods’ to ‘Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Marcus Garvey, Atlanta, Georgia, and Spike Lee’s controversial 1991 race film, *Jungle Fever*’, all ‘key figures and sites of the black freedom struggle’. Lamont Hill also proposes that Nas references Lee’s film ‘as a way of subtly dissing its inferior counterpart, *Zebrahead*’ (1992) (114), for which ‘Halftime’ features as part of the O.S.T.<sup>7</sup> Through the ironic depiction of one of America’s most staunch advocates for freedom (X) catching Spike Lee’s notion of ‘jungle fever’, Nas provides a kind of subversive humour (delivered in the form of subtle jibe) when Lee’s *Jungle Fever* is alluded to as a proposed comparison to *Zebrahead*, the latter being widely regarded as both a sub-par movie and soundtrack.<sup>8</sup>

Nas’s use of autsonic quotation is observed by Adilifu Nama in another of Nas’s early releases, ‘The Genesis’ (1994).<sup>9</sup> Nama states that Nas’s technique of digitally self-sampling his ‘first recorded MC appearance on Main Source’s “Live at the Barbeque”’ for use during initial stages of ‘The Genesis’ ‘suggests the track is referring to Nas’s beginning’.<sup>10</sup> He goes on to acknowledge a second use of autsonic quotation ‘on top of Nas’s faintly audible rapid-fire lyrical delivery’ that is a ‘sampled exchange between two

---

<sup>7</sup> Lamont Hill, ‘Critical Pedagogy Comes at Halftime’, p. 114.

<sup>8</sup> Speaking on the critical reception of *Zebrahead*, Matthew Gasteier states ‘though the movie received generally solid reviews, its low budget and unfortunate fate of following Spike Lee’s similarly themed (if almost totally different) *Jungle Fever* guaranteed it would be quickly forgotten’. Gasteier, *33/3: Illmatic*, p. 42.

<sup>9</sup> Nas, ‘The Genesis’, *Illmatic* (Columbia, 1994).

<sup>10</sup> Adilifu Nama, ‘It was Signified: ‘The Genesis’’, in *Born to Use Mics*, p. 13.

male characters from a scene in Charlie Ahearn's brooding cinema verité film *Wild Style*' (13). Utilising an iconic moment in hip hop history (*WildStyle*, 1982),<sup>11</sup> and layering it with his own suggested 'beginning', this dual use of sample techniques invites the listener also to appreciate Nas as hip hop icon.

Both Lamont Hill and Nama have shown that Nas is an allusive lyricist, then, but further research and analysis of his work is required to document the multiple ways in which he uses allusion and other literary devices to demonstrate a unique engagement with, and understanding of, the practice and function of intertextuality. After highlighting several other instances of intertextual occurrence in Nas's corpus, this chapter will then concentrate on three undocumented examples of Nas's engagement with intertextuality, in order to further elucidate his unique relationship with the concept.

The use of intratextual autsonic quotation in Nas's work to indicate a form of beginning or introduction, or highlight a method of self-mythologising, can also be observed on 'Fetus' (*The Lost Tapes*, 2002),<sup>12</sup> in which lyrics taken from 'One Time For Your Mind' (*Illmatic*, 1994)<sup>13</sup> ('I shot my way out of Mom Dukes') are sampled and quoted repeatedly as a way of re-envisioning the concept of the song, which is narrated from the perspective of Nas as an unborn child. Also, during 'Album Intro' (*I Am...*, 1999),<sup>14</sup> a similar technique is employed as a way of chronologically signposting Nas's creative legacy, by digitally sampling several of his most popular lyrics to date: 'The Message' and 'If I Ruled the World' (*It Was Written*, 1996), 'Live at the Barbeque' (1991), and 'It Ain't Hard to Tell' (*Illmatic*, 1994).<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Charlie Ahearn, *Wild Style* (Submarine Entertainment, 1983).

<sup>12</sup> Nas, 'Fetus', *The Lost Tapes* (Ill Will, Columbia, 2002).

<sup>13</sup> Nas, 'One Time For Your Mind', *Illmatic*.

<sup>14</sup> Nas, 'Album Intro', *I Am...* (Columbia, 1999).

<sup>15</sup> Each song ranks within the top ten of *Complex* magazine's top 100 Nas songs: Gabriel Alvarez, 'The 100 Best Nas Songs', *Complex*, 1<sup>st</sup> August 2017 <[complex.com/music/the-100-best-nas-songs/](https://www.complex.com/music/the-100-best-nas-songs/)> [accessed 1 October 2019]. See Nas, 'The Message' and 'If I Ruled the World (Imagine That)', *It Was*

Nas's use of allosonic quotation is observed in his revision of Rakim's lyric taken from Eric B & Rakim's 'As the Rhyme Goes On' (1987),<sup>16</sup> as part of a long-term creative patrilineage between the two (discussed later in this chapter). Nas revises the line 'I'm the R the A to the K-I-M/If I wasn't, then why would I say I am'<sup>17</sup> during 'You're Da Man' (*Stillmatic*, 2001),<sup>18</sup> substituting Rakim's name for his own name and moniker: 'I'm the N, the A to the S-I-R/If I wasn't, I must've been Escobar'.<sup>19</sup> Here, after literally aligning his given name, 'Nasir', with his mentor Rakim – whilst maintaining stylistic and rhythmic elements in an open gesture of homage to one of his primary artistic influences – Nas intentionally Signifies on the aforementioned lyric, adding contextual depth to this act of revision by alluding to his own crime boss/drug lord alter-ego 'Escobar'.<sup>20</sup> In so doing, Nas displays an acute awareness of aspects of what W.E.B. Dubois terms 'double consciousness'<sup>21</sup> in recognising differences between his own artistic and social standing to that of others situated closer to dominant cultural and social norms. By stating succinctly that without 'Nasir' the artist, the only alternative is 'Escobar' the criminal, Nas highlights the fragility of his artistic status whilst acknowledging the societal forces outside of his creative remit that apparently leave him only one career alternative. Dax-Devlon Ross observes Nas's signposting of a similar duplicity at play in his work regarding 'the distinction between

---

*Written* (Columbia, 1996), Main Source, 'Live at the Barbeque (Ft. Nas, Joe Fatal, and Akinyele)', *Breaking Atoms* (Wild Pitch, EMI, 1991), and Nas, 'It Ain't Hard to Tell', *Illmatic*.

<sup>16</sup> Eric B and Rakim, 'As the Rhyme Goes On', *Paid in Full* (4<sup>th</sup> & B'way, Island, 1987).

<sup>17</sup> Eric B and Rakim, 'As the Rhyme Goes On', *Genius* <[genius.com/Eric-b-and-rakim-as-the-rhyme-goes-on-lyrics](https://genius.com/Eric-b-and-rakim-as-the-rhyme-goes-on-lyrics)> [accessed 1 October 2019].

<sup>18</sup> Nas, 'You're Da Man', *Stillmatic* (Ill Will, Columbia, 2001).

<sup>19</sup> Nas, 'You're Da Man', *Genius* <[genius.com/Nas-youre-da-man-lyrics](https://genius.com/Nas-youre-da-man-lyrics)> [accessed 1 October 2019].

<sup>20</sup> 'Although the peak of the Mafia's influence was largely restricted to New York and the mid-1990s, hip-hop's embrace of Mafioso tics and tropes was an energizing force, and spawned some of the genre's best records' (see rap alter egos/monikers such as Frank White (The Notorious B.I.G.), Capone, Noreaga, Cormega, Wu Gambinos (The Wu Tang Clan)). David Drake, 'The Homage: Mafia Culture's Influence on Rap Music', *Complex*, 15 June 2015 <[complex.com/music/2015/06/mafia-culture-influence-on-rap-music/](https://complex.com/music/2015/06/mafia-culture-influence-on-rap-music/)> [accessed 11 October 2019].

<sup>21</sup> See introduction, pp. 12-13 for further details regarding this concept.

W.E.B. Dubois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Random House, Inc., 2003), p. 4.



rappers and MCs' that relates to the above example of double consciousness: 'as for Nas, he perhaps put it best on *It Was Written*: if it wasn't for his gift he'd be "sticking you up"'.<sup>22</sup>

Nas's enactment of the practice of repetition with a difference in the above lyric also relates to David Brackett's recognition of the 'double-voiced utterance' in African American vernacular, particularly when used in musical forms.<sup>23</sup> As Brackett explains, a 'highly important aspect of Signification' is a 'type of intertextuality' that 'stresses the creative use in oral narration of "formulaic phrases" rather than the creation of novel content' (311). During these types of narrative ('often referred to as "toasts"'),

the emphasis is on reusing and recombining stock phrases in an original way from one context to another rather than creating phrases that are strikingly original in themselves [...] evaluations of performers depend not so much upon the ability of the narrator to "dream up new characters or events" but rather to group together two lines that end in words that [...] bear a phonetic similarity to each other (311).<sup>24</sup>

Here, Nas's shift of meaning in relation to Rakim's original message (and his grouping together of words/letters that bear a phonetic similarity) emphasises the importance of recognising the 'differences' between his and Rakim's similar phrasing as part of his engagement with a form of 'intertextual referentiality' (313).

In a similar technique involving the quotation of a lyric taken from The Notorious B.I.G. (this time as an unrevised direct interpretation), Nas quotes a popular B.I.G. lyric ('I got seven Mac-11's, about eight .38's/Nine 9's, ten Mac-10's the shits never end')<sup>25</sup> for the

---

<sup>22</sup> Dax-Devlon Ross, *The Nightmare & the Dream: Nas, Jay Z, and the History of Conflict in African-American Culture* (Jersey City, NJ: Outside the Box Publishing, 2008), p. 36.

<sup>23</sup> David Brackett, 'James Brown's 'Super Bad' and the Double-voiced Utterance', *Popular Music*, 11 (1992), 309-324 (pp. 311-313).

<sup>24</sup> Here, Brackett quotes Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s explanation of aspects of Signifying(g) to solidify his point(s). See Henry Louis Gates Jr., *The Signifyin(g) Monkey: A Theory of African American Literary Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 60-61.

<sup>25</sup> This lyric has become a popular signifier of B.I.G.'s lyrical prowess (especially the live version taken from a freestyle session during the Budweiser Superfest, at Madison Square Garden, New York, 1993). Popularity of the verse is mainly due to the raw energy, and lyrical dexterity displayed by Biggie throughout his performance, but also because the artist following B.I.G. in the freestyle was the late Tupac Shakur. In this recording, the listener is given an insight into the immense talent of both artists, who soon after would become embroiled in a lyrical beef that sprawled into a deadly bi-coastal war. See Funkmaster Flex & Big Kap, 'Biggie/Tupac Live Freestyle', *The Tunnel* (Def Jam, 1999), and The Notorious B.I.G., 'Come On (Ft. Sadat X)', *Genius* <[genius.com/The-notorious-big-come-on-lyrics](https://genius.com/The-notorious-big-come-on-lyrics)> [accessed 1 October 2019].

chorus of ‘It Never Ends’ (*The Lost Tapes 2*, 2019).<sup>26</sup> Here, Nas quotes B.I.G.’s lyric using the same rhythm, flow, and (to some extent) inflection as B.I.G., mainly in tribute to the late artist.<sup>27</sup> In so doing, Nas takes his place among other esteemed rap artists (such as JAY-Z and Black Thought) by evoking B.I.G.’s memory and continuing his creative legacy.<sup>28</sup>

However, it can also be suggested that Nas uses B.I.G.’s words to frame an act of social commentary. Mirroring B.I.G., Nas lists an arsenal of weapons as part of a clever act of word play and braggadocio, but chooses to repeat the final line of B.I.G.’s lyric (‘this shit never ends’), poignantly highlighting a cycle of violence that surrounds him and the communities he represents. This message is contextualised by Nas’s use of adlib vocal observations between the gaps of the chorus, as he notes: ‘it’s the environment [...] the world’s at war [...] everybody packin’.

As will be discussed in section two, Nas pioneered the use of epistolary narrative in rap lyrics. As Michael Eric Dyson observes in his analysis of Nas’s lyrics in ‘One Love’ (*Illmatic*, 1994),<sup>29</sup> not only does the song’s ‘epistolary conceit’ link ‘its sonic fictional ambitions to Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*, but “One Love” harkens back to another black music classic: Marvin Gaye’s “What’s Going On””.<sup>30</sup> Further analysis of the narrative structure of ‘One Love’ reveals the ongoing intrageneric ripple effect it has had on hip hop lyricism (see pp. 42-47).

Nas has also employed the technique of ‘postmortem borrowing’<sup>31</sup>/sampling (in conjunction with autsonic quotation) on ‘Thugz Mansion’ (*God’s Son*, 2002),<sup>32</sup> a song

---

<sup>26</sup> Nas, ‘It Never Ends’, *The Lost Tapes 2* (Mass Appeal, Def Jam, 2019).

<sup>27</sup> For an example of Nas’s outspoken praise for B.I.G. as an artist/lyricist in song form, see ‘We Will Survive’, *I Am...* (Columbia, 1999).

<sup>28</sup> For an insight into B.I.G.’s influence on other rap artists’ lyrics, see Edwin Ortiz, ‘30 Rappers Who Have Used The Notorious B.I.G.’s ‘Juicy’ Lyrics’, *Complex*, 10<sup>th</sup> September 2014 <[complex.com/music/2014/09/the-notorious-big-juicy-lyrics-as-used-by-30-rappers](https://www.complex.com/music/2014/09/the-notorious-big-juicy-lyrics-as-used-by-30-rappers)> [accessed 3 September 2022].

<sup>29</sup> Nas, ‘One Love’, *Illmatic* (Ill Will, Columbia, 1994).

<sup>30</sup> Michael Eric Dyson, ‘One Love’, *Two Brothers, Three Verses*, in *Born to Use Mics*, p. 144.

<sup>31</sup> Justin A. Williams, ‘The Martyr Industry’, in *Rhyming and Stealin’*, pp. 126-127.

<sup>32</sup> Nas, ‘Thugz Mansion (N.Y.) Ft. Tupac and J. Phoenix’, *God’s Son* (Ill Will, Columbia, 2002).

featuring a posthumously-released performance from Tupac Shakur. As Justin A. Williams explains, whilst autophonically quoting Pac's verses in their entirety during the piece, Nas makes an attempt at 'simultaneously placing himself within the same utopia' that Pac speaks of in his lyrics: 'a utopian place that exists beyond the afterlife, a place where Tupac can escape the hardships of life'. Williams also suggests that whilst attempting to engage with conceptual aspects of Pac's lyrics, Nas also seeks to occupy the 'same canonical space' (127) as the late artist.

More subtle intertextual techniques are also present in Nas's lyrics, including occurrences of 'intergenerational dialogue' between Nas and his father, Olu Dara.<sup>33</sup> Guthrie P. Ramsey Jr speaks of Nas's use of his father's musicianship on 'Life's a Bitch' (*Illmatic*, 1994)<sup>34</sup> to create a 'sonic dialogue' not only between himself and his father, but also 'between jazz, hip hop, and R&B', as well as creating dialogue 'between two aspects of the protagonist's consciousness' (72). Of particular relevance to this thesis is the lyrical exchange between Nas and Dara on 'Bridging the Gap' (*Street's Disciple*, 2004),<sup>35</sup> a later collaboration, in which Nas adheres to a long-established hip hop tradition of implied lineage connecting various historical African-American music genres: 'Did it like Miles and Dizzy, now we gettin' busy/Bridging the gap, from the blues, to jazz, to rap/The history of music on this track'.<sup>36</sup>

Nas is also recognised by Adam Mansbach and Kevin Coval as a participant in the 'poetic legacy of urban realism, from Walt Whitman, Carl Sandburg, and Gwendolyn Brooks to the New York school's Frank O'Hara to the Black Arts Movement's Amiri Baraka, Haki Madhubuti, Sonia Sanchez, and Nikki Giovanni'.<sup>37</sup> Whilst broad connections can be made

---

<sup>33</sup> Guthrie P. Ramsey Jr, 'Time is Illmatic: A Song for my Father, a Letter to my Son', in *Born to Use Mics*, p. 72.

<sup>34</sup> Nas, 'Life's a Bitch', *Illmatic* (Ill Will, Columbia, 1994).

<sup>35</sup> Nas, 'Bridging the Gap', *Street's Disciple* (Columbia, 2004).

<sup>36</sup> Nas, 'Bridging the Gap', *Genius* <[genius.com/Nas-bridging-the-gap-lyrics](https://genius.com/Nas-bridging-the-gap-lyrics)> [accessed 11 October 2019].

<sup>37</sup> Adam Mansbach and Kevin Coval, 'All the Words Past the Margins', in *Born to Use Mics*, p. 247.

between these artists and Nas, his engagement with the urban realist trope (in terms of highlighting realism and intellectual content in rap music) links more closely to an existence of what Paula Higgins terms ‘creative patrilineage’ (a form of intertextuality ‘that emphasizes the student-mentor lineage’)<sup>38</sup> between himself and Rakim.<sup>39</sup>

As Planet Asia explains, Rakim is one of the first emcees, if not the first, to frame rap lyricism as a serious artistic discipline: ‘Many MCs credit Rakim with the big shift toward more complex rhyme schemes and flows’.<sup>40</sup> Masta Ace reinforces this point: ‘When you’re talking about Rakim, you’re talking about the next level, the shift, the literal shift...like, bam—no more simple rap. It upped the ante for lyrics’.<sup>41</sup> Nas is accredited as a driving force behind the first generation of rap lyricists to follow on from Rakim, a figure central to the ensuing ‘shift’ in rap lyricism.

As shown above, Nas’s previous and ongoing engagement with intertextuality includes his use of varying modes of allusion: ‘allosonic’ and ‘autosonic’ quotation, epistolary narrative, ‘postmortem borrowing’, ‘intergenerational dialogue’, and continuation/revision of the ‘urban realist’ tradition. The following three sections of this chapter will focus on unique instances of Nas’s engagement with the concept of intertextuality during lyrical performance. During close reading, complex literary devices pioneered or utilised by Nas that are yet to be discussed in scholarly criticism will be exemplified, and various emotional, intergenerational, socio-political, and artistic outcomes achieved by these techniques will be highlighted.

---

<sup>38</sup> Justin A. Williams, ‘Borrowing and Lineage in Eminem/2 Pac’s ‘Loyal to the Game’ and 50 Cent’s ‘Get Rich or Die Trying’, in *Rhyming and Stealin*, p.143.

<sup>39</sup> Empirical evidence of a creative patrilineage between Nas and Rakim is noted in the track ‘Unauthorized Biography of Rakim’ (*Street’s Disciple*, Columbia, 2004), in which Nas pays homage to his mentor, evidencing an in-depth chronological knowledge of the elder artist’s career highlights in rhyme form.

<sup>40</sup> Paul Edwards, *How to Rap: The Art and Science of the Hip-Hop MC*, (Chicago, IL: Chicago Review Press, Incorporated, 2009), p.97.

<sup>41</sup> Edwards, *How to Rap*, p. 105.

## SECTION ONE

### **Liminality in Nas's Lyrics**

As observed by Imani Perry, Nas has consistently engaged with the microphone booth as a liminal space during lyrical performances through his descriptions of 'transcending the physical world' in active participation in a 'long-standing' African American 'theological' and spiritual 'tradition'.<sup>42</sup> Perry notes that Nas's ongoing consciousness of metaphysical and spiritual transcendence refers 'to an existence beyond the limits of material experience' (200). When viewing forms of metaphysical and spiritual transcendence in rap lyrics from Homi K. Bhabha's perspective, in these 'moments or processes' of lyrically described transcendental existence, and *within* the 'in-between space' of the microphone booth in which performances occur, an 'articulation of cultural difference' takes place, whereby Nas (like many other hip hop lyricists) is able to (re)negotiate his cultural identity, independence, and societal autonomy.<sup>43</sup>

The significance of the microphone booth as 'terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood' (2) works consistently with Renee Green's notion of the marginalised individual's challenge to negotiate their cultural identity at the turn of the twentieth century: 'Multiculturalism doesn't reflect the complexity of the situation as I face it daily.... It requires a person to step outside of him/herself to actually see what he/she is doing' (4). Nas's conscious attempts to 'step outside of himself' or transcend the physical world during lyrical

---

<sup>42</sup> Imani Perry, "It Ain't Hard to Tell": A Story of Lyrical Transcendence', in *Born to Use Mics*, pp. 200-201.

<sup>43</sup> 'It is the trope of our times to locate the question of culture in the realm of the *beyond*'. See Homi K. Bhabha, 'Introduction', in *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge Classics, 2004), pp. 1-2.

description represents his (and many hip hop lyricists') awareness that 'terms of cultural engagement' are 'produced performatively' (3).<sup>44</sup>

As part of this performance, Nas's negotiation of the 'strict four-bar beat'<sup>45</sup> sonic boundaries that dictate the 'primary rhythmic force of rap' (a process of ideological and rhythmical innovation described by H. Samy Alim as navigating 'varieties of possibilities set up by the sixteenth-note back-beat' (96)) is likened here to the four-wall boundaries of the microphone booth, and entails what Adilifu Nama terms the 'transformative impulse' located specifically in African American arts.<sup>46</sup> This impulse is indulged in the booth, a place akin to Green's interpretation of the 'stairwell as liminal space',<sup>47</sup> that is used as 'an interstitial passage' that 'allows' and 'prevents identities' to open up 'the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy' (5). This process, as well as allowing for a fluidity of subjective cultural identification to occur within the performing individual, demonstrates what Nama sees as 'a profound commitment by black and brown youth to transform rather than flee the poverty-riddled social space they inhabit'.<sup>48</sup> Tricia Rose recognises this same commitment by early hip hop practitioners in the Bronx during the culture's formative years: 'Hip hop culture emerged as a source for youth of alternative identity formation and social status in a community whose older local support institutions had been all but demolished along with large sectors of its built environment'.<sup>49</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup> Bhabha, 'Introduction', pp. 2-4.

<sup>45</sup> H. Samy Alim, *Roc the Mic Right: The Language of Hip Hop Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 96.

<sup>46</sup> Nama, 'It Was Signified', p 19.

<sup>47</sup> Bhabha, 'Introduction', p 5.

<sup>48</sup> Nama, 'It Was Signified', p 17.

<sup>49</sup> Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), p. 34.

By mirroring social and mental constraints endured by marginalised subjects with the sonic and physical ‘boundaries’ established during lyrical performance/recording in the booth, rappers such as Nas enable a redefining of cultural independence and societal autonomy.<sup>50</sup>

Before detailing an example of Nas’s engagement with the microphone booth as liminal space trope, analysis of one of rap’s earliest engagements with the concept will be observed through a performance by Rakim, in order to contextualise Nas’s act of revision upon it. As Perry states, Rakim’s concentration on metaphysical and transcendental elements during performance is significant in understanding his influence on Nas as part of the aforementioned creative patrilineage: ‘perhaps only Rakim before [Nas] had crafted such compelling metaphysical, symbolic, and transcendental lyrics’.<sup>51</sup>

Rakim’s ability to articulate transcendence during booth recordings is evident in ‘Follow the Leader’ (*Follow the Leader*, 1988).<sup>52</sup> Beginning the song with an insistence on metaphysical ‘movement’ (implied in both the song’s title and its introduction: ‘follow me into a solo’), Rakim draws the listener into a passage based on time and space travel:

So follow me and while you’re thinking you were first  
Let’s travel at magnificent speeds around the universe  
What could you say as the Earth gets further and further away  
Planets as small as balls of clay  
Astray into the Milky Way, worlds out of sight  
Far as the eye can see not even a satellite  
Now stop and turn around and look  
As you stare in the darkness, your knowledge is took  
So keep staring, soon you suddenly see a star  
You better follow it, ‘cause it’s the R  
This is a lesson if you’re guessing and if you’re borrowing  
Hurry hurry step right up and keep following the leader<sup>53</sup>

---

<sup>50</sup> More work should be done in this area, including linking this concept to hip hop’s ‘carceral canon’ or ‘carceral imagination’ [Dyson, Daulatzai, 2010] in which prison walls/boundaries (and the mental strategies utilised by those incarcerated to endure them) can be likened to recording booth walls/sonic boundaries (and the processes of rhythmic negotiation and mental transcendence that occur ‘within’ them). Nas does this himself in ‘Last Words’ (*Nastradamus*, Ill Will, Columbia, 1999), a track in which he utilises personification: ‘I’m a prison cell six by nine/Livin’ hell, stone wall metal bars for the Gods in jail’.

<sup>51</sup> Imani Perry, ‘It Ain’t Hard to Tell’, p. 204.

<sup>52</sup> Eric B & Rakim, ‘Follow the Leader’, *Follow the Leader* (Uni, MCA, 1988).

<sup>53</sup> Eric B & Rakim, ‘Follow the Leader’, *Genius* <[genius.com/Eric-b-and-rakim-follow-the-leader-lyrics](https://genius.com/Eric-b-and-rakim-follow-the-leader-lyrics)> [accessed 1 October 2019].

Here, alongside Rakim's signposting of the practice of 'masterful revision' ('if you're borrowing') as elucidated by Zora Neal Hurston and Claudia Mitchell-Kernan during this thesis's introduction,<sup>54</sup> echoes of Green's notion of the marginalised individual's renegotiation of multiculturalism are noted in Rakim's act of stepping 'outside of himself' in order to 'actually see what he is doing' (on completion of performance).<sup>55</sup> Through this act, Rakim establishes a metaphysical distancing from immediate societal and mental constraints, allowing for revision of his own (and his listenership's) cultural identity.

Nas's engagement with, and development of, Rakim's use of this tradition is apparent during Large Professor's 'One Plus One (Ft. Nas)' (*The LP*, 1996),<sup>56</sup> in which Nas delivers an ad-libbed vocal introduction ('travellin', through the mind, one time')<sup>57</sup> that serves as a concentrated reinterpretation, or crystallisation, of Rakim's sentiment during 'Follow the Leader'. In conjunction with an intentional meditative sonic otherworldliness provided by Large Professor's production techniques on the track, Nas demonstrates a similar distancing technique and conceptual mindset as utilised by Rakim on 'Follow the Leader', subtly echoing his mentor's sentiment. As Perry suggests, both Rakim and Nas use metaphysical and spiritual forms of transcendence as 'a means of maintaining faith in the face of a white supremacist world',<sup>58</sup> and when viewed from Bhabha's perspective regarding the location of culture, their employment of these themes as part of the process of cultural distancing during

---

Rakim also takes his listenership on a transcendental journey during 'I Ain't No Joke' (*Paid in Full*, 4<sup>th</sup> & B'way, Island, 1987), in which he addresses the urban realist trope in addition to disseminating knowledge pertaining to the Islamic faith: 'Cause everything is real on a serious tip/Keep playing and I get furious quick/And I'll take you for a walk through hell/Freeze your dome, then watch your eyeballs swell/Guide you out of triple stage darkness'.

<sup>54</sup> See 'Introduction', p. 11 (footnote 31).

<sup>55</sup> Bhabha, 'Introduction', p 4.

<sup>56</sup> Large Professor, 'One Plus One (ft Nas)', *The LP* (Geffen, MCA Records, Paul Sea Productions).

<sup>57</sup> Large Professor, 'One Plus One (Feat. Nas)', *Genius* <[genius.com/Large-professor-one-plus-one-lyrics](https://genius.com/Large-professor-one-plus-one-lyrics)> [accessed 1 October 2019].

<sup>58</sup> Imani Perry, 'It Ain't Hard to Tell', p. 200.



performance enhances ‘the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy’.<sup>59</sup>

Nas’s positive advocacy of Five Percenter teachings and Afrocentric historical elements introduced later in his verse (‘Israelite, original, insight and lethal, first Hebrew/God-sent golden Asian, phenomenal/You can’t say the name Nas without saying the honourable’) indicate an additional link to Rakim’s consistent use of Afrocentric imagery and references to the teachings of the Nation of Islam.<sup>60</sup> Both artists’ similar uses of these themes throughout their careers (to initiate positive forms of cultural reidentification during performance) suggest a link to the ‘employment of intertextuality in black literature and black language’ as ‘a defiance of attempted Patriarchal domination’.<sup>61</sup>

Whilst acknowledging both artists’ uses of Afrocentric language, Mansbach and Coval note the revised approach Nas employs: ‘Linguistically, while Nas was influenced by Five Percenters, he wasn’t deep inside of that community as Rakim was, so their language and philosophy tinge his rhymes but don’t dominate’.<sup>62</sup> Nas’s subtle revision of Rakim’s insistent use of Afrocentrism and Five Percenter teachings point to his awareness of one of the eight main characteristics of Signification (to ‘teach but not’ be ‘preachy’, as defined by Geneva Smitherman),<sup>63</sup> and highlights the fine line he walks as an artist, regarding his aversion to ‘being considered overtly political or “conscious”’.<sup>64</sup> This phenomenon is

---

<sup>59</sup> Bhabha, ‘Introduction’, p 4.

<sup>60</sup> Felicia Miyakawa’s definition of the Five Percent Nation: ‘the Nation of Islam refers to Five Percenters as ‘philosophers’ or ‘scientists’ [...] Using the spirit of the Supreme Alphabet, Five Percenters “break down the word” analyzing it as a thing unto itself, with its own components and hidden meanings—not a mere signifier of a signified’. J. Griffith Rollefson, ‘Hip Hop as Martial Art: A Political Economy of Violence in Rap Music’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Hip Hop Music*, ed. by Justin D. Burton and Jason Lee Oakes, *Oxford Handbooks Online*, September 2018 <<https://europeanhiphoporg.files.wordpress.com/2018/12/HipHopAsMartialArt-OxfordHandbook-Rollefson.pdf>> [accessed 8 November 2021], p. 7.

<sup>61</sup> Henry Louis Gates Jr., *The Signifyin(g) Monkey: A Theory of African American Literary Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 84.

<sup>62</sup> Mansbach and Coval, ‘All the Words Past the Margins’, p. 251.

<sup>63</sup> Gates Jr., *The Signifyin(g) Monkey*, p. 104.

<sup>64</sup> Nas’s aversion to being labelled ‘conscious’ is noted during ‘Ether’ (*Stillmatic*, Ill Will, Columbia, 2001), a track inspired by his infamous feud with JAY-Z in 2001. During ‘Ether’, Nas refutes JAY-Z’s claims to his lack of affiliation with the streets, mainly due to his attempts to overtly disseminate knowledge in his lyrics: ‘tryna

observed by Dax-Devlon Ross, who states that artists such as Nas ‘criticize each other for “trying to kick knowledge”’, choosing ‘to dumb down their lyrics as a way of reaching a wider audience that expects entertainment from rappers and nothing else’.<sup>65</sup> In this way, Nas consciously revises Rakim’s approach to Afrocentric knowledge dissemination as a means of protecting his street-based reputation.

Another instance of lyrical transcendence in Nas’s corpus occurs in ‘One Love’.<sup>66</sup> As Adam Mansbach explains: ‘When Nas leaves Queensbridge for “a two-day stay” or hiatus ‘to preserve his sanity, he doesn’t even bother to tell us where he goes. He takes his “pen and pad for the weekend,” but wherever he takes them is off the map; the song restarts when he returns to the “haunted castle” of home’.<sup>67</sup> Nas’s omission of location during this ‘two-day stay’ indicates a revised version of aforementioned methods of lyrical transcendence in rap that links with Ernest Hemingway’s theory of omission. Hemingway demonstrates this theory in ‘Hunger was a Good Discipline’,<sup>68</sup> in which he explains ‘you could omit anything if you knew that you omitted and the omitted part would strengthen the story and make people feel something more than they understood’ (43). In Nas’s conscious literary act of omitting an important aspect of his story in ‘One Love’, he urges his audience to fill in the gaps using a combination of imagination and personal experience, thus heightening their personal and emotional involvement.

---

work it out, you tryna get brolic?/Ask me if I’m tryna kick knowledge?/Nah, I’m tryna kick the shit you need to learn though/That ether, that shit that make your soul burn slow’.

<sup>65</sup> Dax-Devlon Ross, *The Nightmare & the Dream*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>66</sup> Nas, ‘One Love’, *Illmatic*.

<sup>67</sup> Mansbach and Coval, ‘All the Words Past the Margins’, in *Born to Use Mics*, p. 245.

<sup>68</sup> Ernest Hemingway, *A Moveable Feast* (London: Arrow Books, 2004), p. 43.

## SECTION TWO

### Epistolary Legacy in Nas's 'One Love'

In his essay on Nas's 'One Love', Michael Eric Dyson observes the song's 'epistolary conceit' when linking 'its sonic fictional ambitions to Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*'.<sup>69</sup> Walker's influence on Nas's narrative technique during 'One Love' is further emphasised by lyrics on 'Purple' (*The Lost Tapes*, 2002),<sup>70</sup> that reveal Nas's specific awareness of Steven Spielberg's film adaptation of the novel:<sup>71</sup>

A divide-and-fall strategy, they aren't fair  
I dig in my bag of weed that's covered with orange hair  
This Color Purple'll make Whoopi give me the pussy  
And Celie, Oprah and Danny Glover gots to feel me  
This is how I escape the madness  
Too much of anything'll hurt you, so my state of mind's all purple<sup>72</sup>

Whilst addressing members of the cast from Spielberg's version of *The Color Purple* during the above passage, Nas evokes elements of psychological trauma that are woven deeply into Walker's story, in relation to his own themes of trauma and escapism in 'Purple'. In his combination of pun ('make Whoopi'/make whoopee) with allusion to his 'bag of weed' (or source of escapism) being potent enough to allow the traumatised character 'Whoopi'/Celie to consent to sex ('This Color Purple'll make Whoopi give me the pussy'), Nas recalls themes of sexual trauma, and psychological and physical abuse endured by Celie,<sup>73</sup> and issues surrounding sexual orientation and sexism that underscore *The Color Purple*.

---

<sup>69</sup> Michael Eric Dyson, 'One Love', *Two Brothers, Three Verses*, p. 134.

Alice Walker, *The Color Purple* (Salford, MAN: Phoenix Publishing House, 2011).

<sup>70</sup> Nas, 'Purple', *The Lost Tapes* (Ill Will, Columbia, 2002). Nas also references *The Color Purple* in 'Silent Murder' (*It Was Written*, Columbia, 1996), connoting a long-lasting affiliation with the film/novel: 'It's sort of like the conclusion to Color Purple/N\*\*\*as is losing, confusion, with one-time on pursuit moves in'.

<sup>71</sup> Steven Spielberg, *The Color Purple* (Warner Bros., 1985).

<sup>72</sup> Nas, 'Purple', *Genius* <[genius.com/Nas-purple-lyrics](https://genius.com/Nas-purple-lyrics)> [accessed 3 October 2019].

<sup>73</sup> Nas also draws on themes of psychological and physical abuse in his allusion to Oprah Winfrey during 'Purple', not only in reference to the character she played in Spielberg's film adaptation of *The Color Purple*

Nas's drawing on psychological aspects of a literary character relates to Adam Bradley's observations of the 'process of repetition and re-creation' in 'MC's lyrics' as part of 'a creative practice of free exchange'.<sup>74</sup> Bradley views this practice as a form of 'imitation', stating that 'imitation in an artistic context means charging another's words with your own creativity and, in the process, creating something that is at once neither his nor yours, and yet somehow both' (147). This is evident in Nas's evocation of themes of trauma in Walker's text that serve to emphasise his own themes of trauma and escapism in 'Purple'.

Nas's use of epistolary narrative on 'One Love' led to intratextual revisions of the technique, prevalently in 'We Will Survive' (*I Am...*, 1999),<sup>75</sup> a track in which he revises several lyrics during an open letter to the late Tupac Shakur and Biggie Smalls.<sup>76</sup> Also, in 'My Country' (*Stillmatic*, 2001),<sup>77</sup> a political polemic addressing the plight of incarcerated young black males in America and their counterparts involved in foreign conflict, Nas reverses narrative perspective and engages in a revision of what Sohail Daulatzai terms the 'carceral imagination'<sup>78</sup> established in 'One Love', assuming the role of inmate 'sittin' behind these prison walls' with 'pen and pad wishin' on a visit', writing to a soldier deployed in the Iraq War.<sup>79</sup>

---

(Sofia), but also in reference to Winfrey as celebrity, in her 1992 'coming out' as 'incest survivor' for Melissa Jo Peltier's documentary film *Scared Silent: Ending and Exposing Child Abuse* (King World, CBS Television, 1992). See Rosaria Champagne, 'Oprah Winfrey's 'Scared Silent' and the Spectatorship of Incest', *Discourse*, 17 (1995), p. 130.

<sup>74</sup> Adam Bradley, *Book of Rhymes: The Poetics of Hip Hop* (New York: BasicCivitas Books, 2009), pp. 147-148.

<sup>75</sup> Nas, 'We Will Survive'.

<sup>76</sup> There are several instances of intratextual revision during 'We Will Survive', including the opening line 'Whattup Big? You know shit is rough after you slid' that is an allosonic quotation of 'What up, kid? I know shit is rough doin' your bid' taken from the opening line of 'One Love'. See Nas, 'We Will Survive', *Genius* <[genius.com/Nas-we-will-survive-lyrics](https://genius.com/Nas-we-will-survive-lyrics)> [accessed 3 October 2019], and Nas, 'One Love', *Genius* <[genius.com/Nas-one-love-live-lyrics](https://genius.com/Nas-one-love-live-lyrics)> [accessed 3 October 2019].

<sup>77</sup> Nas, 'My Country (Ft. Millennium Thug)', *Stillmatic* (Ill Will, Columbia, 2001).

<sup>78</sup> Dyson, "'One Love', Two Brothers, Three Verses', p. 133.

<sup>79</sup> Nas, 'My Country (Ft. Millennium Thug)', *Genius* <[genius.com/Nas-my-country-lyrics](https://genius.com/Nas-my-country-lyrics)> (accessed 3 October 2019).

Ross explains Nas's pioneering use of the 'song-letter'<sup>80</sup> in rap music, noting that 'with "One Love," a series of prison letters set to song, he effectively began the epistolary sub-genre'.<sup>81</sup> Ross goes on to emphasise the structural, conceptual, and geostylistic ripple effect 'One Love' had on rap music's upper echelons, both shortly after its release and in the decades since: 'A year later, Tupac's "Dear Mama" would rise to the top of singles charts [...] Over the years Jay-Z would become a particularly adept user of the form with songs like [...] "Do You Wanna Ride", Jay-Z's own homage to his imprisoned comrade' (31). Ross goes on to state 'what made "One Love" so groundbreaking at the time [of its release] was its personal nature. It was a letter that we, the audience, happened to overhear being read' (31). The overwhelmingly 'personal', almost vulnerable 'nature' of the recording (and *Illmatic* as a whole), described by Mark Anthony Neal as part of a "brooding introspection," which highlighted [...] existential realities that dictated an engagement with street level criminality',<sup>82</sup> enabled many rap artists to foster a new set of literary tools and attempt to articulate their own often comparable personal experiences.

This is demonstrated, for example, in Xzibit's 'The Foundation' (*At the Speed of Life*, 1996).<sup>83</sup> In 1996, two years after the release of 'One Love', West Coast MC Xzibit utilised hip hop's newly established epistolary sub-genre to form an emotive open letter to his young son, addressing themes prevalent in male African American experience such as lineage, loyalty, masculinity, and the paternal bond. In tandem with Nas's narrative technique on 'One Love', 'The Foundation' harnessed what Henry Louis Gates Jr. (speaking in terms of Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*) defines as 'one of the well-known effects of the epistolary narrative [...]: to underscore the illusion of the real but also of the spontaneous'.<sup>84</sup> This is

---

<sup>80</sup> Dyson, 'One Love', Two Brothers, Three Verses', p. 134.

<sup>81</sup> Dax-Devlon Ross, *The Nightmare & the Dream*, p. 31.

<sup>82</sup> Mark Anthony Neal, 'Memory Lane': On Jazz, Hip Hop, and Fathers', in *Born to Use Mics*, p. 127.

<sup>83</sup> Xzibit, 'The Foundation', *At the Speed of Life* (Loud, RCA, 1996).

<sup>84</sup> Gates Jr., 'Color me Zora: Alice Walker's (Re)Writing of the Speakerly Text', *The Signifyin(g) Monkey*, p. 264.

evident in the following passage taken from ‘The Foundation’, in which Xzibit uses the epistle form in combination with a unique sense of urgency and foreboding to construct a set of life rules/guidelines regarding the perilous existence many African Americans face in modern America: ‘Let no man ever hold you down or supress you/It’s the 90’s the police just arrest you/Disrespect you on occasion take life/By the time you come of age they’ll probably blast on sight’.<sup>85</sup> Gates Jr. explains that ‘the form allows for a maximum of identification with a character, precisely because the devices of empathy and distance, standard in third-person narration, no longer obtain’.<sup>86</sup> In the same way that ‘One Love’ activates listeners ‘to supply any coherence of interpretation of the text themselves’ (64), ‘The Foundation’ requires listeners to identify with, and supply, personal and emotional qualities/realities to the song.

Despite Xzibit’s revision of narrative focus during his recording, dedicating his words to his young son (as opposed to Nas’s addressal of an incarcerated male in ‘One Love’), the intended recipient’s voicelessness or inability to reply serves to strengthen each song’s focus on aspects of what Gates Jr. defines as ‘the concern to depict the quest of the black speaking subject’.<sup>87</sup> Gates Jr. argues that for ‘over two-hundred years’, the African American’s quest ‘to find his or her voice has been a repeated topos of the black tradition, and perhaps has been its most central trope’ (257). Both Nas and Xzibit can be seen to adhere to Gates Jr.’s claim in their use of the epistle ‘as theme, as revised trope’, and ‘as a double-voiced narrative strategy’ during the ‘representation of characters and texts finding a voice’, as both songs engage with an artistic process that functions ‘as a sign both of the formal unity of the Afro-American literary tradition and of the integrity of the black subjects depicted in literature’ (257). Regarding use of this trope in ‘One Love’ in particular, Dyson observes Nas’s act of

---

<sup>85</sup> Xzibit, ‘The Foundation’, *Genius* <[genius.com/Xzibit-the-foundation-lyrics](https://genius.com/Xzibit-the-foundation-lyrics)> [accessed 23 October 2019].

<sup>86</sup> Gates Jr., *The Signifyin(g) Monkey*, p. 264.

<sup>87</sup> Gates Jr., *The Signifyin(g) Monkey*, p. 257.

becoming ‘his friend’s rhetorical double and symbolic substitute, [speaking] to, and for, his isolated brother in arms [...] relieving him of the burden to say it himself’.<sup>88</sup> This role of ‘symbolic substitute’ taken on by Nas, in order to give voice to his ‘isolated brother’ (and listenership), is also inhabited by Xzibit on ‘The Foundation’ as a means of speaking to and for his voiceless son.

Dyson also observes the patriarchal importance of fathering a son as a marginalised man in poverty-stricken areas of America, noting it as a subject that underscores ‘One Love’: ‘the miracle of birth is heightened when black male infants announce their existence [...]. It is the wonder and brokenness of black male life in the ghetto that Nas implicitly grasps and shares as an unspoken bond with his jailed compatriot.’ Xzibit acknowledges this powerful paternal sense, drawing upon the ‘unspoken bond’ previously ‘grasped’ by Nas on ‘One Love’, and refocuses attention on it during ‘The Foundation’.

Nas’s take on the ‘lively and expansive conception of brotherhood: his brothers in prison, the brotherhood of males who struggle to escape the desperate circumstances of the projects, and the brotherhood of mankind implied in his complex vision of a just community’ (138) is also focused upon during ‘The Foundation’: ‘You came from a long line of killers and drug dealers/Who forever smoke bud/So it’s probably in your blood/Realize you can only run the streets so long/Then the streets run you into the ground then gone’.<sup>89</sup> Here, and throughout the song, the ‘poignant moments of black male intimacy and vulnerability’ (133) that Dyson observes as part of Nas’s ‘complex vision of a just community’ struggling ‘to escape desperate circumstances’ in ‘One Love’, and his generating of ‘a holistic vision of black brotherhood that reflects the goodness and potential of one man reflected in the eyes of

---

<sup>88</sup> Dyson, ‘One Love’, *Two Brothers, Three Verses*, p. 137.

<sup>89</sup> Xzibit, ‘The Foundation’, *Genius* <[genius.com/Xzibit-the-foundation-lyrics](https://genius.com/Xzibit-the-foundation-lyrics)> [accessed 23 October 2019].

another, despite the prevalence of negative circumstances' (138), are revisioned by Xzibit to be experienced from a predominantly paternal perspective.

Sonic, geostylistic, and artistic elements reveal further links between 'The Foundation' and 'One Love'. In particular, East Coast rap's influence on Xzibit at the time is noted in the distinctly East Coast-sounding production for instrumental accompaniment of the lyric (in opposition to Xzibit's own West Coast musical heritage). The choice of featured guest on the B side of the 'The Foundation' single ('Eyes May Shine Remix'),<sup>90</sup> also reveals geostylistic influences, as Xzibit enlists the production and vocal talents of Mobb Deep (Havoc and Prodigy), who are from the same Queensbridge housing projects as Nas, and heavily affiliated with the artist (having released several collaborative recordings).<sup>91</sup>

### SECTION THREE

#### **Religious and Thematic Allusion in Nas's 'No Idea's Original'**<sup>92</sup>

Nas's lyrics on 'No Idea's Original' ('NIO') serve as an exemplar of his awareness of the intellectual impact of literary and sonic intertextuality on rap music. In the song, Nas engages in conceptual discourse regarding artistic originality, the role of the 'author' in rap music, and deference in hip hop culture, by using canonical-literary and genre-specific allusions in combination with sonic/instrumental accompaniment.

---

<sup>90</sup> Xzibit, 'Eyes May Shine Remix (Ft. Mobb Deep)' (Loud, 1996).

<sup>91</sup> See Mobb Deep, 'Eye for an Eye (Your Beef is Mine) Ft. Nas and Raekwon', *The Infamous* (Loud, RCA, 1995), Nas, 'Live N\*\*\*a Rap' Ft. Mobb Deep', *It Was Written* (Columbia, 1996), and Mobb Deep, 'It's Mine Ft. Nas', *Murda Muzik* (Loud, 1999).

<sup>92</sup> Nas, 'No Idea's Original', *The Lost Tapes* (Ill Will, Columbia, 2002).



The opening two lines of ‘NIO’: ‘No idea’s original, there’s nothing new under the sun/It’s never what you do, but how it’s done’,<sup>93</sup> draw on a proverb adapted from *Ecclesiastes* 1.9: ‘Whatever has happened—that’s what will happen again; whatever has occurred—that’s what will occur again. There’s nothing new under the sun.’<sup>94</sup> Shakespeare’s reference to the same passage as Nas for ‘Sonnet 59’ (*Ecclesiastes* 1.9-10)<sup>95</sup> is of particular relevance to this thesis, as both artists use a similar sentiment to inform their work regarding notions of originality and creativity (as opposed to what is likely to have been the primary didactic intention of *Ecclesiastes*: to inform its readership that there is nothing new after *God*). Similarities dissipate, however, when observing each author’s differing approach towards the acceptance and articulation of what Harold Bloom terms their ‘belatedness’, or anxiety of influence, when contemplating authorship, authenticity, and originality.<sup>96</sup>

In ‘Sonnet 59’, Shakespeare reinforces the ‘nothing new’ sentiment provided by the narrator in ‘some antique book’ (*Ecclesiastes*), depicting an artist’s struggle for originality whilst weighed down with the ‘burden’ of realising that ‘even of five hundredth courses of the sun’, the creator – irrespective of the success of the captured image they cultivate – will only match the ‘wits’ of artists ‘of former days’. In contrast, Nas utilises the same sentiment as part of an open acceptance of others’ ideas in his work, at ease with traditional borrowing techniques openly practiced in (and integral to) hip hop culture, rather than railing against them as a burden. Nas’s open acceptance of the ‘nothing new’ sentiment through his

---

<sup>93</sup> Nas, ‘No Idea’s Original’, *Genius* <[genius.com/Nas-no-ideas-original-lyrics](http://genius.com/Nas-no-ideas-original-lyrics)> [accessed 2 October 2019].

<sup>94</sup> Most versions of The Bible contain extremely similar constructions to that used by Nas for ‘No Idea’s Original’. This includes the King James Bible (V2), which additionally uses the same rhyming couplet (‘done’ and ‘sun’). However, the Common English Bible version of *Ecclesiastes* 1:9 has been quoted here, as it contains the exact same phrasing as used by Nas, including contraction. Common English Bible (*Ecclesiastes* 1:9) <[biblegateway.com/verse/en/Ecclesiastes%201:9](http://biblegateway.com/verse/en/Ecclesiastes%201:9)> [accessed 22 June 2019].

<sup>95</sup> Mark Jay Mirsky, *The Drama in Shakespeare’s Sonnets: ‘A Satire to Decay’* (Lanham, MD: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2011), p. 99.

<sup>96</sup> Bloom defines ‘belatedness’ as ‘the experience of coming after the event’. Speaking in terms of Romantic poetry, he pragmatically explains ‘the reason why the Romantic poets could not rid their poetry of explicit or implicit references and allusions to Milton was, it would appear, that they were late for the event’. Graham Allen, *Intertextuality* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 133-134.

illustrative allusion to Ecclesiastes 1.9 allows him to exemplify rap's rare intertextual relationship with external forms of literature. His referencing of a text outside of the rap genre also goes a small way to counterbalancing Oliver Wang's explanation of the now 'normalized' employment of intertextuality in rap lyrics through 'internalized discourse', a practice using 'peer references as an obligatory device' that 'gradually' became 'institutionalized' after rap 'developed into a structured and highly normalized genre' during the latter stages of its half-century existence.<sup>97</sup>

Nas also engages with traditional debates regarding artistic originality and the role of the author through his allusion to Ecclesiastes 1.9 as part of a recorded rap performance. When observing the notion of 'communal authorship' in oral cultures, Tricia Rose notes Walter Ong's argument that 'narrative originality lodges not in making up new stories, but in managing a particular interaction with this audience at this time—at every telling the story has to be introduced uniquely into a unique situation [...] formulas and themes are reshuffled rather than supplanted with new materials'.<sup>98</sup> Ong's words link closely with Nas's concise summary of how 'formulas and themes are reshuffled' when 'managing a particular interaction' during the second line of 'NIO': 'it's never what you do but how it's done'. Rose continues the debate, agreeing with Ong that 'in oral cultures, authorship is not essential to performance', but she argues that 'rappers have redefined' this 'concept of communal authorship', and 'narrative originality *is* lodged in creating new stories, and these stories are associated with the rapper' (86).

Nas's engagement with this debate through varying modes of intertextuality during 'NIO' is emphasised by the additional factor of instrumental choice for the song. Nas raps over a beat break sampled from 'I'm Gonna Love You Just a Little More Baby' by The Cecil

---

<sup>97</sup> David Diallo, 'Intertextuality in Rap Lyrics', *Association Francaise d'Etudes Americaines*, 142 (2015), 40-54 (p. 47). See the introduction of this thesis (p. 10) for further details of Wang's idea of 'internalized discourse'.

<sup>98</sup> Tricia Rose, *Black Noise*, p 86.

Holmes Soulful Sounds,<sup>99</sup> that is a version of (or Signification on) the original composition by R&B legend Barry White<sup>100</sup> (White's version of this break was already an established part of the hip hop canon, which, as Gabriel Alvarez notes, 'has been jacked [taken/used] by everyone from the Beastie Boys to Ghostface Killah').<sup>101</sup> As a revision of the original, Nas's use of the Cecil Holmes break for 'NIO' acts as an additional signpost to the 'nothing new under the sun' sentiment evoked during his performance, again consolidated by his 'how it's done' statement.

Drawing these techniques together to form a theoretical platform, or what Gates Jr. terms a 'received structure of crucial elements'<sup>102</sup> from which to speak, Nas additionally layers a 'familiar' but 'rendered anew' (66) construct of verse and performance (in the form of a forty-six bar verse) in adherence to his audiences' implicit expectation of 'poiesis' (as part of the self-valorising trope established in black literature/oral tradition). In doing so, Nas exemplifies Gates Jr.'s observations that 'the artistry of the oral narrator [...] does not depend on his or her capacity to dream up new characters or events that define the actions depicted; rather, it depends on his or her' rendering 'formulaic phrases and formulaic events [...] anew in unexpected ways', foregrounding 'his or her display of their ability [...] rather than the invention of a novel signified' during his performance (66).

---

<sup>99</sup> The Cecil Holmes Soulful Sounds, 'I'm Gonna Love You Just a Little More Baby', *Music for Soulful Lovers* (Buddah, 1973).

<sup>100</sup> Barry White, 'I'm Gonna Love You Just a Little More Baby', *I've Got So Much To Give* (20<sup>th</sup> Century, 1973).

<sup>101</sup> Gabriel Alvarez, 'The 100 Best Nas Songs: No. 45. 'No Idea's Original' (2002)', *Complex*, 1<sup>st</sup> August 2017 <[complex.com/music/the-100-best-nas-songs/](http://complex.com/music/the-100-best-nas-songs/)> [accessed 1 October 2019]. As practitioner and student of hip hop since its inception, Nas's awareness of the rich intertextual history this break shares with the culture is undoubted, especially in relation to its use by mentor Rakim for 'As the Rhyme Goes On' (*Paid in Full*, 4<sup>th</sup> & B'way, Island, 1987), a song Nas previously borrowed from, using allosonic quotation (see p. 31).

<sup>102</sup> Gates Jr., *The Signifyin(g) Monkey*, p. 66.

## CONCLUSION

According to David Diallo's three-point system regarding intertextuality in rap lyrics,<sup>103</sup> Nas's immediate use of the first two lines of 'NIO' to allude to Ecclesiastes 1.9, in conjunction with his choice of instrumental for performance to illustrate the song's overarching 'nothing new' sentiment, 'enables the delivery of an idea in both a concise and evocative way, making it a 'weapon' of choice in a mode of expression where brevity can be of key importance' (48). The same can be said for Nas's allusion to *The Color Purple* during 'Purple', in which he relies on his audiences' implicit understanding of Celie's traumatic experiences in order to underscore his own themes of trauma and escapism during the song.

Nas's 'introduction of stylistic and strategic intertextual references' (48), in his use of autosonic quotation during songs such as 'The Genesis', 'Fetus', and 'Intro' (*I Am...*) to establish his own ideological and conceptual beginnings as part of a cognizant act of self-mythology, 'definitely contributes to enhancing the meaning of rap lyrics, making their bustle of intertextual references essential in contributing to its resultant mood' (48). This is also apparent in his use of allosonic quotation in 'It Never Ends' as act of homage, and 'You're Da Man', as a means of succinctly articulating artistic and sociological factors that have shaped his career, through the occurrence of a 'creative patrilineage' between himself and Rakim.

Finally, Nas's use of Afrocentric imagery and Five Percent Nation teachings as part of the aforementioned creative patrilineage, his pioneering use of sub-genre forms such as the epistolary narrative in rap lyrics, and his career-long utilisation of genre-specific allusion as a means of chronologically dating his work, equate to his 'referencing other aspects of culture

---

<sup>103</sup> Diallo, 'Intertextuality in Rap Lyrics', p. 48.

to create meaning [...] simultaneously’, expanding ‘the possibilities in terms of assonances, alliterations or rhymes’ (48) and other poetic devices.

## PRELUDE TO CHAPTER TWO

### **‘Good Kid’ State of Mind: Revisions on the ‘Observer/Witness’ Trope in Kendrick Lamar’s *good kid, m.A.A.d city*<sup>104</sup> and Nas’s *Illmatic*.<sup>105</sup>**

In recognising hip hop’s integral relationship with intertextuality as part of Oliver Wang’s observations of an exponentially growing ‘internalized discourse’ between culturally informed members,<sup>106</sup> there follows an inevitability that rap artists who exhibit a particular concentration and artistic focus on these aspects of the artform will share critical recognition and cultural/artistic lineage. As bridge for the second chapter of this thesis, rap artist Kendrick Lamar’s close relationship with intertextuality as a means of effecting varying forms of resistance and individual and communal modes of affirmation will be detailed, first through an exploration of his use of allusion to, and development of, Nas’s<sup>107</sup> previous conceptualising of nihilism as social ill within black communities of America. As prelude to the second chapter, various intertextual links between two of the most influential rap artists in hip hop history will be identified, with particular focus on their early albums: Nas’s debut

---

<sup>104</sup> Kendrick Lamar, *good kid, m.A.A.d city* (Top Dawg, Aftermath, Interscope, 2012).

<sup>105</sup> Nas, *Illmatic* (Ill Will, Columbia, 1994).

<sup>106</sup> Oliver Wang, ‘Rapping and Repping Asian: Race, Authenticity and the Asian American MC’, in *Alien Encounters: Popular Culture in Asian America*, ed. by Mimi Thi Nguyen and Thuy Linh Nguyen Tu (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), p. 52.

See the introduction of this thesis (p. 10) for further details of Wang’s idea of ‘internalized discourse’.

<sup>107</sup> Although acknowledging artistic similarities between himself and Lamar, Nas is wary of critical comparisons being made between *Illmatic* and *GKMC*, mainly due to historic and generic factors: ‘*Illmatic* represented a different time and a different expression for different reasons. The times inspired the sound of that—the climate of the music business, the rap game, the industry, the year, and life in itself’. He goes on to note that ‘Kendrick’s album [...] is a brand-new expression that represents these times, the sound represents what’s happening now, he’s changing things today’. Insanul Ahmed, ‘Nas Talks About Kendrick Lamar and the Challenges of Following up a Classic Album’, *Complex*, 24<sup>th</sup> July 2014 <[complex.com/music/2014/07/nas-kendrick-lamar-interview](http://complex.com/music/2014/07/nas-kendrick-lamar-interview)> [accessed 20 March 2020].

classic *Illmatic* (1994), and Kendrick Lamar's second studio album *good kid, m.A.A.d city* (2012) (*GKMC*).<sup>108</sup> As will be discussed, both albums had a seismic effect on the rap genre and hip hop culture at time of release, each providing a platform for their authors to become critically-acclaimed rap artists.

Critically acknowledged intertextual links between Nas and Lamar occur after the release of Lamar's *GKMC*. As Andreas Hale points out, 'Initially the comparisons [of *GKMC*] to Nas' seminal classic *Illmatic* sounded premature. But as time went on, the comparison was adequate'.<sup>109</sup> What Hale deems 'adequate' here are the advanced levels of poetics and social awareness that both artists displayed at early stages in their respective careers: 'Nas's poetry was ahead of his time with a sonic backdrop that was simply brilliant. Kendrick Lamar was the West Coast version of that where he eschewed radio ready songs for a tightly knit album that was both a lyrical and sonic masterpiece' (3). An important additional link observed by Hale is found in the design work for both projects: he notes that *GKMC*'s artwork, featuring a 'childhood photo' of Lamar (*Illmatic* also features a childhood photo of Nas) 'carried a great deal of weight and intrigue', and, for many, 'immediately brought about *Illmatic* comparisons' (3).<sup>110</sup>

The above factors each must, of course, feed into intertextual discourse regarding *Illmatic* and *GKMC*, compounded by Nas's and Lamar's comparative employment (at time of recording) of a similar aesthetic and ideology relating to the 'observer/witness' or 'victim of circumstance' trope in rap lyrics, made popular by Melle Mel (in 'The Message', 1982).<sup>111</sup>

---

<sup>108</sup> Hereafter referred to as *GKMC*.

<sup>109</sup> Andreas Hale, 'How Kendrick Lamar's *good kid, m.A.A.d city* is Hip-Hop's *Pulp Fiction*', *Okayplayer*, 21<sup>st</sup> October 2017 <[okayplayer.com/music/good-kid-maad-city-retrospective-andreas-hale-kendrick-lamar-tde.html](http://okayplayer.com/music/good-kid-maad-city-retrospective-andreas-hale-kendrick-lamar-tde.html)> [accessed 11 February 2020].

<sup>110</sup> Since Nas's initial use of his image as a child for *Illmatic*, other artists such as The Notorious B.I.G. (*Ready to Die*, 1994), Lil Wayne (*Tha Carter III*, 2008), and Drake (*Nothing Was the Same*, 2013) have also employed the idea. See Miranda J., 'Here are Hip-Hop Albums with Children on the Cover', *XXL*, 13<sup>th</sup> January 2015 <[xxlmag.com/10-of-the-most-popular-albums-with-children-on-the-cover/](http://xxlmag.com/10-of-the-most-popular-albums-with-children-on-the-cover/)> [accessed 7 September 2022].

<sup>111</sup> Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, 'The Message', *The Message* (Sugar Hill Records, 1982).

This trope involves the narrator's use of a form of 'street reportage' in conjunction with graphic depictions of narrative 'struggle' (poverty, violence, and ghetto-based reality) often delivered from an objective bystander perspective with an impartiality that neither condemns nor condones the acts described. As part of this process, the author enables an underlying form of social and political commentary to occur, based on current circumstances endured by individuals and marginalised groups (akin to modern definitions of the 'urban griot').<sup>112</sup>

Mitch Findlay presents Lamar as positioning himself as victim and product of his environment throughout the album: 'By this point [Lamar's] nature as a "good kid" has been established; always the observer but never the perpetrator. Songs like "The Art of Peer Pressure" [*GKMC*] paint him as a victim even while victimizing others'.<sup>113</sup> Rachel Kaadzi Ghansah additionally observes Lamar's conscious undertaking of the observer/witness trope in *GKMC*, in opposition to alternate perspectives employed during past and future projects: 'what Lamar does differently is to tell us of what it means to grow up as an observer and witness to an under-discussed inner-city war, while remaining for the most part uninterested in joining the battle'.<sup>114</sup> Noting Lamar's experiences in Compton as fundamental to his employment of this trope, Findlay details the two-pronged approach Lamar adopts towards its execution: first through an exhibition of 'an authenticity earned from lived experience' in

---

<sup>112</sup> Divulging upon this term, Michael Eric Dyson notes Cornell West's indications of the rapper as 'bridge figure', who 'appeals to the rhetorical practices honed in African American religious experiences and the cultural potency of black singing/musical traditions to produce an engaging hybrid'. Additionally, H. Samy Alim quotes Geneva Smitherman's observations that 'rappers are, after all, "postmodern African griots" (a class of musicians-entertainers who preserved African history through oral narratives)' (79). Alim argues that 'in a sense, rappers are truly urban griots dispensing social and cultural critiques, verbal shamans exorcising the demons of hip-hopocrisy and a laissez faire orality that refuses to participate in the media of cultural exploration and social provocation' (21).

H. Samy Alim, *Roc the Mic Right: The Language of Hip Hop Culture* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006), pages 21 and 79.

<sup>113</sup> Mitch Findlay, 'Kendrick Lamar's 'M.A.A.D City' Birthed an Unreliable Narrator', *HotNewHipHop*, 4<sup>th</sup> November 2019 <[hotnewhiphop.com/kendrick-lamars-maad-city-birtherd-an-unreliable-narrator-news.93872.html](http://hotnewhiphop.com/kendrick-lamars-maad-city-birtherd-an-unreliable-narrator-news.93872.html)> [accessed 27 February 2020].

<sup>114</sup> Rachel Kaadzi Ghansah, 'When the Lights Shut Off: Kendrick Lamar and the Decline of the Black Blues Narrative', *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 31<sup>st</sup> January 2013 <[lareviewofbooks.org/article/when-the-lights-shut-off-kendrick-lamar-and-the-decline-of-the-black-blues-narrative/](http://lareviewofbooks.org/article/when-the-lights-shut-off-kendrick-lamar-and-the-decline-of-the-black-blues-narrative/)> [accessed 27 February 2020], p. 19.

Compton, and second, through ‘the cognizance to recognize his place within his surrounding social structure and the impact it would have on his rationality’ (2). It is this double-edged approach, involving the speaker’s lived experience and ‘cognizance’ to see the bigger picture, or objectively understand the implications of their immediate environment on their decision-making, that in this regard substantially relates *GKMC* to Nas’s *Illmatic*.

Noting Nas’s employment of the observer/witness trope, Matthew Gasteier highlights *Illmatic*’s ‘cogent argument for a non-judgmental depiction of violence’ and accurate portrayal of ‘a very real and urgent situation within an otherwise invisible community’.<sup>115</sup> Lines from *Illmatic* such as ‘Life is parallel to Hell, but I must maintain’<sup>116</sup> serve to epitomise Findlay’s previous observations of Lamar’s ‘cognizance to recognise his place within a surrounding social structure’.<sup>117</sup> Revealing his personal understanding of the Queensbridge projects that surrounded him at time of recording *Illmatic*, Nas described the album, before its release, as ‘a reality storybook’, and speaking retrospectively, he noted how the LP highlighted ‘what a young man was going through in society [...] he’s been through Hell, he’s going through Hell and he’s expressing it’.<sup>118</sup>

Nas and Lamar’s use of the observer/witness trope typifies how many rap artists view themselves as products of their environments during writing, the recording and release of their works. For this reason, an ongoing comparative study of both artists’ employments of the observer/witness trope will be considered in the following chapter.

---

<sup>115</sup> Matthew Gasteier, *33/3: Illmatic* (New York, NY: Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 2009), p. 78.

<sup>116</sup> Nas, ‘N.Y. State of Mind’, *Genius* <[genius.com/Nas-ny-state-of-mind-lyrics](https://genius.com/Nas-ny-state-of-mind-lyrics)> [accessed 27 February 2020].

<sup>117</sup> Findlay, ‘Kendrick Lamar’s ‘M.A.A.D City’ Birthed an Unreliable Narrator’.

<sup>118</sup> Gasteier, *33/3: Illmatic*, pages 56 and 63. A song that epitomises Nas’s take on the observer/witness trope is ‘Project Windows’ (*Nastradamus*, Ill Will, Columbia, 1999), a concept piece featuring R&B legend Ron Isley, in which Nas reflects on a childhood spent observing street life through his apartment window of the Queensbridge projects, N.Y.



## CHAPTER TWO

### **Intertextuality and the Articulation of Loss and Trauma in the Lyrics of Kendrick Lamar**

As illustrated in Chapter One, Nas's pioneering use of the 'song letter'<sup>1</sup> on 'One Love' helped artistically to illustrate to a global listenership a heightened sense of the urgent reality faced by young black males in America regarding the intricacies of the 'carceral imagination' (Daulatzai, 2007).<sup>2</sup> In 'Sing About Me, I'm Dying of Thirst' ('SAM') (*GKMC*),<sup>3</sup> Lamar employs a similarly epistolary mode, expanding upon Nas's initial use of the technique in order to shed light on additional, more universal areas of struggle. Using allusion to form a direct connection between his and Nas's lyrics (detailed below), Lamar indicates a dependency on previously-established ideologies contained in Nas's *Illmatic*, that have potential to provide a more rounded understanding of sentiments presented in 'SAM'.

The penultimate song on *GKMC*, a project described by its maker as 'a dark movie album [...] about one day in the life of me and the homeboys',<sup>4</sup> 'SAM' explores the effects of elements of trauma such as grief, abuse, and violence as catalysts for an ideological confrontation with death. The LP provides a fragmented narrative, in which 'SAM' is presented in the immediate 'aftermath of Dave's death':<sup>5</sup> one of Lamar's close friends, who falls victim to gang violence. As Alec Banks explains, Lamar 'pontificates on three tragedies that have impacted him' during 'SAM', 'all from the view of the victims'.<sup>6</sup> The first is Dave,

---

<sup>1</sup> Michael Eric Dyson, 'One Love', Two Brothers, Three Verses', in *Born to Use Mics: Reading Nas's 'Illmatic'*, ed. by Michael Eric Dyson & Sohail Daulatzai (New York, NY: BasicCivitas Books, 2010), p. 134.

<sup>2</sup> Dyson, 'One Love', Two Brothers, Three Verses', p. 133.

<sup>3</sup> Kendrick Lamar, 'Sing About Me, I'm Dying of Thirst', *good kid, m.A.A.d city* (Top Dawg, Aftermath, Interscope, 2012). Hereafter referred to as 'SAM'.

<sup>4</sup> Alec Banks, 'The Hidden Story Behind Kendrick Lamar's good kid, m.A.A.d city', *HighSnobiety*, 26<sup>th</sup> October 2016 <[highsnobiety.com/2016/10/26/kendrick-lamar-good-kid-maad-city-analysis/](https://highsnobiety.com/2016/10/26/kendrick-lamar-good-kid-maad-city-analysis/)> [accessed 27 February 2020].

<sup>5</sup> Banks, paragraph 8.

<sup>6</sup> Banks, paragraph 40.

then the perspective shifts to Keisha's sister (a character related to Lamar's earlier album *Section.80*, and the track 'Keisha's Song (Her Pain)', 2011),<sup>7</sup> and finally to Lamar himself during the third verse, as he considers his coming of age journey taken throughout *GKMC*.

Leila Green observes that 'Kendrick spits an intricate tale of loss [...] a sombre, confrontational song about memory and legacy' during 'SAM',<sup>8</sup> highlighting a growing nihilistic sentiment instilled by the song's narrators, illustrated in the following passage from Lamar's third and final verse of part one of the song ('Sing About Me'):<sup>9</sup>

And I'm not sure why I'm infatuated with death  
My imagination is surely an aggravation of threats  
That can come about, 'cause the tongue is mighty powerful  
And I can name a list of your favorites that probably vouch  
Maybe 'cause I'm a dreamer and sleep is the cousin of death  
Really stuck in the schema of wonderin' when I'ma rest<sup>10</sup>

Here, as Lamar depicts his speaker's 'spiraling nihilistic posture toward life',<sup>11</sup> he alerts listeners to the multifarious threat that nihilism poses, specifically for the black American psyche. This 'threat', as Darrius D. Hills observes, 'is not simply a matter of economic deprivation and political powerlessness [...] it is primarily a question of speaking to the profound sense of psychological depression, personal wholeness, and social despair so widespread in black America' (188). Nas addressed similar deep-rooted psychological and

---

<sup>7</sup> Kendrick Lamar, 'Kiesha's Song (Her Pain)', *Section.80* (Top Dawg Entertainment, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> Leila Green, 'The Secret Writing Tips I Learned From Kendrick Lamar', *Electric Lit*, 19<sup>th</sup> April 2018 <[electriclitterature.com/the-secret-writing-tips-i-learned-from-kendrick-lamar/](http://electriclitterature.com/the-secret-writing-tips-i-learned-from-kendrick-lamar/)> [accessed 27 February 2020]. Lamar's use of phonetic contouring, copula variation, and cadence shifting as 'impression' during performance is underexplored critically. It is proposed here that Lamar's use of such techniques, in conjunction with his ability to reject or employ traditional tropes (such as the spirit of competition), has enabled him to achieve a rare artistic and narratorial autonomy. More work needs to be done regarding Lamar's use of narratorial transition and multi-character channelling in relation to the structural development of his music, but that is beyond the remit of this thesis.

<sup>9</sup> 'SAM' is essentially a two-part song, the first and second parts differing sonically, rhythmically, and temporally.

<sup>10</sup> Kendrick Lamar, 'Sing About Me, I'm Dying of Thirst', *Genius* <[genius.com/Kendrick-lamar-sing-about-me-im-dying-of-thirst-lyrics](http://genius.com/Kendrick-lamar-sing-about-me-im-dying-of-thirst-lyrics)> [accessed 17 February 2020].

<sup>11</sup> Darrius D. Hills, 'Loving [You] is Complicated: Black Self-love and Affirmation in the Rap Music of Kendrick Lamar', in *Kendrick Lamar and the Making of Black Meaning* ed. by Christopher M. Driscoll, Monica R. Miller, and Anthony B. Pinn (New York: Routledge, 2020), p. 187.

philosophical schemas regarding despair, disillusionment, and a fascination with death throughout *Illmatic*, leading Oliver Wang to describe the album as ‘nihilistic’.<sup>12</sup>

The nihilistic sentiments expressed during ‘SAM’ have striking similarities to those expressed by Nas. These similarities are concretised as intertextual links between projects when observing Lamar’s allusive quotation of Nas’s lyrics from ‘N.Y. State of Mind’ (*Illmatic*, 1994)<sup>13</sup> during the song. For the line ‘Maybe ‘cause I’m a dreamer and sleep is the cousin of death’, Lamar quotes (in non-identical rhythm) a passage from Nas’s ‘N.Y. State of Mind’, in which Nas draws upon African proverb to state ‘it drops deep as it does in my breath/I never sleep—‘cause sleep is the cousin of death’.<sup>14</sup> This line, amongst several others in *Illmatic*, served to underscore a philosophical fixation with death and mortality that peppered Nas’s (and many popular rap artists’) music at the time, a theme that threaded throughout *Illmatic*, and became recurrent in Nas’s corpus.

During ‘SAM’, Lamar alludes to this same philosophical fixation, acknowledging Nas as one of ‘a list of favorites’ (as implied by the line quoted above) who have previously demonstrated comparable nihilism. In direct correlation to Nas’s ‘No Idea’s Original’ (*The Lost Tapes*, 2002) (‘NIO’),<sup>15</sup> a song detailed in Chapter One of this thesis,<sup>16</sup> elements of the passage preceding Lamar’s ‘list of favorites’ line can also be attributed to Nas. Observed

---

<sup>12</sup> As part of its heavy thematic reliance on nihilism, *Illmatic* continues to be a generic barometer by which to measure other rap artists’ uses of similar themes. Gasteier, *33/3: Illmatic*, p. 55.

<sup>13</sup> Nas, ‘N.Y. State of Mind’, *Illmatic* (Ill Will, Columbia, 1994).

<sup>14</sup> Relating to the virtues of prudence and sociability in Eve Folk proverbs (‘There is no quarrel between the eye and sleep’), this Congolese proverb ‘shows the close relationship between death and sleep. By implication, the two cannot have misunderstandings between them due to their similarity/close resemblance to each other’ (117). This comparison, however, is common across many ancient and traditional cultures. For instance, in Ancient Greek myth, Thanatos, god of death, is the twin brother of Hypnos, god of sleep. Sleep is also a common metaphor for death in the bible: <[biblehub.net/search.php?q=sleep+death](http://biblehub.net/search.php?q=sleep+death)> [accessed 10 October 2022]. However, Nas has indicated his inspiration: “‘Sleep is the cousin of death’ was around before I was born, that was just a saying, a spirit that’s African, that’s where it came to me’. See Dorothy BEA Akoto-Abutiate, *Proverbs and the African Tree of Life: Grafting Biblical Proverbs on to Ghanaian Eve Folk Proverbs* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill, 2014), p. 117. Nas, ‘N.Y. State of Mind’, *Genius* <[genius.com/Nas-ny-state-of-mind-lyrics](http://genius.com/Nas-ny-state-of-mind-lyrics)> [accessed 6 March 2020].

<sup>15</sup> Nas, ‘No Idea’s Original’, *The Lost Tapes* (Ill Will, Columbia, 2002). Hereafter referred to as ‘NIO’.

<sup>16</sup> See Chapter One, pp. 47-50.

directly after the speaker's 'imagination' is denoted as being 'an aggravation of threats', there follows a self-analytically-styled reasoning that these threats have 'come about 'cause the tongue is mighty powerful'. Referring to the negative use of words as psychological weapons against the speaker in 'SAM', this statement echoes a line taken from 'NIO', in which Nas alludes to the positive metaphorical power of his lyrical and performative prowess: 'my tongue is power, it thrills women, kills demons'.<sup>17</sup> Combining these preceding lines with his revision of the famous 'cousin of death' line, Lamar draws upon its historic and cultural significance as synecdoche for a sprawling psychological concept that has overwhelmed rap music since its thematic emergence in the genre during the early 90s. In doing so, he strengthens his song's focus on the theme, highlighting the ongoing negative presence of despair and disillusionment among many in black America, despite the efforts of several generations of rap artists to confront and artistically ameliorate this threat.

Continuing to define his notion of nihilism in the context of 'black death' and its expression in rap music, Hills's following summary bears relevance to the overarching message contained within *Illmatic* and 'SAM': 'Nihilism [...] is usually understood as a posture toward existence in which life has no real objective meaning – and no discernible standard for morality or ethics'.<sup>18</sup> Narrowing this definition further in specific relation to Lamar's wide-reaching message of black struggle throughout *GKMC*, Cornell West, in his essay 'Nihilism in Black America',<sup>19</sup> goes so far as to argue that the concept 'is the most basic issue now facing black America' (19), defining it as 'the lived experience of coping with a life of horrifying meaninglessness, hopelessness, and (more important) lovelessness' (pp. 22-23). Hills further notes that 'nihilistic perspectives are born out of the death-dealing

---

<sup>17</sup> Nas, 'No Idea's Original', *Genius* <[genius.com/Nas-no-ideas-original-lyrics](https://genius.com/Nas-no-ideas-original-lyrics)> [accessed 2 October 2019].

<sup>18</sup> Hills, 'Loving [You] is Complicated: Black Self-love and Affirmation in the Rap Music of Kendrick Lamar', p. 188.

<sup>19</sup> Cornel West, 'Nihilism in Black America', in *Race Matters* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), pp. 19-23.

restrictions on life meaning and purpose’, which relates directly to the increased threat of poverty, violence, and loss of life depicted by Lamar’s narrators during ‘SAM’.<sup>20</sup>

Lamar joins many of his rap contemporaries in artistically giving voice to nihilism and perpetuating a ‘peculiarly intimate relationship of Black music and questions concerning the life and death of Black America’,<sup>21</sup> but his focus on advocating a conscious resistance to the concept is a notable departure from the norm. Whereas previously, artists such as Nas (*Illmatic*) have used devices including allusion (in conjunction with the observer/witness trope) to draw attention to the destructive effects of nihilism within marginalised groups – a technique relating to what Nick De Genova defines as the ‘imaginative empowerment of a nihilistic and ruthless way of life [...] better understood as a potentially oppositional consciousness—albeit born of desperation and despair’ (113) – Lamar offers additional strategic forms of resolution and resistance, through an intertextual engagement with iconic figures of black literature, employed as affirmations of black literary legacy and representatives of black self-love.

Lamar’s development of the observer/witness trope is evident at the conclusion of ‘SAM’ (*GKMC*’s narrative crisis point), in which, as noted by Banks, the voice of the poet Maya Angelou is introduced:

[This] marks a turning point for the K.Dot [Kendrick Lamar] character when he comes to realize that he must make a change for the better and seek out a higher power. This is reinforced by [...] Angelou, who tells him, “You need to be baptized, with the spirit of The Lord,” and promises “the start of a new life. Your real life.”<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> Hills, ‘Loving [You] is Complicated’, p. 188.

<sup>21</sup> Nick De Genova, ‘Gangsta Rap and Nihilism in Black America: Some Questions of Life and Death’, *Social Text*, 43 (1995), p. 102.

<sup>22</sup> Banks, ‘The Hidden Story Behind Kendrick Lamar’s good kid, m.A.A.d city’.

It is worth noting Angelou’s interpretation of the Prayer of Salvation here, in relation to Nas’s similar use of allusion to Christian Faith exemplified in Chapter Two (see pp. 48-49). For a deeper exploration of the theological implications of religious allusion in Lamar’s lyrics, see *Religion in Hip Hop: Mapping the New Terrain in the US*, ed. by Monica R. Miller, Anthony B. Pinn, and Bernard ‘Bun B’ Freeman (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), and *Kendrick Lamar and the Making of Black Meaning*.

The employment of Angelou as the voice of reason and resolution in *GKMC* is significant in respect of Lamar's use of the artist in context of the album's plot. Introducing her words unattributed, Lamar implicitly alludes to Angelou's body of work and reputation as an equal rights activist and literary great, to formulate a unique method of resistance to the 'realities of antiblack violence and distortions and disregard of black selfhood'.<sup>23</sup> By enlisting Angelou, Lamar can be seen to revise traditional approaches to intertextuality in rap lyrics (such as allusion or auto-citation) by channelling the poet's voice (during non-rhythmic conversation) as an exemplar of African American artistic legacy, global recognition, and career longevity,<sup>24</sup> in testament to black artistic success and prosperity. In so doing, Lamar imbues the conclusion of *GKMC* with a message of positivity, establishing his music as 'a possible site in which black self-love and affirmation can be outlined and interpreted – offering new narratives of black humanity and meaning' (187).

Other songs in Lamar's corpus such as 'HiiiPower' (*Section.80*, 2011), 'i' (*TPAB*, 2015), and 'DNA.' (*DAMN.*, 2017), which also provide messages of affirmation regarding individual and communal aspects of black America, serve to further highlight Lamar's overarching advocacy 'of an ethic of self-love for marginalized communities', aiding in his joining of a 'long tradition of affirmation, self and communal love, and meaning, that has arisen out of the collective African American response to oppression as a means of remaining disloyal to despair and the threat of nihilism' (187-188).<sup>25</sup> An additional example of Lamar's

---

<sup>23</sup> Hills, 'Loving [You] is Complicated', p. 189.

<sup>24</sup> It is important to consider an additional potential factor for Angelou's use here, regarding Justin A. Williams's observations of a disparity in legitimacy between 'rap lyrics' and 'poetry' in some critical circles. Discussing Tupac's posthumously-published book of poetry *The Rose that Grew from Concrete* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2006), Williams states Tupac's 'printed book' of poetry offers 'intellectual priority over the sound recording', and that 'labelling Tupac a poet elevates his status and has been used by academics, in part, to legitimize a problematic and complex icon and his music'. It could be argued that, by drawing on a canonical poet, Lamar elevates his work in some critical circles, regardless of whether or not he intended this. For further considerations of this argument, see Justin A. Williams, 'Musical Borrowing in Hip-Hop Music: Theoretical Frameworks and Case Studies' (doctoral thesis, University of Nottingham, 2009), pp. 207-208.

<sup>25</sup> Songs such as 'I Can' (*God's Son*, Ill Will, Columbia, 2002) by Nas could be argued as precursors to Lamar's attempts at resisting negative ideologies in black communal mentalities. Lamar's conscious attempts at

intertextual engagement with a literary icon as part of his providing ‘new ways of interpreting and understanding the quest for healthier and more robust selfhood in black communities’ (189) is observed in his allusion to Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*.<sup>26</sup> As noted by Lynnee Denise, ‘Alright’ from *TPAB* (2015),<sup>27</sup> ‘starts with the words of Ms. Sophia [from *The Color Purple*], “All my life I had to fight”’.<sup>28</sup> Here, Lamar allusionally quotes Walker/Ms. Sophia in accordance with traditional forms of allusion and intertextual engagement in rap, whilst drawing upon Walker’s artistic legacy and political and social capital in much the same way as he does with Angelou on ‘SAM’.

As Hills again explains, by channelling the novelist’s ideological understanding of a continual resilience to struggle, ‘Lamar seeks to offer reassurance to blacks that they will prevail and be alright’ (179). Further detailing the antidotal effect of Lamar’s allusion on ‘those on the underside of life’ in contemporary black America, Hills goes on to define ‘Alright’ as a ‘ghetto lullaby’ for ‘those who, like Sophia from *The Color Purple*’, could attest to her affirmation that “alls my life I has to fight”’ (179). This notion of a sense of antidotal reassurance implanted in Lamar’s music is supported by Mensah Demary, when recognising Lamar’s awareness of ‘the greater populace’ during creation of ‘art that allows catharsis for both performer and artist’.<sup>29</sup> Consolidating this point (whilst broadening the critical perspective to encompass a greater spectrum of Lamar’s work), Anthony B. Pinn acknowledges Lamar’s lyrics as being used ‘to articulate disruption of dominant political-social discourses, and from within the context of discursive struggle offer an affirmation of

---

formulating methods of resistance at early stages of his career, however, distinctly separate him from such examples, as ‘I Can’ was released much later in Nas’s career, reflecting a more normative artistic progression regarding ideological maturation.

<sup>26</sup> Alice Walker, *The Color Purple* (Salford, MAN: Phoenix Publishing House, 2011).

<sup>27</sup> Kendrick Lamar, ‘Alright’, *To Pimp a Butterfly* (Top Dawg Entertainment, Aftermath, Interscope, 2015).

<sup>28</sup> Lynnee Denise, ‘We Gon’ Be Alright: Kendrick Lamar and the Story of a Conscious Gangsta Balled’, *DJ Lynnee Denise*, 15<sup>th</sup> April 2015 <[dilynneedenise.com/thought-blog/2015/4/15/dear-compton-kendrick-lamar-and-the-legacy-of-conscious-gangsta-rap](http://dilynneedenise.com/thought-blog/2015/4/15/dear-compton-kendrick-lamar-and-the-legacy-of-conscious-gangsta-rap)> [accessed 27 February 2020].

<sup>29</sup> Mensah Demary, ‘The Literary Genius of Kendrick Lamar: Mensah Demary on the Album as Novel’, *Literary Hub*, 27<sup>th</sup> May 2016 <[lithub.com/the-literary-genius-of-kendrick-lamar/](http://lithub.com/the-literary-genius-of-kendrick-lamar/)> [accessed 27 February 2020].

life'.<sup>30</sup> When observing the various ways in which Lamar (and Nas) engage in intertextual conversation with *The Color Purple* as a means of effecting artistic outcomes,<sup>31</sup> it is testament to Walker that her work continues to be such an important source of revision, allusion, and reflection for black writing.

James Bungert provides detailed insight into another complex and multiple-stranded example of Lamar's sonic engagement with literary intertextuality and cultural allusion on 'King Kunta' (*TPAB*, 2015).<sup>32</sup> In addition to being one of the richest exhibitions of intertextuality in his corpus to date, Lamar's unique method of channelling funk music icon James Brown during the song bears relevance to his previous employments of figures of literary authority such as Angelou and Walker as representatives of black artistic legacy. On surface reading of 'King Kunta', Lamar's referencing of Alex Haley's *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* is made apparent.<sup>33</sup> As Bungert suggests, this reference is used as a means of artistically illustrating the 'exploitative forces of the music industry' and 'the systematic racial prejudices of the American economy and judicial system' (6). Bungert goes on to note Natalie Graham's additional observations of Lamar's use of allusion to *Roots* in opposition to previous rap artists' employment of slave narratives: 'While the lyrics within the song do not develop the slave theme in significant detail, the titular reference to slavery, which is salient because of its repetition within the chorus, is compelling of how Lamar couches it' (6). Graham continues: 'other rappers reference slavery, even the whipping scene in *Roots* specifically, but, in the toasting tradition of rap (in which emcees engage in over-the-top self-aggrandizement), only as the *master*weilding [sic] the whip'. For Lamar, however, his 'use of

---

<sup>30</sup> Anthony B. Pinn, "Real N\*\*\*\*a Conditions': Kendrick Lamar, Grotesque Realism, and the Open Body', in *Kendrick Lamar and the Making of Black Meaning*, p. 231.

<sup>31</sup> See Chapter One, pp. 42-47 for further details on Nas's intertextual engagement with Walker's text.

<sup>32</sup> James Bungert, "I got a bone to pick': Formal Ambivalence and Double Consciousness in Kendrick Lamar's 'King Kunta'", *Society for Music Theory*, 1<sup>st</sup> March 2019

<<https://mtosmt.org/issues/mto.19.25.1/mto.19.25.1.bungert.pdf>> [accessed 20 September 2022], p. 6.

<sup>33</sup> Alex Haley, *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* (New York: Random House, 1991).



the figure of Kunte Kinte works differently. He risks the stain of slavery, by refusing to inhabit the body of the master'. This refusal 'presents the possibility that witnessing black people's trauma should be traumatic, especially when histories of abuse are not universal or contained in a hermetically sealed past as in *Roots*' (Graham, 2017) (6). Lamar's positioning of himself as resistant to a commonly employed theme of slave master embodiment in rap lyrics once again exemplifies his insistence on revising previously-established tropes and narratives in the rap genre as a means of listener activation, even if this revision implies an oppositional perspective to those of generic traditions.

Lamar's intertextual (sonic and lyrical) engagement during 'King Kunta' becomes clear when exploring his choice of instrumental for the song. Lamar employs an allosonic quotation/interpolation ('an instrumental reproduction rather than a digital sample')<sup>34</sup> of lesser-known Compton-based West Coast rap artist 'Mausberg's 'Get Nekkid' as a 'nod to his hometown of Compton, CA, and to its storied lineage of influential rappers' (5). Delving further into lyric-based modes of intertextuality in 'King Kunta', Bungert highlights Lamar's engagement with the theme of power in the second verse of the song, through his referencing of Public Enemy: 'Calling yams "the power that be" [...] Lamar piggybacks on their symbolic power in Africa [...]. Most directly, he refers to Public Enemy's 1989 song 'Fight the Power,' whose chorus implores its listeners to "fight the powers that be!"' (8). Lamar then broadens his generic scope to encompass further iconic African American music examples, alluding to both James Brown, whose "Funky Drummer" forms the beat for that song's verse [verse 2], and to the Isley Brothers' 1975 song "Fight the Power" (8).

Allusion to James Brown and his musical legacy during 'King Kunta' gathers further significance in light of Kim Hillyard's observation that Lamar studied Brown's music and performance in preparation for recording. This is noted during an interview with Lamar in

---

<sup>34</sup> Bungert, 'Formal Ambivalence and Double Consciousness in Kendrick Lamar's 'King Kunta'', p. 6.

which he sheds light on an additional figure of inspiration for ‘King Kunta’, the West Coast and Compton affiliated rap artist Suga Free: ‘Suga Free played a big part in my community coming up, in Compton [...] I’m sure he studied James Brown to get that cadence, just the way I studied James Brown to hear it in both of them’.<sup>35</sup> Lamar’s studying of Brown’s cadence during preparation for recording of ‘King Kunta’ demonstrates a deliberate attempt to channel Brown’s voice that involves a process of imitation regarding cadence, inflection, and phonetic contouring.<sup>36</sup> This channelling of Brown is made clear through the sonic allusion to ‘Funky Drummer’ during verse two of the song, and later through Lamar’s ‘explicit’ referencing of Brown during allosonic quotation with the line “‘I can dig rappin’,” which is a direct quote (in identical rhythm) from Brown’s song ‘The Payback’ (1973)’.<sup>37</sup> ‘King Kunta’ is therefore a song that exhibits a rare form of multiple-stranded intertextual engagement.

Lamar’s engagement with elements of Brown’s voice, words, and performative strategies during ‘King Kunta’ relates to David Brackett’s idea of the ‘double-voiced utterance’ in ‘black American oral narration’, particularly regarding black American music performance.<sup>38</sup> As Brackett observes through Henry Louis Gates Jr.’s discourse on similar areas of black language, ‘the black tradition emphasizes refiguration, or repetition and difference, or troping’ (320) as part of the Signifyin(g) practice. This practice is clearly demonstrated in Lamar’s ‘reusing and recombining [Brown’s] stock phrases [such as ‘I can dig rappin’] in an original way from one context to another’ (311). Lamar’s channelling of

---

<sup>35</sup> Kim Hillyard, ‘Kendrick Lamar on New Single ‘King Kunta’: ‘I Studied James Brown’’, *NME* 5<sup>th</sup> June 2015 <[nme.com/news/music/kendrick-lamar-57-1210694](http://nme.com/news/music/kendrick-lamar-57-1210694)> [accessed 5<sup>th</sup> February 2020].

<sup>36</sup> Here, Lamar displays an awareness of what is termed in this thesis ‘lyrical performative stylistic allusion’: a way of textually alluding to, or tuning into, another artist’s lyrical performance to garner additional meaning/emotional reaction. For further details on this technique, see Chapter Three, pp. 88-96.

<sup>37</sup> James Bungert, ‘Formal Ambivalence and Double Consciousness in Kendrick Lamar’s ‘King Kunta’’, p. 7.

<sup>38</sup> David Brackett, ‘James Brown’s ‘Super Bad’ and the Double-voiced Utterance’, *Popular Music*, 11 (1992), 309-324. For an additional, albeit less complex, layered example of this occurrence, see Nas’s lyrical engagement with Rakim during ‘You’re Da Man’ (*Stillmatic*, 2002), discussed in Chapter One of this thesis (pp. 32-33).

Brown's voice and cadence during 'King Kunta' highlights 'another factor contributing to the proliferation of meaning' in his performance that relates to what Brackett describes as 'the importance of *delivery*; that is, the manner of delivery profoundly effects the semantic content [...] these semantic shifts primarily occur through changing inflection' (312) and use of words that 'bear a phonetic similarity to each other' (311).

This rare form of consciously-sustained, song-length imitation (or channelling) of another artist's voice and character in 'King Kunta' is apt when contextualising the album on which it appears (*TPAB*): a unique 'event' in the rap genre that is overwhelmingly intertextual, a recording that sees Lamar 'creating entire personas and vantage points using different shades of his polymorphous voice' in order to contain 'the whole social and linguistic range of his nation' in accordance with Edward Mendelson's 'model of the explicitly "encyclopedic" text'.<sup>39</sup> As Casey Michael Henry observes, Lamar's use of differing 'shades of voice' to achieve this social and linguistic vision in *TPAB* has been 'much remarked on in reviews' (10) and is clearly highlighted in his channelling of Brown's voice as part of an 'extensive use of synecdoche' in relation to 'incomprehensibly large knowledge fields' (11) (another proviso of Mendelson's model of the encyclopedic text) to represent or 'embody' the funk genre. Although similar techniques are employed throughout *TPAB* to embody other musical genres of predominantly African American derivation (free-form and contemporary jazz, P-Funk), Lamar's overt act of 'masterful imitation' during his channelling of Brown is rare, and there are few comparative instances in the rap genre available for analysis.

One such instance, however – and the one arguably most likely to have influenced Lamar's creative intentions for 'King Kunta' – is observed in fellow West Coast rap artist

---

<sup>39</sup> Casey Michael Henry, 'Et Tu, Too?: Kendrick Lamar's 'To Pimp a Butterfly' and the Revival of Black Postmodernism', *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 26<sup>th</sup> July 2015 <[lareviewofbooks.org/article/et-tu-too-kendrick-lamars-tpab-and-the-revival-of-black-postmodernism/](http://lareviewofbooks.org/article/et-tu-too-kendrick-lamars-tpab-and-the-revival-of-black-postmodernism/)> [accessed 12 November 2018], p. 10.

and Compton affiliate Snoop Dogg's 'Lodi Dodi' (*Doggystyle*, 1993),<sup>40</sup> in which Snoop allusionally samples British American rap artist Slick Rick's lyrics and vocal performance techniques featured on 'La Di Da Di' (*The Show*, 1985).<sup>41</sup> Unlike Snoop's 'Lodi Dodi', or other instances of overt voice impression or character embodiment in rap music,<sup>42</sup> Lamar's use of Brown's voice in 'King Kunta' distinctly lacks the irony that Snoop's song overtly displays. This absence of ironic sensibility relates once again to Lamar's insistence on trope revision within the rap genre, in which the use of irony and other forms of humour is routinely abundant during overt artistic impression. As pointed out earlier in Key's and Graham's observations of Lamar's resistance to the slave master embodiment trope,<sup>43</sup> Lamar uses a similar mode of resistance to the use of irony when channelling Brown's voice. This resistance not only reinforces the technique as a serious act of homage, it also serves to underline the fundamental importance of intertextual engagement in *TPAB*.

So far, it has been established that Lamar's embracing of rap-related tropes has been undertaken in conjunction with allusion and intertextual reference to African American literary, musical, and cultural icons as part of an attempt to advance methods of ideological and emotional uplift in his listenership and the wider community through foregrounding a 'whole social and linguistic range' of vision regarding his nation's current social and political circumstances.<sup>44</sup> In the following section, Lamar's reconstruction of another rap-related trope, one Justin Williams defines as 'post-mortem sampling' in rap lyrics, is detailed. Exploring a significant example of Lamar's complex intertextual relationship with Tupac

---

<sup>40</sup> Snoop Dogg, 'Lodi Dodi', *Doggystyle* (Death Row, Interscope, 1993).

<sup>41</sup> Doug E. Fresh and MC Ricky D, 'La Di Da Di', *The Show* (Reality/Fantasy Records, 1985).

<sup>42</sup> Various rap songs feature truncated elements of 'impression' or character embodiment, including: '99 Problems' by JAY-Z (*The Black Album*, Roc-A-Fella, Def Jam, 2003), 'The Real Slim Shady' by Eminem (*The Marshall Mathers LP*, Aftermath, Interscope, 2000), and 'Destroy and Rebuild' by Nas (*Stillmatic*, Ill Will, Columbia, 2001).

<sup>43</sup> Bungert, 'Formal Ambivalence and Double Consciousness in Kendrick Lamar's 'King Kunta'', p. 6.

<sup>44</sup> Casey Michael Henry, 'Et Tu, Too?: Kendrick Lamar's 'To Pimp a Butterfly'', p. 10.

Shakur,<sup>45</sup> it will be considered that Lamar's innovative development and moral re-evaluation of this technique is undertaken in order to affect cathartic modes of kenosis and self-revelation, and artistically to articulate methods of resistance to stereotypes upheld in the media and music industries.

It is important to note that although Lamar's work can be analysed to exemplify intertextual ties and allusions to many rap artists, it is widely acknowledged that the artist he draws most heavily upon is Tupac. As Daniel White Hodge explains, despite his recent 'addition to the hip hop cipher', Lamar's use of songs such as 'Tammy's Song' and 'Keisha's Song' as 'continued conversations of Tupac's 'Brenda's Got a Baby' help to galvanise the ideological bond between both artists', invoking 'many to view him as a sort of secular, profane, and sacred hip-hop icon who is taking up [Tupac's] mantle'.<sup>46</sup> Lamar's intertextual engagement with Tupac's art and ideology is evident from his first major label release, detailed here by Margarita Simon Guillory: '*Section.80*'s success is not about favorable reviews or record sales but the receptivity of this body of work by a particular audience he calls a 'lost generation.' His own depiction of his own era's manifestation of Pac's "'Thug Life" prophetic philosophy' (26).<sup>47</sup> As Ralph Bristout notes, Lamar's 'chanting' of "'Thug Life" ("The hate you give little infants fucks everybody") during the album's 'final seconds' is 'incarnate of Tupac Shakur's 1993' ideological 'war cry' (20).<sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>45</sup> Hereafter referred to as Tupac, his recording artist name.

<sup>46</sup> Daniel White Hodge, 'Hol' Up: Post-civil Rights Black Theology Within Kendrick Lamar's 'Section.80' Album', in *Kendrick Lamar and the Making of Black Meaning*, pp. 42-43.

<sup>47</sup> Margarita Simon Guillory, 'Can I be *both*?': 'Blackness and the Negotiation of Binary Categories in Kendrick Lamar's *Section.80*', in *Kendrick Lamar and the Making of Black Meaning*, p. 26.

<sup>48</sup> Ralph Bristout, 'Kendrick Lamar's *Section.80*: Reagan Era Blues', in *Kendrick Lamar and the Making of Black Meaning*, p. 20.

## SECTION TWO

### **‘What’s Your Perspective on That?’: Evolution of the Post-mortem Sampling Technique in Kendrick Lamar’s ‘Mortal Man’**

Lamar’s continual insistence on trope revision as part of a unique ‘ability to evoke mixed emotions about hip hop and its tropes in general’<sup>49</sup> has been identified in critical circles. An important example of this ability is observed in his development of the post-mortem sampling technique during ‘Mortal Man’ (*TPAB*, 2015).<sup>50</sup> As previously detailed through observations of Nas’s employment of this technique,<sup>51</sup> Justin Williams summarises post-mortem sampling in rap as a way for emcees to pay homage to, and claim authenticity from, deceased artists ‘through the use of the recorded sound or image [autosonic sampling] and its framing through recontextualization’.<sup>52</sup> Running in line with historical evidence regarding his insistence on trope revision in rap, Lamar employs an evolved version of the technique for ‘Mortal Man’, revising it as a means of intensifying emotional and intellectual outcomes regarding *TPAB*.

‘Mortal Man’, an over-twelve-minute track that merges structured musical and spoken word performance with explicatory non-rhythmical dialogue, sees Lamar digitally manipulate an interview conducted shortly before Tupac’s death in order to create the impression of his having an in-depth conversation with the late artist.<sup>53</sup> Monica R. Miller notes how ‘Lamar technologically constructs what can only be described as an ‘otherworldly’ cipher with the

---

<sup>49</sup> James D. Burton (Mike D’Errico), ‘Rhymin’ and Stealin’: Musical Borrowing in Hip-Hop’, by Justin Williams’, *IASPM-US Interview Series*, 18<sup>th</sup> July 2019 <[iaspm-us.net/iaspm-us-interviews-series-rhymin-and-stealin-musical-borrowing-in-hip-hop-by-justin-williams/?](http://iaspm-us.net/iaspm-us-interviews-series-rhymin-and-stealin-musical-borrowing-in-hip-hop-by-justin-williams/?)> [accessed 5 April 2020], 7.

<sup>50</sup> Kendrick Lamar, ‘Mortal Man’, *To Pimp a Butterfly* (Top Dawg Entertainment, Aftermath, Interscope, 2015).

<sup>51</sup> See Chapter One, pp. 33-34.

<sup>52</sup> Justin A. Williams, ‘Post-mortem Sampling in Hip-Hop Recordings and the Rao Lament’, in *Death and the Rock Star*, ed. by Catherine Strong and Barbara Lebrun (Farnham, SRY: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2015), pp. 207-208.

<sup>53</sup> Jack J. Nielsen, *Afrofuturism Cyclicity in Kendrick Lamar’s ‘To Pimp a Butterfly’* (self-published, 2016), p. 73.

posthumous spirit of Tupac Shakur on the nineteenth anniversary of his death'.<sup>54</sup> This idea of 'otherworldliness', combined with the meeting being, in Miller's words, 'styled as a probing, passionate, and thoughtful mental interview' (159), are two key areas that separate Lamar from his peers regarding previous employments of the post-mortem sampling technique.

Whereas artists such as Nas, 50 Cent, and Eminem have rhymed alongside Tupac (utilising his previously recorded performances primarily in homage to the artist, but with potential aspirations also of aligning themselves with his legacy and 'outlaw' notoriety), Lamar employs Tupac's voice during non-rhythmic dialogue that revolves around 'the endless fiction and reality of black loss and life', noted for its 'cognizance' as a 'dizzying remix of black retrospection' (159).<sup>55</sup> Through his choice to engage Tupac in 'mental interview', or conversational 'cipher', as opposed to rhyming alongside him, Lamar sidesteps perceptions of artistic alignment as the primary motivation behind his use of the late rapper's voice/presence, whilst avoiding iterative stereotypes established by various elements of the media and music industry in their use of Tupac as 'memento' of 'Thug' rap.<sup>56</sup>

Elaborating on these stereotypical practices, Travis 'Yoh' Phillips observes the media and music industry's tendency to focus on negative or stereotypical aspects of a deceased artist's legacy. Rather than the artist in question being 'respected in death, able to rest in peace without becoming a commercialized object of affection',<sup>57</sup> Phillips underscores a 'sad truth' that 'artists are worth more dead than alive because of what they become[:] a relic without the protection of a museum; a memento people want as a souvenir [...]. In death, they lose control of their art, their name, and their likeness' (208). Lamar's resistance to these

---

<sup>54</sup> Monica R. Miller, 'Can Dead Homies Speak?: The Spirit and Flesh of Black Meaning', in *Kendrick Lamar and the Making of Black Meaning*, p. 159.

<sup>55</sup> Miller, p. 159.

<sup>56</sup> Travis 'Yoh' Phillips, *The Book of Yoh*, ed. by Amir Ali Said (New York: Superchamp Books, 2017), p. 208.

<sup>57</sup> Phillips, *The Book of Yoh*, p. 208.

practices during his ‘meeting’ with Tupac on ‘Mortal Man’ serves significantly to highlight the moral implications that result from previous uses of post-mortem sampling in rap music.

Lamar’s subversion of genre-specific expectations of the post-mortem sampling trope during ‘Mortal Man’ echoes Williams’s analysis of the artist’s re-perceiving of a celebrated West Coast gangsta rap leitmotif.<sup>58</sup> As Williams explains, since its initial employment by popular West Coast rap producers such as Dr Dre and DJ Quik (through digital sampling techniques and interpolation), ‘the “Funky Worm” [P-Funk] synth’ sound, known as the ‘G-Funk synth’ in the context of rap music (derived from Parliament Funkadelic’s iconic funk sound of the 70’s), has become ‘one of the most prominent signifiers of West Coast gangsta rap, identifying an era, subgenre, and a geographical location’ (304). In ‘m.A.A.d city’ (*GKMC*, 2012), Lamar employs this iconic sound as a marker of his musical heritage, aligning himself with many of his West Coast peers such as Dre, Snoop, The Game, and DJ Quik. However, as is consistent with Lamar’s obsessive focus on trope revision, he uses the sound ‘in markedly different lyrical contexts’: ‘The sound of the synth at the end of ‘m.A.A.d City’ can be read in a completely different manner from previous examples given the lyrical content of the song’ (304). Rather than representing ‘the success of G-funk and its associated artists, the gangsta lifestyle, Compton, and West Coast rap’, Lamar presents it as ‘a leitmotif for Compton that becomes attached to the horrors of the city and the anxieties of its inhabitants’. Subsequently, Lamar’s inclusion into ‘an already-established yet constantly shifting canon of “great rappers”’ of the West Coast gangsta rap tradition is muddled somewhat, as he complicates the association, ‘given that much of [*GKMC*] questions, rather than celebrates, gangsta lifestyles’ (302). In this way, Lamar alters traditional methods of

---

<sup>58</sup> Justin A. Williams, ‘Intertextuality and Lineage in the Game’s ‘We Ain’t’ and Kendrick Lamar’s ‘m.A.A.d City’’, *The Pop Palimpsest: Intertextuality in Recorded Popular Music*, ed. by Lori Burns and Serge Lacasse (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2018), pp. 302-304.



legacy continuation in West Coast rap, viewing it through an alternate lens of vulnerability and victimhood.

Having identified Lamar's moral re-evaluation of this motif in West Coast rap, Williams argues for further recognition of the technique's emotional implications: 'a listener who grew up with G-funk or knows it well would find the Lamar track especially poignant and might even feel a sense of shame for celebrating the "gangsta" lifestyle in the early 1990s' (304). Williams highlights how Lamar revises the perception of the indestructible gangsta<sup>59</sup> (in association with the G-Funk synth) during 'm.A.A.d city', in order to expose the traumatic and life-threatening reality faced by those who live it. To compound this technique (whilst adhering to a career-long artistic intimacy with impartiality and contradiction), Lamar enlists the vocal talents of gangsta rap veteran MC Eiht on the song, a representative figure of longevity, artistic success, musical heritage, and resilience in West Coast rap. Enlisting the posthumous aid of Tupac to garner his work with a similar degree of contradiction on conclusion of *TPAB*, on 'Mortal Man' Lamar evokes mixed emotions akin to those achieved through his moral re-evaluation of the G-funk synth sound on 'm.A.A.d city'.

Subtleties in methods of evoking mixed emotions in the listener regarding Lamar's revision of the post-mortem sampling trope during 'Mortal Man' are marked by a conscious choice to bookend his conversation with Tupac with spoken word recitals. Focusing on the initial piece in particular (which, for the purposes of this thesis will be titled 'Conflicted'),<sup>60</sup>

---

<sup>59</sup> The celebrated image of the 'indestructible gangsta' in rap is defined by Robert Greene and Curtis Jackson (50 Cent) during their collaborative self-help effort *The 50<sup>th</sup> Law*. As described in the text, this image is a constructed projection of self as an infallible, larger-than-life character with 'intense energy' and 'persistence', notable for their ability to endure trauma, tragedy, assassination attempts, and close familial loss without psychological detriment. See 50 Cent and Robert Greene, *The 50<sup>th</sup> Law* (London: Profile Books, 2009), p. 237.

<sup>60</sup> Whilst Lamar gestures towards a title for this piece during 'Mortal Man', his tentativeness suggests a degree of indecision as to its official use: 'Shit and that's all I wrote/I was gonna call it 'Another N\*\*\*a' but, it ain't really a poem'. The title 'Conflicted' has been chosen here mainly due to it being a key word recurring each time Lamar recites the piece during *TPAB*. As the reader will note in the following pages, particular critical attention has been paid to 'Conflicted' as the initial spoken word piece on 'Mortal Man'. This is predominantly due to the second recital piece being 'actually something a good friend had wrote describing my [Lamar's] world', as noted by Lamar before recital. Although Lamar's explanation takes nothing away from the artistic significance of the piece in context of its significance of meaning to *TPAB* (for instance, it may have been

an understanding of its importance, both in the context of cementing an existence of creative patrilineage (Higgins, 2007)<sup>61</sup> between Lamar and Tupac and when highlighting the intertextual significance of its employment throughout *TPAB*, is vital.

In combination with various historic allusions made by Lamar to Tupac's lyrics, ideology, and artistic legacy throughout his career (highlighting a level of idolatry placed upon the late artist by the younger emcee), Lamar's performative humility during 'Conflicted' reveals a personal and artistic vulnerability rarely expressed with such sustained poignance in his previous recordings. This sense of vulnerability is emphasised by Tupac's apparently evasive reception to Lamar's emotionally provocative and deeply personal expressions. In combination with this humility, the narrative content of 'Conflicted' foregrounds aspects of Lamar's struggle with newly-acquired positions of social and political capital, musical success, and enlightenment that have led to a recent decline in the speaker's mental health, as noted from the outset:

I remember you was conflicted  
Misusing your influence  
Sometimes I did the same  
Abusing my power, full of resentment  
Resentment that turned into a deep depression<sup>62</sup>

Addressing Tupac directly in the opening lines, Lamar's 'micro-poem narrative'<sup>63</sup> swiftly transitions to an artistic summary of the complex personal journey he has undertaken during *TPAB*. Continuing to focus on internal struggle during subtle iterations of significant

---

written by any number of Lamar's artistic contemporaries, therefore revealing significant intertextual properties, or, Lamar may have indeed penned the piece, and for reasons undisclosed decided to artistically distance himself from it), Lamar's admittance of non-authorship of the piece presents difficulties in its analysis against his previous original works.

<sup>61</sup> A form of intertextuality 'that emphasizes the student-mentor lineage'. See Justin A. Williams, 'Borrowing and Lineage in Eminem/2 Pac's *Loyal to the Game* and 50 Cent's *Get Rich or Die Trying*', in *Rhyming and Stealin*, p. 143.

<sup>62</sup> Kendrick Lamar, 'Mortal Man', *Genius*, <[genius.com/Kendrick-lamar-mortal-man-lyrics](https://genius.com/Kendrick-lamar-mortal-man-lyrics)> [accessed 23 March 2020].

<sup>63</sup> Casey Michael Henry, 'Et Tu, Too?: Kendrick Lamar's 'To Pimp a Butterfly'', p. 8.

It is worth noting that Lamar suggests this piece is 'not a poem' upon its completion in 'Mortal Man'.

moments spanning the LP, Lamar reveals a uniquely objective understanding of the ‘survivor’s guilt’ that haunts his consciousness during the album, regarding a ‘continuous war’ being fought ‘back in the city’ by his ‘loved ones’:

Found myself screaming in the hotel room  
I didn’t wanna self destruct  
The evils of Lucy was all around me  
So I went running for answers  
Until I came home  
But that didn’t stop survivor’s guilt  
Going back and forth trying to convince myself the stripes I earned  
Or maybe how A-1 my foundation was  
But while my loved ones was fighting the continuous war back in the city  
I was entering a new one

This ‘war’, which is not specified as physical or psychological, avoided by Lamar through musical and financial success, implies a great deal of psychological weight on the young artist’s shoulders regarding his sense of responsibility to those involved. ‘Screaming in a hotel room’ that serves as an interstice between his previous Compton upbringing and a present life of social influence, wealth, and fame, Lamar stands at a personal and intellectual crossroads of sorts, made clear by expressions of anxiety regarding his artistic authenticity, and affiliative ties with (and responsibility to) his hometown (‘Going back and forth trying to convince myself the stripes I earned. Or maybe how A-1 [concrete] my foundation was’), before widening the focus to encompass aspects of gang culture that have consistently shaped his musical career since its beginnings.

In the final third of the piece, as focus on gang culture in Los Angeles becomes prioritised, Lamar speaks openly of a learning process, or form of enlightenment he has undergone since being away from ‘home’:

A war that was based on apartheid and discrimination  
Made me wanna go back to the city and tell the homies what I learned  
The word was respect  
Just because you wore a different gang color than mine’s  
Doesn’t mean I can’t respect you as a black man  
Forgetting all the pain and hurt we caused each other in these streets  
If I respect you, we unify and stop the enemy from killing us

But I don't know, I'm no mortal man  
Maybe I'm just another n\*\*\*a.

Articulating this process (one that involves Lamar's engagement with a 'new' war based solely on a new-found awareness of discrimination on a global scale) requires Lamar to reveal unrefined elements of his own intellect. Made particularly clear by his wish to 'go back to the city' and tell 'the homies what I learned', Lamar alludes to an additional personal flaw that, although understood by the listener as an overt gesture of an emerging self-awareness as part of the album's narrative (and allusion to the integral bond that hip hop culture shares with deference, and the handing down of knowledge as part of an 'each one teach one' ethos)<sup>64</sup> again serves to highlight aspects of weakness and vulnerability in Lamar's character that contrast with rap traditions of self-aggrandisement. Lamar's effective emptying-of-self during 'Conflicted', highlighted by revelations of personal and artistic vulnerability, flaws in intellect, and an overt rejection of his newly acquired authorial power – as part of a process of voluntary humility and self-sacrifice – has led Monica Miller to define this act as a form of 'kenosis'.<sup>65</sup>

As Miller observes, through this unique form of kenosis, 'Lamar both begins and ends with himself as he bears witness to his own struggles with a range of timeless issues that are both deeply personal and individual' (334). This outpouring, used as a means of illustrating internal growth to a global audience, can be noted as a core fundamental reason behind Lamar's obsession with trope revision. This insistence on an ongoing (re)sensitising of celebrated tropes that denote indestructibility in rap is recognised by Miller in her

---

<sup>64</sup> A saying 'peppered throughout rap lyrics for the past thirty years', 'each one teach one' 'comes from the era of African American slavery, when blacks were discouraged from acquiring literary skills. Blacks and whites strove—often illegally—to teach slaves to read and write'. In hip hop culture, 'the phrase "each one teach one" means that if you had the opportunity to learn, you are obliged to teach another what you have learned'. See Mary Fogarty, 'Each One Teach One: B-Boying and Aging', in *Aging and Youth Cultures: Music, Style and Identity*, ed. by Andy Bennet and Paul Hodkinson (London: Berg, 2012), p.58.

<sup>65</sup> Monica R. Miller, 'Conclusion: KENosis: the meaning of Kendrick Lamar', in *Kendrick Lamar and the Making of Black Meaning*, pp. 334-335.

observations regarding Lamar at work: ‘herein lies the brilliance of Lamar’s kenosis, that he undoes the hip-hop braggadocious way of life, and one-ups, trading the dozens in for public discussion of a feeling we have all felt. In this way, Lamar is most of us, if not all of us’ (335).

It is notable that, as with its counterpart (performed on conclusion of Lamar’s dialogue with Tupac), ‘Conflicted’ is presented as though it is recited from paper. This is made clear by a distinct rustling sound at the beginning and conclusion of the respective works. Predominantly employed as a means of providing the moment with a sense of authenticity and realism, this effect also brings to the audience’s attention the palpable weight of expectation Lamar has hinged upon his spoken word recitals, and the subsequent student-mentor aesthetic evoked by these performances. Returning to the existence of an intertextual lineage between Nas and Lamar (as established earlier), it is worth noting here that the ‘paper-rustle effect’, as noted on ‘Mortal Man’, was pioneered by Nas on ‘Book of Rhymes’ (*God’s Son*, 2002).<sup>66</sup> This conceptual track, based upon Nas’s illustrating of his own artistic process, features the Queensbridge emcee auditioning several written pieces (cutting some short in mid-flow, then verbally evaluating, or continuing others) as the sound of jotted pages being turned, torn, and crushed is made audible. In the same way that this technique exposes Nas’s openness to fallibility regarding artistic and performative indecision, the paper-rustling sound effect on ‘Mortal Man’ again aids in compounding a sense of artistic vulnerability regarding Lamar’s efforts, that enhance the audience’s emotional resonance with the piece.

The above-mentioned student-mentor aesthetic is further highlighted by Lamar’s self-positioning as inquirer during his conversation with Tupac on conclusion of ‘Conflicted’. Negotiating Tupac’s often fractious responses to questions posed, Lamar subtly shapes his

---

<sup>66</sup> Nas, ‘Book of Rhymes’, *God’s Son* (Ill Will, Columbia, 2002).

inquiries to illuminate the late artist's political capacity and legacy of social activism. Seeking out Tupac's perspective on issues spanning conceptual and artistic ideology ('I always wanted to ask you about a certain situa-About a metaphor actually, uh, you spoke on the ground. What you mean by that, what the ground represent?'), to themes of mental health ('And through your different avenues of success, How would you say you managed to keep a level of sanity?'), and social uprising ('Would you consider yourself a fighter at heart or somebody that—Somebody that only reacts when they back is against the wall?'), Lamar (re)addresses subjects and themes woven throughout *TPAB* whilst further elucidating his humility in the apparent presence of Tupac.<sup>67</sup>

The striking use of silence as background for the majority of 'Conflicted' (and during initial stages of his dialogue with Tupac) serves as an additional means of contradicting previous uses of the post-mortem sampling technique, the majority of which involve a realignment of Tupac's voice over new instrumentation (beats) which, in many cases, the late artist will not have had the chance to appreciate. In the context of *TPAB*'s entirety, the silence that ensues upon Lamar's 'reaching' Tupac serves as an important feature of Miller's 'otherworldly' reading of their interaction. As noted by Casey Michael Henry, part of *TPAB*'s aesthetically ambiguous allure is found in its chaotic, 'postmodern mixture of high-low' sonic fabrication, evident not only in its 'mixture of lyrical structures and pop cultural references', but in terms of sonic sampling: 'the movement from free jazz' to 'Blaxploitation' soundtrack, 'to Sufjan Steven's *The Age of Adz*', that 'reveals a range of cultural touchstones'<sup>68</sup> juxtaposed consistently throughout the piece, as a continuously building noise that culminates in the silence contained in the first ethereal moments of Lamar and Shakur's meeting. As Nielsen explains, Lamar uses the context of *TPAB*'s complex and intellectually challenging

---

<sup>67</sup> Kendrick Lamar, 'Mortal Man', *Genius*.

<sup>68</sup> Henry, 'Et Tu, Too?', p. 9.

sonic and lyrical journey to set the scene for ‘Mortal Man’s climactic meeting, crafting it to assume his reaching of a spiritual plain, or place of higher understanding: ‘*TPAB*’s varying genre shifts, and time travelling methods lead eventually to the ultimate reveal of the album; [...] a conversation with one of the most influential rappers of all-time’.<sup>69</sup>

Turning back to critical observations of previous rappers’ employments of the post-mortem sampling technique, Williams notes artists such as Nas and JAY-Z’s placement of previously-recorded posthumous guest vocalists (such as Biggie Smalls and Tupac) in a ‘spiritual realm’ through a process of digital enhancement.<sup>70</sup> Here, digital effects such as ‘reverb and echo are added to B.I.G. [and Tupac]’s voice, which [are] not present in the original recording [...] creating the aura of symbolic immortality’ (232). Williams goes on to note the empowering spiritual implications these effects have on the recorded voice, in relation to Richard Middleton’s analysis of blues recordings: ‘The link between disembodied voice (as in echo, for example) and supernatural power is an anthropological commonplace [...] designed to enable the actor to represent godlike authority not only visually but also vocally’ (232-3). On ‘Mortal Man’, rather than artificially building upon spiritual connotations with Tupac through effects or a soundtrack, Lamar chooses a clear canvas on which to build his conversation. Using only silence and the raw human voice to enhance the intimacy, Lamar demonstrates an implicit understanding of his listenership’s assumed resonance with his reaching of Tupac, and the important trilateral relationship the listener shares with him and his spiritual guest. Lamar’s choice to avoid such digital enhancements during ‘Mortal Man’ once again serves to reiterate his compulsion towards alternative, subtle,

---

<sup>69</sup> Jack. J. Nielsen, *The Afrofuturism Cyclicity of Past, Present, and Future in Kendrick Lamar’s ‘To Pimp a Butterfly’*, p. 73.

<sup>70</sup> Williams, ‘Musical Borrowing in Hip-Hop’, pp. 232-233.

and implicitly complex aspects of trope revision that not only elevate his artistic practices above many peers, but remain profoundly impactful on his attempts at listener activation.

An additional technique Lamar employs throughout *TPAB* in relation to listener activation involves the intratextual recurrence, or staggered unveiling of, the aforementioned ‘Conflicted’. Previously teased, or gradually unveiled throughout the LP (on conclusion of ‘King Kunta’, ‘These Walls’, ‘Alright’, ‘For Sale?- Interlude’, and ‘Hood Politics’), ‘Conflicted’ is only revealed in its entirety at the end of the album, in the moment immediately preceding Lamar’s conversation with Tupac. Below is an example of this staggered technique (consistently starting the piece from beginning, and gradually disclosing a further passage each time), that serves to form a bridge between ‘Alright’ and ‘For Sale?’:

I remember you was conflicted  
Misusing your influence  
Sometimes I did the same  
Abusing my power, full of resentment  
Resentment that turned into a deep depression  
Found myself screaming in the hotel room  
I didn’t wanna self destruct  
The evils of Lucy was all around me  
So I went running for answers

Addressing key points of his journey, the piece unfolds as a kind of sonic conscience, or interruptive articulation of the ‘survivor’s guilt’ Lamar expresses throughout the LP. In addition to consolidating previous narratorial concerns of the album, these staggered unveilings serve to increase emphasis on the contextual importance of ‘Conflicted’ – upon the audiences’ acclimatisation to its recurrence – in preparation for its full disclosure on ‘Mortal Man’.

Describing ‘Conflicted’ as ‘the poem that happens over and over again (40:01)’,<sup>71</sup> the producer Rick Rubin notes his own impressions of the technique on his initial listening of

---

<sup>71</sup> GQ, ‘Kendrick Lamar Meets Rick Rubin and They Have an Epic Conversation’, *YouTube*, 20<sup>th</sup> October 2016 <[youtube.com/watch?v=4lPD5PtqMiE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4lPD5PtqMiE)> [accessed 5 May 2020].



*TPAB*: ‘I remember the first time I was listening to it and I was like, “oh wait a minute, I think it messed up”, you know? “It’s playing, it’s playing again”’ (41:07). Continuing to detail the rupture-like effect the recurrence of ‘Conflicted’ had on his appreciation of the album, Rubin continues: ‘It [...] pulls you out of, the normal experience of just sitting back and listening [and] makes you question what’s happening, and forces you to pay attention in a new way’ (41:18). Finally, Rubin emphasises the importance of the technique as a means of activation: ‘it resonates and feels unusual, but it pulls you further into it’ (40:58).

Regarding the above passage’s abrupt ending (‘The evils of Lucy was all around me/So I went running for answers’), it is clear that these ruptures in narrative not only serve to draw the listener further (back) into recurring themes of the LP, they also create a unique sense of temporal shift. The above passage in particular, visceral in its depiction of the speaker’s desperate search for affirmation and self-enlightenment as means of appeasing his current predicament, evokes a palpable discomfort, drawing listeners out of any comfortable present listening state, and placing them back firmly amidst Lamar’s recollective struggle.

Use of interruption, or ‘rupture’, during ‘Conflicted’s unveiling relates to Tricia Rose’s and Arthur Jafa’s recognition of the ‘flow, layer, and rupturing in line’ aesthetic tradition in hip hop.<sup>72</sup> Evident in the fundamental stylistic ‘continuities’ observed ‘between breaking, graffiti style, rapping, and music construction’ (apparent within the culture since its beginnings), this practice centres around the ‘visual, physical, musical, and lyrical lines [that] are set in motion’ during hip hop performance, then ‘broken abruptly with sharp angular breaks’ (38). Drawing close similarities to Lamar’s employment of this practice for his spoken word piece on *TPAB*, Rose further explains that, in contrast to breaking up the ‘flow’ of performance, these ruptured lines ‘sustain motion and energy through fluidity’ (38).

---

<sup>72</sup> Tricia Rose, ‘All Aboard the Night Train’: Flow, Layering, and Rupture in Postindustrial New York’, in *Black Noise* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), pp. 38-39.

When contextualised by its overarching message of social unification and mutual respect between gang-affiliated African American males, Lamar's engagement with 'flow, layer, and rupture' during 'Conflicted' speaks to Rose's imagining of this practice being used as 'a blueprint for social resistance and affirmation' (39). Summarising this practice, Rose notes how hip hop practitioners 'create sustaining narratives, accumulate them, layer, embellish, and transform them', but also 'find pleasure in', and 'in fact, *plan on*' rupture, both aesthetic and 'social'. When these ruptures occur, practitioners such as Lamar 'use them in creative ways that will prepare [the listener] for a future in which survival will demand a sudden shift in ground tactics' (39). 'Ground tactics' applies here to the employment of unifying forms of affirmation and solidarity between oppositional gang members within black communities of Los Angeles,<sup>73</sup> and 'creative ways' denotes the unique intertextual means by which this message is conveyed through 'Conflicted' and *TPAB*, to encourage maximum listener participation.

On conclusion of 'Conflicted', and in the wake of Lamar's uncharacteristic modesty regarding its reception ('it ain't really a poem. I just felt like it's something you probably could relate to'),<sup>74</sup> a soundtrack for the conversation between the artists is introduced through free-form jazz-inspired instrumentation. This fluid and temporally shifting soundtrack positions both artists as representatives of their musical heritage, past and present. Also, when noting how 'jazz aesthetics and imagery' has 'contributed to highbrow distinctions' within the rap genre since its 'golden age' (1986-93),<sup>75</sup> the hierarchical status jazz-influenced rap has enjoyed as 'high art as it functions within the hip-hop world' potentially stimulates the listeners' awareness of both artists' implicit claims to intellectual status (48). For the

---

<sup>73</sup> An important concept relating to a form of social uplift addressed by Tupac upon initial inquiry by Lamar relates to his idea of 'the ground'. In opposition to ground tactics, Tupac uses 'the ground' as a metaphor for the overpowering ('swallowing up') of 'the rich' by 'the poor'.

<sup>74</sup> Kendrick Lamar, 'Mortal Man', *Genius*.

<sup>75</sup> Justin A. Williams, *Rhymin' and Stealin'*, p. 47-48.

purposes of this chapter, this hierarchy relates to Williams's previous recognition of the empowered status poetry holds over rap as a literary art,<sup>76</sup> and it is argued that Lamar Signifies upon academia and the mainstream media's attempts at legitimising Tupac's legacy by changing his status from rapper to poet. Regarding the context of Tupac's posthumously-released poetry collection, *The Rose that Grew From Concrete*, Williams explains: 'Using the term poetry [...] connotes intimacy and a privacy which audiences demand to invade. Labelling Tupac a poet elevates his status and has been used by academics, in part, to legitimize a problematic and complex icon and his music' (207-208). Lamar's use of free-form jazz can be observed as an expression of his anxiety of influence regarding these matters but, perhaps more accurately, his combined use of poetry, non-rhythmic dialogue (in opposition to rap performance), and free-form jazz instrumentation enables *TPAB* to engage with a wider audience than solely a hip hop one.

It is important to note Lamar's conscious omission (or occlusion) of significant aspects of the post-mortem sampling technique (avoidance of rhythmical speech or performance (rap) and studio-based digital after-effects or instrumentation during his meeting with Tupac) whilst still adhering to its overarching premise.<sup>77</sup> Also significant is his use of 'rupture' as a form of omission regarding the recurrence of 'Conflicted' throughout the LP, in similarity to Nas's use of omission during 'One Love'.<sup>78</sup> Here, like Nas, Lamar alerts his audience to important missing aesthetic and conceptual information, urging listeners to use a combination of imagination and personal experience to fill these gaps, thus heightening their own personal and emotional involvement. In contrast to Nas's use of omission, the omitted or ruptured sections of Lamar's poem are eventually revealed in full, allowing his audience to

---

<sup>76</sup> Justin A. Williams, 'Musical Borrowing in Hip-Hop', pp. 207-208.

<sup>77</sup> This premise consists of complimenting 'the ongoing process of a triple-voiced canonization': 'formulating sainthood [Sontag, 1962]; a musical definition of canon which involves albums or songs that stand out in the genre; and as part of a Plutarchian 'history of great men'. Justin A. Williams, 'Musical Borrowing in Hip-Hop', pp. 197-198.

<sup>78</sup> See Chapter One, p. 41.

combine previously constructed intellectual and emotional involvement with an actualised form of narrative resolution.

A full sense of resolution on ‘Mortal Man’ is disrupted, however, by an additional mode of omission highlighted by the abrupt ending to Lamar’s meeting with Tupac. After the second spoken word piece, and (in contrast to his modest avoidance of critique for ‘Conflicted’) when Lamar seeks a direct response from his interlocutor, he is left without answer: ‘What’s your perspective on that? Pac? Pac? Pac?!’ As Henry observes, ‘the conjured Tupac dissipates, like his Coachella hologram, before resolution can occur’.<sup>79</sup> Here, in Tupac’s sudden dissipation, Lamar’s overarching ‘attempt to solicit a direction, or concrete advice’ from the late artist is ‘cut short’, likening events in ‘Mortal Man’ to a kind of hollow victory, one that correlates to Lamar’s career-long relationship with the unresolved, contradictory, and aesthetically ambiguous. The narrative ambiguity ‘encapsulated by [Lamar’s] makeshift interview’ (14) reveals a Joycean conceit prevalent in much of his corpus, relating to a conscious awareness of reader/listener activation similar to previously mentioned intentional acts of omission. Describing the use of this device, Henry again notes Lamar’s audience as drawn into an overt and personal engagement with the ‘text’ through its requirement of interpretation: ‘the listener is left as the final arbiter of what the path forward might be [...] leaving the final point of activation and realization on the one-who-listens’ (14).

Henry’s reference to Tupac’s hologrammatic appearance at Coachella (2012) can be used as an additional means of illustrating Lamar’s re-perceiving of the post-mortem sampling

---

<sup>79</sup> Casey Michael Henry, ‘Et Tu, Too?’, p. 14.

In 2012, ‘On Dr Dre’s order, an Academy Award-winning visual effects studio spent weeks designing a virtual Makaveli [Tupac]’ which would posthumously perform for a live audience at Coachella music festival.

Aaron Dodson, ‘The Strange Legacy of Tupac’s ‘Hologram’ Lives on Five Years After its Historic Coachella Debut’, *The Undeclared*, 14<sup>th</sup> April 2017 <[theundefeated.com/features/the-strange-legacy-of-tupacs-hologram-after-coachella/](http://theundefeated.com/features/the-strange-legacy-of-tupacs-hologram-after-coachella/)> [accessed 28 March 2020].

technique. In the Coachella performance, Tupac's hologram was 'created through production ingenuity'<sup>80</sup> and manipulated to undertake a structured performance, one ostensibly designed for living artists such as Snoop Dogg and Dre to self-align with and gain social and cultural capital from, in much the same way as Tupac's voice, image, and likeness has been used consistently since his passing. It can be argued that Lamar's employment of Tupac's voice (whilst adding to the late rapper's mythological status and bolstering Lamar's own artistic alignments) does not directly adhere to these strategies. Instead, Tupac's voice in *TPAB* is employed primarily in exposing the late artist's genre-shifting complexities, exemplified by his fractious ability to subvert Lamar's intuitive questioning. Unlike his more amicable Coachella hologram, *TPAB*'s Tupac avoids any semblance of a tidy conclusion to Lamar's quest, aiding in his remembrance as a deeply layered personality of varying artistic talents and allegiances. When understood as disruptor to Lamar's 'complex path to self-reinvention', Tupac's vital role as non-provider regarding intellectual or artistic resolution in *TPAB* is separated starkly from the predominantly self-serving previous uses of his voice by multiple rap artists.

Positioning Tupac as obstacle to the resolution of *TPAB* both contrasts and expands upon Lamar's multifarious techniques of employing figures of black excellence such as Maya Angelou ('SAM'), Alice Walker ('Alright'), MC Eiht ('m.A.A.d city'), and James Brown and Alex Haley ('King Kunta') to consolidate messages of socio-political resistance and communal affirmation. In Lamar's choice to expose the fractious, conflicted, and disharmonious elements of Tupac's character in 'Mortal Man', he not only adds nuance, subtlety, and contradiction to any 'complete' reading of the late artist, but also to any overarching socio-political message contained within the album. Instead, by highlighting his own weaknesses and vulnerabilities as a means of self-catharsis during his digitally

---

<sup>80</sup> Casey Michael Henry, 'Et Tu, Too?', p. 14.

manipulated meeting, Lamar refocuses the artistic lens to expose a more singular, confessional character study, which he exposes to a global audience. Using Tupac's posthumous presence in this way, Lamar is able innovatively to illustrate methods of expansion regarding use of the technique in rap music. When viewed in this context, and observing Lamar's evolution of post-mortem sampling as an intrageneric polemic of sorts, the success of his endeavours need only be judged by an almost immediate cessation of stereotypical uses of the technique regarding Tupac's posthumous voice since *TPAB*'s release.

## CONCLUSION

Be it through the reinvention of long-established techniques in the rap genre such as the observer/witness trope to develop methods of resistance to social and individual ills in contemporary black America, or by deviating from the well-trodden path of self-alignment with the post-mortem artist in order to reify the humanistic pluralities of such individuals, Lamar's complex re-perceiving of literary and cultural traditions as a means of readdressing socio-political and artistic imbalances has been consistently observed since his major label debut (*GKMC*). These methods of trope reconstruction have often been dovetailed by an employment of figures of black literary authority (through varying modes of intertextuality and allusion) as synecdochal representations of African American artistic legacy, in order to further illuminate struggle in marginalised communities. In doing so, Lamar has achieved a unique means of illustrating long-held African American traditions of resistance and self-love for a contemporary audience.

Despite his constant struggle to stay artistically unfettered, Lamar remains singularly loyal to his first discipline: hip hop culture and its integral use of intertextuality and allusion as means of consolidation, emphasis, and emotional evocation in his music. Indeed, it can be

argued that in this respect Lamar is more responsible than any other rap lyricist to date for exposing the genre's intellectual capabilities and broadening its artistic boundaries.

Speaking in terms of his consistent rejection of, and resistance to, any critical, media, or music industry attempt to pigeonhole his work, Lamar's obsessive compulsion to revise various tropes and traditions contained within the rap genre is often mirrored by an insistence on enshrouding his art with ambiguity and contradiction. This is exhibited through his representations of communal and individual inconsistency that denote his music with a uniquely flawed kind of humanness, his ongoing use of Signification as a means of outwitting his pursuant listener, and when observing his overt reliance on intertextual engagement within the culture he practices as part of a profound understanding of the fundamental relationship it shares with the concept.

With this being said, and when borrowing directly from the words of Tupac's spirit during 'Mortal Man's otherworldly cipher, it is notable that Lamar's responsibility to rap is less of a singlehanded expansion upon the genre's intellectual and artistic boundaries, than part of a deeply traditional communal process that involves 'letting our dead homies tell stories for us'.<sup>81</sup>

---

<sup>81</sup> Kendrick Lamar, 'Mortal Man'.

## CHAPTER THREE

### **Lyrical Performative Stylistic Allusion in the Lyrics of Kendrick Lamar, J.I.D., Kemba, Saba, Earl Sweatshirt, MIKE, and Navy Blue**

As highlighted in the introduction to this thesis,<sup>1</sup> when attempting to develop a fuller understanding of the multilayered emotional and intellectual meanings expressed in rap music, it is essential to acknowledge that the artform is performative. With this in mind, and as a means of enabling effective transition of this thesis from a critical investigation towards its practice-based, creative component, a widening of focus is required for the final chapter, from the analysis exclusively of aspects of intertextuality and literary allusion in the lyrical content of rap, to encompass also the role of performance.

To achieve this, and uniting a recurring theme throughout this thesis, Chapter Three continues to explore rap artists' expression of trauma and vulnerability through their engagement with intertextuality and allusion. As part of this exploration (and again, in anticipation of the creative component, which relies heavily on the above techniques), a previously undocumented form of performative allusion in rap – defined for the purposes of this thesis as lyrical performative stylistic allusion – will be foregrounded. This chapter will observe the performances of several established and emerging emcees and consider how they utilise the above technique when relaying what is apparently deeply personal subject matter, in order to access artistic platforms for catharsis. As a gesture towards potential future study in this area, the focus of the chapter will then shift to other modes of intertextually-informed

---

<sup>1</sup> See 'Introduction', p. 10.



performance-based strategy in rap, implicating its important role(s) in further articulating trauma (defined as ‘hurt’).<sup>2</sup>

## SECTION ONE

### **Defining Lyrical Performative Stylistic Allusion and Exploring its use in the Lyrics of Kendrick Lamar, J.I.D., and Kemba**

It is important to acknowledge Barthes’s idea of ‘the grain of the voice’ as ‘a dual production of language and music’ when defining lyrical performative stylistic allusion.<sup>3</sup> Located within ‘the very precise space [...] of the encounter between a language and a voice’ (181), it is in the friction between a performer’s conscious and unconscious alterations to the ‘body in [their] voice’ (188) – where deeper meaning and a higher level of pathos is transmitted to the listener – that lyrical performative stylistic allusion occurs. Applying the more overt performative aspects of Barthes’s concept to contemporary rap (such as consciously manipulated timbre, cadence, pitch, and volume during lyrical performance), it is notable how emcees engage in forms of performative allusion, utilising a grain of voice similar to their contemporaries, in order to achieve similar ends.

In the following examples, the artists engage with stylistic allusion in an act closely relatable to Mark Katz’s definition of ‘performative quotation’.<sup>4</sup> Katz observes performative quotation in the context of technological advancements in modern music, and notes that ‘digital sampling offers the possibility of [...] quotation that recreates all the details of timbre

---

<sup>2</sup> For more details on the highly significant contextual and semantic implications associated with this empirical definition, see pp. 122-125 of this chapter.

<sup>3</sup> Roland Barthes, ‘The Grain of the Voice’, in *Image, Music, Text* (London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 1977), pp. 181-188.

<sup>4</sup> Mark Katz, ‘Music in 1s and 0s: The Art and Politics of Digital Sampling’, in *Capturing Sound: How Technology has Changed Music* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2010), pp. 149-150.

and timing that evoke and identify a unique sound event' (149). He proceeds to use Clyde Stubblefield's two-second drum solo during James Brown's 'Funky Drummer' (1970)<sup>5</sup> as exemplar, detailing how its unique sonic qualities have been sampled and utilised by many artists in multiple artistic contexts (146). In Stubblefield's case, it can be noted that it is the *grain* of his drumming – the conscious and unconscious atmospheric, metrical, and technical alterations/nuances of his performance – that has aided in building myriad soundscapes in modern music, creating new meaning, whilst evoking a sonic and rhythmic familiarity unique to Stubblefield's performance.

Lyrical performative stylistic allusion combines Barthes's ideas of the grain of the voice with Katz's performative quotation, exhibited when one rap artist's *lyrical* performance is recreated by another, with the intention of evoking similar emotional and atmospheric conditions (albeit in a less exact form of quotation than that of digital sampling). Through harnessing the grain (or 'body') from a third-party performance, a parallel expression of emotion, meaning, and even cathartic resolution can be achieved. Although it is not strictly a form of literary allusion, and therefore sits on the periphery of this thesis's main concerns, when considering rap songs and/or rap LPs as texts in their own right, this unique mode of performative allusion requires some exploration – an exploration that is overdue in hip hop research.

With regard to using this technique to articulate trauma, or painful memory (as will be noted in the following paragraphs), rap artists utilise technical and thematic elements of their lyrics that not only link their work with a previous performance, but also serve as enabling factors in the occurrence of lyrical performative stylistic allusion. This idea is surmised by Brecht regarding the recreation of emotion in theatrical practice: 'The human being copies

---

<sup>5</sup> James Brown, 'Funky Drummer (Part 1)' (King, 1970).

gestures, miming, *tones of voice*. And weeping arises from sorrow, but sorrow also arises from weeping'.<sup>6</sup>

Allowing previously established structural, chronological, and generationally comparative methods to continue between critical chapters of this thesis (Chapter One's focus on Nas leading into an exploration of his artistic influence on Kendrick Lamar early in Chapter Two), Lamar's influence on a new generation of rap artists such as J.I.D. and Kemba – highlighted by their lyrical performative stylistic allusion of him – is demonstrated early in this chapter. Later on, Lamar's artistic legacy is explored further through highlighting an additional, multilayered occurrence of lyrical performative stylistic allusion, as observed in the work(s) of Saba.

Lamar's use of performance, in conjunction with intertextuality and allusion in his lyrics, to create 'entire personas and vantage points using different shades of his polymorphous voice' during sonic projects<sup>7</sup> is widely recognised.<sup>8</sup> As identified by Mitch Findlay, a unique aspect of this ability is notable during his performance on the 'opening segment'<sup>9</sup> of 'm.A.A.d city' (2012),<sup>10</sup> in which an act of vocal manipulation, employed to evoke a heightened sense of anxiety in the speaker, has demonstrated to a generation of emerging rap artists a performative means of articulating personal trauma to their audiences on an increasingly sophisticated emotional and intellectual level. As Findlay explains, whilst Lamar's 'lyrics [on 'm.A.A.d city'] suggest that his younger self was desensitized to the depravity of his environment', with his 'voice' being 'hitched' in such an 'audible panic'

---

<sup>6</sup> Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. by Marc Silberman, Steve Giles and Tom Kuhn (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), p. 241.

<sup>7</sup> Casey Michael Henry, 'Et Tu, Too?: Kendrick Lamar's 'To Pimp a Butterfly' and the Revival of Black Postmodernism', *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 26<sup>th</sup> July 2015 <[lareviewofbooks.org/article/et-tu-too-kendrick-lamars-tpab-and-the-revival-of-black-postmodernism/](http://lareviewofbooks.org/article/et-tu-too-kendrick-lamars-tpab-and-the-revival-of-black-postmodernism/)> [accessed 12 November 2018], p. 10.

<sup>8</sup> See Chapter Two, p. 66 for further details.

<sup>9</sup> Mitch Findlay, 'Kendrick Lamar's 'M.A.A.D City' birthed an unreliable narrator', *StreetsTalkin*, 4<sup>th</sup> November 2019 <[streetstalkin.com/kendrick-lamars-m-a-a-d-city-birthed-an-unreliable-narrator/](http://streetstalkin.com/kendrick-lamars-m-a-a-d-city-birthed-an-unreliable-narrator/)> [accessed 14 April 2022].

<sup>10</sup> Kendrick Lamar, 'm.A.A.d city', *good kid, m.A.A.d city* (Aftermath, Interscope, 2012).

during the song, ‘his truth is betrayed by his vocal tone. Meticulous performer that he is, Kendrick has no problems planting evidence in every facet of his expression’.<sup>11</sup>

As highlighted previously, Lamar employed the G-Funk synth leitmotif as part of a moral and historical re-evaluation of West Coast gangsta rap during the latter stages of ‘m.A.A.d city’.<sup>12</sup> During the track’s initial stages (it has two distinct, sonically disparate parts), Lamar additionally employs lyrical performative stylistic allusion as part of this gesture, manipulating his vocal performance through a process of cadence, pitch, and tone-shifting, in order to intensify the speaker’s apparent vulnerability.<sup>13</sup>

Lamar affects his vocal performance as a way of emphasising specific dangerous and tragic elements of the gangsta lifestyle. Presenting his narrative in a distinct, wavering tone – rare in his previous work – he begins:

Brace yourself, I’ll take you on a trip down memory lane  
This is not a rap on how I’m slingin’ crack or move cocaine  
This is cul-de-sac and plenty Cognac and major pain  
Not the drill sergeant, but the stress that weighin’ on your brain<sup>14</sup>

Whilst heightening atmospheric conditions provided by his lyrical content and the song’s instrumentalism, Lamar’s jittery, highly-strung vocal presentation additionally evokes a sense

---

<sup>11</sup> Findlay, ‘Kendrick Lamar’s ‘M.A.A.D City’ birthed an unreliable narrator’.

<sup>12</sup> See Chapter Two, pp. 72-72, and Justin A. Williams, ‘Intertextuality and Lineage in the Game’s ‘We Ain’t’ and Kendrick Lamar’s ‘m.A.A.d City’, in *The Pop Palimpsest: Intertextuality in Recorded Popular Music*, ed. by Lori Burns and Serge Lacasse (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2018).

<sup>13</sup> Lamar’s performance on ‘m.A.A.d city’ exhibits an intertextual lineage with Ghostface Killah and RZA’s performance during ‘I Can’t Go to Sleep ft. Isaac Hayes’ (*The W*, Loud Records, 2000), a track released twelve years beforehand. On ‘Sleep’, both emcees employ an overt method of vocal manipulation to evoke heightened emotion. Due to the extreme levels of dramatic performance on ‘Sleep’, Ghostface and RZA’s techniques function differently to that of Lamar, sonically signalling a sense of tragedy and despair, as opposed to the heightened sense of anxiety projected in ‘m.A.A.d city’. Also, ground-breaking work in the area of performative strategy in rap music must be acknowledged in the corpus of Eminem (see ‘Stan’, *The Marshall Mathers LP*, Aftermath, Interscope, 2000), whom Lamar admits to ‘studying when I was a kid’: “How’s his words cutting through the beat like that? What is he doing that I’m not doing, now that I’m into it?”. Further work might be undertaken regarding lyrical performative stylistic allusion, particularly when defining its origins, and could be the subject of a further study.

See Mac McCann and Sean Stout, ‘Kendrick Lamar Talks Next Album, Eminem’s Influence, and More in New Interview With Rick Rubin’, *Complex*, 20<sup>th</sup> October 2016 <[complex.com/music/2016/10/kendrick-lamar-talks-next-album-eminem-influence-more-interview-rick-rubin](https://www.complex.com/music/2016/10/kendrick-lamar-talks-next-album-eminem-influence-more-interview-rick-rubin)> [accessed 14 April 2022].

<sup>14</sup> Kendrick Lamar, ‘m.A.A.d city’, *Genius* <[genius.com/Kendrick-lamar-maad-city-lyrics](https://www.genius.com/Kendrick-lamar-maad-city-lyrics)> [accessed 22 September 2020].

of unpolished realism and urgency to the track (enhanced by digital effects relating to censorship of identity, translated below as ‘\*beep\*’) that intensify descriptions of graphic violence, crime and tragedy:

Seen a light-skinned n\*\*\*a with his brains blown out  
At the same burger stand where \*beep\* hang out  
Now this is not a tape recorder sayin’ that he did it  
But ever since that day, I was lookin’ at him different  
That was back when I was nine, Joey packed the nine  
Pakistan on every porch is fine, we adapt to crime

Here, use of narrative retrospection – to unearth painful memory – acts as trigger, or catalyst, for the presence of a heightened sense of anxiety in the speaker. This act of reminiscence, of crime, violence, and loss – overtly indicated as traumatic in Lamar’s vocal performance – has become an increasingly common strategy for expressing trauma and vulnerability, and can be observed in lyrical performances by J.I.D. and Kemba, who have risen to prominence in the wake of Lamar’s musical success.

In a passage from ‘Lauder’ (2017),<sup>15</sup> for example, J.I.D. also recounts memories of an earlier time in his life intertwined with violence, loss, and crime. Manipulating his vocal to achieve an increasingly exasperated tone during his recollection, J.I.D. implies a sense of psychological trauma attached to these memories, only understood when registering his lyrical content in tandem with his wavering voice during performance. To emphasise this, J.I.D.’s performance settles again, almost immediately following his recalling of events:

Remember we would front yard brawl with big Timothy?  
Kicked them doors because we had a lot of energy  
My brother was locked up for shooting at the enemy  
Caught one n\*\*\*a then caught fifteen  
I ain’t meet that n\*\*\*a ‘til I was fifteen  
Now I’m kicking 16’s with a big screen in attempt to get the big cream  
Little guy with a big dream, I need guidance  
‘Cause if I don’t succeed, I probably proceed violence<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> J.I.D., ‘Lauder’, *The Never Story* (Dreamville, Interscope, Spillage Village, 2017).

<sup>16</sup> J.I.D., ‘Lauder’, *The Never Story*, *Genius* <[genius.com/Jid-lauder-lyrics](https://genius.com/Jid-lauder-lyrics)> [accessed 22 September 2020].

Asking the listener to ‘remember’ an earlier time in his life, in which a tale of violence, incarceration, and loss unfolds., J.I.D. uses retrospection and a similar wavering voice to performatively quote Lamar’s performance on ‘m.A.A.d city’. Just as Lamar articulates to his audience the weight of emotional burden his memories carry with them through his vocal performance, so too does J.I.D. during ‘Lauder’, in an attempt to heighten the listeners’ emotional and intellectual connection with his lyrics and sentiments.<sup>17</sup>

It should be noted here that although the use of sonic and lyrical intertextuality, and multiple forms of allusion, is abundant in rap lyrics (in most cases fundamentally relied upon by artists in order to establish deeper meanings and connections), lyrical performative stylistic allusion (the technique of cadence, tone, pitch, or ‘grain’ recreation) such as J.I.D.’s quotation of Lamar to evoke trauma, is relatively rare and, in the context of the genre’s technical development, still in its infancy. It is possible this technique has not been adopted more readily due to its performative complexity; moreover, there are risks regarding the technique’s close association with mimicry, or ‘biting’ (according to definitions of authentic practice in rap).<sup>18</sup> Either artists such as J.I.D. feel they are extremely adept at negotiating the thin line between ‘biting’ and intertextually-informed performative progression, and they are willing to tackle the risk head on, or they exhibit an artistic naivety revealing an inability to veil influence, perhaps due to the burgeoning nature of their musical careers.

Demonstrating the above juncture, in the following example, Kemba’s overt reliance on Lamar’s performance on ‘m.A.A.d city’ is clearly illustrated. Negative assumption, or critique of his performative strategy as simply a form of ‘biting’, can quickly be quashed,

---

<sup>17</sup> Although direct links between artists here can be assumed, it is important to observe J.I.D.’s persistent employment of this technique throughout his career as a factor identifying it as a normative element of his vocal delivery – exacted to multiple levels of effectiveness – which has seen it become synonymous with his performative persona, owing to naturally high-strung qualities of pitch/tone in his voice.

<sup>18</sup> Adam Bradley notes that ‘biting, or co-opting another person’s style or even specific lines, qualifies as a high crime in hip hop’s code of ethics and aesthetics. Rap polices the boundary between borrowing and theft in ways that at times seem arbitrary’. See Adam Bradley, *Book of Rhymes: The Poetics of Hip Hop* (New York: BasicCivitas, 2009), p. 147.

however, when understanding Kemba's prioritising of the technique as a means of enabling his unique form of catharsis, and realising that, other than through Lamar's pioneering technique of vocal manipulation, these expressions would be impossible to portray in such a directly evocative way.

During his appearance on 'Daemons' (2019)<sup>19</sup> (on which, incidentally, the introductory four-bar drum sample programming bears a strong temporal, sonic, and timbral resemblance to Lamar's 'Sing About Me, I'm Dying of Thirst' (2012), taken from the same album as 'm.A.A.d city'),<sup>20</sup> Kemba depicts a harrowing recollection of drug addiction, loss, poverty, and crime, as the speaker describes varying life episodes that have negatively affected his young mind:

I just found out family and enemies could be different  
I was steppin' over syringes that's in my kitchen  
After mama died, I couldn't go to the bathroom  
Without getting' some second-hand heroin high while pissin'  
This is just me paintin' a picture of what I live with  
What you know about comin' home to your shit missin'  
And findin' out the n\*\*\*as that helped you look for it had did it?  
This is just me paintin' addiction<sup>21</sup>

During the above passage (and throughout his verse), Kemba employs a manipulation of pitch and tone that reveals striking similarities to the panic-stricken, anxiety-induced tone employed by Lamar on 'm.A.A.d city'. Arguably evoked with more poignance than Lamar's original, Kemba's performance assists in depicting an individual on the edge, disillusioned by neglect and familial betrayal, that potentially facilitates a deeply resonant, long-lasting emotional and intellectual connection to form between himself and his audience.

Simultaneously, through this personal outpouring of traumatic events, an important act of

---

<sup>19</sup> XXXTENTACION, 'Daemons ft. Joey Bada\$\$ and Kemba', *Bad Vibes Forever* (Bad Vibes Forever, Empire, 2019).

<sup>20</sup> Kendrick Lamar, 'Sing About Me, I'm Dying of Thirst', *good kid, m.A.A.d city* (Top Dawg, Aftermath, Interscope, 2012). Hereafter referred to as 'SAM'.

<sup>21</sup> XXXTENTACION, 'Daemons ft. Joey Bada\$\$ and Kemba', *Genius* <[genius.com/Xxxtentacion-and-kemba-daemons-lyrics](https://genius.com/Xxxtentacion-and-kemba-daemons-lyrics)> [accessed 22 September 2020].

self-cleansing, akin to a form of personal resolution or kenosis (further detailed below), is enabled.

Immersed in this process, whilst deeply engaging with the lyrical performative stylistic allusion of Lamar, Kemba highlights the difficult personal implications of expressing trauma in this way, explaining: ‘Just give me one damn minute, this shit is hard for me/I lost my whole damn mama, I lost a part of me/She lost her whole damn life from symptoms of poverty’. Two lines later, and comparably to J.I.D., Kemba illustrates an understanding of the healing properties afforded to him through his use of lyrical performative stylistic allusion, as on conclusion of his emotional outpouring, his voice and cadence relaxes – the quaver no longer discernible – and his perspective shifts to one of resolution and positivity for the future that signifies a form of emotional resolution: ‘It was nonstop for me, no one is stoppin’ me/Either fulfil myself or be a self-fulfillin’ prophecy/This just how I introduce myself properly/Kemba’. Literally signing off, after laying his cards on the table, Kemba shows how vital an act of self-exposure such as this can be in rap for the formation of emotional and intellectual bonds between listener and speaker.

Kemba’s drawing of power from Lamar’s performance on ‘m.A.A.d city’ – utilising his strategy as a method of enhancing atmospheric conditions contained in ‘Daemons’ and as a way of enabling himself access to a similar platform for personal and communal catharsis – epitomises Adam Bradley’s notion of ‘imitation in an artistic context’ in rap as an act of ‘charging another’s words [style, technique, or performance] with your own creativity and, in the process, creating something that is at once neither his nor yours, and yet somehow both’.<sup>22</sup> Through his quotation of Lamar’s performance, Kemba positions himself as a highly conscious lyricist, attuned to his emotional vulnerabilities, and astute enough to use his artistic discipline as a therapeutic means of personal growth.

---

<sup>22</sup> Bradley, *Book of Rhymes*, p. 147.



J.I.D.'s and Kemba's harnessing of Lamar's technique to push the boundaries of their self-exposure and performative vulnerability is an early example of what Marcus J. Moore identifies as Lamar's influence on modern black music 'post-Butterfly'.<sup>23</sup> Following the artistic legacy of LPs such as *good kid, m.A.A.d city (GKMC)*, and particularly *To Pimp a Butterfly (TPAB)*,<sup>24</sup> 'it seemed that every record had some elements of [...] creative freedom, which led to the most fertile period of socially conscious black music since Marvin [Gaye] and Stevie [Wonder] ruled the terrain.' In the following section, an additional act of lyrical performative stylistic allusion of Lamar (combining elements of the previously observed strategy with a technique of listing and non-alignment) primarily influenced by lyrical and performative content, and taken from *TPAB*, will be exemplified during Saba's performance on 'PROM / KING' (*Care for Me*, 2018).<sup>25</sup> This section will further reveal how Lamar's use of vocal manipulation in conjunction with narrative retrospection has encouraged modern rap artists to engage with their audiences on increasingly deepening technical and emotional levels, and expand upon Moore's idea that 'Kendrick's album made it okay for his peers to *go in*, to create and release whatever their vision desired regardless of what the public and critics expected' (215).

---

<sup>23</sup> Marcus J. Moore, *The Butterfly Effect: How Kendrick Lamar Ignited the Soul of Black America* (London: Hodder & Stoughton Ltd, 2020), p. 215.

<sup>24</sup> Hereafter referred to as *GKMC* and *TPAB*.

<sup>25</sup> Saba, 'PROM / KING', *Care for Me* (Saba Pivot, LLC, 2018)

## SECTION TWO

### **Lyrical Performative Stylistic Allusion, Listing, and Non-Alignment in Saba's 'PROM / KING'**

Lamar's artistic influence on emerging rapper Saba<sup>26</sup> is exemplified during an act of lyrical performative stylistic allusion, listing, and non-alignment on 'PROM / KING',<sup>27</sup> a performance influenced by several pieces by Lamar, but owing particularly to 'For Free?' (TPAB, 2015).<sup>28</sup> However, before considering this, and the specific texts/performance it engages with, it is vital to establish an understanding of what Mitchell Ohriner conceives as 'non-alignment'<sup>29</sup> or errancy in rap flow, and what John J. Mattessich defines as 'generative' and 'derivative' aspects of flow in rap,<sup>30</sup> in order to grasp how these concepts apply to (and function within) Saba's performative quotation of Lamar.

'Flow' in rap is a complex, broad artistic term, relating to multiple aspects of a rapper's vocal delivery, and has been defined to varying degrees of success in academic criticism. Ohriner observes previous attempts by scholars such as Paul Edwards and Steven Gamble to define the multifarious properties of 'flow' in rap as part of a 'prescriptive view [...] favoured by [a] growing number of rap pedagogues'.<sup>31</sup> Ohriner somewhat facetiously

---

<sup>26</sup> As indicated by the artist during an interview with *Pitchfork*, Saba exemplifies his ability to recite Lamar's lyrics verbatim whilst dissecting Lamar's 'The Heart Pt. 2' (*Overly Dedicated*, Top Dawg, 2010). Coincidentally, 'The Heart Pt. 2' contains perhaps the earliest recorded evidence of the same performative technique displayed by Lamar on the initial stage of 'm.A.A.d city'. See Saba, 'Saba on Kendrick Lamar's 'The Heart Pt. 2'', *Pitchfork*, 11<sup>th</sup> July 2018 <[pitchfork.com/tv/verses/saba-on-kendrick-lamars-the-heart-pt-2/](https://pitchfork.com/tv/verses/saba-on-kendrick-lamars-the-heart-pt-2/)> [accessed 22 September 2020].

<sup>27</sup> Hereafter referred to as 'P / K'.

<sup>28</sup> Kendrick Lamar, 'For Free?', *To Pimp a Butterfly* (TDE, Aftermath, Interscope, 2015).

<sup>29</sup> Mitchell Ohriner, 'Flow in Rap Music: Sources of Confusion and a Strategy for Clarity', in *Flow: The Rhythmic Voice in Rap Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

<sup>30</sup> John J. Mattessich, 'This Flow Ain't Free: Generative Elements in Kendrick Lamar's 'To Pimp a Butterfly'', *Music Theory Online*, 25 (2019) <[mtosmt.org/issues/mto.19.25.1/mto.19.25.1.mattessich.html](https://mtosmt.org/issues/mto.19.25.1/mto.19.25.1.mattessich.html)> [accessed 9 September 2021].

<sup>31</sup> Ohriner, 'Flow in Rap Music: Sources of Confusion and a Strategy for Clarity', p. 10.

describes Edward's definition of flow in rap as a 'law of flow' (10), citing his book *How to Rap*<sup>32</sup> as a prime locator for the critical origins of this 'law', and quoting his establishment of the rule system: 'Rap is not just poetry spoken aloud, because unlike the rhythm of a poem, a song's flow *has to be in time with the music*—the rhythm of the lyrics must fit with the basic rhythm of the music' (Ohriner's emphasis) (63).

Continuing to determine the origins of Edwards's 'law', Ohriner highlights an interview between Chuck D (of Public Enemy) and H. Samy Alim, in which Chuck D states: 'poetry makes the beat come to it, and rap is pretty much subservient to the beat [...]. If you have a beat, you have to [...] follow the beat'.<sup>33</sup> Broadening this notion, widely held by both scholars and practitioners, that rap flow is defined by its strict rhythmic adherence and/or subservience to a beat, Ohriner encompasses anthropological and empirical perspectives, noting that 'the law of flow is also affirmed in how emcees describe their own flows as something controlled, smooth, and continuous' (10).

Ohriner then reveals his findings on rap flow, which contrast somewhat with the rules set out above. In Ohriner's findings, an increasing number of examples can be found of rappers deliberately going against this 'law' of flow, often creating a more intensified, emotional atmosphere. Through his research into aspects of intentional non-alignment in rap flow, Ohriner stresses the importance of recognising 'non-alignment with the beat' as either 'a result of errant performance' *or* 'expressive practice'. Acknowledging that 'distinguishing between the two can be difficult',<sup>34</sup> he furthers his argument that 'some non-alignments are sufficiently systematic that expressive practice provides a more convincing explanation' (4), and goes some way towards establishing that some examples of non-alignment or errancy

---

<sup>32</sup> Paul Edwards, *How to Rap: The Art and Science of the Hip-Hop MC* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2009), p. 63.

<sup>33</sup> H. Samy Alim, *Roc the Mic Right: The Language of Hip Hop Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 96.

<sup>34</sup> Mitchell S. Ohriner, 'Lyric, Rhythm, and Non-alignment in the Second Verse of Kendrick Lamar's "Momma"', *Music Theory Online*, 25 (2019) <[mtosmt.org/issues/mto.19.25.1/mto.19.25.1.ohriner.html](https://mtosmt.org/issues/mto.19.25.1/mto.19.25.1.ohriner.html)> [accessed 14 April 2022] (Footnote 4).

during rap performance are demonstrably the result of a conscious artistic decision, not an emcee's performative shortcomings (often, a rapper's flowing out of rhythm with the beat is deemed as 'wack', or technically poor).<sup>35</sup> Setting out his findings in opposition to the previously established 'law of flow' in rap, Ohriner's position is strengthened when observing independent research undertaken on the subject by John Mattessich.

Like Ohriner, Mattessich understands the inadequacies of applying a one-size-fits-all 'law' to the properties of rap flow. However, he has begun to define the important semantic, emotional, and intellectual implications of 'off-beat'<sup>36</sup> elements of an emcee's flow. Applying Robert Hatton's 'application of markedness'<sup>37</sup> theory to rap flow analysis, which 'evaluates all forms of difference as oppositional' in musical expression, Mattessich identifies the occurrence of 'markedness' in rap as originating 'when a unique or salient event arises, which the competent listener understands as creating or implementing a new opposition'. This opposition, in terms of rap, is explained by using the following analogy:

Most hip hop songs fall into a standard 4444 meter; thus a song in 3344 exemplifies an entity that is stylistically marked. As 4444 is stylistically normative, the uncultured hip hop listener has an expectation that most songs will be in 4444 [...] a song in 3343 draws attention to the fact that it is both in a triple meter (it is marked) and not in quadruple meter (it is not unmarked).

Here, Mattessich alludes to the occurrence of rhythmic difference in rap as significant to an artist's intention regarding meaning (when understood by the 'competent listener'),<sup>38</sup> equating elements of an emcee's flow deemed off-beat, or rhythmically 'marked', as moments of heightened emotional resonance, often containing more semantic meaning than asymmetrical or normative elements of flow. Further defining these areas of markedness,

---

<sup>35</sup> Ohriner's ideas are signposted by his work on Lamar's use of 'flow, rhythm, and non-alignment' in 'Momma', and his previous studies of 'off-beat' rap artists such as Talib Kweli.

<sup>36</sup> Ohriner, 'Flow and Free Rhythm in Talib Kweli', in *Flow: The Rhythmic Voice in Rap Music*, pp. 191-196.

<sup>37</sup> John J. Mattessich, 'This Flow Ain't Free: Generative Elements in Kendrick Lamar's 'To Pimp a Butterfly'', para. 21.

<sup>38</sup> Mattessich, 'This Flow Ain't Free', para. 21.

Mattessich uses Lamar's performative technique on 'For Free?' to highlight the difference between what he terms 'generative' and 'derivative' flows in rap.<sup>39</sup>

Regarding performance, 'For Free?' is one of Lamar's most experimental songs. During the track, he strays far from the reimits of any law of flow as identified above, choosing instead to follow the jazz-style free-rhythm instrumentation of the track, effectively turning his voice into a kind of accompanying instrument, in opposition to his usual practice of employing it as lead. Detailing this performance as a prime example of generative flow in rap, Mattessich explains:

'For Free?' contains a flow and instrumental track that are completely stratified (there is no structural relationship between the rhythms in the vocals and the metrical implications of the instrumental track) [...] Lamar's flow is reminiscent of a spoken word performance, as his segmentations are guided more by semantic concerns and affect than metrical concerns.<sup>40</sup>

Noting the difference in structural integrity between generative and derivative flow(s), Mattessich goes on to state that 'the primary musical material within a *generative* flow is derived from the sound and cadence of the words, not from the structural hallmarks of the instrumental track itself'.<sup>41</sup>

Mattessich defines the occurrence of generative flow as often 'unusual' – his case in point being the stratified texture in 'For Free?' – primarily 'because the stylistic nature of hip hop lends itself so readily to derivative flow (which is to say that we as listeners tend to expect rappers to rap in relation to the instrumental track)'.<sup>42</sup> It is this 'unusual' aspect, and the corresponding semantic and emotional meanings that transpire from it (even when fleeting), that opens a world of possibility regarding an emcee's emotional and intellectual intentions when 'straying', even in the least measure, from the 'metrical implications of the

---

<sup>39</sup> See Mattessich, paragraphs 5 and 12.

<sup>40</sup> Mattessich, para. 9.

<sup>41</sup> Mattessich, para. 20.

<sup>42</sup> Mattessich, p. 20.

instrumental track'.<sup>43</sup> Relating these findings back to Saba's act of lyrical performative stylistic allusion during 'P / K', there are clear signs of engagement with Lamar's performative strategy on 'For Free?'. This is particularly notable in Saba's use of non-alignment, creating a similar sense of chaos and disintegrating worldview as evoked by Lamar.

It is important to recognise additional sonic, narratorial, and thematic allusions to Lamar's previous works (*GKMC* and *TPAB*) made by Saba throughout the album including 'P / K' on *Care for Me*,<sup>44</sup> before further detailing this act. These often subtle, implicit nods to Lamar not only signpost his strong artistic influence on the younger artist, but also act as precursive catalysts for Saba's climactic use of lyrical performative stylistic allusion on 'P / K'. Many of the powerful cathartic properties contained on *Care* rely heavily on Saba's multi-layered intertextual engagement with Lamar's previous works, and would be greatly diminished otherwise.

Addressing elements of aesthetic conceit relating sonic elements of *Care* to *TPAB*, both albums are notable for their use of live, jazz-infused instrumentation. Whilst *TPAB* champions this 'jazz-style', encompassing elements of the genre throughout, *Care* employs it sparingly, emphasising elements of live instrumentation over recognised jazz motifs. A sonic lineage regarding this instrumental employment can be identified on both albums, particularly on 'P / K', which stands out for its jazz-inspired, live performative qualities.

Regarding similarities of form, Saba's lyrics on 'P / K' exhibit the framework of a Bildungsroman, relatable to Lamar's day-in-the-life narrative across *GKMC*. As works that rely heavily on singular events (signposted and gradually revealed throughout the projects), *GKMC*'s climactic depiction of a young black male losing a close friend to violence in the

---

<sup>43</sup> Mattessich, para. 7.

<sup>44</sup> Saba, *Care for Me* (Saba Pivot LLC, 2018). Hereafter referred to as *Care*.

penultimate song, ‘SAM’,<sup>45</sup> is mirrored by *Care*, in Saba’s dramatic description of losing his cousin Walt<sup>46</sup> to violence in ‘P / K’ which is, correspondingly, the penultimate song on his album. As a final act of homage, Saba exposes a reliance on Christian faith that immediately follows ‘P / K’’s resolution (notable in the lyrics and title of *Care*’s final track ‘Heaven All Around Me’) that once again echoes Lamar during the final ‘scenes’ of *GKMC*, in his depiction of prayer (the prayer of salvation that takes place at the conclusion of ‘SAM’) as an important precursor for resolution.

These varying sonic, narratorial, and thematic allusions to Lamar’s *GKMC* and *TPAB* culminate in a complex lyrical performative stylistic allusion of Lamar (‘For Free?’) by Saba (‘P / K’). This act (detailed in stages below, beginning with significant alterations to sonic elements of the track that initiates it) can be read as an amalgamation of Saba’s previous allusions that build towards him reaching a similar platform for personal and communal catharsis at the conclusion of *Care* as those reached by Lamar at the conclusions of *GKMC* and *TPAB*.

During the latter stages of ‘P / K’, the instrumentation rapidly fragments into a series of less rhythmical, elaborate, and virtuosic jazz-infused drum rolls. This musical disintegration, in which the strict metrical structure of the song is broken down considerably, echoes the fully stratified, non-rhythmical structure of ‘For Free?’. Simultaneously, a heightening of Saba’s use of performative anxiety (vocal manipulation), in combination with his current use of narrative retrospection, becomes apparent, intensifying the sense of chaos and disruption implied by the backing track. In addition, Saba employs a technique defined by the author here as *listing*, a literary device involving the speaker’s listing of a number of

---

<sup>45</sup> See Chapter Two, pp. 57-61 for further details.

<sup>46</sup> Gabe Allanoff explains further: ‘PROM / KING’ is essentially Saba’s rap eulogy for his cousin Walter, who was murdered on Feb. 8, 2017’. Gabe Allanoff, ‘Why Saba’s ‘PROM / KING’ is the Best Anecdotal Rap Track of the Decade’, 19<sup>th</sup> May 2018 *Gabe Allanoff* <[gabeallanoff.com/music-journalism/2018/5/19/why-sabas-prom-king-is-the-best-anecdotal-rap-track-of-the-decade](http://gabeallanoff.com/music-journalism/2018/5/19/why-sabas-prom-king-is-the-best-anecdotal-rap-track-of-the-decade)> [accessed 14 April, 2022].

relating factors that have contributed towards the sonic, performative, and lyrical chaos reflected in the song. As these techniques combine, they manifest in Saba's increasingly non-aligned flow, which serves performatively as a final straw regarding the speaker's frantic and dangerously spiralling worldview.

In the passage below, Saba anxiously lists important life events – snap-shots relating to his rapidly-developing musical career – that contrast with his decaying worldview and loss of emotional security (themes that mirror Lamar's articulations on 'Conflicted' during and throughout *TPAB*).<sup>47</sup> At the same time, due to a conscious use of narrative signposting and gradual revelation throughout the duration of *Care*, the listener is implicitly aware of an impending sense of tragedy, soon to follow in the form of Saba's loss of his cousin Walt:

Six months pass by, every day we celebrate, every day a better day  
I just dropped Bucket List, Walt about to drop a tape  
Everything goin' perfect, couldn't paint a better way  
PIVOT Gang is on the way  
We just sold out Lincoln Hall, then I went to talk to Sway  
I got back home and got back on it  
'Cause Walt was doing two-a-days  
Sendin' me links to songs that he made  
Kid Cudi, we are not riding no waves, ayy  
Grandma made his plate, we played 2K, that's just a day before<sup>48</sup>

At times nearing complete non-alignment with the instrumental, Saba's lyrical performance is comparable to Lamar's stratified performance on 'For Free?'. This is particularly clear when observing a section of 'For Free?' in which Lamar also employs the listing technique; the inherently repetitive quality of listing enables the speaker to free himself from any strict adherence to rhythmic elements of the track, thus allowing for non-alignment to occur:

...see our friendship based on business  
Pension, more pension, you're pinchin' my percents  
It's been relentless, fuck forgiveness, fuck your feelings

---

<sup>47</sup> See Chapter Two, pp. 72-78 for further details.

<sup>48</sup> Saba, 'PROM / KING', *Genius* <[genius.com/Saba-prom-king-lyrics](https://genius.com/Saba-prom-king-lyrics)> [accessed 18 November 2020].



Fuck your sources, all distortion, if you fuck it's more abortion  
More divorce courts and portion<sup>49</sup>

Here, Lamar's rapid listing of factors that contribute towards his conflicted ideals regarding success and systematic racial oppression in the music industry (in conjunction with his use of non-alignment and the stratified instrumentation of 'For Free?') lead listeners to a similar sense of impending chaos as expressed in 'P / K', potentially heightening their anxiety regarding events on the track, and emphasising both artists' prioritisation of semantic concern over metric implication.

Mattessich observes that 'Lamar's flow [on 'For Free?'] is reminiscent of a spoken word performance [...] his segmentations [...] guided more by semantic concerns and affect than metrical concerns',<sup>50</sup> and this is also true in the quoted section of 'P / K'. In Lamar's case in particular, his lyrical bombardment – with little adherence to metrical structure – echoes the work of poetry groups such as the Watts Prophets and The Last Poets.<sup>51</sup> In Saba's case, his more subtle use of the techniques detailed above – employed sparingly but to devastating effect – harness Lamar's artistic intentions during 'For Free?', drawing context and meaning from them as a vehicle for imparting deeper, more semantically-charged, highly emotional content.

Continuing with Saba's lyrical performative stylistic allusion on 'P / K', anxiety levels indicated by his vocal delivery are raised further as he depicts the final moments of

---

<sup>49</sup> An additional example of Lamar's pioneering employment of the listing and non-alignment technique is observed during his guest appearance on fellow Black Hippies group member Jay Rock's 'King's Dead' (*Black Panther*, Top Dawg, Aftermath, Interscope, 2018). This verse is the clearest definition of listing and non-alignment thus far in Lamar's career, and when perceived aurally, serves as a prime example of its use as what Ohriener terms 'expressive practice'.

Jay Rock, 'King's Dead ft. Kendrick Lamar, Future, and James Blake' <[genius.com/Jay-rock-kendrick-lamar-future-and-james-blake-kings-dead-lyrics](https://genius.com/Jay-rock-kendrick-lamar-future-and-james-blake-kings-dead-lyrics)> [accessed 18 November 2020].

<sup>50</sup> Mattessich, 'This Flow Ain't Free', para. 9.

<sup>51</sup> See 'Part-ES' by The Watt Prophets, which exhibits strong sonic and performative similarities to 'For Free?'. Also see 'When the Revolution Comes', by The Last Poets, for performative resemblances to 'For Free?'. The Watts Prophets, 'Part-ES', *Black Voices: On the Street in Watts* (Ala Records, 1969). The Last Poets, 'When the Revolution Comes', *The Last Poets* (Douglas, 1970).

confusion and desperation before realising Walt has died. At various points touching upon non-alignment, Saba recalls a phone call between himself and Walt's mother, in which a heightened sense of nervousness and frantic urgency is evoked in his performance:

She says, 'Hello, Malik, have you or Squeak  
Talked to my son today? He was just on the train'  
We got in the car but we didn't know where to drive to  
Fuck it, wherever you are, my n\*\*\*a, we'll come and find you...<sup>52</sup>

This is where the ordeal (and Saba's lyrical performative stylistic allusion of Lamar) ends. It is also at this point that the chaotic drum performance concludes, leaving only a distant, sombre piano melody. Listeners are left to dwell on the tragedy that might have befallen Walt, before being confronted with a sobering message, highlighting the perverse regularity of events such as the ones described in 'P / K' (and depicted on *GKMC*) in poverty-stricken sections of predominantly black America:

Just another day in the ghetto  
Oh, the streets bring sorrow  
Can't get up today with their schedule  
I just hope I make it 'til tomorrow  
I just hope I make it 'til tomorrow  
I just hope I make it 'til tomorrow  
I just hope I make it 'til tomorrow

Sung in a reflective tone, in far more linear fashion than the previous lyrical performance, this final gesture once again strongly reflects similar sentiments evoked on 'm.A.A.d city' (and throughout *GKMC*) in terms of narrative and theme.<sup>53</sup> What makes this message especially compelling, however, is the knowledge that its deliverer is the late John Walt, recreated posthumously through autsonic digital quotation. Saba utilises Walt's solemn voice to imply the tremendous impact of his loss, not only on his family and friends but also on the artform he practised.

---

<sup>52</sup> Saba, 'PROM / KING', *Genius*.

<sup>53</sup> Sentiments evoked in this passage relate to another song in Lamar's corpus, 'Chapter 6' (*Section.80*, TDE, 2011). In this track, the speaker makes a similar 'wish' as Walt ('pray that we make it to twenty-one') that, although being less immediate, still carries the same message regarding street-related violence and gang-related death that threatens young black males in America.

It is fitting – when considering Saba’s reliance on sonic, narratorial, conceptual, thematic, and aesthetic allusion to Lamar’s previous works – that the overwhelming sense of resolution achieved by the conclusion of *GKMC* is so closely matched by *Care*. Here, Saba’s transient, nuanced lyrical performative stylistic allusion of Lamar enables an expression of trauma and resolution similar to Kemba’s performance during ‘Daemons’. Like Kemba, resolution here is akin to an act of self-cleansing, an effective renouncement of recollected, recreated, and reinvented pain. As a mode of catharsis, this act is rarely achieved to such heightened effect in the form of a rap album as it is on *GKMC* and *Care*.

The rarity of this act, even though it can be demonstrably successful for emotional evocation and audience engagement, is testament to its extreme difficulty. This is recognised by Gabe Allanof, who notes that Lamar’s influence on Saba in particular serves to reinforce the younger artist’s ability: ‘Kendrick is so unprecedentedly talented that resembling him is a feat in itself’.<sup>54</sup> In this way, Saba’s successful employment of Lamar’s performative technique(s), and the heartfelt sense of resolution he achieves through its complex execution (for both himself and his audience), can be viewed as rite of passage of sorts, not only regarding artistic expression, but also in terms of self-positioning.

Saba’s allusion to Lamar’s ground-breaking employment of non-alignment of flow – particularly when noted for its prioritisation of semantic concern over metrical adherence – sheds light on other areas of rap associated with this understanding. The next section of this chapter will continue to concentrate on lyrical performative stylistic allusion in rap, specifically regarding aspects of non-alignment and performative adaptation in the lyrical performances of Earl Sweatshirt, MIKE, and Navy Blue. Such techniques prioritise semantic

---

<sup>54</sup> Allanof further observes Saba’s musical resemblances to Lamar’s previous work(s) here: Gabe Allanof, ‘Why Saba’s “PROM / KING” is the Best Anecdotal Rap Track of the Decade’, *GabeAllanof*, 19<sup>th</sup> May 2018 <[gabeallanoff.com/music-journalism/2018/5/19/why-sabas-prom-king-is-the-best-anecdotal-rap-track-of-the-decade](http://gabeallanoff.com/music-journalism/2018/5/19/why-sabas-prom-king-is-the-best-anecdotal-rap-track-of-the-decade)> [accessed 24 September 2020].

and metaphysical concerns over metrical or technical adherence, and are employed as methods of expressing personal trauma. In the final section, by using a recent example of commercial rap artist JAY-Z's engagement with lyrical performative stylistic allusion (in an act of non-alignment similarly rooted in the expression of trauma), this chapter will show how prioritising semantic concerns over metrical performance is becoming more prevalent throughout modern rap practice.

### SECTION THREE

#### **'Then Came the Hurt':<sup>55</sup> Expressing Trauma in Rap through Lyrical Performative Stylistic Allusion**

Developments in post-millennial rap lyricism have seen a growing number of emerging and established artists (particularly in underground subgenres) shift performative priority away from technical, structural, and metric aspects of the discipline, and towards semantic, metaphysical, and emotional concerns. In line with Ohriner's and, particularly, Mattessich's findings on this matter ('the markedness of generative flow creates a specificity of meaning that requires a more robust analysis in order to understand fully, it impels us to dive into the semantics of the text'),<sup>56</sup> key practitioners within this movement exhibit a clear understanding of the potential for performative strategy – especially when engaging with non-alignment, or errancy in rap flow – as conscious or subconscious expression of heightened emotion. A leader in this field is Earl Sweatshirt.<sup>57</sup>

---

<sup>55</sup> MIKE, 'Like My Mama Ft. Navy Blue', *War in my Pen* (10K, 2018).

<sup>56</sup> Mattessich, 'This Flow Ain't Free', para. 22.

<sup>57</sup> Hereafter referred to as Earl.

Contrary to artists such as Lamar and Saba, whose consistent focus on antiphony (a call-and-response duality between individual and communal, speaker and audience) remains part of an overall aim of *communal* catharsis and commercial accessibility, Earl's focus when engaging with music is driven by a *singular* requirement, one of pathos and personal resolution: Earl's music 'is not explicitly shiny or for sale – the goal of it isn't to sell, it's to get it off. Rap helps me figure out life, it's the medium I use to sort life out'.<sup>58</sup> As part of this objective, Earl typifies many aesthetic and thematic qualities observed in traditional underground rap, evidenced by his lo-fi, gritty soundscapes, convoluted lyrical content, raw vocal takes, and use of non-alignment. Using these conditions to disrupt any singular readings of his work and distance himself from stereotypical intrageneric expectancies, Earl has pioneered an encompassing performative strategy defined here as *performative quasi-consciousness*.

As there is no specific term for (or definition of) this phenomenon in current academic literature, the term 'performative quasi-consciousness' has been coined to refer to a style of vocal delivery in rap that mimics the semi-conscious properties of near-sleep conversation,<sup>59</sup> and in which a speaker's performances are deliberately underwhelmed and rhythmically non-linear, and lyrics are intentionally under-pronounced, as a means of shifting priority from traditional expectancies of rap performance such as a strict rhythmical (or metrical) adherence and clearly enunciated vocal delivery.<sup>60</sup> As will be exemplified below,

---

<sup>58</sup> Lala, '5 Things We Learned from Earl Sweatshirt's Talk With His Mother at MOCA in L.A', *Billboard*, 12<sup>th</sup> August 2019 <[billboard.com/music/rb-hip-hop/5-things-we-learned-from-earl-sweatshirts-talk-with-his-mother-at-8545708/](https://www.billboard.com/music/rb-hip-hop/5-things-we-learned-from-earl-sweatshirts-talk-with-his-mother-at-8545708/)> [accessed 5<sup>th</sup> April, 2022].

<sup>59</sup> Incidentally, Lamar engages with this performative strategy on 'Growing Apart Ft. Jhené Aiko' (*Overly Dedicated*, Top Dawg, 2010). Lamar's use of the strategy, however, is distanced from Earl and other users of performative quasi-consciousness, mainly due to his coherent narrative throughout the song. Performative quasi-consciousness is best defined when the author uses deeply symbolic references that supersede linear narratological intentions, in conjunction with ineffable gestures, and non-alignment.

<sup>60</sup> This definition should not be confused with other forms of performative strategy practiced by underground rap artists such as KA, whose uniquely calm, understated vocal delivery – whilst being highly symbolic and allusive – rarely contains elements of non-alignment and is clearly articulated. See Elias Leight's 'Ka: How New York MC Makes Understated Rap Minimalism', *Rolling Stone*, 31<sup>st</sup> August 2016 <[rollingstone.com/music/music-news/ka-how-new-york-mc-makes-understated-rap-minimalism-249331/](https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/ka-how-new-york-mc-makes-understated-rap-minimalism-249331/)> [accessed 29 March 2022].

this strategy is predominantly employed in order to prioritise semantic, symbolic and emotional meaning in the works.

An early empirical reading of an important aspect of performative quasi-consciousness in rap is provided in Paul Edwards's *How to Rap*, in which the established underground artist Evidence details his prioritisation of emotion – even when it is to the detriment of displaying technical ability – in his vocal recordings: 'If I like a take [vocal recording] I did and I'm like, "Damn, the emotion was there but the pocket wasn't," then I'll just go in and move [digitally edit] one part a little bit here and keep the take, because I like the way I did it. It's more about emotion than it is anything else'.<sup>61</sup> Even whilst admittedly making attempts to 'fix' his work in post-production (to fit the 'pocket'), Evidence's admittance that he prioritises emotion over 'anything else' acts as an early indicator of a recent proliferation in the employment of this ideal in the work of his underground contemporaries.

Gaining a theoretical vantage of this prioritisation of emotion during rap performance – especially when employed to heightened effect by artists such as Earl – requires an understanding of Julia Kristeva's work on semiotic analysis, particularly when registering her observations of Freud's theory of the non-logical language of dreams.<sup>62</sup> Kristeva's writing on semianalysis, and the semiotic analysis of a poetic work concerning 'the language of drives, erotic impulses [...] bodily rhythms and movements',<sup>63</sup> reveals a requirement that the author

---

<sup>61</sup> Edwards, *How to Rap*, p. 156.

<sup>62</sup> In a 1994 conversation with Sergio Benvenuto, Kristeva discussed Freud's praxis regarding language and the unconscious mind: 'For Freud, language remains in the sphere of the preconscious. Nevertheless, language possesses the power to go beyond consciousness because it is situated between consciousness and the unconscious'. She proceeded to note that Freud's ideas of 'language as the lever of the cure, and the unconscious assimilated to language, are all elements of *The Interpretation of Dreams*'. Of particular significance to this thesis, and the following analysis of Earl's 'Shattered Dreams', is Kristeva's further observation that 'Freud himself suggested [...] there is a rhetoric and a grammar of dreams', and that 'in order for consciousness to be dominated by the unconscious, the model of the unconscious itself will be ever more influenced by linguistic consciousness'. See Sergio Benvenuto, 'Freudian Models of Language: A Conversation', *European Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 3 (1997) <[psychomedia.it/jep/number3-4/kristeng.htm](http://psychomedia.it/jep/number3-4/kristeng.htm)> [accessed 15 April 2022].

<sup>63</sup> Graham Allen, 'Transposition', *Intertextuality* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 47-49.

be viewed as ‘split subject’, whose writing exhibits a duality of conscious and subconscious intentions: ‘reason and desire [...] the rational and the irrational [...] the communicable and the incommunicable’ (47).

In line with Kristeva’s findings, the inhabited semi-conscious state that artists such as Earl have been known to perform in – strengthened by dream-like, symbolic, and semantically-concerned qualities in their lyrics – helps them to access what Kristeva terms a ‘fluidity of self’ (49). Described as a concept of subject awareness lost almost entirely at infancy, in the wake of an individual entering ‘the social world, governed as it is, by monological notions of language’ (48), the fluidity of self lies in the subconscious, and ‘bubbles up in poetic language, disturbing the monologic order of the symbolic field’, revealed ‘through poetics in the form of ‘pre-symbolic drives’, ‘impulses’, and ‘bodily pulsions (rhythms and movements)’ (48).

Although it is arguably impossible to measure artists’ awareness of their own subconsciousness, and/or what depths of this altered state they are able to harness through performance, as will be noted shortly, it is revealing how much emphasis Earl places on elements of the dream-like semantic qualities of his lyrical output, and aspects of the ‘incommunicable’ in his delivery. When registering Kristeva’s preoccupation with these areas during poetic analysis, Earl’s deliberate attempts to draw out these elements (as with his contemporaries who engage in lyrical performative stylistic allusion of him) are clear.

With aspects of the unconscious and incommunicable in mind, Paul Gilroy’s ‘politics of transfiguration’, and ‘the slave sublime’<sup>64</sup> become apparent as an additional artistic driving force behind the employment of performative quasi-consciousness. These politics regard a history of black musical expression in America being a vehicle for the articulation of ‘phatic and ineffable’ elements of ‘racial terror’ endured by African Americans ‘repeatedly in the

---

<sup>64</sup> Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Verso: London, 1999), p. 37.

nineteenth-century' (73-74).<sup>65</sup> Often marked by utterances beyond the remit of literary analysis, signposting an implicit focus on desire, impulse, and sonic resonance, Gilroy observes these articulations as 'a discursive mode of communication [that], though by no means literal[ly], can be grasped through what is said, shouted, screamed, or sung' (37). This notion relates to Graham Allen's observation of Bakhtin's early work on the duality of language, specifically that 'the single word "well" or "so", or sounds such as "oohh", lacking in meaning for other varieties of linguistics, can possess many specific meanings when we look at the concrete situation between addresser and addressee in which they are uttered'.<sup>66</sup>

Viewing American black music's traditional accessing of the subconscious as a way to address an 'unsayability' contained within the roots of the slave experience, Earl and his rap contemporaries employ performative quasi-consciousness to evoke similar expressions in previous black music genres, whilst accessing (in part) an *ancestral* fluidity of self. This enables a rearticulation of the 'conspicuous power of the slave sublime' effected 'on a lower frequency where it is played, danced, and acted, as well as sung, and sung about' rather than documented at purely literary level, 'because words [...] will never be enough to communicate its unsayable claims to truth'.<sup>67</sup>

This historical evocation – one that certainly relates to rap's fundamental reliance upon intertextuality and Signifyin(g) as part of a deeply woven, integral form of deference regarding black musical expression and rhetorical traditions – is reflected by Earl in his understanding of the ancestral fluidity contained within its language:

Rap music is slave music, number one. It's the modern day iteration of that. Slave communication had to be encrypted. You gotta code. If I understand it, then it's like teaching: if I understand a subject, even if you don't know it off the bat, I can teach it to you, because I can paint this picture very clearly if I know what I'm saying. You

---

<sup>65</sup> Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, pp. 73-74.

<sup>66</sup> Allen, *Intertextuality*, p. 19.

<sup>67</sup> Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, p. 37.



know what I'm saying? Writing is a very meticulous process for me. I'm cracking my own code'.<sup>68</sup>

Understanding his work through the dual lens of semianalysis and politics of transfiguration/aspects of the slave sublime, an example of Earl's employment of performative quasi-consciousness during the highly intertextual 'Shattered Dreams' (2018)<sup>69</sup> will now be explored, before detailing a new wave of artists' lyrical performative stylistic allusion of it. 'Shattered Dreams' illustrates modern rap's continually evolving relationship with vulnerability, and uses intertextuality and literary allusion in the search for a personal resolution to psychological trauma.

---

<sup>68</sup> Ariel LeBeau, 'Here's what went Down at Earl Sweatshirt's Forum at MOCA' , *Highsnobiety*, (2020) <[highsnobiety.com/p/earl-sweatshirt-moca-discussion-recap/](https://highsnobiety.com/p/earl-sweatshirt-moca-discussion-recap/)> [accessed 1 April 2022].

A form of lyrical analysis of rap that prioritises performative and semantic concern is overdue in hip hop studies, and is ripe for exploration in other areas of (predominantly) black music studies, too. As Gilroy states: 'foregrounding the history of black music making [...] requires a different register of analytic concepts. This demand is amplified by the need to make sense of musical performances in which identity is fleetingly experienced in the most intensive ways and sometimes socially reproduced by means of neglected modes of signifying practice like mimesis, gesture, kinesis, and costume. Antiphony (call and response) is the principal formal feature of these musical traditions. It has come to be seen as bridge from music into other modes of cultural expression, supplying, along with improvisation, montage, and dramaturgy, the hermeneutic keys to the full medley of black artistic practices'. This chapter aims to answer (in part) Gilroy's calls for a different register of analysis regarding rap lyrics in hip hop studies. See Gilroy, 'Jewels Brought from Bondage': Black Music and the Politics of Authenticity', in *Black Atlantic*, p. 78.

<sup>69</sup> Earl's level of performative strategy regarding performative quasi-consciousness varies from song to song, and project to project. As 'Shattered Dreams' and other songs such as 'The Mint Ft. Navy Blue' and 'Peanut' from the containing album, *Some Rap Songs*, are particularly marked by this strategy, this thesis concentrates on *Some Rap Songs*, and the evident influence this project has had on emerging artists such as MIKE and Navy Blue. See Earl Sweatshirt, 'Shattered Dreams', *Some Rap Songs* (Tan Cressida, Columbia, 2018).

## SECTION FOUR

### **‘It’s a Feeling’: Instances of Intertextuality, Allusion, and Performative Quasi-Consciousness in Earl Sweatshirt’s ‘Shattered Dreams’**

‘Shattered Dreams’ begins with an autsonic quotation of James Baldwin’s 1962 lecture, *The Artist’s Struggle for Integrity*,<sup>70</sup> a truncated digital snapshot of Baldwin’s voice (‘imprecise words’) triggered in the silence before music or lyric begins. Taken purely on merit as symbolic allusion to an unknown speaker, this sample serves to demonstrate an ongoing concern with ambiguity and obscurity in Earl’s music that often contextually eludes the listener, whilst remaining one of its most alluring aspects.<sup>71</sup> However, the proactive listener who investigates the allusion is rewarded by the discovery that ‘imprecise words’ relates to Baldwin’s notion of ‘a kind of distrust’ of words regarding their imprecision, or inaccuracy when defining broad, highly subjective, and/or readily manipulatable subject matter. In the introduction to his lecture, Baldwin lists a number of terms (‘integrity’, ‘peace-loving’, ‘nobility’, ‘war-like’) that demonstrate his point, before concluding: ‘and yet, one’s

---

<sup>70</sup> During Earl’s quotation of Baldwin, the sound of crackling vinyl can be heard. This relates to Justin Williams’s understanding that the informed listener (especially someone familiar with the art of digital sampling in hip hop music) will recognise this ‘vinyl hiss’ as a form of ‘textual signalling that some of the song has its roots elsewhere, that elements have been borrowed’ – in Earl’s case, the Baldwin sample most likely deriving from a vinyl recording of Baldwin’s lecture.

James Baldwin, ‘The Artist’s Struggle for Integrity’ (Full Recording), *The Struggle*, New York, 1963, 24<sup>th</sup> July 2015 <[youtube.com/watch?v=dU0g5fAA2QY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dU0g5fAA2QY)> [accessed 11 July 2022].

See Justin Williams, ‘Introduction’, in *Rhymin’ and Stealin’: Musical Borrowing in Hip Hop* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2013), p. 9.

<sup>71</sup> In ‘Grief’, a song taken from *I Don’t Like Shit, I Don’t Go Outside* (Tan Cressida, Columbia, 2015), Earl signals his awareness of the highly subjective, personal, and near-impenetrable aspects of his work: ‘I’m a hard act to follow [...] like it or not, when it drop, bet he gotta listen’. Here, his intention of making music that cannot traditionally be comprehended as part of a collective experience of participation is clear, but what is also revealed is his acute awareness that it is these elements of his work that make him intriguing: the darker, more distant, disassociated, and alien aspects of Sweatshirt’s music attract a listenership.

compelled to recognize, that all these imprecise words are kind of attempts, made by us all to get to something which *is* real, and which lives *behind* the words'.<sup>72</sup>

Earl's drawing upon Baldwin's statement to reflect a similar sentiment – through brief but effective quotation – evokes Gilroy's previous observations of the black artists' traditional attempts to move beyond the word, in order to express the 'ineffable', or 'unsayable' in relation to the articulation of terms often too broad or emotionally complex to be easily defined. Framing his song to fit around (and within) conceptual parameters set by Baldwin, in his immediate affirmation of the 'imprecise words' quotation ('yeah'<sup>73</sup>), Earl prepares the ground for a deeply symbolic lyrical journey, even before the main musical sample of 'Shattered Dreams' begins.

Earl engages in a long-established tradition of digital sampling in hip hop to create 'Shattered Dreams', utilising the beginning section of a B-side release by funk band The Endeavors (1970) to create his musical backdrop.<sup>74</sup> In order to fit his unique musical requirements, however, Earl somewhat reinterprets this tradition, choosing to overtly signpost the artistic legacy he taps into (as opposed to implicitly signalling this lineage, a more common method of sampling in rap)<sup>75</sup> by naming his song after the sample from which it derives ('Shattered Dreams' is also the title of The Endeavour's B-side).

---

<sup>72</sup> James Baldwin, 'The Artist's Struggle for Integrity'.

<sup>73</sup> Earl Sweatshirt, 'Shattered Dreams' *Genius* <[genius.com/15949949](https://genius.com/15949949)> [accessed 16 April 2022].

<sup>74</sup> The Endeavours, 'Shattered Dreams' (Nashville, TX, Stop Records Inc., 1970).

<sup>75</sup> Drawing veiled attention to one's artistic influences by implicitly revealing, or subtly obscuring, one's sampling origins is a long-established practice in rap. As Williams notes, 'hip-hop songs can textually signal their borrowing overtly or not do so, and both approaches can be manifested in a number of ways'. One of hip hop's earliest methods of getting ahead of one's competition was for DJs to deliberately obscure the origin of a vinyl record being played, as noted by DJ Kool Herc: 'My father said, "hide the name of your records because that's how you get your rep" [...] you don't want the same people to have your same record down the block'. Regarding Herc's comments, Jeff Chang observes this practice as 'one source of hip-hop's competitive ethic and beat-this aesthetic'. In Earl's case, in 'Shattered Dreams', his overt spotlighting of his borrowing origins is unusual; in contrast somewhat with traditional forms of sampling in rap music, and is presumably part of a deliberate attempt to further consolidate his artistic vision for the song. See Williams, *Rhyming and Stealin'*, p. 9; Jeff Chang, 'Making a Name: How DJ Kool Herc Lost his Accent and Started Hip Hop', in *Can't Stop Won't Stop: History of the Hip-Hop Generation* (London: Random House, 2007), p. 79.

Here, in addition to using the sample to access a musical ancestry, the vocal harmony contained within it (the word ‘dream’, looped and repeated to an elongated and hypnotic effect throughout the work) serves to contextualise the lyrical content soon to follow, emphasising a dream-like, symbolic vision for the song. Echoing a previous thematic sentiment expressed by The Endeavors on the original, this layered act of overt allusion (in conjunction with the implicit quotation of Baldwin) can be seen as a kind of sonic, uttered, and ideological breadcrumb trail, set out from the beginning of the piece, that – when registered by the proactive listener – provides a fuller, more rounded understanding of Earl’s artistic intentions.

In typical strategic fashion regarding his fixation with artistic ambiguity, Earl deliberately manipulates The Endeavor’s sample to contrast with the rhythmic structure of the original. Earl’s ‘version’ of the sample is triggered to recur at intervals irregular to The Endeavor’s original, gesturing towards an oppositional approach to traditional or widely recognised interpretations of metric time structures in most rap performances. Contesting existing generic expectancies of rap in this way, Earl’s errant triggering of The Endeavor’s sample works in tandem with his performative strategy of performative quasi-consciousness (detailed below). Through his irregular programming, Earl jars the listener into recognising the importance of non-rhythmical or non-linear elements of the track, in preparation for his subsequent semantically-charged, deeply symbolic lyrical performance.

Establishing a backdrop such as this, he creates a soundscape unique to his own rhyme scheme: one that remains exclusively attributable to his style of presentation, readily allowing for the employment of non-alignment in his vocal performance. In what follows, Earl veers between rap and spoken word delivery. Whilst evoking qualities of the spoken

---

word, however, his esoteric ability to remain rhythmically inclined during the song once again serves to keep his work unmistakably rap at its core.

Using intertextuality, allusion, digital quotation, and a quasi-conscious performative strategy as a platform for his impending lyrics, Earl embarks on a cyclic, hallucinogenic, and semantically-driven self-inquiry, always remaining steadfast to the concept of ambiguity as the nucleus of his artistic vision. The first two stanzas of ‘Shattered Dreams’ are also repeated at the conclusion of the song, serving as a refrain:

Yeah, chief, get it ‘cause we mean it  
Ease up, free smokin’, n\*\*\*s need it  
Mask off, mask on, we trick-or-treatin’  
Back off, stand-offish and anaemic

Yeah, my n\*\*\*a Ish, told ‘em it’s a feelin’  
Blast off, buckshot into my ceilin’  
Why ain’t nobody tell me I was bleedin’?  
Please, nobody pinch me out this dream<sup>76</sup>

Delivered amidst an almost sedate, deliberately underwhelming and rhythmically non-aligned vocal performance, reflecting the altered rhythmic properties of the instrumental and almost mirroring the elongated vocal harmony contained within it (‘dreams’), Earl’s wave-like patterns of speech are image-heavy and symbolic. Using a personally referential and highly codified string of chain-rhymes (‘mean it’, ‘need it’, ‘treatin’’, ‘aneamic’/‘mask off’, ‘back off’, ‘blast off’) to detail flashpoints in an extremely fragmented narrative, Earl reinforces a thematic concern with the notion of dreaming (‘Please, nobody pinch me out this dream’).

Whilst any singular meaning is hard to draw from the above passage (mainly due to the intentionally obscure and personal nature of the work: a common analytical dilemma relevant to much of Earl’s corpus), a specific kind of jeopardy is undeniably present. Lines

---

<sup>76</sup> Earl Sweatshirt, ‘Shattered Dreams’.

such as ‘Back off, stand-offish and anaemic’ suggest the speaker’s struggle with social interaction, isolation, personal neglect, and mental and/or physical health decline, whilst the passage ‘Blast off, buckshot into my ceilin’/Why ain’t nobody tell me I was bleedin’?’ gestures towards a violent event involving a firearm, even hinting that it might be a self-inflicted injury.

Through the clouded abstraction and obscurity, however, a clear act of allusionistic quotation (non-rhythmic) occurring at line five does go some way towards indicating Earl’s artistic intentions. Alluding to a music piece released by alternative underground rap duo Shabazz Palaces, entitled ‘Are you... Can you... Were you? (Felt)’ (2011),<sup>77</sup> Earl quotes a lyric by Ishmael Butler (formerly a member of influential rap group Digable Planets), in which Butler repeatedly states ‘it’s a feeling’ as part of his vocal introduction to the song. Referring to the artist by name (‘Ish told ‘em it’s a feelin’), Earl shares his recognition of Butler’s vision for ‘Can You...’, one that extols a similar artistic objective: to express a sense, or feeling (during musical performance), that champions semantic and emotive evocation over rhythmic and metrical concerns.

Viewing this act through the politics of transfiguration, Gilroy’s call for a ‘different register of analytic concepts’<sup>78</sup> when addressing black artistic expression is particularly important here. Observing Earl’s allusive exchange with Butler during his ‘musical performance’ as an attempt to establish an ‘identity [...] fleetingly experienced in the most intensive ways’, ‘reproduced by means’ of what Gilroy terms ‘neglected modes of signifying practice like mimesis, gesture, kenesis and costume’ (78), it can be argued that Earl’s borrowing from Butler’s previously stressed ideology on ‘Can You...’ implicitly signifies his

---

<sup>77</sup> Shabazz Palaces, ‘Are you... Can you... Were you? (Felt)’, *Black Up* (Sub Pop, 2011).

<sup>78</sup> Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, p. 78.

intention to use ‘Shattered Dreams’ as an expressive personal reminder of a feeling pertaining to previous emotional trauma.

Earl’s focus on evoking ‘a feelin’ during ‘Shattered Dreams’ goes some way towards summarising an overall approach to his musical creation, one that relates to an earlier admittance of using rap to help ‘figure out life, it’s the medium I use to sort life out’.<sup>79</sup> In this way, Earl uses the medium of rap to touch upon a raw experiential nerve, recorded in such a deeply personal way that he is able repeatedly to access its effect (if only briefly) on each repetition of the song.

Use of performative quasi-consciousness as a performative strategy in emerging rap circles has become increasingly common. As will be shown in the following section, in the lyrics of MIKE and Navy Blue during their lyrical performative stylistic allusion of Earl on ‘Like My Mama’ (2018),<sup>80</sup> Earl’s pioneering use of his performance(s) for such distinctly individual purposes has been recognised by his contemporaries as a highly effective means of achieving resolution to various forms of personal trauma.

## SECTION FIVE

### **Lyrical Performative Stylistic Allusion in the Lyrics of MIKE and Navy Blue**

During their brief but impactful musical careers, both MIKE and Navy Blue<sup>81</sup> have, like Earl, demonstrated a desire to prioritise ‘emotion’ over ‘anything else’.<sup>82</sup> Often, their lyrical content points to a keen understanding of rap’s capacity for healing, and the utilisation of its

---

<sup>79</sup> Lala, ‘5 Things We Learned from Earl Sweatshirt’s Talk With His Mother at MOCA in L.A.’.

<sup>80</sup> Mike and Navy Blue, ‘Like My Mama’, *War in my Pen* (10K, 2018).

<sup>81</sup> Hereafter referred to as Navy.

<sup>82</sup> Edwards, *How to Rap*, p. 156.

artistic properties for personal catharsis, particularly when attempting to achieve resolution to trauma. In the lyrics quoted later in this section, which are from ‘Like My Mama’ (a collaborative effort by MIKE and Navy), these concerns are clearly demonstrated. These lyrics are also a striking example of MIKE’s and Navy’s lyrical performative stylistic allusion of Earl’s performative quasi-consciousness technique.

Like much of Earl’s musical output, ‘Like My Mama’ reflects lo-fi, abstract, and unpolished aesthetics often deemed prerequisites of underground rap. The track begins with a short monologue, presented anonymously, and positioned low enough in the mix to keep the words indecipherable. This is performed alongside an obscure (undisclosed) and significantly slowed down digital music sample. During this, MIKE uses a vocal technique typical to many of his recordings (and rap music in general), in which he repeats an utterance (‘uh’) that signals not only his introduction to the song, but also suggests his deep artistic immersion within the track and emotional investment in his current performance. Whilst MIKE’s use of this expression – not explicatory, without linguistic definition – signifies an engagement with Gilroy’s politics of transfiguration and the slave sublime, his utterance and introductory strategy also falls into the ‘incommunicable’ aspects of poetic language prioritised by Kristeva during semianalysis.<sup>83</sup>

In relation to this utterance, Graham Allen’s observations of Bakhtin’s understanding of the plurality of language once again becomes highly significant, particularly in his noting that ‘sounds such as “oohh”, lacking in meaning for other varieties of linguistics, can possess many specific meanings when we look at the concrete situation between addresser and addressee in which they are uttered’.<sup>84</sup> Here, through his use of a comparable expression, MIKE’s utterance acts as an initial signal, a kind of calling card to the informed rap listener,

---

<sup>83</sup> Allen, ‘Transposition’, in *Intertextuality*, p. 47.

<sup>84</sup> Allen, *Intertextuality*, p. 19.



regarding his affiliation with a form of hip hop lyricism that prioritises semantic elements contained in the work. After establishing his intentions in this way, MIKE begins his verse:

If you really didn't need it, I denied it  
Couldn't see you n\*\*\*as sleeping, I was grinding  
Had the crib in Piccadilly, move my mind mint  
Man, I say you n\*\*\*as silly, different timing  
But there's a n\*\*\*a fucking with me, I should dodge him  
I remember back in Philly, eating ramen  
My head be clouded in the city, hard to process  
They wanna see me in the city with the mob ment'  
Had me counting every penny, had the goblet  
I stay around, these n\*\*\*as envy, I'm the proudest  
Chopped it with my brother living, he an outlet  
My success just make 'em livid 'cause they doubted<sup>85</sup>

Strikingly clear throughout MIKE's typically introspective, highly symbolic, structurally repetitive, and personally referential lyrics on 'Like My Mama' is his engagement with performative quasi-consciousness. Like Earl on 'Shattered Dreams', MIKE's vocal delivery exhibits a near-sleep quality,<sup>86</sup> leaning towards a sedate, deliberately submersed, and non-linear rhythmic performance that stresses the listeners' focus on semantic and emotional concerns, rather than concentrating on technical aspects of delivery.

Due to the ambiguous nature of MIKE's lyrics (as with Earl's verse on 'Shattered Dreams'), analytical evidence suggesting he utilises this technique in an attempt to achieve the same objectives as Earl is inconclusive. However, similarly to Earl's allusion to 'a feelin'' during 'Shattered Dreams', MIKE's nod towards a prioritisation of 'feelings' on 'Like My Mama' suggests a common artistic goal. This objective is observed in the concluding lines of the verse:<sup>87</sup>

---

<sup>85</sup> MIKE, 'Like My Mama Ft. Navy Blue', *Genius* <[genius.com/Mike-like-my-mama-lyrics](https://genius.com/Mike-like-my-mama-lyrics)> [accessed 16 April 2022].

<sup>86</sup> MIKE is described by one contributor to the *Genius* website as delivering 'woozy, mumbly flows and personal rhymes over abstract, lo-fi production' on 'Like My Mama's' containing album, *War in My Pen*. See <[genius.com/albums/Mike/War-in-my-pen](https://genius.com/albums/Mike/War-in-my-pen)> [accessed 28 April 2022].

<sup>87</sup> Categorised on Genius.com as a 'chorus' for the song.

My papa hate to see me sitting, see me slouching  
Like my mama, in my feelings, I be drowning  
I be drowning, see me sitting, see me slouching  
Like my mama, in my feelings, I be drowning

Repeating a maternally influenced inclination towards ‘drowning’ in his own ‘feelings’, MIKE’s self-conscious revelation denotes an awareness of, and sensitivity to, emotional and semantic elements of musical expression in the same vein as Earl.

Whilst MIKE’s overall use of performance on ‘Like My Mama’ is only suggestive of his prioritising personal catharsis, Navy’s subsequent verse leaves the listener in no doubt as to his specific use of rap performance for this goal. Following suit with MIKE’s lyrical performative stylistic allusion of Earl’s technique, Navy employs performative quasi-consciousness in the guise of an overtly calm vocal presence, under-pronounced delivery, and reliance on symbolism and semantics, in what is a more clear-cut attempt at reaching personal catharsis than can be read in MIKE’s performance. Leading on from MIKE’s admittance to being overwhelmed by emotional aspects of his life, Navy affirms a similar oversensitivity through his introductory statement on the track: ‘I be drowning, yeah, yeah.’

What follows during Navy’s subsequent verse is an introspective character study and exploration of familial ties, leading to an outpouring of heightened emotion relatively rare in recorded rap vocals. Below are the initial lines of the verse:

All this drama never sit straight with me  
When I’m alone, know my sister’ll miss me  
All I’ve known is the scars that I’ve hidden  
Ten days strong, now I’m lost, keep wishing  
Now I’m a ball ‘cause my pop was in prison<sup>88</sup>

Here, in addition to projecting a sense of empathy onto his sibling (in part inspired by his own current isolation: ‘When I’m alone, know my sister’ll miss me’), the speaker’s revelation

---

<sup>88</sup> Navy Blue, ‘Like My Mama’.

of his father's imprisonment during a transitional period in his life – some twenty-five years after Nas detailed comparable circumstances on songs such as 'One Love' – brings to mind Sohail Daulatzai's ideas on the 'carceral imagination' often inherent in the African American male experience.<sup>89</sup>

Continuing his exploration of traumatic events pertaining to familial bonds, the speaker proceeds to paint a vivid picture of grief:

It was all in the words and the cards that were dealt  
When the car hit the curb, brother ain't around  
Papa in the wall, Michael in the ground  
My father pray I check, my wrist is green and brown  
Listen here, the sound, brothers in the struggle

Acknowledging the loss of his brother 'when the car hit the curb' – a situation compounded by his father's ongoing incarceration ('Papa in the wall') – the speaker delves deep into the psychological effects of personal trauma, before opening these experiences up as part of a universal gesture towards the African American male experience ('brothers in the struggle').

Of particular note here is the initial line 'It was all in the words and the cards that were dealt', in which it seems that the speaker has faith in the power of words (and music) to change an individual's perspective of real-world events. Combined with the speaker's belief in fate (in their metaphorical gesture towards tarot, or playing 'cards that were dealt'), this idea of the power of words to cause a kind of cathartic healing sharpens the final line of the passage ('Listen here, the sound, brothers in the struggle'), which provides context for Navy's upcoming expression of emotion during the final lines of the piece.

Depicting his family unit's maintaining of a great deal of resilience in the face of tragedy and absence, Navy concludes his verse:

Glad we took a different route, mama made a home  
Father in a different house, we was in a drought  
Had to make it work, had to make it work  
When my brother passed, then came the hurt

---

<sup>89</sup> See Chapter One, p. 38 (footnote 50), and p. 43.

Then came the hurt, then came the-  
Had to make it work, had to make it work  
Then came the hurt, then came the hurt  
Then came the-, and then came the hurt  
Yeah, then came the hurt

In opposition to MIKE's admittance to 'drowning' in his own feelings in relation to familial bonds (as discussed at the beginning of 'Like My Mama'), and in contrast to his affirmation of this statement at the beginning of his own performance ('I be drowning'), Navy now notes the speaker's current struggle – his family torn apart by incarceration and untimely loss – as 'a drought', a situation bereft of emotional nourishment, in which there is nothing left for them to do but 'make it work'.

Reaching the crux of his narrative, Navy demonstrates in an extremely clear manner how lyrical performative stylistic allusion aids him in reaching a personal form of catharsis. Using the past tense to enable retrospection – in conjunction with a calm, intimate delivery typical of performative quasi-consciousness – to consolidate his introspective narrative ('had to make it work'), Navy now reiterates highly emotional, semantically charged areas of his verse, making their repetition seem more like a kind of mantra, a coping mechanism for enduring times of struggle, than an explanation of events.

Emerging as a slant-rhyming couplet of repeated phrases ('Had to make it work, had to make it work/Then came the hurt, then came the hurt'), this repetition acts as emotional trigger for Navy, its emotional meaning audibly overwhelming him, especially when contextualised by the one-off interjection of the line 'When my brother passed'. In repeating this mantra, especially 'then came the hurt', Navy emphasises the wave-like sense of loss, transition, change, hardship, and grief he has symbolically built towards throughout his performance. This act is exacted so specifically, in fact, that he is twice unable to continue his vocal delivery due to being emotionally overwhelmed. Here, likenesses can be drawn between Navy's vocal delivery and techniques utilised by Kendrick Lamar, J.I.D., Kemba,

and Saba, in their employment of a wavering voice tone and a heightened sense of anxiety in their performances. However, it is vital to note the difference between these intentionally communal acts of antiphony and Navy's raw and apparently unmasked exposition of personal emotional vulnerability.

In Navy's outpouring, a sense of emotion is not only implied, but reached, and overtly displayed. In this way, he differs from Lamar, and the other performers discussed in this chapter, in his using a performative platform for highly personal reasons. Whilst other artists will portray an emotion, primarily to heighten the listeners' experience, Navy taps into what seems real emotion, apparently reaching a purer, more singular form of personal catharsis. When applying the connotations of Navy's use of the term 'hurt' to Earl's previous focus on 'feelin'' during 'Shattered Dreams', this strategy leads back to Earl's notion of using rap 'to get it off. Rap helps me figure out life, it's the medium I use to sort life out'.<sup>90</sup> Navy's affiliation with Earl's strategy is solidified by statements made in further releases such as 'Certainty' (2020) ('wasn't said but is felt'), and 'Alignment' (2020) ('I write this shit in retrospect and catch a vibe, and cry alone as I digress, I left the rest behind [...] this is more to me than making music, this is therapeutic'), taken from his solo LP, *Song of Sage: Post Panic!*.<sup>91</sup>

Since its introduction on 'Like My Mama', the important implications of 'hurt' for articulating an artist's ability to express trauma has been reemphasised by MIKE, notably during a line taken from 'More Gifts' (2020),<sup>92</sup> in which he notes his reliance on emotional distress and painful memories to create rap: 'to put the work in, I gotta get to hurtin' a bit'. MIKE's focus on 'hurt' as a key ingredient to his art is continued on 'Get Rich Quick

---

<sup>90</sup> Lala, '5 Things We Learned from Earl Sweatshirt's Talk With His Mother at MOCA in L.A.'

<sup>91</sup> Navy Blue/Sage Elsesser, *Song of Sage: Post Panic!* (Freedom Sounds, 2020).

<sup>92</sup> MIKE, 'More Gifts', *Weight of the World* (10K, 2020).

Scheme' (2020),<sup>93</sup> in which he expresses a reliance on his music's therapeutic properties far outweighing any monetary gain ('you think I did it for the figures, it was all for hurt').

Whilst the introduction of the term 'hurt' as allusion to a technique for prioritising emotion over anything else is relatively new in emerging rap circles, it is important to note that the core mechanics of this act, of using the recollection of emotion as fundamental fuel or catalyst for black poetic verse/artistic expression, has a legacy in blues, part of rap's multifaceted musical ancestry. As Rachel Kaadzi Ghansah observes through the writing of Ralph Ellison:

The blues is an impulse to keep the painful details and episodes of a brutal experience alive in one's aching consciousness, to finger its jagged grain, and transcend it [...] As a form, the blues is an autobiographical chronicle of personal catastrophe expressed lyrically.<sup>94</sup>

Following this impulse, artists such as Earl Sweatshirt, MIKE, and Navy Blue keep their 'brutal experiences alive' through rap performance in order to transcend these experiences, keeping records of 'personal catastrophe' in multifarious ways. Albert Murray expands upon this idea in relation to the blues:

[The] whole point of the blues idiom lyric is to state the facts of life. Not unlike ancient tragedy, it would have the people for whom it is composed and performed confront, acknowledge and proceed in spite of, and even in terms of, the ugliness and meanness inherent in the human condition. It is thus a device for making the best of a bad situation.<sup>95</sup>

Finding artistic ways to heal in the wake of traumatic experience, modern rap artists can be seen to follow in this tradition, with the added understanding that this process does not 'render capitulation tolerable',<sup>96</sup> or allow for a kind of sympathy, or consolation of 'those

---

<sup>93</sup> MIKE, 'Get Rich Quick Scheme', *Weight of the World*.

<sup>94</sup> Ghansah quotes from an Ellison review of Richard Wright's 1945 publication *Black Boy* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 1998).

See Rachel Kaadzi Ghansah, 'When the Lights Shut Off: Kendrick Lamar and the Decline of the Black Blues Narrative', *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 31<sup>st</sup> January 2013 <[lareviewofbooks.org/article/when-the-lights-shut-off-kendrick-lamar-and-the-decline-of-the-black-blues-narrative/](http://lareviewofbooks.org/article/when-the-lights-shut-off-kendrick-lamar-and-the-decline-of-the-black-blues-narrative/)> [accessed 17 April 2022].

<sup>95</sup> Albert Murray, 'The Dynamics of Heroic Action', in *The Hero and the Blues* (New York: Random House, 1995), pp. 36-37.

<sup>96</sup> Albert Murray, 'The Dynamics of Heroic Action', p. 36.

who would compromise their integrity’, but rather enables an ‘orientation to continuity in the face of adversity [...] consistent with the folklore and wisdom underlying the rugged endurance of the black American’. As with ‘blues-idiom dance music’, rap that engages with lyrical performative stylistic allusion to express trauma ‘challenges and affirms [a] personal equilibrium’, ‘sustains humanity’, and enables an individual to maintain ‘higher aspiration[s] in spite of the fact that human existence is so often mostly a low-down dirty shame’ (36-37).

## CONCLUSION

Tracing the allusive origins of lyrical performative stylistic allusion in ways established during this chapter aids in illuminating the innovative modes of intertextuality and allusive strategies that rappers engage with. Using lyrical performative stylistic allusion as a means of expressing vulnerability to ultimately gain communal and/or individual catharsis gives rise to new possibilities of practice and analysis regarding hip hop studies. Utilising this performative strategy as a way of Signifyin(g) on a past in which rap artists were predominantly judged on their ability to rhyme consistently ‘in the pocket’, new generations of rap practitioners have shed much of their adherence to previous performative norms, choosing instead to infuse as much individually resonant vulnerability, raw emotion and metaphysical sensibility into their work as possible, this often taking precedence over technical and rhythmical astuteness.

When defining the importance of developing new methods of close reading rap lyrics, it is worth noting Adam Krims’s recognition that ‘attention to aesthetic detail is needed’ in order to identify the ‘patterned context’ behind innovations such as the ones set out in this

chapter.<sup>97</sup> Quoting Martin Stokes, Krims explains the imperative of seeing ‘music and dance’ not just as ‘static symbolic objects which have been understood in a context, but [as] a patterned context within which other things happen’. This is where analysis of lyrical performance really comes in to play: drawing crucial aspects of communicative meaning from source materials as a means of acknowledging the ‘complex aesthetic vocabularies, or single terms covering a complex semantic terrain’ that ‘point to minute and shifting subtleties of rhythm and texture which make or break the event’ (97). Applying this idea to the recognition of lyrical performative stylistic allusion in rap, it is clear that ‘without these qualities, however they are conceived in a particular society, the ritual event is powerless to make the expected and desired connections and transformations’.<sup>98</sup>

As a final demonstration of the far-reaching potential of this strategy, it is worth noting a vocal performance by the highly influential and commercially successful artist JAY-Z, taken from Jay Electronica’s ‘A.P.I.D.T.A’ (2020).<sup>99</sup> In summary, JAY-Z uses incommunicable or ineffable utterance during introduction (‘uh’), a moderately errant flow (‘sleep well, sleep well’), a markedly calm, emotionally effected vocal presentation, and lyrical content that implies raw emotion, all as a method for apparently achieving personal resolution to recent effects of trauma (‘I got texts on my phone, that’ll never ping again/I screenshot ‘em so I got ‘em, I don’t want this thing to end’).<sup>100</sup> Due to JAY-Z’s ‘overground’ success, his employment of elements of performative quasi-consciousness as part of a strategy of lyrical performative stylistic allusion during ‘A.P.I.D.T.A’ demonstrates that this

---

<sup>97</sup> Adam Krims, ‘The Musical Poetics of a ‘Revolutionary’ Identity’, in *Rap Music and the Poetics of Identity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 97.

<sup>98</sup> Martin Stokes, et al., *Ethnicity, Identity, and Music: The Musical Construction of Place*, ed. by Martin Stokes (Oxford: Berg, 1994), p. 5.

<sup>99</sup> Jay Electronica, ‘A.P.I.D.T.A Ft. JAY-Z’, *A Written Testimony* (Roc Nation, 2020).

<sup>100</sup> Jay Electronica, ‘A.P.I.D.T.A Ft. JAY-Z’, *Genius* <[genius.com/Jay-electronica-apidta-lyrics](https://genius.com/Jay-electronica-apidta-lyrics)> [accessed 17 April 2022].



strategy has an impact beyond the remits of ‘underground’ rap music, and further highlights the urgent requirement for further work in this area of hip hop studies.<sup>101</sup>

---

<sup>101</sup> An important starting point for further research into the ever-expanding employment of performative quasi-consciousness in rap should be an exploration of emerging artist Jadasea, an affiliate of MIKE, having featured on ‘da screets’, taken from *War in my Pen*. In his most recent release, *LOOKALIVE!* (Self-released, 2022), Jadasea effects performative quasi-consciousness to extreme levels (see ‘CITY-GRITTY’ as a prime example).

## Preface to *CAPsule*

The creative component of this thesis comprises the glossed complete lyrics to *CAPsule*, and a trilogy of music LPs,<sup>1</sup> in alignment with an ongoing tradition in hip hop culture that observes ‘LP versions’ and ‘LP vinyl recordings’ of rap music as the ‘primary sources of study in hip hop’.<sup>2</sup> The glosses highlight – and, where necessary, unpack – the intended instances of intertextuality and literary allusions in the lyrics.<sup>3</sup> The LPs themselves are also included in appendices, so that a reader is able to consider the lyrics in their musical context. Each segment of *CAPsule* (*S.T.A.R.V.E.*, *Houses*, and *Uzumaki*) responds to its counterparts’ artistic functions in varying conceptual, narratorial, and thematic ways.<sup>4</sup> These responses, or interactions, between each LP are contextualised in the brief introductions provided for each album, and throughout the remainder of this thesis.

Building upon research undertaken in the critical component, *CAPsule* was crafted with the intention of artistically illustrating some of the many intertextual and allusive techniques employed in rap, and developing these into a cohesive whole. These illustrations not only exemplify techniques employed by artists previously considered in this thesis, but

---

<sup>1</sup> Kwame Harrison provides reasoning as to why my creative component is presented in the form of an LP: ‘Due to the role of pioneering turntable deejays in its development, hip hop historians have dubbed records ‘hip hop’s original and therefore most authentic medium’. Anthony Kwame Harrison, “‘Cheaper than a CD, Plus We Really Mean It’: Bay Area Underground Hip Hop Tapes as Subcultural Artefacts’, *Popular Music*, 25 (2006), 283-301 (p. 287).

<sup>2</sup> ‘Classic Crates Research Project’, *HARI: hiphoparchive.org* <[hiphoparchive.org/projects/classic-crates/intro](http://hiphoparchive.org/projects/classic-crates/intro)> [accessed 23 June 2021].

<sup>3</sup> A text – including an LP – exists independently of its creator, or its creator’s intentions, and other allusions and even intertextual connections than those outlined here may, of course, exist in the work. These terms, as used in this thesis, are defined in the introduction, pp. 7-10.

<sup>4</sup> Whilst bearing little relation to *CAPsule* other than in terms of broad artistic discipline/genre, other notable trilogies in rap music include JAY-Z’s *Blueprint* series and Kanye West’s ‘Higher Education Trilogy’: *College Dropout*, *Late Registration*, and *Graduation*. These projects often share recurring themes and concepts, or expand upon previously established narratorial experiences that link each work indelibly with its predecessor/antecedent. See: JAY-Z, *The Blueprint* (Roc-A-Fella, Def Jam, 2001); JAY-Z, *The Blueprint 2: The Gift & the Curse* (Roc-A-Fella, Island, Def Jam, 2002); JAY-Z, *The Blueprint 3* (Roc Nation, Asylum, Atlantic, 2009); Kanye West, *College Dropout* (Def Jam, Roc-A-Fella, 2004); Kanye West, *Late Registration* (Def Jam, Roc-A-Fella, 2005); Kanye West, *Graduation* (Def Jam, Roc-A-Fella, 2007). Kanye West’s trilogy is discussed in detail in H.R. Lewis’s ‘An Examination of Kanye West’s Higher Education Trilogy’, in *The Cultural Impact of Kanye West*, ed. Julius Bailey (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp 65-77.

also artists beyond its direct limit of reference. As a means of concisely detailing these illustrations, this document uses a process of gloss noting (expansive footnoting) to highlight and contextualise each occurrence of intertextuality and allusion when relevant to the stated objectives of this thesis, as outlined in the thesis introduction. Utilising this format has alleviated the need for an additional chapter of discursive, self-reflexive commentary, and simultaneously allowed me to chart and demonstrate the uses of allusion and intertextuality especially clearly and (potentially) in real time, as the reader listens along. The following transcriptions and footnotes allow the reader to follow important intertextual and allusive occurrences whilst in the process of experiencing *CAPsule* in its preferred aural format.

It is worth noting that certain forms of visual, sonic and aural intertextuality and allusion that do not directly relate to the lyrics contained in each LP have not, as a rule, been footnoted.<sup>5</sup> Whilst the employment of these techniques will impact the listener's meaningful experience and understanding of *CAPsule*, the thesis's remit requires the privileging of the lyrics, for the purpose of laying bare its *literary* intertextual connections and allusions.<sup>6</sup> Regarding the occurrence of intratextuality throughout the trilogy, footnotes have been provided, as these elements of the creative component serve comparable purposes to intertextual and allusive links: to provide important historical, conceptual, and artistic contexts with the intention of aiding audience comprehension, or (often aesthetically and

---

<sup>5</sup> In relation to this point, it is worth noting here that there are rare occasions when explanatory, or contextual information is detailed during the footnoted annotations regarding my artistic influences. This is only when these influences spill into aspects of allusion, and require further explanation to strengthen audience comprehension. See 'Wi(n)dow', p. 156, footnote 46 for an example of this occurrence.

<sup>6</sup> For example, during the final stages of 'Slow Poison' (*S.T.A.R.V.E.*), an audio sample of a ticking clock taken from Pink Floyd's 'One of the Few' (*The Final Cut*, Harvest/Columbia Records, 1983) is employed as a means of illustrating the speaker's gradual progression towards a suicidal mind frame. As this sample bears no direct intended relevance to literary intertextuality/allusion, it is therefore not heavily detailed in the footnotes. However, there are times during this document when aural, sonic, or visual forms of intertextuality/allusion *will* be detailed. This is undertaken only when the technique has a direct and meaningful relation to an aspect of literary intertextuality/allusion.

artistically more importantly) empathy for characters, their circumstances, actions, and sentiments.

While exemplifying multiple forms of intertextuality and allusion through an individual artistic illustration of them, this creative project is highly nuanced in its employment of these techniques, and at times will be notable for its contrasting uses of them in relation to rappers previously researched in the critical component.<sup>7</sup> This is mainly due to the nature of ambiguity exacted during my artistic practice (subversion, adaptation, innovation, etc.), but also relates to social and cultural differences between myself and the artists researched. These instances (as with more conventional uses of each technique) are detailed in the footnotes.

Regarding the preferred method of experiencing the following transcriptions, I acknowledge critical observations that ‘Hip Hop must be understood as a sonic force more than anything else’<sup>8</sup>, and that ‘rap music is a form of rhymed storytelling accompanied by highly rhythmic, electronically-based music.’<sup>9</sup> My hip hop lyrics were not written to be read, but to be heard, often with full sonic accompaniment. It is my intention that the creative component of this thesis be received aurally as well as in a textual document, and ultimately the resultant art belongs to an oral and aural tradition, wholly off the page.

Two thirds of *CAPsule* (*S.T.A.R.V.E.* and *Houses*) follow the interactions, internal conflicts and reflections, and real-time actions of a fictional character in contemporary Nottingham, England, during two crucial points in his adult life. *S.T.A.R.V.E.* explores the

---

<sup>7</sup> As an example of this occurrence, during Chapter Three, Kendrick Lamar’s subversion of Snoop Dogg’s chorus on ‘Down 4 My N’s’ (*No Limit Top Dagg*, No Limit, Priority, 1999), is highlighted as a way of altering and broadening the original narrator’s gendered perspective. During ‘White’ (*Uzumaki*), I also subvert a lyric from Snoop Dogg (see p. 229, footnote 34), but in contrast to Lamar, I adapt the passage to situate the speaker’s artistic alignments and generic influence, whilst evoking a sense of irony in presenting Snoop’s lyrics in an academic setting.

<sup>8</sup> Adam Krims cites Robin D. G. Kelley’s *Yo’ Mama’s Disfunktional!* (1997) during ‘Music Analysis and Rap Music’, in *Rap Music and the Poetics of Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 38.

<sup>9</sup> Tricia Rose, ‘Introduction’ in *Black Noise* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), pp. 2-3.

impact of self-imposed social isolation on this character's mental health, by illustrating his immediate reactions to a relationship breakdown, and their individual negotiation of alcohol and drug addiction. In contrast, *Houses* explores the same character's experiences of group inclusion and familial and social responsibility at a later, more stable time in his life, and the impacts of these developing societal bonds.

Providing a deeper contextual understanding of the above-mentioned dichotomy, the final third of the trilogy, *CAPsule*, draws from academic texts considered during the critical component of this thesis, as well as classic and popular contemporary cultural allusions and literary texts, and various intrageneric points of reference, as a means of highlighting and detailing key points of narratological, conceptual, thematic, and technical significance during *S.T.A.R.V.E.* and *Houses*. In this way, *CAPsule* serves a similar purpose to that of a novel's omniscient narrator, and is at once deeply connected and distinctly separate from other segments of the trilogy in its employment as a kind of key, or codex, to understanding the project as a whole.

I found a way of encapsulating some of the above ideological interventions included in *CAPsule* whilst observing Michel Maffesoli's ideas on 'avoidance lifestyles' during *Time of the Tribes*.<sup>10</sup> Particularly reflected in the musical sub-genres or 'DiY cultures' close to my own practice, Maffesoli's ideas have aided scholars such as Anthony Kwame Harrison to define elements of internal politics within 'underground' rap:

DiY cultures [are] caught between agendas of cultural change and what Michael Maffesoli (1996, p. 92) calls *avoidance lifestyles*. Whilst most underground hip hop music artists aspire to have their music reach a large number of underground consumers, the fluidity and porous nature of subcultural collectivities (see Bennett, 1999) makes this target market quite ambiguous.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> Michel Maffesoli, 'Tribalism', in *The Time of the Tribes: The Decline of Individualism in Mass Society* (London: Sage Publications, 1996), p. 91.

<sup>11</sup> Anthony Kwame Harrison, 'Cheaper than a CD, Plus We Really Mean It', p. 297.

Counting myself firmly a part of these ‘subcultural collectivities’, my work continues to resonate with Maffesoli’s further notions on modern society, even as he shifts focus away from ‘avoidance lifestyles’ and ‘the presence of a collective privacy’ within larger social groups to broadly encompass what he feels ‘sociality is all about’ in the epithet ‘Noi siamo la splendida realta’ (‘we are the splendid reality’).<sup>12</sup> My artistic vision for *CAPsule* draws strong parallels with Maffesoli’s summary below:

It contains in miniature all of sociality’s various elements: the relativism of life, the grandeur and tragedy of the everyday, the burden of the world around us which we bear as best we can; all of which are expressed in that ‘we’ which forms the glue holding everything together. We have dwelled so often on the dehumanization and the disenchantment with the modern world and the solitude it induces that we are no longer capable of seeing the networks of solidarity that exist within (72).

The latter stage of Maffesoli’s statement links to my offering the *S.T.A.R.V.E.* LP up as a musical example of social and psychological solitude, depicting an individual consumed by ‘the dehumanization and disenchantment of contemporary society’, that runs parallel to an ‘endless pointing to the examples of narcissism and the evolution of individualism’ (72), notable in particular in many of the modernist texts that have influenced me. *Houses*, on the other hand, conforms to Maffesoli’s ideas on the ‘Divine Social’, that ‘the majority of the people’s pleasures are found in the pleasures of the crowd or the group’ (77), and that there ‘still remains an affirmative *puissance* that, despite everything, confirms the “(ever-) renewed game of solidarity and reciprocity” that springs from “social existence”’ (72).

Maffesoli’s observations on the contemporary social experience link with an overarching personal objective I have for *CAPsule*: to present, as palpably as possible in musical form, a dichotomy of social isolation and social inclusion that I have personally experienced, and desire to articulate. To this end, I employ various techniques using the discipline of rap lyricism, such as allosonic and autosonic quotation, nihilistic sentiment,

---

<sup>12</sup> Michel Maffesoli, ‘Tribalism’, in *The Time of the Tribes*, p. 92.

‘plunderphonics’,<sup>13</sup> and lyrical performative stylistic allusion, with the hope that the emotional and psychological outcomes presented in response to these techniques will benefit those in comparable circumstances.

Expanding upon previous critical explorations into the function and practice of intertextuality and allusion in rap by scholars such as David Diallo (2015)<sup>14</sup> and Justin Williams (2013)<sup>15</sup> (particularly when these techniques present a moral re-evaluation of previously established tropes/ideologies embedded within the culture), the *CAPsule* project artistically exemplifies how rappers employ multiple modes of intertextuality and allusion as a means of tapping into rap’s unique capacity for the expression of personal trauma and vulnerability. In addition to illustrating this capacity in various previously-established ways (as noted in the gloss notes), I have also introduced innovative ways of executing these techniques through my engagement with (often canonical) literature<sup>16</sup> as a means of enabling new discourse on culturally significant matters in hip hop. These innovations include (but are not limited to) the amplifying of such concepts as Guthrie P. Ramsey Jr’s ‘intergenerational dialogue’ (2010),<sup>17</sup> recognition of ‘creative patrilineage’ as an important aspect of ‘care’ in

---

<sup>13</sup> In specific relation to musical accompaniment, my choice of sonic samples, soundbites, and sound effects during the work adheres both to an intertextual and allusive process of highlighting deeper contextual, historical, and artistic aspects of the work, and to an additional (theoretically contrasting) technique involving the selection of musical samples for strictly aesthetic purposes, akin to John Oswald’s theory of ‘plunderphonics’ (1985), as a means of emphasising emotional variations throughout the piece(s). John Oswald, ‘Plunderphonics, or Audio Piracy as a Conditional Prerogative’, *Plunderphonics* (1985) <[plunderphonics.com/xhtml/xplunder.html](http://plunderphonics.com/xhtml/xplunder.html)> [accessed 20 September 2021].

<sup>14</sup> David Diallo, ‘Intertextuality in Rap Lyrics’, *Association Francaise d’Etudes Americaines*, 142 (2015), 40-54.

<sup>15</sup> Justin A. Williams, *Rhyming and Stealin’: Musical Borrowing in Hip-Hop* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2013).

<sup>16</sup> Here, my ongoing use of narratorial, conceptual, and ideological elements of James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) serves as a prime example of my broadening the rap genre’s intertextual scope when engaging with canonical literature in particular.

<sup>17</sup> ‘Dialogue is fundamental to appreciating sample-based hip-hop. Listener competence, based on personal experience—always determines how clearly one will hear the conversation.’ Guthrie P. Ramsey Jr, ‘Time is Illmatic’, in *Born to Use Mics: Reading Nas’s ‘Illmatic’*, ed. by Michael Eric Dyson & Sohail Daulatzai (New York: BasicCivitas Books, 2010), p. 72.

rap genres (Higgins, 2007),<sup>18</sup> and the expansion of rap's artistic repertoire for the expression of anxiety, grief, and access of painful memory.<sup>19</sup>

In addressing these progressions to a global rap culture, through the use of an authentic demonstration of the discipline in action (in practice, as opposed to observed through traditionally non-inclusive, scholar-focused and ethnographically distanced academic lenses), my work responds to Paul Gilroy's call for a 'different register of analytic concepts', particularly as a means of making 'sense of musical performances in which identity is fleetingly experienced in the most intensive ways'.<sup>20</sup>

Gilroy's focus on 'antiphony (call and response)' as 'the principle formal feature' of (typically black) 'musical traditions' directly links to the core function of intertextuality and allusion in rap, techniques that require an often-implicit audience comprehension, interaction, or sense of pathos which 'has come to be seen as a bridge from music into other modes of cultural expression' (78). Presenting *CAPsule* as a practice-based, artistically-prioritised part of a creative and critical doctoral thesis, I provide a unique means for the listener – whether academically inclined or not – to engage with areas of study such as English literature, media, contemporary music, and cultural ethnography.

---

<sup>18</sup> A form of intertextuality 'that emphasizes the student-mentor lineage'. Justin A. Williams, 'Borrowing and Lineage in Eminem/2 Pac's *Loyal to the Game* and 50 Cent's *Get Rich or Die Trying*', in *Rhyming and Stealin*, p. 143.

<sup>19</sup> For further details, see Chapter Four, pp. 151-160.

<sup>20</sup> Paul Gilroy, 'Jewels Brought from Bondage': Black Music and the Politics of Authenticity', in *Black Atlantic, The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1999), p. 78.



## Key for Reading the Following Transcription

‘A’: Allosonic quotation.

‘Au’: Autosonic quotation.

‘R’: Passage quoted in rhythmic synchronicity with the original source.

‘N-r’: Passage quoted partially or non-rhythmically to the original source.<sup>21</sup>

### Positioning of quoted passages indicating the speaker:

Left: Guest speaker.

Centre: Author.

Right: Digital (autosonic) quotation.

### Use of text brackets:

During moments of allosonic quotation (‘A’), squared brackets indicate elements of the source text that have been muted or adapted in order to allow a clearer narrative.

---

<sup>21</sup> Quotes marked by an ‘A’ or ‘Au’ indicate if the passage is an allosonic quotation (A), or autosonic quotation (Au). These terms are defined and discussed in the introduction to this thesis, on p. 20-22. Quotes marked with an additional ‘R’ or ‘N-r’ indicate if the passage quoted is in rhythmic synchronicity with the original source (R) or quoted partially or non-rhythmically (N-r).

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Annotated Lyrics of *S.T.A.R.V.E.*, *Houses*, and *Uzumaki*

#### *S.T.A.R.V.E*



---

<sup>1</sup> Although not directly linked to an aspect of literary allusion or lyrical intertextuality, the cover of *S.T.A.R.V.E.* plays an important enough intertextual role in the making up of meaning within the LP to warrant mention. Here, in casting my blurred image in stark white against a black background, I imitate the original cover for Adrian Lyne's *Jacob's Ladder* (Tri-Star Pictures, 1990), a pivotal text referred to multiple times throughout *S.T.A.R.V.E.*'s gloss notes due to the ideological, conceptual, and thematic influence it has had on the making

*S.T.A.R.V.E.* provides an illustration of alienation, or isolation amongst the multitudes, through a fragmented and sometimes abstracted series of morally evaluative vignettes regarding a young Nottingham-based working-class man's rapid descent into mental health decline, due predominantly to the breakdown of a long-term relationship and drug and alcohol addiction. Texts intertextually engaged with throughout the LP include *The Divine Comedy* by Dante,<sup>2</sup> *Hunger* by Knut Hamsun,<sup>3</sup> *War all the Time* by Charles Bukowski,<sup>4</sup> *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison,<sup>5</sup> and 'Acquainted with the Night' by Robert Frost.<sup>6</sup> The work also (and in addition to various sonic and music-based intertextual links) draws on films such as *Enter the Void* directed by Gaspar Noé,<sup>7</sup> *Jacob's Ladder* directed by Adrian Lyne,<sup>8</sup> and *First Reformed* directed by Paul Schrader.<sup>9</sup> This is a depiction of isolation informed by other depictions of isolation, to emphasise that isolation is inherently as pervasive and collective as it is individual.

---

of this LP. In 'Musical Borrowing', Williams notes Nicholas Cook's ideas on the importance of recognising how 'the visual image and musical sound [the record sleeve and the music] circulate indivisibly, and are consumed together' and 'inevitably contributes to musical meaning'. Justin A. Williams, 'Musical borrowing in Hip-Hop Music: Theoretical Frameworks and Case Studies' (doctoral thesis, University of Nottingham, 2009), pp. 210-211.

<sup>2</sup> Dante, *The Divine Comedy: Inferno, Purgatorio, Paradiso*, trans. Robin Kirkpatrick (London: Penguin Books, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Knut Hamsun, *Hunger: Warbler Classics Annotated Edition*, trans. by George Egerton (New York: Warbler Press, 2021).

<sup>4</sup> Charles Bukowski, *War all the Time* (Santa Rosa, CA: Black Sparrow Press, 1993).

<sup>5</sup> Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (Harmondsworth, London: Penguin, 1984).

<sup>6</sup> Robert Frost's 'Acquainted with the Night', *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, ed. by Margaret Ferguson, Mary Jo Salter, and Jon Stallworthy (London: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2005), p. 1237

<sup>7</sup> *Enter the Void*, dir. by Gaspar Noé (Fidélité Films, Wild Bunch, 2009).

<sup>8</sup> *Jacob's Ladder*, dir. by Adrian Lyne (Tri-Star Pictures, 1990).

<sup>9</sup> *First Reformed*, dir. by Paul Schrader (A24, 2017).

**S.T.A.R.V.E.  
Annotated Lyrics**

[https://soundcloud.com/grand\\_imperial\\_cappo/sets/s-t-a-r-v-e/s-3ES2hWjSWef?si=aec6b979fd0948d7a19a4a5a90014d75&utm\\_source=clipboard&utm\\_medium=text&utm\\_campaign=social\\_sharing](https://soundcloud.com/grand_imperial_cappo/sets/s-t-a-r-v-e/s-3ES2hWjSWef?si=aec6b979fd0948d7a19a4a5a90014d75&utm_source=clipboard&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=social_sharing)

Tracklist/Narrative Structure

**Breakdown:**

‘Jar’	142
‘Drip’	146

**Isolation:**

‘TERRACE III’	151
‘Void’	153
‘Window’	154
‘Terrace II’	160

**Crisis:**

‘Strongbow’	161
‘Slow Poison’	165
‘terrace I’	171

**Resolution:**

‘Wrightful Owner’	172
-------------------	-----

## Jar

As the lyric that introduces *S.T.A.R.V.E.*, ‘Jar’ depicts the final stage of the protagonist’s (P’s) relationship breakdown. Whilst attempting sonically and lyrically to illustrate the hollow sense of loneliness experienced by an individual during a breakup, ‘Jar’ highlights this event as a meaningful (and universally felt) part of the human experience.

*I love you  
Try not to forget...  
I know it's impossible  
Try to stay alive!  
Until tomorrow...  
Yes, I love you  
Goodbye  
[exhales deeply]’ (Au, N-r).<sup>10</sup>*

Trust.

---

<sup>10</sup> Beginning with the sound of a roaring crowd that gradually fades into the distance when layered with the voice of a distraught/downhearted French woman claiming their love for an unknown recipient, this sample taken from Murilo Salles’s *Two Billion Hearts: 1994 FIFA World Cup USA The Official Film* (Sport Target Media Productions, 1995) initially attempts to illustrate the breakdown of an important relationship in the protagonist’s (P’s) life, and his gradual withdrawal from the ‘crowd’ of society. Willing the unknown recipient to ‘stay alive!’, whilst unable to hide the sense of disillusionment or exhaustion in her voice, this anonymous vocal represents the first of four differing perspectives on the female character, as perceived by P. This French-speaking voice (French often being characterised as a language of love) signifies P’s initial perspective on femininity, one that contains aspects of honesty, genuine romantic interest, and a caring intent that P is soon to have removed from his life. As the voice exhales—noticeably relieved at the conclusion of her emotionally fraught conversation—P begins his initial statement based on the articulation of an imminent break-up of a trusted relationship. Use of a foreign language sample at the beginning of *S.T.A.R.V.E.* is intended to have a specific effect on the listener, one of disorientation, stemming from a sense of alienation they feel when unable to decipher the full meaning of the vocal. This strategy requires the listener to further engage with the sample in order to gain an emotional understanding of it in relation to the music and lyrics, sensing only the feeling contained in the sample—the ‘grain’ of the voice (see Chapter Three, pp. 88-89), the disillusionment, and emotional exhaustion—as opposed to grasping meaning and context from the words. In this way, from the off, the listener is encouraged to be aware that *S.T.A.R.V.E.* privileges ‘feeling’, in much the same way as many emerging underground rap artists intend their music to be heard (see Chapter Three, pp. 116-122). Foreign language samples are rarely used in English-language rap music, mainly due to the jarring effect they have on the listener regarding their access to understanding the track/artist. For this reason, it could be suggested that use of a foreign language sample in my work goes against many of the expected functions of intertextuality in rap. However, I hope to subvert the function of intertextuality in order to heighten the listeners’ intuitive conditioning to primarily understand the feeling contained in a speaker’s voice, rather than in their words alone.

You said that you would be there for me  
when I needed you, but you never turned up...  
All I did was turn up.  
You said that you would be there for life,  
and love me regardless of those in my past...  
So, why'd you hide behind that?

*'Do you mind if I work while you talk?  
I promise I hear every word' (Au, N-r).<sup>11</sup>*

Yeah, trust.

Life is like a sample.  
Caught between the start and end,  
you cut the chord and cut support and start again.  
Kind of like a cycle,  
programmed to loop and then repeat,  
and then repeat, and in the end, you end the beat.

Trust.

Life is like a sample.  
Caught between the start and end,  
you cut the chord and cut support and start again.  
Kind of like a cycle,  
programmed to loop and then repeat,  
and then repeat, and in the end, you end it.

Trust.

I don't know about you, but,  
seems like we're goin' round and round and round and round and round.  
Nah, I don't know how this came up,

---

<sup>11</sup> The second vocal sample on 'Jar', from Dennis Villeneuve's *Bladerunner 2049* (Alcon Entertainment, Columbia Pictures, 2017), attempts to convey another perspective of femininity and the female character as perceived by P. Presented this time in English—immediately understandable in language and content, but still veiled in intent—this voice promises to hear P's 'every word', to which P responds with sarcasm: 'Yeah, trust'. Here, P's mistrust of women, as established by his initial words, is reaffirmed: all further uses of female vocal samples emphasise either a similar mistrust, or additional negative perceptions of women as felt/sensed by P. For many of these sampled voice excerpts (particularly the first four female voices), I attempt to employ them as part of a kind of intricate conversation between rapper and listener, one that simultaneously engages with P's internal monologue, by invading it, causing alterations to, and continuations of, P's thought patterns, and in turn S.T.A.R.V.E.'s overall narrative. At times only distantly relating to P's current thoughts, these samples nevertheless play a significant role in gathering the presented sonic vignettes/glimpses into P's journey that are often highly fractured in themselves.

but I'm finding it harder now to find the heart to pick the pieces off the ground and  
I...

I know.

Those words you make are pennies.  
No more I need the pounds.  
Your hope and your forgiving,  
I never needed more than now.

Trust.

But those walls you build are many,  
and they're leading me to ground.  
Yeah, new world and new beginnings,  
no more I need you now.

Trust.

Air's hot, but your body is freezing.  
Past brought up, I'm past caring.  
Lost hope and lost all bearings.

Yeah, we used to be a voice in the dark,  
we used to make choice in the dark.  
We used to keep dreams in a jar.  
We used to be.

We used to be a voice in the dark,  
we used to make choice in the dark.  
We used to keep dreams in a jar.  
We used to be.

Eyes closed, but nobody is sleeping.  
Air's hot, but your body is freezing.  
Past brought up, I'm past caring.  
Lost hope and lost all bearings.

We used to be a voice in the dark,  
we used to make choice in the dark.  
We used to keep dreams in a jar.  
We used to be.

We used to be a voice in the dark,  
we used to make choice in the dark.  
We used to keep dreams in a jar.

*'I can't help your future,  
but I can give you good memories  
to think back on, and smile.  
- That's nice.  
It's better than nice.  
It feels authentic,  
and if you have authentic memories  
you'll have real human responses.  
Wouldn't you agree?  
[inhales and exhales deeply]' (Au, N-r).<sup>12</sup>*

---

<sup>12</sup> Here, the same female voice as heard earlier (*Bladerunner 2049*) returns, this time foreshadowing the dark psychological decline P faces without his partner as guide. This sample also signposts wider narratological and conceptual elements offered during *S.T.A.R.V.E.* that include explorations into the authenticity of memory reinterpretation in song form, and the validity of artistic presentation when interpreting loss. The voice then inhales sharply before breathing out for a sustained period, as if blowing out a candle and making a wish at a birthday party (what the female character re-enacts in *Bladerunner 2049*), to conclude the song. This action not only links with the previous French female vocal sample's exhalation on conclusion of her dialogue, but also represents the extinguishing of P's communication with this character, and in turn, the final curtain on this current problematic relationship. Respiratory elements of vocal samples are strategically focused on throughout *S.T.A.R.V.E.*, in order to highlight the importance of understanding expression and presentation in dialogue/performance as major tools towards the cultivation of meaning in rap, as opposed to the listener finding meaning exclusively from words.



## Drip

Written as an initial marker of P's mental health decline, and more broadly establishing *S.T.A.R.V.E.* as an internalised journey into psychological aspects of a young male in contemporary British society, 'Drip' expresses a resentful but defiant tone towards women in the wake of P's breakup. Here, P articulates his intentions of employing resentment as a primary method of recovery after his relationship breakdown.

*'You're nothing!  
You're not even good in bed!  
I just felt sorry for you, that's all.  
Bastard!  
You poor pathetic bastard!'* (Au, N-r).<sup>13</sup>

*'You're very quiet...  
so why do you shop at night then?'* (Au, N-r).<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> For 'Drip', another more jarring, aggressive, and somewhat sensorily violent female vocal sample taken from Clint Eastwood's *Play Misty for Me* (Universal Pictures, 1971) is used to portray P's increasingly negative impression of women as complicated, deceitful, and threatening. Beginning by lifting the listener out of the previous sombre revelry of 'Jar', this aggravated female voice represents a deepening sense of resentment felt by P towards women in the wake of his having to face the harsh realities of life without the partner upon whom he previously relied on so heavily. Also presented here is the sound of a car leaving the scene of the shouting woman. This effect of travel/distancing is continued in the background of the fourth and final female voice to follow.

<sup>14</sup> Signifying the sonically sparse aesthetic qualities of 'Drip' ('you're very quiet') whilst signposting the inward journey into the mind of P and his own isolation, the fourth and final female voice sample presents a well-spoken English woman—somewhat cold and inquisitive—taken from Jonathan Glazer's *Under the Skin* (BFI, Film4, 2013). Strategically placed throughout 'Drip', this voice interweaves with the internal dialogue of P, spurring him on ('what about your friends?'), antagonising him ('you're uncomfortable?'), and generally adding salt to already inflicted psychological wounds. This interrogative sample strategy draws on a technique employed by Sadat X on 'The Interview' (*Wild Cowboys*, Loud, RCA, 1996), in which a fictional journalist named Sarah Hall interviews Sadat X in rhyme form, providing him with questions to which Sadat responds through verse. An important difference here is that 'Drip' utilises a film sample that originally has no relation to *S.T.A.R.V.E.*'s narrative, and manipulates it (non-rhythmically) to reflect a deeper meaning in relation to it. When noting the reinterpretation of a non-rhythmical voice on 'Drip' to continue and deepen the LP's narrative and technical depth, this strategy also draws on Kendrick Lamar's manipulated conversation with the late Tupac on 'Mortal Man' as an ingenious way of deepening the meaning and context of his album *To Pimp a Butterfly* (TDE, Aftermath, Interscope, 2015), see Chapter Two, pp. 74-85 (hereafter referred to as *TPAB*).

Release—release—release—release

Peril in my cerebellum, power struggle,  
war between my thoughts and these present terrors...

*'You uncomfortable?'* (Au, N-r).<sup>15</sup>

Power struggle...

Peril in my cerebellum, power struggle,  
war between my thoughts and these present terrors  
Present tensions risen  
While we speak, but hardly know each other  
Ships up in the night  
And while we sleep, we dream of other...

Things.

I dream of sexing you  
Before my cork is burst  
I hold my breath and keep protecting you  
Rarely speaking loud about the truth  
I just repress it back  
Stay alone inside the attic,  
building like a pressure pack

*'So, you never think about it then?'* (Au, N-r).<sup>16</sup>

While I'm grinning like a Cheshire cat<sup>17</sup>  
Pressure not to go out like my father or Virginia Woolf<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> This ongoing sample is taken from a particularly disturbing scene from *Under the Skin*, in which the female protagonist (played by Scarlett Johansson) is attempting to seduce a man she has picked up in her car on the street. The man (Simon Pearson) she picks up is a facially disfigured, isolated, and lone figure. For those familiar with the film, it is my intention that, by recognising this scene, they will also recognise (and immediately resonate with) the sense of isolation I intend to evoke in 'Drip'. For those familiar with *Play Misty for Me* and *Under the Skin*, I hope that P's skewed and negative perception of women is concretised during 'Drip' (even if on an obscure implied level), and this recognition of P's skewed perspective of females is carried forward into the album.

<sup>16</sup> Placed strategically in the gap between P's rhyme(s), this sample emphasises the emotional and psychological suppression iterated throughout 'Drip'.

<sup>17</sup> Like the interrogative female voice fading in and out of the song, P references the evasive and elusive nature of the Cheshire Cat from Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (Hampshire, UK: Pan Macmillan, 2015).

<sup>18</sup> Although not directly a literary allusion, P uses details of Virginia Woolf's suicide as a way of implicitly disclosing the suicide of his own father, and illustrates his own emerging suicidal mind state, foreshadowing this issue as a strong element of *S.T.A.R.V.E.*'s ongoing narrative. Alluding to Woolf in this way, I attempt to imitate a technique employed by artists critically studied for this thesis such as Nas and Kendrick Lamar, in their metonymic use of figures of black artistic excellence such as Alice Walker and Maya Angelou, to emphasise a message and/or concept (see Chapter One, pp. 42-43, and Chapter Two, pp. 62-63). However, I allude to Woolf as a way of illustrating P's negative mind state, and his fear of further mental health decline, as opposed to Nas and Lamar using their allusions as models for positivity/self-affirmation. To help tie P's current

Ghosts around my past and present  
Turn up like a finger snap  
People of my age completely blinded by the need for cash  
Blinded by the need to climb the classes  
Climb until your numb  
Crumbling into dust  
And what is it you're taking with you, huh?

So, you've been Yoko'd<sup>19</sup>, and pussy-whipped,  
She says that you're a God,  
And then she turns up on some other shit  
Tells you not to joke around  
That's a drone  
Won't leave you alone until your hopes are drowned  
Tellin' you your friends are just a lost cause  
Money mad and class obsessed  
Make you change your mind and change your step  
Change your accent and the ways you dress

Until you change address...

Cus nothing's ever good enough  
Something always has to change  
Nothing's ever good enough  
Something always has to change  
Nothing's ever good enough  
Somethings [sic] always has to change  
Nothing's ever good enough  
And something...

*'What about your friends...?*

Something

*...so, you don't have any friends?' (Au, N-r).<sup>20</sup>*

Release.

Take a seat and I will stand  
Strangers round the table  
Never speaking with an open hand

---

circumstances to Woolf's struggle with mental health decline, I present the following excerpts from her suicide note: 'I feel certain I am going mad again. I feel we can't go through another of those terrible times. And I shan't recover this time. I begin to hear voices, and I can't concentrate [...] I don't think two people could have been happier till this terrible disease came. I can't fight any longer'. See Michele Wick, 'Woolf, Creativity and Madness: From Freud to FRMI: Virginia Woolf's Suicide Note' *Smith.Edu* <[smith.edu/woolf/suicidewithtranscript.php](http://smith.edu/woolf/suicidewithtranscript.php)> [accessed 8 October 2021].

<sup>19</sup> P alludes to the notion of Yoko Ono being the main catalyst in the breakup of The Beatles (in particular, Ono's part in the breakdown of Paul McCartney and John Lennon's creative relationship) to again illustrate his current negative perception of women as destructive and untrustworthy.

<sup>20</sup> Glazer, *Under the Skin*.

Tell them how you're working hard  
Working—working—papers—working  
While you're lookin' down your nose  
Like the butter's never melted on your tongue  
Like you're not the same as me  
An animal, a shameless beast  
Built to kill, and fuck, and eat  
Repress.  
Repress  
Hold it back until you burst  
And let the rage spill out on your precious sons and daughters first...

OK  
You OK?  
I'm OK

I'm as good as I can get,  
And as far as I can see  
You will never catch me trying to tell them how it's meant to be  
While you're leading me around  
Tolerating all my talk  
You just remember all the bars  
And everything I did this for  
And when you get the love from all those people that you hated first  
I'll be in this attic working-working-working with the verse  
I'll be in this attic working-working-working on the words  
Same as when I first picked up the pen  
The same as ever now  
No thing on this planet's ever strong enough to turn him down.

Repress

I'll bring out the art surrounded by the truth I never scheme  
I'll bring out the art surrounded by the truth I never scheme  
Never plot, never plan...

Release

Release—release—release—release.

Release

*'When was the last time you touched someone?'* (Au, N-r).<sup>21</sup>

Cus nothing's ever good enough  
Something always has to change

---

<sup>21</sup> Glazer, *Under the Skin*.

Nothing's ever good enough  
Something always has to change  
Nothing's ever good enough  
Something always has to change  
Nothing's ever good enough

Something

Repress

*'TRUE! — nervous — very, very dreadfully nervous  
I had been and am;  
but why will you say that I am mad?  
The disease had sharpened my senses  
— not destroyed — not dulled them.  
Above all was the sense of hearing acute.  
I heard all things in the heaven and in the earth.  
I heard many things in hell.  
How then, am I mad?  
Hearken!  
And observe how healthily — how calmly  
I can tell you the whole story' (Au, N-r).<sup>22</sup>*

---

<sup>22</sup> Voiced by Bela Lugosi, this famous passage from Edgar Allan Poe's 'The Tell-Tale Heart' is employed to highlight P's gradual mental health decline, using Poe's internally focused narrative to signpost ongoing concepts and themes to follow in the LP. Here, Lugosi speaks of madness as 'disease', signposting P's descent into his own form of madness. Importantly, Lugosi also speaks of his 'hearing' being 'acute' (a subject that relates to this creative component's format as being an audible/literary project) and mentions hearing things in 'hell', foreshadowing my project's drawing upon Dante's descriptions of an individual's descent into hell (*Inferno*) in the following song 'TERRACE III'. Edgar Allan Poe, 'The Tell-Tale Heart', in *Edgar Allan Poe: The Complete Stories* (New York: Random House, Inc. 1992), p. 657. Bela Lugosi, 'The Tell-Tale Heart as Told by Bela Lugosi', *YouTube*, 31<sup>st</sup> October 2011 <[youtube.com/watch?v=x-jl0WY0kaA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x-jl0WY0kaA)> [accessed 11 August 2021].

### TERRACE III

Written and performed in the guise of an emcee's (or hype man's) chant to an expectant crowd during a live performance, 'TERRACE III' is the first of a series of candid acapella sketches that act as brief insights into P's gradual descent into a form of self-imposed mental purgatory. Each 'Terrace' piece, placed strategically throughout *S.T.A.R.V.E.*, references Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and represents a circle, or level of descent into hell. During 'Purgatorio', the second part of Dante's trilogy, Dante 'imagines Purgatory as being divided up into seven terraces, each one corresponding to a vice',<sup>23</sup> a 'psychological state of the soul' depicted as levels on a mountain. In opposition to Dante's narrative (illustrating his climbing of the mountain towards 'paradise'), *S.T.A.R.V.E.* attempts to show P's struggle and gradual descent, towards a form of eternal damnation. The terrace series also reveals a reasoning behind *S.T.A.R.V.E.*'s protagonist's name, 'P', as early on during Dante's journey, at the second stage of 'ante-purgatory', an angel guarding the gates of Purgatory Proper 'carves Dante's forehead with the letter "P" seven times'.<sup>24</sup>

IN THIS CITY THERE ARE NO STORM DRAINS  
IN THIS TOWN THERE'S ONLY BLACK CLOUDS  
FEELS LIKE I'M LIVIN' IN SOME PURGATORY  
PLUS I GOT MY FACE SLAPPED AT THE DOLE CENTRE.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> School of Languages, Cultures, and Societies, 'Purgatorio: Dante's Ideas of Purgatory', *University of Leeds* <[ahc.leeds.ac.uk/discover-dante/doc/purgatorio/page/2](http://ahc.leeds.ac.uk/discover-dante/doc/purgatorio/page/2)> [accessed 9 October, 2021]. See Dante, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. by C. H. Sisson (London: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>24</sup> School of Languages, Cultures, and Societies, 'Purgatorio: Dante's Ideas of Purgatory'. 'Seven P's he traced upon my forehead/With the point of his sword, and said: 'See that you wash/Those wounds, when you are in here'. See Dante, 'Purgatorio IX', *The Divine Comedy*, p. 237.

<sup>25</sup> Insights into P's current sense of vulnerability (as noted in this passage) during the 'Terrace' series are inspired by Kendrick Lamar's candidness and honesty when divulging upon his own story of mental health decline during his spoken word piece 'Mortal Man' (*TPAB*). Building on similar themes regarding depression, personal disillusion, and even isolation, the 'Terrace' series also draws on the way Lamar strategically places his spoken word piece at staggered points in *TPAB*, gradually unveiling its content, until it is finally revealed in full at the conclusion of the LP. My series of insights differs slightly, as each episode contains a new element of P's narrative, as opposed to a continuation of the same written piece. An additional formal similarity the series

& I ISOLATE MYSELF FROM ALL MY FAMILY  
& I ISOLATE MYSELF FROM ALL MY FRIENDS  
THERE'S A WAR INSIDE MY MIND NO MAN IS SAFE FROM.<sup>26</sup>  
TERRACE III, MAKE SOME FUCKIN' NOISE!

---

shares with Lamar's 'Mortal Man', however, is how each episode is performed a cappella. Having nowhere to hide—and nothing to hide behind—sonically during these a cappella renditions of my work, I found this format extremely effective in heightening the apparently personal nature of each insight. As a means of developing upon Lamar's narrative technique and form during 'Mortal Man', I have placed each 'Terrace' piece in a different 'physical' environment: the first episode takes place in a live performance scenario, whilst the second takes the form of a phone call on the street to an unknown recipient, and the third is spoken directly to the listener. To illustrate the protagonist's gradual decline into isolation, serious depression, and suicidal ideation, these performances gradually lessen in energy and aesthetic quality, quietening from hype man shouting ('TERRACE III'), to anxious phone rant ('Terrace II'), to a disillusioned, conversational tone ('terrace I'). To mimic this gradual quietening in energy and urgency, the 'Terrace' series utilises stylistic, typographical changes during transcription ('TERRRACE III' using all caps, 'Terrace II' using capitals for each word, then 'terrace I' using all lower case, and each piece in a slightly decreased font size).

<sup>26</sup> Queensbridge (NY) rap artist Prodigy's famous line 'There's a war going on outside, no man is safe from', taken from Mobb Deep's 'Survival of the Fittest' (*Tha Infamous*, Loud, RCA, BMG, 1995) is turned inward here, to illustrate P's internal war (of the mind), as opposed to Prodigy's direct reference to the threatening environment he faces in the Queensbridge Projects.

## Void

Drawing on the universal notion of loneliness as symbolised by an endless void, ‘Void’ attempts to reflect the emptiness felt by P at this time in his life. Acting as a kind of sonic ellipsis, this song also attempts to reflect a temporal shift, or a sense of time passing, in the *S.T.A.R.V.E.* narrative.

Days and the hours they roll into one

How I’m living

Living in the great white void and beyond<sup>27</sup>

Days and the hours they roll into one

Hours-upon-days-upon-weeks-upon-years-upon

Living in the great white void and beyond

Days and the hours they roll into one

Hours-upon-days-upon-weeks-upon-years-upon

*‘That night I found myself hearing not only in time,  
but in space as well.  
I not only entered the music but descended,  
—like Dante—into its depths’ (Au, N-r).<sup>28</sup>*

---

<sup>27</sup> Articulating the vast void that engulfs P on a daily basis at this time in his life, I draw on depictions of similar conceptual, thematic, and narratological events as noted by Cormac McCarthy in *Suttree* (London: Picador, 2010) (particularly *Suttree’s* fevered, near-death dream of a ‘frozen chlorine void’, p. 555) and Charles Bukowski, in his notion of emptiness (‘nothing else fills’) during ‘Alone with Everybody’ in *Love is a Dog From Hell* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1977, p. 97). By depicting this all-encompassing emptiness, ‘Void’ attempts to contribute performatively towards Sartrean idealisations of existentialism and the concept of ‘bad faith’, described by Elijah Guerra as ‘a mode of self-deception in which one believes he is something he is not, or believes he is not something that he is [...] hindering [his] ability to live a more meaningful and fulfilling life and embrace his responsibility to create himself [...] perhaps the most detrimental to his project of self-creation is his failure to let go of the past’. Elijah Guerra, ‘Sot’s Skull Subsiding, Sweet Nothingness Betide Me’: *Suttree* and Sartrean Bad Faith’, *MDPI*, 5<sup>th</sup> June 2017 <[mdpi.com/2076-0787/6/2/38/html](https://mdpi.com/2076-0787/6/2/38/html)> [accessed 9 October 2021].

‘Void’ demonstrates a sense of day-to-day monotony through rap familiar to those who might have experienced life without sufficient purpose. Particularly important here is the cyclic nature of ‘Void’, executed as an attempt to depict the feeling of being trapped in an endless cycle of searching, as articulated in *Enter the Void*, a film by Gaspar Noé. P’s awareness of, and anxiety about, the day-to-day emptiness of life without his partner makes him fearful of waking each day to the realisation that this cycle will continue.

<sup>28</sup> Taken from Joe Morton’s reading of Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* (Random House Audio, 2010), this sample serves a similar purpose to Bela Lugosi’s reading of Edgar Allan Poe’s ‘The Tell-Tale Heart’ (as quoted earlier, see p. 147), as both pieces focus on the importance of aural sensory perception (an ‘acute’ sense of ‘hearing’, and entering, or ‘descending’ into ‘the music’). Important to *S.T.A.R.V.E.’s* listener, samples such as this combine (along with several other related vocal samples) to form a kind of omnipresent author surrounding *S.T.A.R.V.E.*, one that activates the listener and enables a parallel discourse, or mode of philosophical allegory, that takes place above and beyond the story of P, based upon aspects of art and life pertaining to conceptual



## Wi(n)dow

Following on from where ‘TERRACE III’ left off, ‘Wi(n)dow’ depicts P’s further psychological descent into a Kafkaesque form of madness relating to his self-imposed isolation and untreated mental health decline. Changing tempos halfway through, the track sonically illustrates P’s fragmented and disorientated mind state at this time, detailing the negative impacts of his current addiction to drugs and alcohol, and his financial insecurity.

*[cough]—I’m a little indisposed.  
But tomorrow I shall be the happiest man in the world.  
Tell her that from me.  
Say I’ll be coming tomorrow.  
I’ll be coming tomorrow...  
Very nice, eh? (Au, N-r).<sup>29</sup>*

---

debates relating to theology, religion, and artistic authenticity. In this way, Ellison’s revelatory way of describing music in prose during this sampled passage suggests a method by which the listener might comprehend and relate to *S.T.A.R.V.E.* Perhaps most crucial to *S.T.A.R.V.E.*’s narratological functioning is Ellison’s allusion to Dante’s *Divine Comedy* (1320), which *S.T.A.R.V.E.* increasingly relies upon as the LP progresses. Here, ending Ellison’s quote with ‘like Dante, into its [the music’s] depths’ before the next song begins, encourages the audience to solidify some of their implicit understandings/inklings that may have surfaced during earlier stages of the LP. Particularly, for those familiar with Dante’s work, the direct reference to his name during this quote (in relation to the song series being titled ‘Terrace’) will serve overtly to signify one of the intertextual relationships occurring throughout *S.T.A.R.V.E.* See Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*, p. 11.

<sup>29</sup> Beginning with a loud cough (or exhalation), jarring the listener in a similar way to an earlier sample from *Play Misty for Me* (see ‘Drip’, p. 143), Per Oscarson’s version of Knut Hamsun’s protagonist from *Hunger* (Henning Carlsen, *Svält*, Athena Film, 1966) is heard portraying a man on the edge of starvation, society, and sanity, who is experiencing extreme isolation, much of which (like P’s) is self-imposed. As with the French quotation at the beginning of *S.T.A.R.V.E.* (see p. 139), this sample is spoken in a foreign language (this time Danish). Once again, for those without privilege of translation, the strategy of employing a foreign language forces the listener to make sense of the audio sample through only tone of voice, atmospherics, and aesthetic qualities. As part of this sense making, in conjunction with contextual clues left by the Ellison sample previously quoted (and Krzysztof Komeda’s soundtrack to *Svält*), it is intended that the listener pick up on potential etymological connections in ‘English-sounding’ words, particularly ‘hell’, or ‘hellso’, which is repeated during the sample. Here, for a selection of *S.T.A.R.V.E.*’s audience, a form of pathetic fallacy might occur in relation to previous references and varied allusions to P’s descent into hell, as mentioned earlier and throughout the LP. This quotation sees Per Oscarson’s character attempting to make sense of his current situation by putting a positive spin on his hellish predicament, willing himself to believe in better days ahead: ‘but tomorrow I shall be the happiest man in the world’, as it is translated in the film’s subtitles. For the audience, their understanding of the protagonist being trapped in a viscous cycle of mental health decline is clear, as it is with P in *S.T.A.R.V.E.* The false sense of positivity depicted in this scene from *Svält* acts as a foreshadowing for one of the final acts in *S.T.A.R.V.E.*, during a similar moment when P’s attempt at maintaining a positive mental outlook is destroyed by an internal voice (‘Dream on’, see conclusion of ‘terrace I’, p. 166). See Knut Hamsun, *Hunger*.

'Widow/window' (repeated)<sup>30</sup>

Once again...

Once again.

Once again! (Au-R)<sup>31</sup>

Woke up early then I prayed to HOV<sup>32</sup>

Put the Fjallraven jacket hood up

On my physical like it's a robe

See the world like I was Michael Collins<sup>33</sup>

See this world like I was Dennis Prose<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> During introductory and concluding stages of this song, a trance-like vocal sample is repeated. This sample can either be perceived as saying 'window', or 'widow', or both. This occurrence of misperception or misinterpretation—and the subsequent confusion caused by it for the listener—is contextually important to the song, due to its thematic and conceptual focus on the fragility of mental health. Here, these samples aid in illustrating how P views his rapidly fragmenting world through a fractured mental 'window'; his confusion, paranoia, and anxiety compounded by drug (in this song's case white 'widow', a notoriously strong strain of marijuana) and alcohol abuse.

<sup>31</sup> This Mobb Deep sample ('Once again') from 'Drop a Gem on 'Em' (*Hell on Earth*, Loud/RCA, 1996) complements P's vocal introduction to 'Wi(n)dow', but also aids in consolidating a previous allusion to Prodigy's (of Mobb Deep) famous line 'there's a war goin' on outside no man is safe from' on 'TERRACE III' (see p. 149).

<sup>32</sup> Reference to JAY-Z's alter ego 'HOVA', or 'Hov' (this name being a play on Jehovah: 'JAY-HOVA') affirming P's strong allegiances to rap music. This allusion also signifies P's atheist beliefs, or at least his current heretical or Godless state of mind, in which he claims to worship a musical artist rather than a deity. JAY-Z gestures towards a similar state of mind on 'D'Evils' (*Reasonable Doubt*, Roc-A-Fella/Priority, 1996): 'I never prayed to God, I prayed to Gotti'. The difference is that JAY claims to idolise a crime boss (John 'Gotti') rather than a religious figure, whereas P worships a rap lyricist (and the culture he symbolises). As a means of further concretising this allusion, this passage also alludes to another JAY-Z song, 'Early This Morning', described on Genius.com as 'a Blueprint 2-era unreleased, unfinished gem' ('Woke up early then I prayed to HOV'). During this song, JAY again articulates his own disillusionment with religion: 'Never read the Qur'an or Islamic scriptures/Only Psalms I read was on the arms of my n\*\*\*as'. JAY-Z, 'Early This Morning', *Genius.com* <[genius.com/Jay-z-early-this-morning-lyrics](https://genius.com/Jay-z-early-this-morning-lyrics)> [accessed 10 October 2021].

<sup>33</sup> Inspired by Kevin Fong's *13 Minutes to the Moon* podcast series, based on the Apollo 11 space flight, I draw on the story of Michael Collins ('Michael Collins: The Third Man', Ep. 07, *BBC World Service* <[bbc.co.uk/programmes/w3csz4dq](https://bbc.co.uk/programmes/w3csz4dq)> [accessed 10 October 2021]). Collins is alluded to here due to his being known as 'the loneliest man in history' during his isolated role as pilot of the command module Columbia on the Apollo 11 NASA space mission in 1969, when he spent 'close to 28 hours alone in orbit' awaiting the return of his crew mates. In the mission log, it was noted 'not since Adam has any human known such solitude as Mike Collins is experiencing during this 47 minutes of each lunar revolution'. I used Collins's story to emphasise P's sense of loneliness and isolation. Matt Hambly, 'Michael Collins: Apollo 11 Pilot and 'Loneliest Man Ever' Dies Age 90', *New Scientist*, 29<sup>th</sup> April 2021 <[newscientist.com/article/2276248-michael-collins-apollo-11-pilot-and-loneliest-man-ever-dies-aged-90/](https://newscientist.com/article/2276248-michael-collins-apollo-11-pilot-and-loneliest-man-ever-dies-aged-90/)> [accessed 13 August 2021].

<sup>34</sup> 'Denis Prose' is a poem written by former Premier League footballer Marvin Sordell, articulating his experiences with depression. Sordell personifies depression as a character that becomes so overbearing he takes over Sordell's life ('since Denis Prose took over, I just obeyed'), eventually leading him to be taken to 'where there is peace', or 'a place to sleep' ('Heaven'). In many ways, the journey described in Sordell's poem serves as microcosmic version of P's journey and battle with mental health decline during S.T.A.R.V.E. Donald McRae, 'Marvin Sordell: 'I Felt Dead Inside. Writing is a way to get Emotions Out'' *The Guardian*, 10<sup>th</sup> September 2018 <[theguardian.com/football/2018/sep/10/marvin-sordell-interview-dead-inside-emotions-depression](https://theguardian.com/football/2018/sep/10/marvin-sordell-interview-dead-inside-emotions-depression)> [accessed 10 October 2021].

Medicating on a daily basis  
 Raw Bacardis with tobaccos—  
 I'm rapping now to fill a void  
 Asking how you build an ark<sup>35</sup>  
 For when the flood is coming  
 I've been living unemployed  
 Knowing that art is a currency  
 Never considered valid  
 I can see them valleys,  
 I can see the shadows<sup>36</sup>  
 Read that malice written in your eyes.  
 Moving back when I approach  
 These spirits is close  
 'Til all that I'm seeing is ghosts...

*And when you find your ark...<sup>37</sup>*

all that I'm seeing is ghosts...

*'Well, you've done it to yourself this time, haven't you?' (Au, N-r).<sup>38</sup>*

---

<sup>35</sup> Referencing P's current heretically-focused internal debate, and his rapidly developing thoughts of suicide as a dramatic upcoming event, P alludes to the biblical character Noah, and his preparation towards his own life-altering event (Genesis 6.11-9.19). As a way of tying the *CAPsule* trilogy closer together, this reference also intertextually links with 'SPRT LVLS' during the *Houses* LP. For both 'Wi(n)dow' and 'SPRT LVLS', the allusion to Noah's story foreshadows a meaningful event in each LP (see 'SPRT LVLS', p. 207).

<sup>36</sup> Another biblical reference, this time to Psalms 23.4 (KJV): 'Yea, as I walk through the valley of the shadow of death', used here to reiterate P's suicidal state of mind, and his obsession with death and mortality. Psalm 23.4 has been referenced in rap music multiple times. Two high profile examples are Nas's 'Let There Be Light' (*Hip Hop is Dead*, Def Jam, 2006) and Coolio's 'Gangsta's Paradise' (*Gangsta's Paradise*, Tommy Boy, Warner Bros., 1995).

<sup>37</sup> Here, as part of the musical accompaniment to 'Wi(n)dow', the sampled vocal complements P's recent allusion to building an ark: 'and when you find your ark...'. Spirit, 'Topanga Windows', *Spirit* (CBS Inc., Epic, 1973).

<sup>38</sup> This sample is the first of several taken from Adrian Lyne's psychological horror film *Jacob's Ladder* (Tri-Star Pictures, 1990), and also the first of several references to the biblical story of Jacob (Genesis 28.10-19, KJV). *Jacob's Ladder* tells the story of Jacob Singer, a veteran of the Vietnam War, who suffered irreparable psychological and physical trauma during conflict, and who lives in a constantly haunted state. In addition to further contextualising P's current theological musings, *Jacob's Ladder* plays a central role in the narrative of *S.T.A.R.V.E.* by drawing upon the main premise of the film. *S.T.A.R.V.E.* attempts to reinterpret Bruce Joel Rubin's (the writer of *Jacob's Ladder*) vision that 'this would not be the story of a man going to hell, but of a man already there' (p. 150). As noted previously in relation to 'TERRACE III', P has already alluded to feeling like he is 'living in some' kind of 'purgatory', and to a 'war' inside his mind. As part of this negative mental state, I interweave the story of Jacob Singer, a man caught in a kind of hellish purgatory himself in *Jacob's Ladder*. The vocal sample here—and the ones to follow during 'Wi(n)dow'—are taken from a scene in which Jacob and his chiropractor (his guardian angel of sorts), Louis, discuss the idea of hell according to Meister Eckhart's theological teachings. Louis asks, 'You ever read Meister Eckhart?', to which Jacob shakes his head. 'How did you ever get your Doctorate without reading Eckhart? [...] You know what he said? The only thing that burns in Hell is the part of you that won't let go of your life; your memories, your attachments. They burn 'em all away. But they're not punishing you', he said. 'They're freeing your soul' (pp. 81-82). Using theological notions relating to Meister Eckhart in this way, 'Wi(n)dow' additionally links with 'Green', a track taken from

*'Canyon's falling down, canyon's falling down'* (repeated).<sup>39</sup>

A demon swimming in my skull piece,  
I can see the fractures like lines upon the porcelain.  
I'm watching the smoke rising high over an audience of you and I  
Me and my shadow<sup>40</sup> are now bitter rivals.

Me and them we have been worshipping off different idols.  
Reading loud from separate hymn sheets, different titles  
Plus, I'm needing more than Nyquil to keep me lighted  
Cross breeding White Widow with that White Lightning

I cease to miss you when my brain is in this G-clamp  
I keep forgettin'<sup>41</sup> when my mind is in this green vice.  
But when the dust is settling, that's when I see you clearly  
Face fading from my view until you're disappearing<sup>42</sup>

*'It's all pain'* (Au, N-r)<sup>43</sup>

And then I wake up in that ice bath  
Burning like I'm Jacob, but my Jezzabelle<sup>44</sup> is nowhere near me

---

*Uzumaki*, a counterpart LP of the *CAPSule* trilogy (see 'Green', p. 240). Bruce Joel Rubin, *Jacob's Ladder* (New York: Applause Theatre Books, 1990), p. 150, and pp. 81-82.

<sup>39</sup> This vocal sample is used to add to the listener's understanding of P's fracturing mental state, and his negative, destructive view of the world around him. Spirit, 'The Great Canyon', *Spirit* (CBS Inc., Epic, 1973).

<sup>40</sup> The Rat Pack, 'Me and My Shadow', *Genius* <[genius.com/The-rat-pack-me-and-my-shadow-lyrics](https://genius.com/The-rat-pack-me-and-my-shadow-lyrics)> [accessed 10 October 2021]. Subverting themes of kinship, belonging, and the idea of an individual and their shadow being a 'team' ('you'll never get rid of your shadow'), P references the song 'Me and My Shadow' to demonstrate his own self-loathing, and his inability to escape his thoughts.

<sup>41</sup> Here, a subtle allusion to a passage from Michael McDonald's 'I keep forgettin' (*If That's what It Takes*, Warner Bros., 1982), in which the speaker notes his/her reoccurring regret at the realisation of a broken relationship ('I keep forgettin' we're not in love anymore'), consolidates *S.T.A.R.V.E.*'s narrative thus far. Once again, for the informed listener, this passage, and the music accompanying it, will be recognisable for being sampled by Warren G for 'Regulate Ft. Nate Dogg' (*Regulate...G Funk Era*, Violator, RAL, 1994).

<sup>42</sup> Here, the tempo of the song is noticeably altered, and the rapidity of my performance is increased momentarily as part of my attempt to engage with artists such as Kendrick Lamar ('For Free?', *TPAB*), and Saba ('PROM / KING', *Care for Me*, Saba Pivot, LLC, 2018), in their use of what John J. Mattesich describes as 'non-alignment', or 'errancy' in rap flow. Here, my performance also adheres to what Mitchell Ohriner terms 'generative' aspects of a rapper's flow, using a quasi-rhythmic delivery to highlight areas of emotional instability and/or subconscious relevance in my lyrics (see Chapter Three, pp. 96-106). During moments such as this in 'Wi(n)dow', by fracturing, or distorting the linear/rhythmic elements of the song, I again artistically gesture towards the disintegrating mind set of P.

<sup>43</sup> An additional sample from *Jacob's Ladder*, this time quoting the protagonist Jacob Singer, is used here to heighten the sense of chaos and pain felt by P at this time.

<sup>44</sup> For this passage, I now overtly allude to Lyne's *Jacob's Ladder*, specifically to a scene in which Jacob finds himself in a feverish, nightmare scenario, coerced into laying in an ice bath to lower his soaring temperature. During this scene, Jacob's mistress, Jezzabelle, is present and willing to help him through his sickness. However, as noted in this passage from 'Wi(n)dow', P remarks that *his* version of Jezzabelle—the individual he has recently broken apart from—is not there to help him.

And my vision's getting more distorted, more devoid of any ideas  
I'm in the void  
Its unavoidable, I need a clean break from all of this  
But I would drop it all for one phone call or one word

Hollow man,<sup>45</sup> I'm waking up broke.  
The mind of a terrorist<sup>46</sup> and body of a roach<sup>47</sup>  
More and more I'm realising now  
In my reflection, all around me<sup>48</sup>  
All I'm seeing is ghosts...  
All I'm seeing is ghosts  
All I'm seeing is ghosts...

*'Widow/window'* (repeated).

*'I was in hell...'* (Au, N-r).<sup>49</sup>

*'So, the way he sees it,  
if you're frightened of dying and holding on,  
you'll see devils tearing your life away.  
But if you've made your peace then the devils  
are really angels freeing you from the earth.'*

---

<sup>45</sup> An allusion to T. S. Eliot's 'The Hollow Men', thematically locating P amongst those 'empty men' of the 'twilight kingdom' who 'lean together' by a 'valley of dying stars'. T. S. Eliot, 'The Hollow Men', *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, ed. by Margaret Ferguson, Mary Jo Salter, and Jon Stallworthy (London: Norton., 2005), p. 1356.

<sup>46</sup> Whilst acknowledging that 'isolation' and 'solitude' 'are not the same' as 'loneliness' in 'Ideology and Terror: A Novel Form of Government', Hannah Arendt contends that when associated with the 'sphere of social intercourse' loneliness can be a by-product of a political isolation which is 'fertile ground' for the breeding of extremism and 'terror'. With one eye on P's vulnerable mind state during 'Wi(n)dow'—enforced mainly by the severe isolation he endures throughout *S.T.A.R.V.E.*—Arendt's ideas of manipulation through isolation by totalitarian regimes can be attributed to P's position on the outskirts of society, and his potential to become a dangerous weapon by influence of extremism. As a means of further articulating P's current self-hatred, vulnerability, and suicidal mind state, I draw here on Arendt's notion that 'loneliness concerns human life as a whole', and can be used as a catalyst for hate, further defining P's position as societal outsider, and potential time bomb. Arendt's observation that 'solitary men have always been in danger of loneliness, when they can no longer find the redeeming grace of companionship to save them from duality and equivocality and doubt' links strongly with P's current circumstances, especially in relation to 'the loss of one's own self', that can only be 'confirmed in its identity' by the 'trusting and trustworthy company' of 'equals', of which P has lost all contact. Hannah Arendt, 'Ideology and Terror: A Novel Form of Government' *The Review of Politics*, 15 (1953) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 322-326 (pp. 323-324).

<sup>47</sup> Here, P references the fate of Gregor Samsa, and his gradual degradation into 'monstrous vermin', or roach-like creature, during Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*. In similarity to Samsa, P senses himself slipping away from his previous life, and the anchors of communication he once relied upon, until he becomes completely out of touch with the outside world. Franz Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*, trans. by Susan Bernofsky, ed. by Mark M. Anderson (London: Norton, 2015 [1915]).

<sup>48</sup> Here, the tempo of the song is altered again, in order to illustrate P's shifting and chaotic mind state, in the same vein as Saba during the final chaotic moments of 'PROM / KING' (see Chapter Three, p. 103).

<sup>49</sup> Lyne, *Jacob's Ladder*.

*It's just a matter of how you look at it, that's all' (Au, N-r).<sup>50</sup>*

---

<sup>50</sup> Another sample from *Jacob's Ladder*, in which Louis divulges upon Eckhart's theories on the existence of hell.

## Terrace II

Presented as a telephone call to an unknown recipient, ‘Terrace II’ continues to elaborate on P’s ongoing crisis, recalling (in a conversational, semi-rhythmically-aligned style) the same vocal hook used on ‘TERRACE III’ based upon the psychological effects of self-imposed isolation (‘Cus I Have Isolated Myself From All My Family/And I Isolate Myself From All My Friends’). When understood as an answering machine message, ‘Terrace II’ takes on an intratextual quality, engaging with ‘Neutral’, a track from *Houses*, in which a missed call message (‘you have a missed call from P’) is audible at the conclusion of the song.<sup>51</sup>

So Now I’m Lifting Weights Inside My Houses Cellar  
One Meal A Day: Donner Meat Kebab, Washed Down With Cans Of Stella  
And The Bailiffs Knocked On My door Last Night, It Was Half Eleven  
I Was Upstairs Hiding, My Debts Are Rising. I’m Petrified...  
Cus I Have Isolated Myself From All My Family,  
And I Isolate Myself From All My Friends  
There’s A War Inside This Pen<sup>52</sup> No Man Is Safe From  
Hello, Can You Hear Me? Hello...?  
Fuck

---

<sup>51</sup> See ‘Neutral’, p. 187, for this intratextual engagement. As *Houses* is set at least two decades in the future of P’s current phone message, the missed call on ‘Neutral’ can be viewed as P’s former self attempting to resurface within the older, more socially-capable P depicted in *Houses*.

<sup>52</sup> Building upon a previous allusion to a lyric by Prodigy of Mobb Depp (‘There’s a war going outside, no man is safe from’) made on ‘TERRACE III’ (see p. 148, footnote 26), I here allude to an album by MIKE (*War in my Pen*, Self-Released, 2018) for ‘Terrace II’. For each of the ‘Terrace’ series, the theme of an internal psychological battle is highlighted, each time in a slightly different guise. I also refer to emerging underground rapper MIKE’s seminal album as a way of bringing my work into the understanding of newer generations of rap fans, by aligning my work with an artist who considers similar themes of mental health.

## Strongbow

‘Strongbow’ acts as the emotional core of the album, providing an evocative insight into P’s day-to-day existence, whilst maintaining a first-person perspective. ‘Strongbow’ relies on listener empathy in order to articulate the serious matter of mental illness *S.T.A.R.V.E.* depicts, and so – like much of the album – utilises a colloquial, localised tone, and imagery portraying P’s vulnerable mental state throughout, to suggest an intimate one-to-one with the listener, and P’s confiding in them.

*‘It’s about you.  
And your despair, your lack of hope...*

You know every day’s a struggle for me

Everyday

*...Look, people have throughout history  
have woken up in the dead of the night  
confronted by blackness.  
The sense that our lives  
are without meaning...’ (Au, N-r).<sup>53</sup>*

Everyday

And you know

Yeah, so I walk  
Slow shuffling while I talk  
Under my breath to myself  
Head down like I’m cowering  
And I’m grown  
Still feeling like a child though  
My daily routine to the shop  
For my four pack of Strongbow

---

<sup>53</sup> This vocal sample is taken from a conversation during Paul Schrader’s film *First Reformed*, in which Ethan Hawke’s character, a Protestant minister, attempts to dissuade a young father-to-be from insisting on the abortion of his baby, due to concerns regarding the impending threat of global warming and climate change, and the world his baby will inherit. This minister’s words speak to P’s current dilemma, especially regarding his first statement (‘It’s about you’), which aids in highlighting how issues such as loneliness, depression, and mental health decline are very individualised problems, centered firmly around the self. Speaking on the concept of ‘blackness’ in terms of philosophical discourse, i.e. a sense of meaninglessness experienced by many at different times throughout their lives, Hawke’s words work (like many of the vocal samples planted around P’s rhymes) to emphasise themes and concepts that engage in important debates around mental health decline in contemporary society.



And then I walk  
Slow shuffling while I talk  
Under my breath to myself  
Until I'm back to my dad's house  
Closing the door  
Safe again within these walls  
Taking my meds  
I ain't forgetting, I ain't going back  
Nah.

Put the telly on and start sipping  
While my mind's flicking back to last Wednesday or Thursday  
See I was walking to the shop that's when I saw him  
And he asked me how I was and so I told him that:  
'I'm not doing very well at all you know,  
This manic depression is getting worse bruv,  
Can't seem to shake it—  
It's only getting worse, and I'm scared you know?  
It just really fuckin' hurts bruv'.

Seen it in his eyes he's looking for an escape route,  
'Stay strong buddeh, stay strong'.  
Sniff-cough, fist pump then he's gone.

See I don't know how it happened  
If I did, I wouldn't be letting it happen  
Now how can that be?  
And these Doctors are fuckin' rubbish  
I get the distinct impression they're just laughing at me  
Fucking class divisions  
And for weeks now I just think the whole world is out to kill me  
Living in purgatory—can't remember where it all started or where it's stored up

Daytime telly and the curtains closed  
Cus outside is a jungle  
And white women are the worst  
They just treat me like shit for no reason

I'm only at peace when I'm sleeping  
I'm only calm when I'm sleeping  
I'm tryna doze off...  
Shit, I can't sleep

*'I never sleep' (Au, R).<sup>54</sup>*

---

<sup>54</sup> One of the most influential passages to signify the nihilistic sentiment presented in many reality rap releases of the 90s, Nas's 'I never sleep, cause sleep is the cousin of death' ('N.Y. State of Mind', *Illmatic*, Columbia,

Wolf the whole can cus I'm gone  
And I'm dying for a spliff, but I know I can't have one  
Cus you don't need them voices back  
Nah, I don't need them voices back

And so I walk,  
Slow shuffling while I talk  
Under my breath to myself  
Head down like I'm cowering  
And I'm grown  
Still feeling like a child though,  
On my routine to the shop  
For my four pack of Strongbow

And then I walk  
Slow shuffling while I talk  
Under my breath to myself  
Head down like I'm cowering

Safe again within these walls  
Yeah, taking my meds  
I ain't forgetting, I ain't going back,  
Nah.

Everyday

Everyday

'And you were able to just go on?  
- Courage...

Everyday

*...is the solution to despair.  
Reason provides no answers.  
We can't know what the future will bring,  
we have to choose despite uncertainty.  
Wisdom is holding two contradictory truths in our mind,  
simultaneously.  
Hope and despair.  
A life without despair is a life without hope.*

---

1994) not only helps to re-centre S.T.A.R.V.E. as a rap record with deeply-rooted rap affiliations and influences, it also helps to indicate P's current mind state as fearful of sleep, due to its close association with death.

*Holding these two ideas in our head is life itself...* (Au, N-r).<sup>55</sup>

- *'Looks like you've got a great looking flying machine there, Eagle, despite the fact you're upside down.*
  - *Somebody's upside down.*
- *There you go, one minute 'til TIG, you guys take care...* (Au, N-r).<sup>56</sup>

---

<sup>55</sup> Continuing their philosophical debate on the meaningfulness of life despite the despair it entails. Hawke's character speaks of hope as being a kind of antidote to despair. This sample, I intend, kindles a small flame of hope within the listener regarding P's psychological 'blackness'. As well as implying a glimpse of light in *S.T.A.R.V.E.*'s dark narrative, the idea of 'hope and despair' aids to establish the stark binary existent in *S.T.A.R.V.E.* and its counterpart, the *Houses* LP. Regarding this binary, each LP is sonically, aesthetically, thematically, and conceptually separate from the other, whilst being unalterably linked. For the active listener, this binary is more notably underlined by the final words contained within the quote 'holding these two ideas in our head is life itself'. In similarity to Maffesoli's ideas of the 'divine social' ('Noi siamo la splendida realta') noted during this thesis section's preface (see pp. 131-132), these words help to establish my artistic intentions for *S.T.A.R.V.E.* and *Houses*: two deeply connected projects that conceptually work for and against one another simultaneously, just as hope and despair, light and dark, joy and pain, perhaps even God and the devil, etc., rely on one another for definition.

<sup>56</sup> Linking with a previous allusion to Michael Collins on 'Wi(n)dow' (see p. 152, footnote 33), this sample quotes a passage of correspondence between Collins and the base command of the Apollo 11 moon landing expedition. Within the sample, Michael Collins is heard to say 'somebody's upside down'. Whilst recalling the idea of Collins as 'loneliest man in history', his words also help to reflect P's current chaotic mental state, he is literally 'upside down', and out of alignment with the world he once knew. Kevin Fong, 'Michael Collins: 'The Third Man'.

## Slow Poison

As the penultimate ‘scene’ from *S.T.A.R.V.E.*, ‘Slow Poison’ depicts P at his lowest, again highlighting his reliance on drugs and alcohol, and articulating his mental exhaustion at fighting off a spiralling and now imminently dangerous decline into suicidal depression. To artistically represent the internal ‘voices’ P mentions hearing during the previous track, ‘Strongbow’ (Cus you don’t need them voices back/Nah, I don’t need them voices back’), ‘Slow Poison’ employs quotes from Ernest Hemingway’s *For Whom the Bell Tolls*<sup>57</sup> and Robert Frost’s ‘Acquainted with the Night’.<sup>58</sup>

*‘Oh yes  
there are worse things than  
being alone  
but it often takes decades  
to realize this  
and most often  
when you do  
it’s too late  
and there’s nothing worse  
than  
too late’ (Au, N-r).<sup>59</sup>*

Slow Poison  
My rope  
From when I wake up  
‘til when I don’t  
  
On the brain always  
My dose  
Tryna find new ways (ways)

---

<sup>57</sup> Ernest Hemingway, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (London: Arrow Books, 2004).

<sup>58</sup> Robert Frost ‘Acquainted with the Night’, *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, p. 1237.

<sup>59</sup> As introduction to this song, Charles Bukowski’s poem ‘oh yes’ (*War all the Time*, p. 100) is digitally quoted. Employed as a way to increase the sense of isolation felt by *S.T.A.R.V.E.*’s protagonist, this poem is quoted in a computer-generated voice. Here, the soulless, emotionally distant recital adds to the hollow sense of social distance presented on ‘Slow Poison’. There are also narrative elements of the poem that reflect the social dichotomy artistically presented on *S.T.A.R.V.E.* and *Houses* (‘but it often takes decades/to realize this/and most often/when you do/it’s too late’). The listener/reader is given the chance to reflect upon P’s dilemma and current situation, balancing this with his actions on *Houses*, an LP that again focuses on P, but two decades later in his life.

Out 'til when I ghost<sup>60</sup>

Deep in the void (void)<sup>61</sup>  
Cold days  
And my eyes open—wide—shut<sup>62</sup>  
To my old ways

And the truth hurting  
cus when I dig deep  
All I see is mistakes, hate, pain  
and that missed grief

Let this shit burn up  
Knowing escape  
Only found at the bottom of a bottle or a jar<sup>63</sup>  
It's a piss take

*'Maybe I'll just do it now...'*<sup>64</sup>

---

<sup>60</sup> To 'ghost', in rap vernacular, means to vanish, exit, or die.

<sup>61</sup> Here, I again make indirect reference to Gaspar Noé's *Enter the Void*, a film that articulates an individual's journey through death in accordance with ideologies contained in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* (London: Penguin Books, 2006). Using this reference, I try to establish a resonance between the journey undertaken by the protagonist of *Enter the Void* (a bodiless soul searching for a vessel/refuge) and P, linking ideas of P's life being a kind of endless, searching purgatory (in the same way as the LP links with elements of Adrian Lyne's film *Jacob's Ladder*). I draw upon 'the void' several times during *S.T.A.R.V.E.*.

<sup>62</sup> Here, I draw on Stanley Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut* (Warner Bros., 1999) for similar reasons as *Enter the Void*. There are levels of complexity relating to an individual's musing on mortality associated with both films that I wish to draw on, in order to align my creative output with these works.

<sup>63</sup> Intratextual reference to 'Jar' ('we used to keep dreams in a jar'), an earlier track from *S.T.A.R.V.E.* (see p. 141) that, when referenced in relation to P's current alcohol and drug addiction, adds further meaning to the title in context of the full LP.

<sup>64</sup> As one of several quotes taken from Ernest Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (*Tolls*) (Simon and Schuster Audio, 2006) during 'Slow Poison', the words of *Tolls*'s protagonist, Robert Jordan (narrated here by Campbell Scott), are utilised to emphasise P's internal struggle with his apparent decision to commit suicide. Here, I also implicitly draw on Hemingway's experiences of his father's suicide, and his own struggle with mental health decline and eventual suicide (albeit later in life), using these aspects of his writing and life as metonymy for active themes throughout *S.T.A.R.V.E.* As noted throughout *Tolls*, Jordan engages in an internal debate regarding what constitutes a noble death, and the morality of suicide, particularly relating to the suicide of his father ('after your father had shot himself with this [Jordan's grandfather's] pistol, and you had come home from school and they'd had the funeral' (349). These internal musings, particularly relating to the idea of suicide as intergenerational recurrence in specific family lines (and even the possible genetic implications of mental health decline described as the 'Hemingway curse' by Hemingway's paternal granddaughter, Mariel) all highlight issues I wish to raise during *S.T.A.R.V.E.* Sharing similar experiences with Jordan (and Hemingway), P's sense of 'pressure not to go out like my father or Virginia Woolf' (see 'Drip', p. 144) is compounded here. Using *Tolls* quotations almost like provocations, in much the same way as Scarlett Johansen's voice is employed during 'Drip' (see p. 143, footnote 14), Jordan's scattered internal monologue throughout 'Slow Poison' serves not only to highlight important themes raised on *S.T.A.R.V.E.* regarding isolation and suicide, but also artistically to reflect P's mental health decline, mainly due to a form of marijuana-induced psychosis that causes him to hear voices. Acting as voices in P's head, these quotations link back to the previous track, 'Strongbow', in which P notes he is 'dying for a spliff' but does not want to smoke one, as he 'don't need them voices back' (see p. 160). Barbara Maranzani, 'Ernest Hemingway: How Mental Illness Plagued the Writer and

Let it all burn up  
Let it just break

...Who are you talking to?...

Tryna hold up livin' with the weight of the world  
'til my wrists break

...I don't want to do that business that my father did,  
I will do it alright,  
but I'd much prefer not to have to.  
I'm against that.  
Don't think about that, don't think at all.' (Au, N-r).

You're in the midst of a hollow victory,  
See you may have won the battle  
But you'll never win the war...<sup>65</sup>  
(War, all the time).<sup>66</sup>

You're in the midst of a hollow victory,  
See you may have won the battle  
But you'll never win the war...  
(War, all the time).

I've been on my vice and white Bacardi's  
visioning my life in sniper targets  
tryna keep my mind from out this garbage  
living off the crumbs up in these carpets  
recently been riding round in circles  
seeing only whites, and browns and purples.  
Breathin' only once or twice an hour...

Eternal sunshine I'm erasing any traces of them (Al, R).<sup>67</sup>

---

His Family', *Biography*, 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021 <[biography.com/news/ernest-hemingway-mental-illness-family](https://www.biography.com/news/ernest-hemingway-mental-illness-family)> [accessed 26 July 2022].

<sup>65</sup> Derivations of this saying also feature on 'SPRT LVLS': 'and you may have won the battle but you'll never win the --' (see *Houses*, p. 208), and 'Berry': 'may have now but you can't win 'em all' (see *Uzumaki*, p. 263) acting as a binding statement connecting the trilogy in sentiment and theme. Whilst tying together the LPs, the saying is subverted to display a sense of circumstantial irony regarding the emotional impact of the statement, depending upon on which LP it is heard. In 'Slow Poison', the protagonist refers to it in the context of his ongoing battle with mental health decline, from which he fears he may never escape. During 'SPRT LVLS', the protagonist uses it to articulate his ongoing struggle with familial and social responsibility, and as a metaphor for his immediate drunkenness. Finally, in 'Berry', the phrase is referred to in relation to my struggle to leave an enduring artistic legacy.

<sup>66</sup> Reference to Charles Bukowski's *War all the Time* (Santa Rosa, CA: Black Sparrow Press, 1993), a book of deeply personal and reflective poetry that often depicts isolation, and a sense of loneliness amongst the multitudes that relates directly to the protagonist of *S.T.A.R.V.E.* Alluding to this text also aids in contextualising the initial poem, 'oh yes', that begins 'Slow Poison'.

<sup>67</sup> Quotation that preempts a line from 'Writeful Owner' (see p. 169), a track from the final stage of *S.T.A.R.V.E.*'s narrative, highlighting the cyclic and spiraling nature of the protagonist's mental state. This passage, and the footnoted quotations that follow it, are repeated during the conclusion of 'Slow Poison' as a

Living in the great white void and beyond  
Days and the hours they roll into one (Al, R).<sup>68</sup>

Waste Land of the mind I'm erasing any traces of them (Al, R).<sup>69</sup>

Living in the great white void and beyond  
Days upon, weeks upon, hours upon, months upon (Al, R).<sup>70</sup>

*'I wish there was some way to pass on what I've learned  
though...Christ I was learning fast there at the end' (Au, N-r).<sup>71</sup>*

Slow Poison  
My rope  
From when I wake up (up, up)  
'til when I don't

On the brain always (ways)  
My dose  
Tryna find new ways (ways)  
Out 'til when I ghost

*'I guess I'm not awfully good at pain'.<sup>72</sup>*

Deep in the void (void)  
Cold days  
And my eyes open—wide—shut  
To my old ways

*'Listen, if I do that now  
you wouldn't misunderstand,*

---

sequence of flash forwards/flashbacks, in order to compound the emotional weight attached to them. This technique again draws on Kendrick Lamar's iteration of the 'Mortal Man' spoken word piece throughout *TPAB* (see Chapter Three, pp. 79-82).

<sup>68</sup> Allosonic quotation of a passage taken from 'Void' (see p. 150).

<sup>69</sup> Allosonic quotation of a passage taken from 'Writeful Owner' (*S.T.A.R.V.E.*) that refers to T. S. Eliot's 'The Waste Land' (see p. 169, footnote 83 for further details).

<sup>70</sup> Passage quoted from 'Void'.

<sup>71</sup> Foreshadowing the conclusion of *S.T.A.R.V.E.*, and the possible imminent demise of P, the voice of Robert Jordan is employed again as a kind of omniscient narrator, highlighting P's plight as an experience presented here for listeners to learn from, hopefully gaining deeper understandings of themselves and the world around them.

<sup>72</sup> Here, Robert Jordan's admittance to being intolerant to pain links with Jacob Singer's observation that 'it's all pain' during 'Wi(n)dow' (see p. 154, footnote 35).

would you?...<sup>73</sup>

cus when I dig deep

...*Nobody, he said*'.<sup>74</sup>

All I see is mistakes, hate,  
Pain and that—pain and that

Let this shit burn up  
Knowing escape  
Only found in the bottom of a bottle or a jar  
It's a piss take

Let it all burn up  
Let it just break  
Tryna hold off livin' with the weight of the world  
'til my wrists break

Yeah, that's it D.O.C...

I have been one	<i>'I have been one... (Au, N-r).</i> <sup>75</sup>
Acquainted with the night	
I walked out in the rain	<i>...And back in rain... (Au, N-r).</i>
And back in rain	
I have outwalked	
The furthest city light	
And I dropped my eyes	<i>...dropped my eyes... (Au, R.)</i>
Unwilling to explain (Al, N-r).	<i>...unwilling to explain...</i>

I have been one

---

<sup>73</sup> Referring to suicide as 'that', Robert Jordan (employed here as a voice in P's head) prompts listeners to question P's decision to commit suicide, and asks them to attempt to understand, or empathise with, his circumstances.

<sup>74</sup> Further illustrating the confusing and gradually fragmenting nature of P's mental state, Jordan's character is spoken of in the third person here.

<sup>75</sup> For this passage, I draw upon Robert Frost's poem 'Acquainted with the Night', which explores themes of isolation and loneliness. I have adapted the poem slightly, in order to recite it rhythmically, but with the intention of being close enough to the original to evoke it. Here, I layer my voice with Ron Pearlman's recital of the same poem, during a monologue from Ron Koslow's TV series *Beaty and the Beast (Beauty)* (Republic Pictures, 1987). After allowing both recitals to echo/overlap each other, I layer both voices in unison. I do this for two specific artistic purposes. Firstly: Pearlman's voice as Beast in *Beaty* has a dramatic aesthetic impact in consolidating the seriousness of the song. His tone and performance, spoken as almost a whisper, helps continue the idea that P is hearing voices inside his head. Towards the end of 'Slow Poison', voices such as Pearlman's Beast become increasingly overpowering, interrupting P's thoughts, and interjecting upon his focus, until eventually they begin to completely control him. Secondly, the Beast's narrative struggle with isolation in *Beauty* adds further depth to *S.T.A.R.V.E.*'s protagonist's journey. In addition, I believe P's speaking in unison with a 'Beast' aids in illustrating his transition into something unrecognisable to himself and others, an altered state that better suits his vision of himself, and his disassociation from society/humanity.



Acquainted with the night	<i>...acquainted with the night...</i>
I walked out in the rain	<i>I have walked out in the rain...</i>
And back in rain	
I have outwalked	<i>...I have outwalked</i>
The furthest city light	<i>the furthest city light...</i>
And I dropped my eyes	

*...Came over houses from another street,  
But not to call me back or say good-bye;  
And further still at an unearthly height,  
One luminary clock against the sky  
Proclaimed the time was neither wrong nor right.  
I have been one acquainted with the night' (Au, N-r).<sup>76</sup>*

*'When you're one of the few to land on your feet,  
what do you do to make ends meet?  
Makes 'em laugh, make 'em cry,  
Make 'em lay down and die' (A, R).<sup>77</sup>*

---

<sup>76</sup> Here, Pearlman's Beast takes over the speaking completely, concluding Frost's poem in an uncanny quasi-rhythmic fashion. This employment of Pearlman's reading once again serves to illustrate P's metamorphosis into something unrecognisable.

<sup>77</sup> Pearlman's dramatic reading of Frost's 'Acquainted' is gradually underpinned by the dark undertones of Pink Floyd's 'One of the Few' (*The Final Cut*, Harvest, 1983). Roger Water's lyrics (in combination with the ticking clock percussive element of the song) adds to the dramatic sentiment presented at the conclusion of 'Slow Poison'. Here, P's mind is depicted as a time bomb due to the ticking clock soundtrack, and the theme of death and dying throughout the song is solidified. Another layer of meaning can be added to this quotation of Pink Floyd, as the passage references 'teaching'. This links to a previous allusion to 'learning' noted in a passage spoken by Robert Jordan ('I wish there was some way to pass on what I've learned though'), placing further emphasis on the listener to take something from this LP, to learn from it.

## terrace I

Spoken against a background of silence, ‘terrace I’, the third and final piece from the ‘Terrace’ series, represents P reaching a spiritual space of sorts, between life and death, in which he continues to reflect on his recent struggles.<sup>78</sup> Here, P’s voice is noticeably calm as he again echoes the ‘Terrace’ refrain, now attempting to use positive language as a means of ‘breaking from’ the war ‘inside’ his mind.

so the doctors gave me that prescription bull shit  
but it just don’t work until i’m feeling nothing  
and i even lost my faith in music  
gave away my cds and vinyl,  
gave away my favourite music  
so i isolate myself from all my family  
and i isolate myself from all my friends  
see, there’s a war inside this brain  
that i know i can break from...

if i just keep focused, and maintain that self-belief, and remember what you been told, it’s twenty-four hours  
in a day...<sup>79</sup>

[fading out]

‘Dream on’.

---

<sup>78</sup> Here, P’s reaching of a spiritual plain can be likened to Kendrick Lamar’s reaching of an ‘otherworldly cipher’ (Miller, 2020) during his digitally manipulated meeting with the late Tupac Shakur during ‘Mortal Man’ (*TPAB*). To achieve this effect, I have used stark silence as a background to my words, rather than a musical soundtrack, in similarity to Lamar’s use of silence during ‘Mortal Man’. Additionally, my use of a refrain for each episode of the ‘Terrace’ series echoes Lamar revealing the ‘Conflicted’ poem throughout *TPAB*. Regarding Lamar’s ‘mental interview’ with Tupac, see Monica R. Miller, ‘Can Dead Homies Speak?: The Spirit and Flesh of Black Meaning’, in *Kendrick Lamar and the Making of Black Meaning*, ed. by Christopher M. Driscoll, Monica R. Miller, and Anthony B. Pinn (New York: Routledge, 2020), p. 159, and Chapter Two of this thesis, pp. 72-88.

<sup>79</sup> As the final ‘Terrace’ sketch in the series, this piece draws on a technique pioneered by Kendrick Lamar on ‘Sing About Me, I’m Dying of Thirst’ (*good kid, m.A.A.d city*, TDE, Aftermath, Interscope, 2012). In that song, the speaker embodies the sister of Keisha, a tragic figure depicted earlier by Lamar on ‘Keisha’s Song (Her Pain)’ (*Section.80*, TDE, 2011), insisting that the listener not ignore them (‘I’ll never fade away, I’ll never fade, I know my fate [...] don’t ignore me...’) even as their voice is faded ironically into the instrumental of the song. For ‘terrace I’, I employ a similar technique during P’s final attempt to will himself out of his suicidal mind state. Whilst engaging in this attempt (‘if i just keep focused, and maintain that self-belief, and remember what you been told, its twenty-four hours in a day’), P’s voice is faded away, to undermine his gesture towards positive thinking, which is overshadowed by his depression.

## Writeful Owner

‘Writeful Owner’ represents an ambiguous form of resolution to *S.T.A.R.V.E.*, one which might depict P’s passing on (death), or a passage in time in which P erases all memory of previous events. Either way, ‘Writeful Owner’ signifies a moment of cleansing, a form of kenosis in which P strips himself of earthly conditions and material possessions, in order to reach a place of psychological peace.

*‘They all think it’s about more detail,  
but that’s not how the memory works.*

Blank slate, blank slate.

*We recall with our feelings,  
anything real should be a mess.  
I can show you...’ (Au, N-r).<sup>80</sup>*

Blank space, blank slate

Eternal sunshine  
I’m erasing any traces of them,<sup>81</sup>  
Putting all I recall on the bonfire,<sup>82</sup>  
Vanities on the scrapheap, look.  
You’re a blank space, white noise.  
Lost thought in a dead brain cell,  
I don’t need fuck all to do with them—  
‘F’ all of you lot, I’m losing my memory.

Waste Land<sup>83</sup> of the mind  
I’m erasing any traces of them,  
Immolation of art on the bonfire,

---

<sup>80</sup> To highlight the cyclical nature of *S.T.A.R.V.E.*’s narrative, here, the same female voice as heard on ‘Jar’ (sampled from Dennis Villeneuve’s *Bladerunner 2049*) is utilised. Speaking directly to the listener regarding the track’s thematic concentration on memory, and the willful eradication of memory, this quote serves the purpose of describing how people ‘recall with our feelings’, an idea that links with Chapter Three’s exploration into the prioritisation of ‘feeling over everything’, as noted on p. 108, and pp. 112-117.

<sup>81</sup> This line refers to Michael Gondry’s film *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (Focus Features, 2004), in which the protagonist attempts to rid himself of all memories of a previous relationship.

<sup>82</sup> In addition to referencing Tom Wolfe’s novel *The Bonfire of the Vanities* (Farrar Straus Giroux, 1987), and Brian De Palma’s movie adaptation of the same name (Warner Bros. 1990), this line mainly refers to the 1497 ‘burning of the vanities’ in Florence, Italy, in which citizens were required to burn thousands of objects, such as texts, cosmetics, art work, etc., that were condemned by religious authorities as sinful.

<sup>83</sup> Here, T. S. Eliot’s ‘The Waste Land’ is alluded to regarding its phantasmogoric nature, and the personal mental decline and social lassitude it presents. Eliot’s poem is also referenced as a way of positioning *S.T.A.R.V.E.* alongside poetry such as ‘The Waste Land’ as complex, multi-layered literary art.

Put it all on the scrapheap, look.  
You're a pound note, lens flare,  
Lost thought in a dead brain cell.  
I don't need fuck all to do with them—  
'F' all of you lot-I'm losing...

*'I felt like I was Jacob...*

Clipping off the roots,  
Separate and cut ties for good riddance,  
Nevermore<sup>84</sup> you be blessed with this presence,  
Nevermore you will feed from my plate.

*...Wrestling all night long...*

Cutting out your claws  
Anyways I can do's, I rebuild,  
Barricade them pathways are trapped veins,  
I retain the pack now to re-deal.

*...Fighting in the grass...*

Guillotine the past,  
Separate and cut ties for good riddance,  
Damnatio Memoriae,  
And nevermore you will take from my faith,

*...Every sentence, every question...' (Au, N-r).<sup>85</sup>*

Locking off the rot,  
Anyways I can do's I rebuild,  
Barricade the pathways are tourniquets,  
Molloy, Malone Dies, Unnamable.<sup>86</sup>

---

<sup>84</sup> Edgar Allen Poe's ideas of lost love in the form of Lenore are evoked here, in my repetition of what the raven 'quoth': 'nevermore'. Edgar Allen Poe, 'The Raven', *Edgar Allan Poe: The Complete Stories* (New York: Random House, 1992 [1845]), pp. 716-719.

<sup>85</sup> Again highlighting *S.T.A.R.V.E.*'s spiraling narrative, a voice heard previously on 'Strongbow' is employed between my vocals. Here, Ethan Hawk (playing a catholic minister in Paul Schrader's film *First Reformed*) is heard recollecting an encounter between himself and a disillusioned father-to-be (for further details, see 'Strongbow', footnote 53). To match the uplifting sense of cleansing, or self-immolation, presented on 'Writeful Owner', Hawk's voice is jubilant, comparing his encounter to that of Jacob wrestling with the angel in Genesis 32.22-32. Whilst aligning with the sentiment of cleansing, or self-affirmation provided on 'Writeful', this passage also links with previous quotes taken from *Jacob's Ladder* (and verbal allusions made to the same film) that appear on 'Wi(n)dow' (see pp. 151-156). This link aids to solidify the importance of the listener's familiarity with the story of *Jacob's Ladder* which, when contextualised, helps provide further insight into the mind of P.

<sup>86</sup> Allusion to Samuel Beckett's 'trilogy' series of novels, *Malloy*, *Malone Dies*, and *The Unnameable*, which focuses thematically on mortality, memory loss, and the entropic fragmentation of the ageing mind and identity. The trilogy is inherently entropic and circular in nature, the protagonists' conditions worsening and the style of the novels becoming increasingly non-linear and fragmentary. The differences between Beckett's trilogy and mine, in this regard, will become obvious, but at this point it is hoped the informed listener might see the allusion as an indication that that is, at this stage, not inevitable. Samuel Beckett, *Molly, Malone Dies*, and *Unamable* (New York: Grove Press, 1951-1956).

Allow me now to explain and edutain<sup>87</sup> upon my next arrangement,  
I'm about to turn a corner—  
I'm about to burn them all up.  
Rhyming out the booth, idolised like I'm climbing out the 'Guini.  
Loose canon, Bruce Banner<sup>88</sup>, Bad Lieutenant<sup>89</sup> firing at the ceiling.

And I'm talking about the 'Mastermind'<sup>90</sup>  
I'm about to master mine  
I'm out for that sublime—  
I'm Arthur Ash.  
More than most I'm out for that hard to find:  
peer respect.  
More than your mortgage and more than coin<sup>91</sup>  
I'm more concerned with mortal matters, more respect.  
I need acknowledging more than I need to climb them corporate ladders

Look.

I will not trust,  
none of my trusted work to the unworthy.  
How would I look,  
giving up what's sacred to the ghosts?  
I will not trust,  
none of my bespoke premium releases,  
How would I look,  
giving up my stock to a wolf in sheep's skin?

---

<sup>87</sup> In my allusion to Boogie Down Production's LP *Edutainment* (Jive, RCA Records, 1990), I once again align my work with the rap genre, whilst highlighting my intention that *S.T.A.R.V.E.* be used as an educational tool as well as for entertainment.

<sup>88</sup> Here, I allude to Bruce Banner, the tormented doctor who is liable to transform into *The Incredible Hulk* (Marvel Comics, 1963) when agitated, as a way of illustrating P's transitioning into something stronger, in similarity to my use of Ron Pearlman's Beast character on 'Slow Poison' (see p. 166, footnote 75).

<sup>89</sup> Reference to Harvey Keitel's character in Abel Ferrara's *Bad Lieutenant* (Aries Films, LIVE Entertainment, 1992) as a means of illustrating P's sense of redemption during 'Writeful Owner'. In similarity to Keitel's character at the conclusion of the film, the conclusion of *S.T.A.R.V.E.* serves as P's moment to redeem himself, to rid himself of past sins.

<sup>90</sup> Here I allude to 'Mastermind', a song by Nas, in which he states 'a mastermind sees it coming before it comes [...] everything planned out perfect...'. I use this reference to illustrate P's new mental state, in which he seems to have grasped important elements of his life, and is beginning to manipulate them in his favour. At the same time, I allude to Nas's notion of the mastermind as part of my making of *CAPsule*, a musical trilogy that took a great deal of planning and time to create. Nas, 'Mastermind', *God's Son* (Ill Will, Columbia, 2002).

<sup>91</sup> Gesturing towards his disdain for elements of financial security such as 'mortgage' and 'coin', P inadvertently foreshadows themes prominent in the following LP, *Houses*. Here, P is clearly not interested in monetary gain, and would rather garner 'peer respect' and artistic acclaim than the fruits of the 'corporate ladder'. However, when depicted some twenty years later during *Houses*, P can be noted as completely consumed by his responsibilities and obligations to his family as bread winner, and often refers to his need for the financial security he scorned at a younger age. This contrast in personality and life perspective between young P and the more mature P helps artistically to illustrate how time (for better or worse) can reshape an individual's mind in terms of what they deem most important.

Nah.

## *Houses*



Set two decades after where *S.T.A.R.V.E.* left off, *Houses* is a temporally linear day-in-the-life narrative, presented as a series of musical vignettes. The narrative focuses on a fictional working-class early-middle-aged father of two in contemporary Nottingham, England, as he struggles to come to terms with the societal restrictions, conformities, and benefits of fatherhood. The piece is set to music that builds on forms of intergenerational dialogue

---

<sup>1</sup> *Houses* intertextually links with James Joyce's *Ulysses* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) in various ways. The colour and texture of the LP cover image is inspired by the first published version of *Ulysses*. To view a picture of this first edition, see Graham Foster, 'Anthony Burgess and the Censorship of *Ulysses*', *The International Anthony Burgess Foundation*, 12<sup>th</sup> September 2018 <[anthonyburgess.org/banned-books/anthony-burgess-censorship-ulysses/](http://anthonyburgess.org/banned-books/anthony-burgess-censorship-ulysses/)> [accessed 26 January 2022]. For *Houses*, a stamp-sized sample of the *Ulysses* first edition has been enlarged to form the album cover. Whilst being an ambiguous and obscure link between the texts, when combined with all of the (many) other allusions to Joyce's text made in the LP, this aesthetic choice becomes more significant: this is an abstracted close-up, as is the work. This thesis, and the albums including *Houses*, were completed in 2022, on the centenary of the publication of *Ulysses*.

between the character and his late father, drawing heavily on James Joyce's *Ulysses* and Homer's *Odyssey* to provide thematic and conceptual contexts (as detailed in the relevant track introductions and gloss notes below). Framing itself around these texts, *Houses* simultaneously links with other works in multiple genres, from high modernism to popular music and culture, in accordance with traditional definitions of the 'encyclopedic narrative',<sup>2</sup> to imply the multiplicity of the protagonist's struggles, and his connections to the world beyond him. The album also provides a running, subjective commentary on the state of contemporary British society, and focuses upon multiple themes including those of the paternal bond, masculinity, mortality, sexual desire, race and racial diversity, and fatherhood.

---

<sup>2</sup> For further information on Edward Mendelson's 'model of the explicitly 'encyclopedic' text', see Casey Michael Henry, 'Et Tu, Too?: Kendrick Lamar's 'To Pimp a Butterfly' and the Revival of Black Postmodernism', *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 26<sup>th</sup> July 2015 <[lareviewofbooks.org/article/et-tu-too-kendrick-lamars-tpab-and-the-revival-of-black-postmodernism/](http://lareviewofbooks.org/article/et-tu-too-kendrick-lamars-tpab-and-the-revival-of-black-postmodernism/)> [accessed 12 November 2018], p. 10.



*Houses*  
Annotated Lyrics

[https://soundcloud.com/grand\\_imperial\\_cappo/sets/houses/s-1Vjb2tDtcxn?si=aec6b979fd0948d7a19a4a5a90014d75&utm\\_source=clipboard&utm\\_medium=text&utm\\_campaign=social\\_sharing](https://soundcloud.com/grand_imperial_cappo/sets/houses/s-1Vjb2tDtcxn?si=aec6b979fd0948d7a19a4a5a90014d75&utm_source=clipboard&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=social_sharing)

**Morning:**

- |            |     |
|------------|-----|
| 1. Ghosts  | 179 |
| 2. Lyfe    | 183 |
| 3. HMRC    | 186 |
| 4. Neutral | 188 |

**Afternoon:**

- |                         |     |
|-------------------------|-----|
| 5. Funeral              | 191 |
| 6. Unborn Seed          | 194 |
| 7. Will We?             | 198 |
| 8. Sessy Lu             | 201 |
| 9. Undigested Sweetcorn | 204 |

**Evening:**

- |               |     |
|---------------|-----|
| 10. Forces    | 208 |
| 11. SPRT LVLS | 210 |
| 12. Solitaire | 214 |

**Night:**

- |                               |     |
|-------------------------------|-----|
| 13. Lay Your Head Down        | 218 |
| 14. While You Sleep           | 221 |
| 15. Ghosts ( <i>reprise</i> ) | 223 |

## Ghosts ('The Telemachiad')

Drawing upon classic literature that converses with the theme of paternity, such as *Hamlet*,<sup>3</sup> *Ulysses*,<sup>4</sup> and *The Odyssey*,<sup>5</sup> 'Ghosts' acts as a bridge (in time) between *Houses* and *S.T.A.R.V.E.*, highlighting P's transition from suicidal twenty-something to overwhelmed family man in his early forties, through an introspective address to an unknown recipient. As *Houses* is loosely framed around *Ulysses* and, in turn, '*Ulysses* is framed on the *Odyssey*', vocal samples taken from *Ulysses* on this song link with Stephen Dedalus's drive 'to answer two questions: "Am I father? If I were?"'.<sup>6</sup> This focus is particularly relevant to Dedalus's intellectual musings on paternal themes during the first three chapters, or the first part of Joyce's novel, 'The Telemachiad' ('Telemachus'/'I').<sup>7</sup>

'Ghosts' also reflects upon how P came to resolve inner tensions regarding his father's suicide, a circumstance alluded to throughout *S.T.A.R.V.E.* P also offers the listener a chance to understand how he overcame his own suicidal mind state at the conclusion of *S.T.A.R.V.E.*, and sets the stage for the *Houses* narrative.

- 'D'you know they say, the worst thing is a man who takes his own life.
- Oh, temporary insanity of course. We've got to take a charitable view of it.
  - They say the man who does it is a coward.
  - Well, that's not for us to judge' (Au, N-r).<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> William Shakespeare, *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, ed. by Philip Edwards (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>4</sup> James Joyce, *Ulysses: The 1922 Text (U)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>5</sup> Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. by E. V. Rieu (London: Penguin Books, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> Ann Kimble Loux, "Am I Father? If I Were?" A Trinitarian Analysis of the Growth of Stephen Dedalus in 'Ulysses', *James Joyce Quarterly*, 22.3 (1985), 281-296 (p. 281).

<sup>7</sup> D.G. van der Vat notes that '*Ulysses* deals with a son in search of a father (Stephen-Telemachos) and with a wanderer away from his home (Bloom-Odysseus). The very choice of *The Odyssey* as a frame stresses the importance of the father-son theme'. D.G. van der Vat, 'Paternity in Ulysses', *English Studies*, 19 (1937), 145-158 (p. 145).

<sup>8</sup> Beginning the LP with a vocal sample taken from Joseph Strick's film adaptation of *Ulysses* (British Lion Films, 1967), *Houses* picks up where *S.T.A.R.V.E.* left off, dealing with themes of male mental health decline, the father-son bond, and suicide. In this vocal sample, traditional stigmas regarding suicide are debated candidly in the presence of Leopold Bloom, who is notably quiet during the discussion. Unbeknownst to all but one of the group, Bloom's father committed suicide. Like Bloom, P (the protagonist of the preceding *S.T.A.R.V.E.* LP) lost

Like father like...<sup>9</sup>  
And plus the apple never falls too far from the...<sup>10</sup>  
When you're caught up,  
And can't see the wood for the...<sup>11</sup>

Don't fly too close...<sup>12</sup>

---

his father to the same fate. Soon after the sample ends, the lyrics of 'Ghosts' begin with a reference to several proverbs ('like father like...'/ 'the apple never falls too far...') that aid in contextualising P's psychological complex regarding his father's suicide, an issue alluded to during *S.T.A.R.V.E.* Each of these idioms breaks off in prosopopoeia: they are clichés, true but also unutterable for the protagonist, each speaking to a truth he needs to negotiate and finds painful. Using this initial quote enables a link between P and Leopold Bloom to be immediately established, and opens the door to the possibility of further links between them in the LP.

<sup>9</sup> Alluding to an English proverb with roots in classical Latin ('Fathers and sons resemble each other, and sons tend to do what their fathers did before them'), this opening line—even when cut short—suggests to the listener the notion that the speaker is affected somehow by the past actions of his father. As the reader will note, P often makes use of commonly known proverbs/sayings during *Houses*, that are often anonymous in origin and do not have set texts containing them. Whilst these are not literary allusions as such, they are cultural touchstones that are hugely important to the function of *Houses*, due to P's reliance on them to help him negotiate his place in the world. At multiple times during *Houses*, P uses these phrases as forms of communally-acquired knowledge that have been passed down throughout the ages—and proven to be historically sound regarding the human experience—to help him navigate dilemmas. *Houses* reflects Michael Maffesoli's ideas on the 'Divine Social' (see Preface, pp. 131-132), and P's use of proverbs to illustrate his reliance on society at large (in opposition to his previous isolation during *S.T.A.R.V.E.*) helps to highlight this. See Richard A. Spears, *McGraw-Hill's Dictionary of American Idioms: The Most Practical Reference to the Idiomatic and Verbal Expressions of Contemporary American English* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2005), p. 404.

<sup>10</sup> In c.1830, in 'Ralph Waldo Emerson's Notebooks for the years 1824–1836', the mid-sixteenth-century German proverb 'Der Apfel fällt nicht weit van Stamm' appeared for the first time in English translation as 'The apple does not fall far from the tree'. Linking with the preceding line of 'Ghosts', this phrase—even when truncated—draws upon the long-established idea that the son will inherit the traits of the father. See Wolfgang Mieder, *Dictionary of Authentic American Proverbs* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2021), p. 42.

<sup>11</sup> A phrase first referenced in John Heywood's 1546 glossary ('I see, ye can not see the wood for trees'), this idiom is used during 'Ghosts' to continue developing the idea that the paternal bond—and themes and issues pertaining to the relationship between father and son—are as old as time, exhibited in the oldest literature, and always prevalent in the arts. See John Heywood, 'The Fourthe Chapter', *A Dialogue conteinyng the nomber in effect of all the Prouerbes in the Englishe tongue*, Early English Books Online <[quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A03168.0001.001/1:4?rgn=div2;view=fulltext](http://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A03168.0001.001/1:4?rgn=div2;view=fulltext)> [accessed 22 December 2021], page unnumbered.

<sup>12</sup> Allusion to the ancient Greek myth of Icarus and Daedalus. The introductory juxtaposition of proverbs in 'Ghosts', in particular 'Don't fly too close [to the sun]', play with the idea of Ernest Hemingway's theory of omission (in being cut short, muted, and leaving it up to the reader's/listener's imagination to fill in the blanks, see Chapter One, p. 41). Also, these truncated sayings allude to a common literary trick used by Early Modern poets such as John Donne (see 'A Hymn to God the Father', lines 15-16: 'But swear by thyself, that at my death thy Son/Shall shine as he shines now...'). The same pun can be observed in an exchange between Claudius and Prince Hamlet, in *Hamlet*: King: 'How is it that the clouds still hang on you?' Hamlet: 'Not so, my lord: —I am too much i'th'sun'. By my partaking in the literary tradition of conflating the homophones sun/son, I am highlighting ongoing artistic articulations of paternal instinct and the father-son relationship that has occurred at least since the origins of poetic language. See William Shakespeare, 'The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark', in *William Shakespeare: Complete Works*, ed. by Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen (London: Macmillan, 2007), P.1929; Jon Donne, 'A Hymn to God the Father', in *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, ed. by Margaret Ferguson, Mary Jo Salter, and Jon Stallworthy (London: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2005), p. 321.

If I told you the whole truth,  
If I bared to you my soul  
In this moment that we are sharing now  
more rarer than gold fleece.<sup>13</sup>

Would you hear me without judgement?  
Would you blame me for these flaws?  
Or would you stand with me, ears open,  
And remain with me each thought.

I recall when I first told you  
Early May, when we just met  
See, I was caught up with my father's death<sup>14</sup>  
Busy tryna pay what was his debt.<sup>15</sup>

Like my life rhythm was broken,  
In my sights was a black hole  
All I was going round in a circle as if  
All my life was a glass bowl.

And my future was mapped out  
With no choice, knowing what's next  
Stuck fast, nothing left but them days counting down  
Until I follow his footsteps.

*'Ineluctable modality of the visible.*

But I knew there was one option

*At least that if no more.*

One chance I could reach change.

*Thought through my eyes' (Au, N-r).<sup>16</sup>*

---

<sup>13</sup> By referencing a well-known symbol in Greek mythology (even whilst the 'gold fleece' is detailed in *The Quest for the Golden Fleece*, a story separate to that of *Odyssey/Ulysses*), this allusion serves to alert the listener to the allegorical nature of *Houses*. Apollonios Rhodios, *The Argonautika: The Story of Jason and the Quest for the Golden Fleece*, trans. by Peter Green (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997).

<sup>14</sup> In *Ulysses*, Leopold Bloom's father is known to have committed suicide ('Thought he was asleep first. Then saw like yellow streaks on his face. Had slipped down to the foot of the bed. Verdict: Overdose. Death by misadventure. The Letter. For my son Leopold', p. 93). For the informed reader, this information, combined with subtle allusions to Joyce's novel and to Greek mythology throughout the LP, will assist in their linking of these narratives.

<sup>15</sup> Drawing on the biblical proverb regarding the 'sins of the father' ('Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them; for I, the Lord thy God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me' (Deuteronomy, 5.9, KJV)), the speaker contextualises their previous mind state as a younger man (during *S.T.A.R.V.E.*), before surviving beyond the age of his father, and literally outliving the sins he inherited.

<sup>16</sup> Here, another *Ulysses* vocal sample from Strick's film version is employed, this time from Dedalus's monologue that begins the third chapter of Joyce's text ('Proteus', *Ulysses*, 37). In using Dedalus's words here, I intend to establish the attachment of *Houses* to the narrative of *Ulysses*, showcasing the current lyric ('Ghosts') as representative of Joyce's first three chapters ('The Telemachiad' section of *Ulysses*) that focuses exclusively on the thoughts and interactions of Dedalus. By beginning 'Lyfe' soon after, a song that depicts P's

If I kept living on past him  
I could snap some of these chains.

---

morning routine as a means of loosely shadowing Bloom's routine during the second section of *Ulysses* ('The Odyssey' and 'Calypso' in particular), an additional link between the narrative structures of *Houses* and *Ulysses* is highlighted.

## Lyfe ('Calypso')

Loosely shadowing the beginning of the second part of Joyce's *Ulysses* ('The Odyssey'/'Calypso'/'II'), 'Lyfe' depicts an average chaotic morning according to the working-class 'P' family. Here, the visceral language used by Joyce during his opening descriptions of Bloom ('Mr Leopold Bloom ate with relish the inner organs of beasts and fowls')<sup>17</sup> is subverted by somewhat cold, ironic gestures regarding the modern family morning routine (Bloom's partially burned but 'done to a turn' liver (63) being replaced by spilled 'Coco Pops'). Also, the leisurely, somewhat middle-class pace of life applied to Bloom's character in *Ulysses* is contrasted here by a modern working-class family's morning rush, as they fulfil their duties.

*[Sound of car tires screeching to a halt]  
'Well, up and at 'em. We're here' (Au, N-r).<sup>18</sup>*

Please,  
Welcome to my life.

*'He wanted to take a modern man  
and present him in epic terms...*

Welcome to it.

*...To use every chapter to make some observation...*

You are welcome to it.

*And to use literature to sum up civilization' (Au, N-r).<sup>19</sup>*

---

<sup>17</sup> Joyce, *Ulysses*, p. 53.

<sup>18</sup> As a way of breaking up the ongoing thematic concentration on suicide and mental health in both *S.T.A.R.V.E.* and 'Ghosts', here I employ a sample from Harold Ramis's comedy movie *National Lampoon's Vacation* (Warner Bros, 1983), in which Chevy Chase plays Clarke Griswold, a father of two plagued by disasters and embarrassments whilst attempting to enjoy a family holiday. Using this sample—in which a car is heard to skid and swerve, narrowly avoid a crash, then come to an abrupt halt before Clarke states 'Well, up and at 'em. We're here' (as though he had intended this to occur)—I introduce a lighter, more satirical, ironic, sentimental, and humorous tone that will last for the duration of the rest of *Houses*, separating the LP from the sense of melancholia that dominates *S.T.A.R.V.E.* Simultaneously, this sample alludes to a paternal theme that stretches throughout *CAPSule*, and is particularly notable in *Houses*, an LP that often refers to the genuine efforts of a father to do good for his family, a sentiment consolidated at the beginning of the *Uzumaki* LP: 'Good dad, mad city, never far from the truth' (see 'White', p. 230, footnote 42).

<sup>19</sup> Between P's gestures of 'welcome' to his life, vocal samples taken from Nigel Wattis's *James Joyce's Ulysses* documentary are triggered. Here, Melvyn Bragg, series editor of *The Southbank Show*, succinctly summarises some of Joyce's intentions when writing *Ulysses*. Utilising Bragg's astute summary of the novel, I employ his

I'm kind of overqualified for this.  
Learning how to get the child support.  
See, I've been washing pots and cleaning windows,  
Cash in hand, I live beyond them walls.

See:

I don't think you understand or comprehend the lengths that I'm prepared to go for this,  
I've been hibernating, I've been lying to myself, and now I'm lying wide awake...

Wait. Dealing with flashbacks,  
Hate! All the mistakes.

21 Cr\*\*\*ley, livin' in Sherwood, Notts.<sup>20</sup>  
Two bed terrace,  
me and my lady,  
we are just stirring, watch:  
Weekday morning,  
Baby on tip toe, tryna jump out the cot.  
Plus, my son is hypo mode,  
tellin' me the toilet blocked.

'Houses' (Au, N-r).<sup>21</sup>

What?

Pull on my boxers, put on my training top.  
Move to the kitchen,  
Watch him spillin' his bowl of Coco Pops.

*'You don't want anything for breakfast?'* (Au, N-r).<sup>22</sup>

(Leave that)  
Leave that shit 'til later,  
I've gotta get washed.  
Gotta get clean, drop my partner at work/start with this verse.

---

words to echo my intentions as author of *Houses*, signposting some of the conceptual, thematic, and narratological techniques that will follow, whilst again linking my work with Joyce. See 'James Joyce's Ulysses' (1987), *YouTube*, 26<sup>th</sup> November 2018 <[youtube.com/watch?v=Ob3NWUtCCJ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ob3NWUtCCJ)> [accessed 11 March 2022].

<sup>20</sup> Here, censorship during P's narrative is employed to suggest evidence and other information being suppressed, adding to the realistic atmosphere of the track, and linking to P's offer in the previous track, 'Ghosts', to provide 'the whole truth' (see p. 178). This technique was employed in rap music by Kendrick Lamar on 'm.A.A.d city' (*good kid, m.A.A.d city*, Aftermath, Interscope, 2012). For further information on Lamar's use of this censorship technique, see Chapter Three, p. 91.

<sup>21</sup> A voice peppered throughout *Houses*, Donald Donnelly's interpretation of Leopold Bloom (*Ulysses by James Joyce* (Maryland: Recorded Books, 1995) is employed more than any other as intertextual technique during *CAPsule*. Donnelly's voice creates a strong link between *Houses* and Joyce's text, and, due to its frequency of use, denotes its integral importance to the artistic aspirations of my trilogy.

<sup>22</sup> Utilising Wattis' and Bragg's *Ulysses* documentary again, Bloom (here played by David Suchet) interjects on the morning routine depicted in 'Lyfe', answering the previous line spoken by P.

Strappin' up my daughter inside this pram.  
Runnin' up Haydn road,  
I'm tryna keep up with my young man.  
See, he is too old now just to hold my hand.  
Wipe the crumbs off his face,  
And me and her wave him off at the gates—

I'm kind of underqualified for this.  
Learning how to keep us all afloat.  
Keepin' on the clock and taking orders,  
trying my damndest not to rock the boat.

*'In a new way, about life' (Au, N-r).<sup>23</sup>*

(But) but:

I don't think you understand or comprehend the lengths that I'm prepared to go for this,  
I've been in denial, but the truth is, I could do without the stresses and the strife...

Wait. Lemme unpack that:  
Please, welcome to my life.

---

<sup>23</sup> Here, Bragg's summation of *Ulysses* continues from the beginning of 'Lyfe'. In a similar fashion as the initial employment of Donald Donnelly's voice (as Bloom) to state the title of the current LP ('Houses'), Bragg's voice is used here to provide the title of the current song ('in a new way, about *life*').



## HMRC ('Lotus Eaters')

Whilst tidying his children's bedroom, P receives a 'romantic' letter from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs in which he and his family are informed they have made several council tax overpayments. 'HMRC' serves as an ironic counterpart to Bloom receiving a 'sexually provocative' letter from Martha Clifford during 'Lotus Eaters'.<sup>24</sup>

As well as loosely fitting around events in Bloom's morning timeline during *Ulysses*, this 'love letter' from what P deems an old flame ('that recycled paper just brought it all back [...] For all of these years I have been waiting') acts as an important narratorial hinge in the forthcoming breakdown of P's relationship with his partner, and marks his first intentions of estranging himself from partner and family.

As Shari Benstock states, 'letters attempt to bridge time, to close the temporal as well as the spatial gap that separates writer and reader'.<sup>25</sup> Appealing to the significance of the written letter in *Ulysses*, 'HMRC', like much of *Houses*, can be heard/observed as an epistolical narrative in and of itself, and is intended strategically to bring the LP into closer conversation with *Ulysses*, specifically in relation to Bloom's actions throughout the novel. As with Bloom's collection of Martha Clifford's letter from his local Post Office, 'the reader participates with the fictional character in finding the text' (170) in 'HMRC'. This allusion to a 'found' text within 'the larger text' (174) aids in drawing 'attention to [...] varying relationships in the larger text', and serves to deepen the realistic atmosphere of *Houses*, and strengthen its dramatic pull.

---

<sup>24</sup> Shari Benstock, 'The Printed Letters in *Ulysses*', *James Joyce Quarterly*, 50.1 (2013), 167-174 (pp. 170-174).

<sup>25</sup> Benstock, p. 170.

Safe as houses (safe as houses)<sup>26</sup>

June 16<sup>th</sup><sup>27</sup> at 11:23

See, I was in the kid's bedroom, tidying up.

That's when I heard the front door, saw the envelope:

HMRC

My address, my government name

'Open it' (Au, N-r).<sup>28</sup>

Printed in black, wrote in ALL CAPS.

See I could hardly contain myself,

Cus that recycled paper just brought it all back.

Feelin' faint, had to sit myself down

Staring at it like, how could this be?

For all of these years I have been waiting:

HMRC

Four off-white sheets of unbridled glory

Folded length ways and I know this fragrance.

And written inside the most purest verse

Informing us that we have made overpayments.

...£2,300 pounds.

That means I will never forget this moment.

See your impersonal cold-hearted tone

Just made this event all the more so...

potent.

...Joyous day.

And I will need to thank them powers that be

'X, x, x, x...' (Au, N-r).<sup>29</sup>

For blessing us on this majestic morning

HMRC.

---

<sup>26</sup> Widely believed to refer to the perceived relative security of investing in property as a 'safe bet' compared to other riskier investments, this Victorian expression is presented here to ironic effect, for narratological purposes. Tying in with the title of the work, 'safe as houses' is meant to evoke a sense of certainty or security, 'with no risk of failure'. However, as the plot will soon reveal, much of P's life is about to unravel into uncertainty. This expression serves another purpose in the *Houses* narrative, as an ambiguous gesture towards P's family's long-term quest to attain a mortgage, the seed of this idea being planted throughout the LP, and finally addressed in full at its conclusion ('Ghosts Reprise', see p. 220). For an early example of this mid-nineteenth-century English phrase in use ("The clothes will floor us as safe as houses!" said Coggin'), see Thomas Hardy, 'A Foggy Night and Morning: Conclusion', in *Far From the Madding Crowd* (Mineola, NY: Dover Thrift Editions, 2007), p. 345.

<sup>27</sup> Allusion to Bloomsday, a literary event that takes place every year on 16 June in Dublin (and elsewhere), the date and setting of Joyce's *Ulysses*.

<sup>28</sup> Donnelly, *Ulysses* (Maryland: Recorded Books, 1995).

<sup>29</sup> Donnelly, *Ulysses*.

### Neutral ('The Lotus Eaters')

After informing her of their unexpected reimbursement from the HMRC, P soliloquises on the current emotional distance he feels from his partner. This distance is made particularly clear by the couple's contrasting intentions regarding how to utilise their windfall, emphasising their differences rather than bringing them closer.

The track echoes Bloom's problematic relationship with his partner, Molly, particularly regarding an intermarital affair: 'Oh, weeping God, the things I married into!'<sup>30</sup> This is acknowledged by Bloom throughout *Ulysses*, e.g. 'Can real love, supposing there happens to be another chap in the case, exist between married couples?' (132). 'Neutral' once again serves to signpost P's current frustrations, or disillusionment with his relationship.

*'Travelin' through the mind, one time'* (Au, R).<sup>31</sup>

### Splash<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> Keri Elizabeth Ames, 'The Oxymoron of Fidelity in Homer's *Odyssey* and Joyce's *Ulysses*', *Joyce Studies Annual*, 14 (2003) 132-174 (p. 132).

<sup>31</sup> Autosonic quotation of a Nas lyric/ad lib, taken from a track by Large Professor ('One plus One', *The LP*, Geffen, MCA Records, Paul Sea Productions, 1996). This quotation encourages the listener to infer that P is speaking internally, attempting to articulate problems in his relationship 'through the mind'. At the same time, Nas's notion of 'travelin' also enhances 'Neutral's' metaphorical use of a car's gears to represent the differing speeds at which partners in a couple might be travelling, emotionally and spiritually.

<sup>32</sup> This initial image serves two purposes: a) a verbal gesture towards 'splashing the cash' in alignment with the continuing narrative of 'HMRC' and 'Neutral', b) a veiled allusion to the Greek myth of Icarus, and specifically to its interpretation in William Carlos Williams's ekphrastic poem 'Landscape with the Fall of Icarus' and the Pieter Brughel painting of the same name that inspired it, linking with an initial passage from 'Ghosts', the introductory lyric from *Houses* ('don't fly too close...', see p. 177). At the conclusion of Williams's poem, the speaker depicts Icarus's 'unsignificant' fall: 'a splash unnoticed/this was/Icarus drowning'. The idea of the tragedy of Icarus being such an unremarkable event occurring in an unadorned, workaday landscape, as illustrated by Brueghel and Williams, appealed to me with regard to how I wished to depict *Houses* as a day-in-the-life-narrative regarding an ostensibly unremarkable working-class man. In addition to following in Joyce's protagonist's footsteps (depicting a relatively uneventful day in the life of two men from Ireland as ironic reflection of *Odyssey*, an epic sprawling tale of heroes and adventure), I wished to create a rap narrative that subverted/signified upon various other rap day-in-the-life concept albums such as Sticky Fingaz's *Black Trash* and Kendrick Lamar's *good kid, m.A.A.d city*, that rely heavily on tragedy, violence, or life-changing events for the story to function. In ironic fashion, *Houses* is a rap concept album in which little of note occurs, at least ostensibly. However, there is no reason this should take away from the quality of music and literary complexity contained therein, and indeed it opens spaces for those things to flourish among the quotidian. Williams among many other writers knew this, and so do I. As initial core inspiration for this idea, I leaned on Ice Cube's oppositional view of South-Central LA on 'It was a Good Day' (*The Predator*, Lench Mob, Priority, 1992). In this

You just wanna let it all go.  
You're saying it's for the best,  
Well, maybe I know.

Maybe I know  
Still,

I just need time.  
Can I get a couple moments?  
It's like you have only one speed.  
You don't even know what slow is.

If there's one thing I know,  
life is a Shoot 5.  
You kick it too quick, and it will go  
Swinging in the air, round the post to the other side.

So, you have to understand,  
I never go rushing in.  
Born British so I'm in the queue,  
you will never catch me pushin' in.

Nah, there's no need to be rushing this.  
I'm saying, 'let's weigh up these options'.<sup>33</sup>

Can I get a minute please?  
Too fast we are—  
Please.  
Let the water settle down,<sup>35</sup>  
before we throw it all to the wind.<sup>36</sup>

'travelin'' (Au,R).<sup>34</sup>

---

song, Cube highlights his pleasure in experiencing an uneventful, relatively unremarkable day in South Central LA, as opposed to his normalised everyday experiences of violence, poverty, and police brutality. See: Pieter Brueghel the Elder, 'Landscape with the Fall of Icarus' (c. 1560); William Carlos Williams, *Collected Poems 1950-1962* (New York: New Directions Books, 1962), p. 4; Sticky Fingaz, *Black Trash: The Autobiography of Kirk Jones* (Universal Records, 2001); Kendrick Lamar, *good kid, m.A.A.d city* (TDE, Aftermath, Interscope, 2012).

<sup>33</sup> Here, P uses the idiom to 'weigh something against something' as a way of establishing his careful decision making and ponderous mindset in contrast to his partner's more erratic, spontaneous nature. See Spears, McGraw-Hill's *Dictionary of American Idioms*, p. 744.

<sup>34</sup> Here, Nas's adlib regarding travel is integrated into P's lyrics as a means of reiterating its significance in the song.

<sup>35</sup> Deriving from the phrase 'when the dust has settled', an idiom first observed in the early 1800's, P's advice to 'let the water settle down' refers to the 'turmoil' or 'commotion' caused by the P family's recent windfall. See Christine Ammer, *The American Heritage Dictionary of Idioms* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013), p. 504.

<sup>36</sup> Widely used in English since the early 1900s, P alludes to the idiom 'throwing caution to the winds' as a way of attempting to negotiate with his partner in light of their windfall. As will be noted by the reader/listener, 'Neutral' contains several traditional proverbs and idioms, all used by P in an attempt to illustrate his idea of human history's tendency to err on the side of caution. An idiom, after all, is a phrase that has often been

I just wanna plan it out.  
You wanna advance on the offer.  
See this is how I know that we're runnin' out of road  
'stead of bringing out the best in other like:

You're the quick and impatient.  
I'm the thinker, overcautious.  
I resist the temptation.  
You're grabbin' the bull.<sup>37</sup>  
So drop a few 'til you're neutral,  
and I'll up a gear 'til I'm cruising.  
Let me meet you up on a level  
Somewhere.

*'But the thing is man, it's like I felt like I knew her...*

Somewhere

*...You know? You ever get that feeling?*

- *Yeah, like you've seen her before, and you know her.*

- *Yeah.*

- *It's a feeling.*

*But, actually, you really don't know her' (Au, N-r).<sup>38</sup>*

[mobile phone ringing]

*'You have a missed call from P' (Au, N-r).*

---

called upon to describe broadly comparable feelings or circumstances. See Ammer, *The American Heritage Dictionary of Idioms*, p. 497.

<sup>37</sup> Rather than 'act in determination', P further details his tendency to 'avoid temptation', whereas his partner tends to 'grab the bull by its horns'. See Martin H. Manser, *The Wordsworth Dictionary of Idioms* (Ware, HRT: Wordsworth Editions, 2006), p. 34.

<sup>38</sup> In the first of two vocal samples from Derek Cianfrance's *Blue Valentine* (The Weinstein Company, 2010), the voice of the male protagonist of the film, Dean (played by Ryan Gosling), is heard articulating his feelings about a woman he believes he knows, or has known previously, but in truth has no understanding of at all. This sample links with P's expressions of frustration at differences in opinion and manner between himself and his partner. Gosling's words serve to consolidate P's uncertainty regarding their future.

## ‘Funeral’ (‘Hades’)

Again, loosely shadowing the day-in-the-life narrative of Leopold Bloom in *Ulysses*, ‘Funeral’ echoes Bloom’s attendance at a funeral for an acquaintance (‘Poor [Paddy] Dignam! His last lie on the earth in his box’).<sup>39</sup> Whilst in attendance at a funeral for an unknown acquaintance, P ruminates on subjects such as death, mortality, and the paternal bond, just as Bloom does during the ‘Hades’ chapter.

‘1-2, you ready?’ (Au, R)<sup>40</sup>

‘Faithful departed, as you are now, so once were we’ (Au, R).<sup>41</sup>

Way back I smoked Gandalf<sup>42</sup>

I never talked much, I walked alone like the Sabbath wizard,<sup>43</sup>

Never knew about the snare traps and barb wires

Unaware of the pitfalls, frauds and sabotism

‘Bury the dead’ (Au, N-r).<sup>44</sup>

Fuck it though,

My Timberlands was brown leather

---

<sup>39</sup> Joyce, *Ulysses*, p. 105.

<sup>40</sup> This sample is from the immediate introduction to Gravediggaz, ‘Mommy, What’s a Gravedigga?’ (*6 Feet Deep*, Gee Street, Island, PolyGram, 1994). This vocal (presented just before the highly recognisable beat for ‘Mommy’ begins) implies to the informed listener the onset of that track, before a different soundscape and beat interjects. Whilst putting these listeners on their guard, this sample is intended to activate their awareness of my employment of Gravediggaz to highlight an overall aesthetic pertaining to death, burial, the afterlife, and related matters. When viewing the allusive powers of the track title alone, additional links between maternal feelings and infant mortality evoked throughout the ‘Funeral’ also add to its poignance. This sample is triggered at various times throughout ‘Funeral’, as a way of repeatedly emphasising its connection to the track, as well as for aesthetic purposes.

<sup>41</sup> Donnelly’s voice as Bloom now details his ruminations on mortality whilst he attends his friend’s funeral (*Ulysses*, p. 109).

<sup>42</sup> Reference to the wizard Gandalf, a protagonist in J. R. R. Tolkien’s novels *The Hobbit* (London: HarperCollins, 1995), and *The Lord of the Rings* (London: HarperCollins, 2002). Here, whilst using Gandalf’s name to refer to a specific strain of potent marijuana, I also allude to his role as leader and mentor throughout Tolkien’s novels, a role that P is ironically distant from at this point in *Houses*.

<sup>43</sup> Likening himself to the wizard depicted by Ozzy Osbourne on Black Sabbath’s ‘The Wizard’ (*Black Sabbath*, Vertigo, 1970), the speaker alludes to his previous life (depicted during *S.T.A.R.V.E*) as an isolated individual who often travelled alone whilst habitually smoking marijuana (‘never talking, just keeps walking, spreading his magic’).

<sup>44</sup> Donnelly, *Ulysses*, p. 97.

And laced tighter than a nun's crotch, my lung's metal  
I walked the hills from the yellow brick<sup>45</sup> to Wells Road  
And memorised what it was I saw that had me unsettled.

Journalist of all the five senses,  
When the road became blocked, I would resort to climb fences.  
And move forward 'til my foes couldn't follow  
The type who Ghost Dog<sup>46</sup> you when you call, ignore you when you holla.

This some Catcher in the Rye shit<sup>47</sup>  
I'm capturing the picture and adapting to the brightness.  
Similar to how you open up your eyes,  
And your irises adapting to the changes when the light switch.

And this all becomes crystal  
When you see it from a distance  
and you separate your thoughts from it.  
More you move back, the more you dwell upon it  
More you realise this all becomes clear the more you walk from it.

Writing while my son and earth still are dreaming  
I'm divulging on my past present/past future.  
First memories I'm up top: Dad's shoulders  
To present day I'm in this attic tryna crack boulders.

Dream recurring when I was a child:  
Jumping from my mother's staircase and never hitting ground.  
I would always wake up, way before I hit the ground,  
Now I'm at that age now, I can't fly  
I think I'm ready to land.

---

<sup>45</sup> Allusion to the Yellow Brick Road as depicted in Victor Fleming's *The Wizard of Oz* (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1939). Here, by contrasting a fictional location with a real one (Wells Road, Nottingham), I emphasise P's previous life as being one spent often in his own head, living out fantasies whilst existing in a very real, often cold world.

<sup>46</sup> Referencing Jim Jarmusch's cult classic movie *Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai* (Artisan Entertainment, 1999), the speaker once again refers to his previous life as an isolated individual who went unnoticed by the public, in similarity to Forest Whitaker's character in *Ghost Dog*.

<sup>47</sup> Alluding to J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (London: Penguin Books, 2010), P attempts to align himself with the technical and cathartic authorial power of the novel, likening themes contained in the text to his own story. Here, the speaker refers to a sense of isolation often felt by the novel's lone protagonist, Holden Caulfield.

*'What is he, that builds stronger than either the mason,  
the shipwright, or a carpenter?'* (Au, N-r).<sup>48</sup>

I think I'm ready to land.

[Silence]

*'And when you are asked this question next,  
say 'A grave-maker'.  
The houses that he makes last till doomsday'* (Au, N-r).<sup>49</sup>

---

<sup>48</sup> Delving deeper into Bloom's ruminations on mortality, this time linking with a train of thought that leads him to question the notion of humour in the face of death ('You must laugh sometimes so better do it that way. Gravediggers in *Hamlet*. Shows the profound knowledge of the human heart') (*Ulysses*, p. 105), a sample taken from the grave digger's speech during *Hamlet* is triggered. This question ('what is he...?'), and its subsequent answer ('a grave maker') serves an additional thematic purpose, deepening androcentric connections between *CAPSule* and the classic literature it draws upon, and (as an ideal aesthetic coincidence) references the containing album's title ('houses'). In addition to linking with Bloom's ruminations, this sample also interacts with a recurring focus on Shakespeare's *Hamlet* during *Ulysses*. References to the play are peppered throughout the text, particularly in light of Stephen Dedalus's 'idea of Hamlet': Stephen 'proves that Hamlet's grandson is Shakespeare's grandfather and that he himself is the ghost of his own father' (*Ulysses*, pp. 17-18).

See Shakespeare Network, 'Richard Burton, Hamlet, Shakespeare, HD Restored Edition', *YouTube*, 8th July 2020 <[youtube.com/watch?v=r0cB4gzFO1M](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r0cB4gzFO1M)> [accessed 1 August 2022].

<sup>49</sup> *Hamlet* (Act Five, Scene One).



## Unborn Seed ('Hades')

Inspired by the protagonist's attendance at a funeral, this track continues P's rumination on mortality and death (in this case a recent miscarriage) and relates to instances of Bloom's thoughts on the early passing of his son, Rudy, throughout *Ulysses* ('I could have helped him on in life. I could. Make him independent. Learn German too' (*Ulysses*, 86)).

P is highly superstitious, a strong believer in fate, and intolerant of uncertainty, as exemplified in his attempt to control life issues that are out of his hands during the song. The initial line 'throwing this bracelet into the craters of the dark side of the moon' links with Damian Chazelle's *First Man*,<sup>50</sup> a film in which Neil Armstrong (played by Ryan Gosling) discards his late daughter's name bracelet into a crater of the moon during the Apollo 11 space mission. The song is also written in the form of an epistle in relation to Nas's 'One Love',<sup>51</sup> Kendrick Lamar's 'Sing About Me, I'm Dying of Thirst',<sup>52</sup> and particularly, 'Letter 2 My Unborn' by Tupac Shakur.<sup>53</sup>

*'I see what it means, I see.  
To protect him as long as possible,  
even in the earth' (Au, R).<sup>54</sup>*

Throwing this bracelet into the craters of the dark side of the moon<sup>55</sup>  
Name that's written and engraved on the chain is:

Unborn Seed

---

<sup>50</sup> *First Man*, dir. by Damian Chazelle (Universal Pictures, 2018).

<sup>51</sup> Nas, 'One Love', *Illmatic* (Ill Will, Columbia, 1994). For further details on Nas's pioneering use of the epistle in rap form, see Chapter One, pp. 42-47.

<sup>52</sup> Kendrick Lamar, 'Sing About Me, I'm Dying of Thirst', *good kid, m.A.A.d city* (Top Dawg Entertainment, Aftermath, Interscope, 2012).

<sup>53</sup> Tupac Shakur, 'Letter 2 My Unborn', *Until the End of Time* (Amaru, Death Row, Interscope, 2001).

<sup>54</sup> Donnelly, *Ulysses*, p. 106.

<sup>55</sup> Allusion to Pink Floyd's *Dark Side of the Moon* (Harvest, 1973), a concept album that deals with themes such as death and mental illness.

I never will hear your voice,  
I reckon you would have looked just like your brother or sister, look:

Throwing this bracelet into the craters of the dark side of the moon  
Name that's written and engraved on the chain is:

Unborn Seed

I never will hear your voice,  
I never will hear your voice

We never got to the point we could hear your heartbeat.  
You swam away, entered the void<sup>56</sup> so quick I don't think I shed tears.  
Sat with my back to the door of the bathroom listening  
And your mum's inside, crying her heart out—crying enough for the both of us.

In a world that's free to engage in relationships—free to fuck  
Same world that's free to produce that realest pain that will eat you up.  
See, I never said goodbye completely, I kept bleached.  
Trying again and again for you, I'll tell you a secret:

On the day that your mum went to the GP with the problems,  
I was unable to be there with you, I wasn't *able* to be there.  
But I needed a way to relate to you both,  
So I searched, looked around the bedsit, 'til I found one single strand of your mum's  
hair.

And I wrapped it around my wedding ring finger  
I laid there staring—hoped and I prayed there.  
Yeah, tied it around my wedding ring finger  
And I laid there, hoped and I prayed there.

Superstitious ways of attempting to control—it's pathetic  
But I can't help thinking the reason was the strand was synthetic

If I could have found one real piece, would I hear your voice now?  
If I could have found one real strand. Grand.

---

<sup>56</sup> Allusion to Gaspar Noé's movie *Enter the Void* (Fidélité Films, Wild Bunch, 2009), exploring the journey of the soul after death.

Throwing this bracelet into the craters of the dark side of the moon  
Name that's written and engraved on the chain is:

'Unborn Seed' (R) (Author's daughter's voice)

I never will hear your voice,  
I reckon you would have looked just like your brother or sister, look:

Throwing this bracelet into the craters of the dark side of the moon  
Name that's written and engraved on the chain is:

'Unborn Seed' (R) (Author's son's voice)

I never will hear your voice  
I never will hear your voice

*'You took the life right out of me,  
I'm so unlucky I can't breathe.  
You took the life right out of me' (Au, R).<sup>57</sup>*

*'Our. Little. Beggar. Baby. Meant nothing. Mistake of nature...*

[Silence]

*...If it's healthy it's from the mother.  
If not, from the man' (Au, N-r).<sup>58</sup>*

- 'Cut the cord please,
- Cutting.
- We couldn't hear a heart rate doctor.
- Bulb
- Your stethoscope.
- We're going to give you a few stitches
- I can't hear a heartbeat.
- Listening
- It's in arrest. Begin resuscitation.

---

<sup>57</sup> Here, the Beyonce song 'Heartbeat' (*Life is But a Dream*, HBO, 2013), which alludes to her experience of miscarriage, is employed as part of a response to the speaker's masculine perspective of child loss.

<sup>58</sup> As an additional (and oppositional) response to the speaker's overtly male perspective during this song, here, a sample of Bloom's ruminations of infant mortality place the reproductive blame firmly in the man's court. Donnelly, *Ulysses*, p. 92.

- Your placenta is coming out.
- One, two, three
- Ventilating
- Listening.
- Your placenta is coming out
- Ma'am, I can't hear a heartbeat' (Au, N-r) <sup>59</sup>.

---

<sup>59</sup> Linking thematically with Beyonce's 'Heartbeat' and issues raised in the lyrics of 'Unborn Seed' (whilst also serving as part of an attempt to rebalance the masculine perspective of the speaker during this song), a sample of a highly traumatic scene taken from Alfonso Cuarón's *Roma* (Pimienta Films, Esperanto Filmoj, 2018) is employed, sonically depicting a female perspective of child loss. In sonically presenting the panic-stricken, haunting sounds of the female protagonist's rapid breathing and groans of pain during this scene (as she struggles to negotiate childbirth amidst the pragmatic and cold articulations made by medical staff), I intend to acknowledge the deep sense of trauma unique to the mother during this experience, further highlighting the notably different, distanced sense of trauma that may be experienced by the father.

## Will We? ('Aeolus')

After witnessing the funeral of an acquaintance, contemplating loss, mortality, lost opportunities, and past relationships, P begins seriously to question the path his life is taking. Relying heavily on the persistent questioning vocal located in the audio sample for the song, 'Will We?' attempts to highlight P's sense of being lost to societal constraints, and to articulate his dilemma: should he remain as a provider and family man, or leave it all behind to be 'free'? Whilst not linking directly with Bloom's tribulations throughout *Ulysses*, this song does align itself with the insistent headline/subheading structure of 'Aeolus', a chapter in *Ulysses* intended to mimic the columns of a newspaper. For this song, the reoccurring inquiry of 'Will We?', aids in triggering a stream of conscious-like list of concerns regarding P's current problems.

*Will We?*<sup>60</sup>

Ten years from here, will we still be as tight as we are now?

*Will We?*

There's no tellin' what may happen, there's only focusing on the present so—

*Will We?*

Ever see a time when the rent and the bills, the car and the clothes don't matter?

*Will We?*

I don't have a clue, all I know is it's affecting my health when I think about it—

---

<sup>60</sup> As part of the technical strategy of 'Will We?', a lyric sung by Annie Lennox (Eurythmics, 'Julia', 1984: *For the Love of Big Brother*, Virgin, 1984) is repeatedly quoted. This sample—developed to create a sense of anxiety in the listener/reader due to its employment as a form of incessant open-ended questioning—inspires P to spill out a list of his innermost fears as a father, husband, life partner, and male member of society. Lennox's lyrics also carry semantic significance here, as the more they are repeated, the more potential there is for the listener to hear them as 'weary', rather than 'will we?'. In either circumstance, the lyrics work either as incessant, anxiety-inducing interrogative practice, or as an admission of P's current exhaustion/weariness at facing up to his societal and familial responsibilities. When understood as a lyric deriving from the Eurythmics' soundtrack to Michael Radford's film adaptation of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Virgin Films, 1984), this lyric also carries with it an added focus on the individual's struggle with societal constraint and entrapment powerfully depicted in Orwell's novel. See George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (London: Penguin, 2003).

*Will We?*

Ever get it back to where we had it before? The divorce or devout cause?

*Will We?*

Ever get it right, will I ever write this out in a timeless and perfect way?

*Will We?*

See another chance, and grab it with both hands, or am I being a fuckin' mug?

*Will We?*

Someone needs to tell me. Someone needs to give me advice.

*Will We?*

Be able to get a mortgage?, be able to go abroad and to then afford it?

*Will We?*

Be able to do it from the music, I know it's a dream I know this is stupid.

*Will We?*

Still I'm wishin' hard for it. I'm an idiot, I can't give it up, I can't quit it.

*Will We?*

Sucker for the punishment. In the cold, desperate for acknowledgment.

*Will We?*

As a race, ever give up on the chase, and realise we're all dust?

*Will We?*

Take it back to that free love. Fuck the law courts and the pre numpts.

*Eight million stories (Au, R).*<sup>61</sup>

*Will We?*

Tell somebody now, your life's worth, it's eight billion stories.<sup>62</sup>

*Will We?*

Keep livin' for the now, or stay blinded by Labours and Tories?

*Will We?*

Ever get a chance to observe how it really is?

---

<sup>61</sup> Sample taken from Kurtis Blow's '8 Million Stories' (*Ego Trip*, Mercury, Polydor, 1984), used as a means of preempting the next line in P's lyric.

<sup>62</sup> Allusion to '8 million stories', a song that discusses the trauma of inner-city life in 1980s New York. Here, I attempt to broaden Blow's message by expanding 'eight million sad, but all true stories', to 'eight billion', as a way of including all of humanity, according to current global population estimates. United Nations, 'World Population Day', *United Nations* <[un.org/en/observances/world-population-day](https://un.org/en/observances/world-population-day)> 11<sup>th</sup> July 2022 [accessed 2 August 2022].

*Will We?*

Tell me, will you get a chance to tell 'em just how you really feel

*Will We?*

Might not be a better time, so you, you should let 'em know

*Will We?*

Keep losin' it all, cus if you love somethin' then you let it go.<sup>63</sup>

*Will we still be there?*

*Will we? Will we (we)*

*'Why are you helping me?*

- *Because you're the first mortal  
ever to use his mind...*

*Will we? Will we (we)*

*...And you understand  
there's always something to learn...*

*Will we still be there?*

*...Now go!' (Au, N-r).<sup>64</sup>*

---

<sup>63</sup> Allusion to the proverb 'if you love something, let it go (set it free); if it comes back to you, it is yours' that was first brought to public attention in a Jess Lair self-help text. The sentiment expressed in this saying is thematically reiterated throughout *Houses*. In his own way, at this point in his story, P is letting go of family ties, responsibilities, and burdens. Later in the story, when P is reunited with these elements of his life, the proverb's powerful meaning for him is solidified, and forms part of P's new outlook. See Jess Lair, *I Ain't Got Much Baby—But I'm All I've Got* (New York: Random House Publishing Group, 1985), p. 203) and Charles C. Doyle, Wolfgang Mieder, and Fred Shapiro, *The Dictionary of Modern Proverbs* (London: Yale University Press, 2012), p. 101.

<sup>64</sup> In the first of multiple references to Andrei Konchalovsky's TV mini-series *The Odyssey* (Hallmark, American Zoetrope, 1997), the epic journey of Odysseus is alluded to as a means of loosely echoing Joyce's allegorical plot for *Ulysses*: he formed Bloom's narrative around the ancient Greek myth of Homer's *Odyssey*.

## Sessy Lu ('Sirens')

Dipping into events from *Ulysses* chapters 'Lestrygonians' and 'Sirens', 'Sessy Lu' depicts P on his way home from a funeral, still reflecting on his past. P continues internally to debate the pros and cons of his current circumstances, articulating his sense of being trapped in a world not of his own making. As this track builds towards P's overwhelming need for escape from familial and social responsibility, it culminates in his intentions of attempting an extramarital fling with a local single mother, Sessy Lu.

Here, in P's hinting at an affair, the narrative as told by Joyce regarding Bloom's fractured relationship with Molly is subverted. As Keri Ames observes, instead of Bloom wondering 'about the state of his marriage as he prepares to return home to his unfaithful wife, Molly',<sup>65</sup> P questions whether his own intentions of infidelity are worth breaking up his family and partnership for. This switch in gender roles regarding infidelity in *Ulysses* and *Houses* sees the narrative revert to Homer's original source (*The Odyssey*), in which 'the actual infidelity that threatens Odysseus's marriage is not committed by Penelope with any [...] suitors, but by Odysseus himself with the goddesses Kalypso and Kirke' (133).

Just as Joyce's 'Sirens' chapter illustrates the importance of the theme of music throughout *Ulysses* (in allegorical alignment with Homer's telling of Odysseus's struggle with the sirens' song), the music for 'Sessy Lu' is hypnotic, alluring, and enchanting.

I moved on from those places.

*'You mortals understand so little...*

Changed heart and locations.

*...Time has no meaning...*

Still, knowing what I've escaped from...

*...It passes, slips by, fades, however I choose' (Au, N-r).<sup>66</sup>*

---

<sup>65</sup> Ames, 'The Oxymoron of Fidelity in Homer's *Odyssey* and Joyce's *Ulysses*', p. 132.

<sup>66</sup> Here, the voice of Circe, a lustrous nymph in Homer's *Odyssey* (played by Bernadette Peters in Konchalovsky's film adaptation) is heard. Peters's voice is used here mainly as a way of introducing the idea of P becoming distracted from his family-focused life by a female temptress. Just as Circe attempts to stall



...means something.

I provide a second chance,  
cus the opportunities are rarer than a Bathing Apes jacket.  
Still upholding a belief within myself and this music,  
cus the rest is more slender than my wage packet.

Same amount of words used on the take in this attic  
as is thrown into the ether or the waste basket.  
As the effort that I put into them days spent with my baby daughter  
nothing changed but my rate of patience.

I dive deep in this leap of faith.  
Eyes closed with my dreams on this piece of paper.  
Grasping at half hours and them nap times,  
tryna stack lines up in whispers before she's waking.

Whenever faced with a mental block  
I recall the time spent in self-made solitary confinement.  
And keep my mind on the up and up,  
knowing if I don't focus on the plusses, I will see the minors.<sup>67</sup>

But still, I cease moving forward.  
Quicksand, feeling stuck to these obligations.  
Tryna keep tabs onto where I came from  
but it's something in the air that I can't escape from.<sup>68</sup>

I moved on from them places.  
Changed heart and locations.  
Still, knowing what I'm escaping...  
...I should be grateful.

But now she's staring at me each time  
that I pass the post box and shop close to my road.  
And her eyes' like an invite for my soul,

---

Odysseus from finding his way home to his beloved Penelope (and Athens) using various means of seduction, so too does Sessy Lu (or so P believes) during this lyric.

<sup>67</sup> This stanza refers back to P's previous experiences as a younger man, in an intratextual link to the overwhelming themes of isolation, loneliness, and mental health decline depicted in *S.T.A.R.V.E.*

<sup>68</sup> Here, P references Phil Collins, 'In the Air Tonight' (*Face Value*, Virgin, Atlantic, 1980), a track that expresses a sense of imminent change, transition, and empowerment. In turn, P also alludes to Beanie Seigel's 'Feel it in the Air' (*The B. Coming*, Dame Dash Music Group, Def Jam, 2005), a song that echoes Collins's artistic expression, but is given a more specifically contemporary (rap) setting. Collins's notion of an impending change has been celebrated in hip hop, with several versions of the song being referenced/quoted/sampled over the years. This is exemplified on the R&B/hip hop tribute album to Collins, *Urban Renewal* (WEA, 2003), the lead single from which was Lil Kim's reworking of 'In the Air Tonight ft. Phil Collins'. This line also intratextually links to 'X', a track taken from *Uzumaki*, drawing upon the same sentiment ('feelin' something in the air, yeah, that must be change') as evoked during 'Sessy Lu' (see p. 255, footnote 117).

until I need confirmation, in spite of myself.

Greener grass grown Sessy Lu through the window,  
in amongst the punters and the locals, she's exotic.  
Single mum from the street opposite me.  
Visit anytime she is free, how simple it would be...

I'm carrying that baggage.  
But the way she looks makes it easy for me to drop it.  
Cut away them old ties and begin afresh  
deep in my feels, isn't easy for me to stop it.

Is she worth giving up for?  
Is she worth walking away from all these  
Responsibilities that equate  
to a leaden weight in my stomach  
piled high on a single plate?

Best to wait 'til I get home  
'stead of plottin' if now is the right time.  
Spill some seed and relieve  
just to tell if I am thinking with my dick, or my right mind.

*'Brave Odysseus...*

Best to wait 'til I get back,  
'stead of plottin' if now is the right time.

*...Are you still a man?' (Au, Nr).<sup>69</sup>*

Spill some seed and relieve  
just to tell if I am thinking with my dick, or my right...mind.

---

<sup>69</sup> As conclusion to the song's lyric, P decides to refrain from engaging with Sessy Lu. In the midst of this decision, Circe's (Peters's) voice is heard again, taunting P for his lack of courage in this matter by questioning his manhood.

### ‘Undigested Sweetcorn’ (‘Nausicaa’)

This track engages intertextually with ‘Nausicaa’, a chapter from *Ulysses* that contributed to the text’s world-wide ban in 1922.<sup>70</sup> In this chapter, Bloom publicly masturbates at a distance from Gerty Macdowell, a young female stranger who poses for him from afar (*Ulysses*, 351). ‘Undigested Sweetcorn’ is an artistic depiction of P’s attempts to avoid an extramarital affair with Sessy Lu, a character introduced in the previous track, by choosing to masturbate rather than attempt a one-night stand with her. As expressed during the final lines of ‘Sessy Lu’, P decides to ‘spill some seed [...] ‘when I get home’ whilst engaging in a sexual act with a woman on the internet.

Quoting Nottingham-affiliated artist Matt Berry (‘Relaxation Podcast’),<sup>71</sup> who articulates a similar theme in his work, other allusions during this song include an extract from Louis C.K.’s, ‘Sex’<sup>72</sup> and the Beastie Boys’, ‘Slow and Low’.<sup>73</sup>

---

<sup>70</sup> For further information on the *Ulysses* worldwide ban, see Foster, ‘Anthony Burgess and the Censorship of *Ulysses*’.

<sup>71</sup> Matt Berry, ‘Relaxation Podcast’, *YouTube*, 27<sup>th</sup> November 2009 <[youtube.com/watch?v=bNc0ErVirBE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bNc0ErVirBE)> [accessed 22 January 2022].

<sup>72</sup> Louis C.K., ‘Sex’, *Word: Live at Carnegie Hall* (Pig Newton, 2012).

<sup>73</sup> Beastie Boys, ‘The New Style’, *Licensed to Ill* (Def Jam, Columbia, 1986).

*You have a virus installed on your computer...  
Security of your personal data...remove spyware...  
as soon as possible...please call the number provided  
as soon as possible...seeing these pops ups means  
that you have a virus...adware...spyware...'* (Au, N-r).<sup>74</sup>

*'Ooooh, Ooooh'* (Au, R).<sup>75</sup>

Yeah, this is what it feels...  
yeah, this is what it feels like, this is.  
Yeah

This is what it feels like when doves cry,<sup>76</sup>  
my love's life,  
is lost in translation<sup>77</sup>  
needing subtitles, encoded.

This the calm before and after each storm,<sup>78</sup>  
passing through the same as how it started  
like it's undigested sweetcorn.

---

<sup>74</sup> Here, a computerised female voice is triggered in overlapping layers as a message of 'warning' to the listener. The voice uses IT-related terminology such as 'spyware', 'virus', and 'personal data' as a way of alluding to P's possible use of an unstable internet porn site whilst seeking to 'spill some seed [masturbate] and relieve' his passions for Sessy, a character referenced in the previous track, 'Sessy Lu'.

<sup>75</sup> Use of the Beastie Boys' 'The New Style' (*Licensed To Ill*, Def Jam, Columbia, 1986) here is simultaneously aesthetic and strategic. On the one hand, the sample sounds pleasing to the ear in tone and tempo; on the other, use of a 'fight-for-your-right-to-party' style Beastie Boys sample denotes the reckless, rebellious nature of the group during its earliest stages, and in turn, alludes to P's current leanings towards his youth, immaturity, and misogyny. P wishes not to confront his responsibilities as father, member of society, and man, but rather to escape from these 'burdens', to a time when elements of his character such as these were not so pronounced. Using the early Beastie Boys 'frat boy, party boy' reckless style to reflect this need in P, the sample can also be turned on its head to convey an underlying message located in 'Sweetcorn'. This message becomes clear during the latter stages of the album (particularly on 'Solitaire', see pp. 211-214) during passages that pertain to a man's potential to develop and learn over time. Just as the Beastie Boys moved on from their early controversies, developing into one of the most innovative, experimental, socially-active bands of the early twenty-first century, my aim in using their voices here is to illustrate that so too can a man grow from an immature person with a penchant for sexism and misogyny into one who is conscious of his role in society.

<sup>76</sup> As with P's allusion to Phil Collins's 'Air' in 'Sessy Lu', here, P references a track from another 1980s musical icon, Prince's 'When Doves Cry' (*Purple Rain*, Warner Bros, 1984). As well as providing clues to P's age and cultural upbringing with allusions such as these, once again, P uses the Prince lyric, and the image it conjures, to reflect the sense of relief felt by an individual post-climax.

<sup>77</sup> Allusion to Sofia Coppola's *Lost in Translation* (Focus Features, 2003), a film that subtly depicts the transitional period of an individual from sexually-active, virile male, to a mature man. Use of this sample aids in enhancing an overall message contained in *Houses* concerning maturation, development, and change.

<sup>78</sup> Here, P uses the proverb 'after a storm comes a calm' to describe the feeling of serenity, or 'time of peace' in the moments immediately before and after sexual climax. Also, this saying foreshadows 'a period of trouble or disorder' to follow in 'SPRT LVLS' (see pp. 207-209). George Latimer Apperson, Martin H. Manser, and Stephen J. Curtis, *Dictionary of Proverbs* (Ware, HRT: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 2006), p. 13.

Shut down, minimise and close windows  
no more, I lust for tits and arses, 'til the next time, my mind's free.  
Until some stranger's hourglass reminds me,  
and I begin to fiend again,  
but for now, I'm free my friend.

Free to focus on my intellect,  
without the mental burden turning every female into an object for sex.

*'Dick...I'm very disappointed' (Au, N-r).<sup>79</sup>*

...yeah

Now I'm extra calm, feelin' extra anxious.  
You're a piece of shit you don't deserve fuck all, you bastard.  
You should end it all.

You fuckin' waster.  
You're a piece of shit, nah, you're just a fucking wanker...'

*'Fuckin' cunt, you evil stupid little cunt,  
that's what you are' (Au, N-r).<sup>80</sup>*

Kill yourself...

*'But, you know, you get older  
and some things you can't do anymore.  
Some things you don't wanna do anymore.  
It's a nice change...*

Move on,

*...Feel some desires fall away...*

empty out and move on.

*...New things make you happy...*

Move on,

*...But some things don't change,  
and some things I'm sick of' (Au, N-r).<sup>81</sup>*

---

<sup>79</sup> As a way of aurally illustrating P's sense of dissolution in the immediate wake of his 'relief', I use a vocal sample from Paul Verhoeven's *Robocop* (Orion Pictures, 1987) to introduce an element of humour to 'Undigested Sweetcorn' that continues to develop in absurdity until the track's conclusion. This sample, as with several others triggered after it, nods towards Joyce's use of a more bizarre, absurd and overt form of humour in *Ulysses*, particularly noted in the 'Circe' chapter.

<sup>80</sup> As Matt Berry's 'Relaxation Podcast' focuses on a similar theme as noted in 'Undigested Sweetcorn', a vocal soundbite is sampled from it that again attempts to illustrate P's current sense of disillusion and lack of self-worth post-climax. This sample is meant to mimic voices inside P's head that compound his current feelings of worthlessness.

<sup>81</sup> Spilling further into the realms of absurdity, and as musical samples, rhythms, and tempos begin to degrade and fall out of rhythm, a vocal piece taken from Louis C.K.'s stand-up routine ('Sex') is utilised. Here, in addition to illustrating P's current feelings, and consolidating points raised in 'Sweetcorn', C.K.'s words (especially when taken in context of recent allegations of misogyny made against him) work to further deepen

empty out and move on.

**[Silence]**

Could you turn it down just a little bit in the head phones D.O.C.?, the music—not the vocals—the vocals are perfect.<sup>82</sup>

---

the meaning behind *Houses's* explorations into aspects of toxic masculinity, sexism, and sexual desire. See Louis C.K., 'Sex', *Word: Live at Carnegie Hall*.

<sup>82</sup> In a conscious act to break the fourth wall, so to speak, P now requests to have his own music turned down in 'the headphones'. This passage, spoken in the silence between the end of 'Sweetcorn' and the beginning of 'Forces', is delivered as a final layering of absurdity, delving now into the realms of the metaphysical, as a way of drawing the listener out of the *Houses* narrative and promoting their proactivity as listeners.

## Forces ('Oxen of the Sun')

In a clearer state of mind (post-climax), P confirms to himself and the listener his intentions of leaving his family for the 'greener grass grown'<sup>83</sup> pastures of Sessy Lu, a bachelor's life, or some similar scenario. Here begins P's embarkation on his own kind of 'hero quest', an ironic twist on Homer's *Odyssey*: whilst Odysseus leaves his kingdom of Ithaca to engage in the war of Troy on behalf of the freedom of his people, P escapes contemporary societal restriction and the financial and emotional requirements of his family, in order to live as freely and independently as he can.

*'Well, it's half an hour later.  
My initial reaction was one of intense joy,  
but that's now been replaced  
by a vague feeling of inadequacy and gloom...*

Message to the forces.

*...It's not an experience which I can see catching on...*

Powers that be...

*...But, eh, neither is it one which I regret' (Au, N-r).<sup>84</sup>*

You think that even if she's restricting access to my daughter and my son that she would ever stop me?

You think by forcing zero-hour class divisions on my intellect that they would ever see me kneeling?

This my Rocky moment,<sup>85</sup>

this is when I separate myself from out the family unit  
just to show you I am able

To see the bigger picture from a wider scope.

Been round the block a few,

seen it coming from a while ago.

---

<sup>83</sup> See 'Sessy Lu', p. 200.

<sup>84</sup> Recalling to previous scenarios depicted in 'Sweetcorn', a sample taken from Chris Morris and Armando Iannucci's mock news programme *The Day Today* (BBC 2, 1994) is used. This sample is taken from a skit ('Attitudes Night') starring Steve Coogan, who plays a news journalist reporting for 'The Scrutineer' on his being 'fellated' as part of what he describes as 'a very fashionable thing to do among young people'. Utilising only the second part of the skit (after the event has taken place), the sample emphasises P's post-climax sense of 'inadequacy and gloom'.

<sup>85</sup> Once again illustrating his upbringing in the '80s, P makes reference to John G. Avildsen's *Rocky* (United Artists, 1976). Here, P likens his quest to Rocky Balboa's comeback from broken journeyman boxer to champion. Using this allusion as a loose framework for his own quest, P attempts to rally himself for the challenge of leaving his family.

With age comes experience,  
and that can breed the pessimistic negatives I'm tryna shake off.  
Benefits of gettin' older comes the knowledge that you see it happenin'  
Plus, you're never chewing more than you can break off.<sup>86</sup>

I put my all into it.  
Can I make it on my own without crumbling underneath this pressure?  
Keep trusting in myself,  
Pack my rucksack and sleep round at D's 'til I sweep this mess up.

See I put my thought into it,  
I will live upon that breadline until I find my feet and wages.  
Yeah,  
and in the meantime, I'll sip and smoke bud, get fucked up and sleep with strangers.

Yeah,  
*'Separated from the rest of the fleet...*  
yeah.

Empty out and move on  
*...I was lost...' (Au, N-r).*<sup>87</sup>  
Empty out and move on

If I put my all into this  
Will I have enough to make it 'til their sending out the crisis payment?  
9 o'clock Monday morning, I'll be stood on upper parliament queuing,  
that's first serve basis.

Am I able to do this?  
Can I make another life, past, present, future, all I will be?  
Keep trustin' in myself,  
knowing it could only make me stronger if it doesn't kill me.<sup>88</sup>

---

<sup>86</sup> As P readies himself for the challenge of singledom, he deviates on the proverb 'don't bite off more than you can chew'. P alludes to this saying as a means of willing himself to believe that he has the task at hand under control, unaware that it 'is larger or more difficult than [he] can manage'. Martin H. Manser, *Proverbs: Meanings and Origins of over 1,700 Sayings* (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 2007), p. 59.

<sup>87</sup> Returning to Konchalovsky's *Odyssey*, Odysseus's voice is heard in comparison to P's current lyrics. In answer to P's intentions of leaving his family and household behind and becoming single, Odysseus's tale of being taken away from Penelope and Athens is alluded to.

<sup>88</sup> With the same sentiment employed as when referring to *Rocky*, P now alludes to Nietzsche's saying, 'out of life's school of war—what does not kill me makes me stronger'. Treating his choice to leave his family and partner behind as an important task he must endure, P again tries to talk himself into a positive state of mind regarding the decision. Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Maxims and Barbs', in *Twilight of the Idols or How to Philosophize with a Hammer*, trans. Duncan Large (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).



## SPRT LVLS ('Circe')

'SPRT LVLS' depicts P's first outing as a 'free man', apart from his family. Loosely following events that take place in Joyce's 'Circe' chapter, in which Bloom and Dedalus frequent Bella Cohen's brothel in Nighttown (or Monto, as 'most Dubliners in 1904 knew it'),<sup>89</sup> P's outing consists of a night out with friends at a local club. In similarity to Stephen Dedalus during 'Circe', P becomes recklessly drunk (and high) before spotting Sessy Lu (or a similar woman he is attracted to) in the same venue. Before being able to speak to her, P is caught in the middle of a bar brawl between gangs.

His evening turning sour, events of the song (in which P narrowly avoids being seriously injured in the brawl) gesture towards Dedalus's encounter with Private Carr of the British Army in 'Circe', during which he is knocked out after drunkenly insulting Carr and his associates' monarch and 'brutish empire'<sup>90</sup>:

### Private Carr

*(Tugging at his belt.) I'll wring the neck of any bugger says a word against my fucking king (553) [...] (He rushes towards Stephen, fists outstretched, and strikes him in the face) (558).*

Spirit levels...

*'The apparition of these faces in the crowd.  
Petals on a wet, black bough' (Au, N-r).<sup>91</sup>*

...spirit levels.

Waiting in the wings<sup>92</sup>  
pouring up another,

---

<sup>89</sup> John Hunt, 'Nighttown', *The Joyce Project*, 2014 <[m.joyceproject.com/notes/150005nighttown.html](http://m.joyceproject.com/notes/150005nighttown.html)> [accessed 24 January 2022].

<sup>90</sup> Joyce, *Ulysses*, p. 552.

<sup>91</sup> Aligning with another popular modernist author, Ezra Pound's famous imagist poem is utilised here as a means of contextualising P's current situation amongst a large crowd in an unnamed night club.

<sup>92</sup> Alert, and ready to act upon his new-found sexual availability 'when the opportunity comes', P refers to the idiom to '[wait] in the wings'. Paul Heacock, *Cambridge Dictionary of American Idioms* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 470.

put the liquor to the glass.  
Heat upon the chest,  
feel it in the ribs for a minute,  
Let it pass.

Whoa

Rum upon the breath  
Music in the blood, from the drums, going deaf.  
Death  
Spirit Levels

Spirit levels up,  
pull the cap down 'til the vision levels up.  
See it in your eyes,  
you're looking the same when you listen the hook.

Glasses in the air,  
spillin' on my Nikes and I'm laughing unaware  
Yeah, yeah.  
Money's all around me  
moving all around me.

*'Summon the captains...*

You lot in the dark.  
Looking at your rivals from over the bar.

*...Assemble the crews...*

They don't wanna start,  
they were looking peaceful,  
They are looking calm.

*...We sail for Troy...*

But I'm feelin' like I'm Noah in the Ark,<sup>93</sup>  
stood up in the black T, glowing in the dark,  
I just wanna drink a whole gallon at the bar,  
fuck it, drink a whole bottle sat up at the—  
'til I'm punching my own temple and my jaw.  
Whole pint Guinness, still spillin' from the jar,  
livin' hella ignorant, yeah I'm livin' large  
and you may have won the battle but you'll never win the—  
Phone screen cracked and it's runnin' out of charge

*...Troy' (Au, N-r).<sup>94</sup>*

---

<sup>93</sup> Biblical allusion to Noah (Genesis 6.11-9.19), as P gestures towards his sense of importance, or uniqueness, amongst the crowd. P's allusion to Noah is also intratextual, referring to 'Wi(n)dow', from *S.T.A.R.V.E.* ('asking how you build an ark, for when the flood is coming', see p. 153, footnote 35). Here, employing the same strategy as 'Wi(n)dow', I use Noah's story to alert the audience to a crisis about to happen (a flood, in Noah's case; an impending suicide attempt in 'Wi(n)dow'; a chaotic fight in 'SPRT LVLS').

<sup>94</sup> Further illustrating current circumstances, Odysseus's voice (Konchalovsky's *Odyssey*) is heard in relation to P noticing a rival crew in the club.

and I'm losin' my focus and heading for the floor.  
Manager is shouting for the bouncer on the door  
So lemme just calm down, lemme go...

*'Athena!...*

She is over there.  
Trying not to notice you're fierce over there.  
Moving to the drum,  
moving like you're tribal, movin' like you're rare.

*...I think the wine swells your head,  
my Odysseus...*

Clicking with your mates.  
Many blokes try  
but you're sticking with your mates...

*...Are you drinking because you fear your future?...*

Spirit levels

Giving me the eye.  
Tryna play it calm, but I'm picking up a vibe.

*...Me?...*

Thinking up a line.  
Need to move quick cus I'm runnin' out of time.

*...I'm afraid of nothing' (Au, N-r).<sup>95</sup>*

Entering the crowd,  
tryna keep close but I'm swimming on the tide.  
Swear this was all fate,  
written in the stars and this shit is all aligned but...

*'My Goddess, you have always protected me...*

Them lot in the dark  
looking at your rivals from over the bar.

*...Athena...*

They don't wanna start.  
They were looking peaceful,  
They were looking calm.

*...Tell me, is there no way to avoid this war?...*

It's like everything was OK,  
I was nearly there.

*...Speak to me' (Au, N-r).<sup>96</sup>*

---

<sup>95</sup> During a scene in *Odyssey*, as Odysseus sets sail for Troy, he prays to Athena for protection. On appearing to him, Athena questions Odysseus's motives for drinking so heavily. For 'SPRT LVLS', I have captured this exchange and manipulated it to reflect P's current circumstances, as he becomes more and more inebriated in a nightclub, before attempting to chat up a woman he has spotted on the dancefloor.

<sup>96</sup> As P musters up the courage to speak to a woman who he has seen dancing in the nightclub, he again spots the rival gangs he observed at the start of 'SPRT LVLS'. Using another vocal sample from *Odyssey*, P's

Shit

That's when I seen a glass beer bottle flyin' through the air, and it's done.

---

trepidation at the prospect of an ensuing fight between these gangs is made clear through the prayers of Odysseus to Athena.

## Solitaire ('Eumaeus')

Loosely framed around Bloom and Dedalus's journey back to Bloom's house in the 'Eumaeus' chapter, 'Solitaire' depicts P's return home to his family, and his previous roles and responsibilities as father, family man, and casual worker, after narrowly escaping serious involvement in the bar brawl during 'SPRT LVLS'. P's witnessing of inner-city Nottingham's violent underbelly is enough for him to realise that his secure situation as provider is far more appealing than a life free of responsibility.

Tail tucked firmly between his legs, P consolidates his new intentions of doing anything it takes to bring prosperity to his family, as opposed to living solely for himself.

*'Listen. I didn't wanna be somebody's husband, okay?  
And I didn't wanna be somebody's dad,  
that wasn't my goal in life.  
Some guys it is, wasn't mine.  
But somehow, I've...it was what I wanted.  
I didn't know that.  
And it's all I wanna do,  
I don't wanna do anything else,  
that's what I want to do...  
I work so I can do that' (Au, N-r).<sup>97</sup>*

Cheat, beg-steal-borrow...  
Cheat, beg-steal-borrow.<sup>98</sup>

Child born with no state of mind.<sup>99</sup>

---

<sup>97</sup> In the ensuing silence that follows the conclusion of 'SPRT LVLS', the voice of Dean in *Blue Valentine* returns (see 'Neutral', p. 187, footnote 38 for initial use). Used to preempt the forthcoming 'Solitaire's' lyrical content, Dean's words aid in carrying the *Houses* narrative forward, as themes of paternity and familial responsibility begin to surface.

<sup>98</sup> Observed in Chaucer's 'Man of Law's Tale': 'Maugre [despite] thyn heed, thou most for indigence or stele, or begge, or borwe [borrow] thy despence [expenditure]!', P alludes to this cliché as a way of highlighting his newfound intentions of obtaining a prosperous family life 'in any possible way'. See Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, ed. by Robert Boenig and Andrew Taylor (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Editions, 2012), p. 127, and Christine Ammer, *The Dictionary of Clichés* (New York: Sky Horse Publishing, 2013), p. 29.

<sup>99</sup> Allusion to Melle Mel's introductory verse on Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five's 'The Message' (*The Message*, Sugar Hill Records, 1982). Always the ponderer, P questions the innocence of childhood, and the loss of this innocence, to environmental and biological stimuli.

Clean slate until judged by them words and actions.  
Pointless in tryna question these whys and hows,  
throwin' stones at glass houses,<sup>100</sup> I'm livin' trife.

Another day stretched to the margins.  
Learn from mistakes made, then I pen sketches.  
Quick steps back to my road  
I write my woes on iPhone I'm tryna turn back...

time

Clocking how the world views me:  
slow but sure, fading economic spirals.<sup>101</sup>  
Young Man is growing tall for this narrow terrace,  
soon he will spot the flaws, even in his idol.  
And Young Lady's not a baby no more,  
She's a flame that needs fuel,  
no escaping these obligations.  
It's time to call on these privileges  
by any means so that us four can make the majors.

Please believe, there comes a point,  
When you realise all's fair in love and war.<sup>102</sup>  
And you see just how far your life path will take you  
So, you call in all favours:

'Lord:

Regardless of what's wrong and right,  
I use what's available, nouse and the know-how  
Beg, steal, borrow, go against all morals,  
until we're upwardly mobile'.

---

<sup>100</sup> In addition to linking with the theme of property ownership that is peppered throughout *Houses*, P's take on the proverb 'people who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones' is primarily used to emphasise his change of mindset. Leaning on Chaucer's use of this saying for *Troilus and Criseyde*, and aligning *Houses* with the theme of enduring love highlighted in Chaucer's text, here, P realises the hypocrisy of his recent words/actions against his life partner, and without wishing to blame, belittle, or involve them in his recent mistakes, he calls on himself to take responsibility ('I'm livin' trife'), before returning to them. See Geoffrey Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, trans. by Barry Windeatt (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 129.

<sup>101</sup> Veiled reference to *Houses's* counterpart LP, *Uzumaki*, in which the theme of spirals, repetition, and cyclic events is concentrated upon.

<sup>102</sup> Drawing on a well-known proverb deriving from an early English translation of Miguel De Cervantes's *Don Quixote* ('Love and warre are all one and as in warre it is lawful to use sleights and stratagems to overcome the enemy: So in amorous strifes and competencies, Impostures and juggling tricks are held for good, to attaine to the wished end') (1640), P again emphasises his intentions of familial and economic success regardless of the moral cost. Passage from Cervantes quoted in Wolfgang Mieder, 'Beating Swords into Plowshares: Proverbial Wisdom about War and Peace', in *Behold the Proverbs of a People: Proverbial Wisdom in Culture, Literature, and Politics* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2014), p. 81.

List of what I don't need:

A long line of so-called friends who won't feed their own seeds,  
without tending to their own needs  
first and foremost, I don't co-sign for proceeds.  
I will stay focused on my own schemes,  
get them groceries, travel at my own speeds.  
And put the hopes/dreams of the ones I hold most close  
highest above all, and without a second thought.<sup>103</sup>

Plus, you can't deny the intention  
from the point when these rhymes make an entrance  
and the lines get supplied from my mind to this instrumental.  
Influenced by the violence, I'm heading home.  
Silence has got me thinking 'bout life  
not about the art when I'm linking words from the heart  
'til I'm growing wings when I put my thoughts on my wife.  
Tryna bottle these feelings for selfish reasons.

Grasping on to a notion that's out of reach.  
Thoughts turning to an ocean without a beach  
my mistakes made up into features  
I'm tryna reach those at war with their own selves  
Dealing with dependents.

Walking tight ropes,  
in a tug of war with them bank credits.  
Mouths to feed, tryna keep afloat,  
knowing if you love something then you let it go—<sup>104</sup>  
And I'm just using what I was born with and what was taught me.  
Seeing doubles of my youth now I'm hittin' forty.  
And it's panging at my conscience,  
I have responsibility to 'em  
I *have* to attempt to school 'em.

---

<sup>103</sup> Here, without a direct literary reference being employed, a sentiment articulated by Victor Frankl in *Man's Search for Meaning* is alluded to. This sentiment refers to the fact that, as P begins to realise the importance of his responsibilities to his family, and his moral anchor and life focus is renewed, his yearning to live for a specific meaning and purpose is fulfilled. Upon reaching this point of awareness, P falls in line with Frankl's teachings of logotherapy. Frankl writes: 'a man who becomes conscious of the responsibility he bears toward a human being who affectionately waits for him, or to an unfinished work, will never be able to throw away his life. He knows the why for his existence, and will be able to bear almost any how'. With P's mind made up, and his focus firm on the upkeep and protection of his family, his transformation from a previous self, as depicted on *S.T.A.R.V.E.* and at earlier stages during *Houses*, is complete. P is no longer under threat of falling back into a suicidal mind state, or under the impression that his life would be better off without his family and partner. With the responsibility of having dependents he can serve comes a form of freedom and stability in his life that keeps it balanced, healthy, and full. See Victor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (New York: Pocket Books, 1985), p. 101.

<sup>104</sup> Reiterated proverb (see 'Will We?', p. 196, footnote 58).

So you can relate to them same mistakes.  
Same fate, just a change to them name and dates.  
But somehow, I know you will refuse it.  
Numb to it, just a cycle, a paper chase.

See, from the printed page to my latest tape.  
Odysseus returns to Molly's embrace.<sup>105</sup>  
Still, I know you can't, and refuse to hear it.  
And that's word to Homer and Dublin James.<sup>106</sup>

So, here's a list of what I don't need:  
A long line of so-called friends who won't feed their own seeds  
without tending to their own needs.  
First and foremost, I don't co-sign for proceeds.  
I will stay focused on my own schemes,  
get them groceries, travel at my own speeds.  
And put the hopes/dreams of the ones I hold most close  
highest above all, and without a second thought.

*[Silence]*

So, here's a list of what I most need:  
Shelter and support plus the coach fees  
from my co-dependents of my own genes.  
Nutrients and proteins,  
my daughter's on a growth scheme.  
Plus, my son in his low teens.  
And my Missus puttin' up with me the most—  
Seems like I am the most blessed,  
So, I put my hopes/dreams high up on the shelf  
for good cause, without second thought.

*'...It's the rock we all push, men...  
We call it our burden,  
but, it's really it's our privilege' (Au, N-r).<sup>107</sup>*

---

<sup>105</sup> In one of the only overt references to *Ulysses* and *The Odyssey* on the LP, I here allude to Joyce and Homer. By intentionally locating this reference towards the final stages of the LP, I seek to solidify an intertextual lineage between my work and the above-mentioned authors (after much hinting). Upon hearing this allusion, the informed listener might find deeper meanings and wider resonances in the LP, and an added understanding of these links when listening afresh.

<sup>106</sup> Referencing the authors of such significant literary works as *Ulysses* and *The Odyssey*, one a great Classical work and the other perhaps the defining Modernist novel, representing very broadly both ends of the Western literary canon, I guardedly confirm my intentions of homage, pastiche, and at times, satire, regarding these texts.

<sup>107</sup> Using a sample from an Adam Arkin directed episode of the *Fargo* television series (season 2, episode 10: 'Palindrome', FX, 2015), P's eventual acceptance of his familial responsibility, and his new-found focus on fatherhood and provision, is further consolidated. Also here, Camus's ideas in *The Myth of Sisyphus* are referred to as conscious allusion. As the sample claims, the family unit can often be likened to a 'burden' by



## Lay Your Head Down ('Ithaca')

Arriving home, P attempts to resolve relationship issues with his partner. In particular, he tries to seduce her, in an attempt to strengthen their bond. As with much of the LP, during sections of the song, the speaker considers his current predicament, this time detailing his relationship with his young daughter. P's attempts to talk to – and to be intimate with – his partner contrast starkly with Bloom's actions on returning home in *Ulysses*. Whilst P triumphantly achieves his goal of reconciliation (and sex) with his partner, Bloom and Molly settle for the briefest of exchanges:

Then?

He [Bloom] kissed the plump mellow yellow smellow melons of her [Molly's] rump, on each plump melonous hemisphere, in their mellow yellow furrow, with obscure prolonged provocative melonsmellonous osculation

[...]

What followed this action?

Somnolent invocation, less somnolent recognition, incipient excitation, catechetical interrogation' (*Ulysses*, 686).

Next, the narrator's [Bloom's] reply to Molly's 'interrogation' regarding his day's events is modified to omit many (if not all) of his most significant actions, before both fall into ruminative silence (687).

*'Well, that's a nice hour of the night  
for him to be coming home at to anybody.  
First, I'll look at his shirt to see,  
where I'll see if he has that French letter still in his pocketbook.  
I suppose he thinks I don't know.  
Deceitful, men (Au, N-r).<sup>108</sup>*

---

some fathers, only for them to realise it is actually their 'privilege' when life requires them to change their perspectives. See Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, trans. by Justin O'Brien (London: Penguin Books, 2013).

<sup>108</sup> As his journey nears its end, and P returns home to his partner, I employ another sample taken from Strick's *Ulysses* that features the voice of Molly (played by Barbara Jefford) as she internally comments on Bloom's return home in the small hours. As the sample reveals, P's partner knows far more about his promiscuity than he realises.

Are you coming downstairs?

Lay your head down,  
lay your head down,  
I wanna talk to you.

Lay your head down,  
let your hair down,  
it's been a long while...since.

And while our seeds rest,  
we can reconvene then reconnect from where we left  
off from last time, it's been a while since we last crept:  
private and enclosed spaces  
silent and imposed patience.

I'm filling pages with them good thoughts.  
filling glasses up with E&J's and toasting us two.  
thousand years since we bared our souls and opened up to  
each other in awe of each other in all, I see more.

And when I close my eyes, I see yours  
close enough, I'm thinking them thoughts that's pure and impure.  
honest as I can be, trying hard to keep my soul clean.  
Kurt Cobain taught me through that Lithium, there's no shame.<sup>109</sup>

So long as my will is good, I'm OK.  
I let you be the driving force and lie back.  
watching moves, no artist on this planet could describe that,  
keep my focus on your most rare, without the sidetracks.

Lay your head down...

*And first I put my arms around him, yes,  
and drew him down to me so he could feel my breasts,  
all perfume, yes, and his heart was going like mad,  
and, 'yes' I said, 'yes I will, yes' (Au, N-r).<sup>110</sup>*

Lay your head down,  
just lay your head down...

Afterwards  
I'm walking to the sink,

---

<sup>109</sup> In contrast to his earlier sexual encounter with a stranger on the internet, P intends to make 'love' to his partner, with honest and pure intentions. To express this, P refers to a lyric from Nirvana's 'Lithium' (*Nevermind*, DGC, 1991): 'I'm so excited, I can't wait to meet you there, and I don't care/I'm so horny, that's ok, my will is good'.

<sup>110</sup> Using another sample from Strick's *Ulysses*, this time a vocal sample spoken internally and in retrospect by Molly (on conclusion of Joyce's *Ulysses*, p. 732), P and his partner's lovemaking is illustrated.

cleaning off and breathing hard,  
clouds up in my mind are clear.  
I'm allowed now, the visions flooding like a tidal wave,<sup>111</sup>  
ideas upon ideas, tall orders and wider frames.

So now I talk of how I picture you:  
stood up while you're giving birth,  
knee-deep in a tepid pool.  
it's like my hands are tied, I'm stood behind a sheet of glass.  
all my hopes upon you, while you push.

Push

Two attempts to cut the cord.  
rich and vital red is spilling royal from this woman born.  
I can only bear a witness to you in your mother's arms,  
metaphor for how we always will be living worlds apart.

See even though I cradle you and stand,  
we are polar opposites; I try my best to understand.  
and even though I cradle you and sing,  
I know inside my heart that you and I forever will be strangers.

I lay my head down,  
I lay my head down.  
and I will lay my head down,  
and try my best to understand.

I lay my head down,  
lay my head down...  
while you talk to me.

talk to me...

*P's daughter babbling.*<sup>112</sup>

---

<sup>111</sup> Veiled intratextual allusion to the previous mention of the biblical story of Noah on 'SPRT LVLS' (see p. 208).

<sup>112</sup> During the second verse of 'Lay Your Head Down', and as it concludes, P's thoughts turn from his partner to his relationship with his young daughter. To emphasise this, the listener hears the voice of P's daughter, babbling to herself. This 'female' voice is used to answer P's request for one of the females in his life to 'talk to me' during the song. This quotation is also an additional means of ambiguously linking *Houses* with *Ulysses*. As readers of Joyce's text will know, the final chapter of *Ulysses* ('Penelope') is written from Bloom's partner Molly's perspective. After deciding that writing (and performing) from P's partner's perspective would be a disingenuous way to end the LP, I opted to employ quotations from Molly's stream of consciousness during 'Penelope' in strategic places, and also to employ the voice of P's daughter, as a way of enabling a female voice to be heard during the LP's conclusion. P's daughter reads from a storybook, its pages (being turned) audible in the background. Her reading echoes Joyce's use of the a 'found' text within 'the larger text' previously established on 'HMRC' (see Benstock, 'The Printed Letters in *Ulysses*', p. 183) by aiding in drawing 'attention to [...] varying relationships in the larger text' (174), and serves to deepen the realistic atmosphere

## While You Sleep

Before concluding his day, P looks in on his sleeping son. Here, the cyclic paternal pattern of *Houses* is consolidated through denouement, highlighting the father-son bond that connects the beginning and end of the LP.

*'My son, me in his eyes' (Au, N-r).<sup>113</sup>*

Watching you while you sleep.  
Stroking your face and hair.  
Hoping you know that I  
will always be here

Always.

Seems like everyday  
you're throwing off the covers.  
See you are just like me,  
but a billion times better.

You are a blank slate.  
Please don't forget it, Chris.  
I tuck your blankets in,  
and give your head a kiss.

You are quiet and at peace.  
I follow how you breathe,  
wondering what you dream.  
Watching you while you sleep.

Watching you while you sleep  
Watching you while you sleep  
Watching you while you sleep

*'I understood that I was only one man in the world.  
Nothing more, and nothing less' (Au, N-r).<sup>114</sup>*

---

of *Houses*, and strengthen its dramatic pull. Whilst much of what P's daughter says is indistinguishable, it is hoped the listener will connect with the paternal instinct her voice evokes.

<sup>113</sup> Turning attention to his eldest child (his son, Chris) here, a sample of David Suchet's version of Bloom is employed. As well as being an aesthetically apt sample, the vocal and its sentiment helps to return the thematic focus of *Houses* back to the paternal bond.

<sup>114</sup> Ending P's day, Odysseus's words of enlightenment in the wake of his own epic travels are used here to consolidate P's newfound understanding of his actions, the meaning of his journey, and his place in the world.

### Ghosts Reprise ('Penelope')

Veering away from alignment with *Ulysses* or *The Odyssey* (apart from the link with both tales' broadly happy endings), 'Ghosts Reprise' is presented as part of a dream, or perhaps as part of a letter that arrives the day after the narrative of *Houses* takes place. In the song, P receives confirmation from his bank that his family have managed to secure a mortgage. This letter is read by P's partner (a female voice, representing Molly, in alignment with the final chapter from *Ulysses*, 'Penelope', written from Molly's perspective).

*'Inked characters fast fading on the frayed breaking paper' (Au, N-r).<sup>115</sup>*

*Dear Mr – and Miss –, regarding – Sherwood,  
Nottingham. NG5 – Subject to contract without prejudice...*

*Following our recent conversations in respect of the above property,  
we are pleased to enclose a property transaction in respect of the offer...*

*I am pleased to confirm your purchase has been duly completed today.  
You will find a completion statement and invoice attached for your records (Au, N-r).<sup>116</sup>*

*'Begin to be forgotten. Out of sight, out of mind' (Au, N-r).<sup>117</sup>*

---

<sup>115</sup> Introducing the idea of another kind of 'found text' (this time a mortgage acceptance letter) in *Houses*, Donnelly (Bloom) describes artistically—in a haiku-like passage—the characteristics of a letter.

<sup>116</sup> As a way of affirming P's decision to stay with his family, here, *Houses*'s somewhat 'happy ending' is revealed, as the P family are made aware of their successful attempt to secure a mortgage. P's partner reads aloud from a solicitor's letter. Echoing Joyce's choice of employing the female voice/perspective of Molly for the final chapter of *Ulysses*, here, in the final track of *Houses*, the female voice is foregrounded. This further emphasises the intended intertextual nature of the work.

<sup>117</sup> As the omnipresent father figure behind the narrative of *Houses*, Bloom's final words allude to the transient and fleeting essence of P's story. In stating to the listener that P's story will 'begin to be forgotten', almost as soon as it has been told, *Houses*'s narrative reveals itself to be a wholly normal, relatively uneventful day-in-the-life of a working-class male in the English Midlands. Whilst seeming like an average day, P has taken a great journey of self-discovery throughout *Houses*, that has led him to realise the importance of family, fatherhood, and social responsibility. Fittingly, and as a final act of linking P with Bloom, Bloom's concluding words reveal the final proverb from the LP, in alignment with P's use of proverb throughout the album. As with themes of paternity and fatherhood, this proverb enables the narrative to circle back on itself, ending neatly where it began. See Joyce, *Ulysses*, p. 107.

## *Uzumaki: The Universal Thump*<sup>1</sup>



*Uzumaki* encompasses aspects of both of its predecessors (*S.T.A.R.V.E.* and *Houses*), by juxtaposing elements of *S.T.A.R.V.E.*'s thematic abstraction and fragmented (cerebral) narration with the temporally linear narrative and conceptual elements of *Houses*. *Uzumaki* draws heavily on the contemporary rap music scene, whilst also largely maintaining the characteristics (format, structure, time signatures, etc.) of a traditional rap album through the employment of unconcealed Signifyin(g), and traditional tropes such as spirit of competition, internal struggle/conflict, and contemporary cultural allusion. *Uzumaki* can be listened to as an introduction to the trilogy and/or as a conclusion.

---

<sup>1</sup> Hereafter referred to as *Uzumaki*, unless further stated.

*Uzumaki*  
Annotated Lyrics

[https://soundcloud.com/grand\\_imperial\\_cappo/sets/uzumaki/s-J0C0isPYba7?si=aec6b979fd0948d7a19a4a5a90014d75&utm\\_source=clipboard&utm\\_medium=text&utm\\_campaign=social\\_sharing](https://soundcloud.com/grand_imperial_cappo/sets/uzumaki/s-J0C0isPYba7?si=aec6b979fd0948d7a19a4a5a90014d75&utm_source=clipboard&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=social_sharing)

1. Ito	227
2. White	231
3. Pequod	236
4. Red	240
5. Greene	244
6. Frost	249
7. Gold	252
8. X	257
9. Z	261
10. Berry	265
11. Glaze <sup>2</sup>	269

---

<sup>2</sup> I have named each track after an artist/author, text (or idea contained therein), or film that I have been influenced by, 'borrowed' from, or directly quoted: 1. Junji Ito, *Uzumaki* (San Francisco, CA: Viz Media, 2001). 2. The Notorious B.I.G. (aka Frank White), 'The Ten Crack Commandments' (*Life After Death*, Bad Boy, Arista, 1997). 3. The ship in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* (London: Wordsworth Editions, 2002). 4. Thomas Harris, *Red Dragon* (London: Corgi Books, 1992). 5. Graham Greene, *The End of the Affair* (London: Vintage Books, 2001). 6. Robert Frost, 'Acquainted with the Night' (*The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, ed. by Margaret Ferguson, Mary Jo Salter, and Jon Stallworthy, London: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2005), p. 1237. 7. William Golding, *Lord of the Flies* (London: Faber & Faber, 2012). 8. Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (London: Penguin Books, 2001). 9. JAY-Z, 'Where I'm From', *In My Lifetime Vol. One* (Roc-A-Fella, Def Jam, 1997). 10. Ray Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2003). 11. Jonathon Glazer, *Under the Skin* (StudioCanal, 2013). For further information on borrowing in hip hop, see Justin Williams, *Rhyming' and Stealin': Musical Borrowing in Hip Hop* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2013).

### Ito<sup>3</sup>

As introduction to the LP, 'Ito' highlights the employment and function of literary concepts in rap such as intertextuality and Signifyin(g) through an artistic illustration of them.

Referring to various authors and critical works, this song also draws together ties between the *CAPsule* trilogy, modernist literature and literary criticism.

[Song begins] *'Are you watching closely?...*  
*...Look closer.*  
*Never show anyone.*  
*They'll beg you, and they'll flatter you for the secret...*

Overstand *But as soon as you give it up...*

Understand *...you'll be nothing to 'em. You understand?' (Au, N-r).<sup>4</sup>*

Yeah,

A ceaseless weaponised receipt of rhetoric,  
tapestries replete with myriad textured fabrics,  
multiple artistic signatures that's layered and stacked up,<sup>5</sup>  
until the fact of actual authorship no longer holds weight.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> *Uzumaki* begins with a reference to Junji Ito's graphic novel *Uzumaki*. This novel concentrates on the dangerous and hypnotic properties of the spiral as observed in nature, which becomes increasingly prevalent (and threatening) throughout the text. During 'Ito', the speaker deems elements of intertextuality in rap music (allusion, 'borrowing', and sampling) as forms of endless repetition and revision, likening this cyclic process to Ito's notion of the spiral.

<sup>4</sup> Highlighting one of the concepts detailed throughout *Uzumaki*, here, the album begins with a quotation from Christopher Nolan's *The Prestige* (Buena Vista Pictures, Warner Bros. Pictures, 2006). This sample is used to frame the LP as a kind of magic trick regarding its use of various literary layers, or hidden messages. Utilising the *Prestige* quotation in this way, I hope to establish a line of narratological communication with the listener that suggests there is more going on within the music than can be grasped on first listen, and therefore provide the work with a solid intellectual grounding that will, it is hoped, be accepted and followed up by listeners. As with much of Nolan's filmography, psychological depth is infused into *Uzumaki*, inviting the listener to glean clues and details contained within the lyrics and samples that further their understanding of the project.

<sup>5</sup> Throughout this stanza, I make several allusions to Roland Barthes's ideas around the plurality of language/literature, especially relating to his notion that 'the text is a weapon against time, oblivion and the trickery of speech, which is so easily taken back, altered, denied', and that the 'text is a tissue [a fabric] of quotations', or 'made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures'. Roland Barthes 'The Death of the Author', in *Image, Music, Text* (London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 1977), pp. 146-148).

<sup>6</sup> In another (loose) allusion to Barthes, I artistically gesture towards his idea of the author's redundancy after their work is given to outside interpretation (see 'Death of the Author').



That's my world you walk in—  
this my word and bond I place down,<sup>7</sup>  
modernist Stravinsky turn this Waste Land to my playground,<sup>8</sup>  
stood upon the shoulders of Goliaths<sup>9</sup>  
I retain this ambiguous victory,  
cus all these picture cards are face down.<sup>10</sup>

*Soon, you'll throw down your disguise,  
we'll see behind those bright eyes,  
by and by, when the sidewalks are safe, for the—<sup>11</sup>*

Through them gaps and spaces in-between,  
narrations omnipresent—I live through these bars I record  
ethereal, other worldly, Grand Imperial,  
pearls of wisdom found like in the words between Lamar and Shakur.<sup>12</sup>

*'What you mean by that?  
What the ground represent?'* (Au, N-r).<sup>13</sup>

Repetition plus revision,<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Allusion to a well-known phrase in hip hop culture and Five-Percent Nation teachings, 'word is bond' (my word is my bond). This allusion also refers to Sascha Jenkins's namesake documentary film (*Word is Bond*, Mass Appeal, 2018) in which hip hop poetics are explored. For further information on the origin of this phrase, see Paddy Lane, 'The Origins of the Phrase "Word is Bond"', *The Word is Bond*, 20<sup>th</sup> June 2013 <http://thewordisbond.com/food-4-thought-word-is-bond/> [accessed 4 August 2022].

<sup>8</sup> Allusion to two modernist artists and their works: the unique and controversial efforts of Igor Stravinsky, particularly his avant garde score for Vaslav Nijinsky's ballet *The Rites of Spring* (Ballets Russes, 1913); and T. S. Eliot, focusing on his highly intertextual poem *The Waste Land*. Using these allusions, I not only link my own work with artists who pushed the boundaries of artistic experimentalism, I also hope to liken the speaker's individualist mindset during 'Uzumaki' to ideas of the 'individual talent' as articulated by Eliot in his essay 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (*The Sacred Wood*, London: Faber and Faber, 1997), pp. 39-50.

<sup>9</sup> Reference to a phrase made popular by Sir Isaac Newton in a letter addressed to Robert Hooke (1675) ('if I have seen further, it is by standing upon the shoulders of giants') and utilised by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in *The Friend* (1812). Here, I use this metaphor for building upon previously established knowledge to illustrate my employment of 'multiple artistic signatures' that I have 'layered and stacked up' to build 'Uzumaki', and the entire *CAPSule* trilogy.

<sup>10</sup> Veiled allusion to Kendrick Lamar's adherence to artistic ambiguity and contradiction, as effective methods of artistic development (see Chapter Two, pp. 83-86).

<sup>11</sup> Vocal quotation from 'Third World Man' by Steely Dan (*Gaucho*, MCA, 1980). Whilst being applied here for mainly aesthetic reasons (akin to Oswald's concept of 'plunderphonics' in modern music production, see Preface for *Capsule*, pp. 132-133, footnote 12), the lyrics of this sample also adhere to the speaker's attempts to 'throw down' their artistic 'disguise' in order to reveal the secrets behind the project: making transparent their reliance on intertextuality and literary allusion in order for the LP to function fully.

<sup>12</sup> Allusion to Kendrick Lamar's 'Mortal Man', from *To Pimp a Butterfly (TPAB)* (TDE, Aftermath, Interscope, 2015) that gestures towards the atmospheric and otherworldly meeting of minds between Lamar and the posthumous Tupac Shakur in the final stages of the album (detailed in Chapter Two of this thesis, see pp. 69-85).

<sup>13</sup> Kendrick Lamar, 'Mortal Man', *TPAB*.

<sup>14</sup> Reference to Russel A. Potter's conceptualising of Signifyin(g) as 'repetition with a difference; the same and yet not the same'.

See Potter, *Spectacular Vernaculars*, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995), p. 27.

relentless cycles, endless spirals like Uzumaki,<sup>15</sup>  
Junji Ito  
words deeper than Lovelace Deep Throat,<sup>16</sup>  
rap game Heath Ledge  
'bad dreams in the night', I'm Heathcliff.<sup>17</sup>

'Uzumaki, huh?' (Au, N-r).<sup>18</sup>

Logged off from the clicks I'm free'd up,  
White Deffin', from the inhale  
snow falls on cedars.<sup>19</sup>  
Hatred palpable,  
blood colder than reptiles,  
boundaries that stand out like petals on a wet bough.<sup>20</sup>

Apparitions, faces in a crowd,  
language is commodity  
so let me make these Ezra Pounds.  
Still, if the game is to be sold and never told completely,<sup>21</sup>  
then let my two-piece spicy without the rice be greasy,<sup>22</sup>  
let my Blue Cheese cap act as a blinding beacon,  
fracture the words symbolic,  
I'm searching for active listeners.  
I'm a scholar now

---

<sup>15</sup> As noted previously (see footnote 3), Ito's *Uzumaki* is used artistically to represent acts of intertextuality, allusion, and Signifyin(g) in rap as an endless and cyclic process.

<sup>16</sup> Ironic comparative gesture to Gerard Damiano's *Deep Throat* (Bryanston Distributing Company, 1972), a pornographic movie starring Linda Lovelace, renowned for her dexterous oral capabilities.

<sup>17</sup> Lyrics taken from Kate Bush's 'Wuthering Heights' (*The Kick Inside*, EMI, 1977), which carries its own intertextual connections with Emily Bronte's novel of the same name (see Bronte, *Wuthering Heights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020). By mentioning Bush's song in conjunction with my own highly intertextual and allusive lyrics, I hope again to highlight the underlying message contained in *Uzumaki* regarding the complexities of intertextuality and its practice and function in rap lyrics.

<sup>18</sup> Here, using Higuchinsky's film adaptation of Ito's horror novel (*Uzumaki*, Omega Micott, 2000), I am able to consolidate my metaphoric use of the spiral as an artistic representation of the concept of intertextuality.

<sup>19</sup> This allusion to David Guttererson's novel *Snow Falling on Cedars* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009) is employed primarily for the imagery the title conjures. As a pre-emptive gesture towards a forthcoming image to which I allude (taken from Ezra Pound's poem 'In a Station of the Metro') in the following lines/stanza, I link the idea of snow falling on cedar trees to that of 'petals' falling 'on a wet bough'. I do this mainly as an additional means of artistically illustrating the technique of Signifyin(g), a process that involves 'repetition with a difference' (see Potter, footnote 14). See Ezra Pound, 'In a Station of the Metro', *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, p. 1297.

<sup>20</sup> In another reference to a famous modernist work during 'Uzumaki', and as follow up to the image presented in my reference to *Snow Falling on Cedars* (see footnote above), Ezra Pound's adapted haiku 'Station at the Metro' is mentioned in fragmented form, here, and recited in reverse (beginning at the end, and ending at the beginning): 'boundaries that stand out like petals on a wet bough/Apparitions, faces in a crowd'.

<sup>21</sup> Reference to Snoop Dogg's LP, *The Game is to be Sold, Not to be Told* (No Limit, Priority, 1998).

<sup>22</sup> Reference to a slang term for a 'beat down' called a 'two-piece'. Use of this term can be located in Steve McQueen's *Widows* (20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, 2018) during a scene involving serious violence. By alluding to this scene immediately following my reference to Snoop's LP, I am effectively saying, if I don't use my platform correctly, and in respect of the hip hop culture, then let my beat down (the repercussions of my actions) be serious.

reporting from a foreign ground,  
the meaning's hidden through these posted letters  
like a captured prisoner.

Enough now with the melodramatics,  
I strip emotion from the pure science—medical practice.  
wrought iron, still beating them out of shape,  
gifts for the sick hearted, I brought flowers and sour grapes.

Verses I submit like papers for the *Quel Tel*,<sup>23</sup>  
diary pages equate to wages and self-help,  
performance artist, play my part like no one else there,  
but peace to all them hardcore authors, writers and pioneers.

*Soon, you'll throw down your disguise,  
we'll see behind those bright eyes,  
by and by, when the sidewalks are safe, for the—*

*'Nothing. The secret impresses no one.  
The trick you use it for is everything' (Au, N-r).<sup>24</sup>*

---

<sup>23</sup> Reference to an avant garde French literary journal *Tel Quel*, founded by Philippe Sollers and Jean-Edern Hallier (Paris: Édition du Seuil, 1960-1982). This journal featured some of the powerhouses behind literary criticism and the concept of intertextuality, e.g., Barthes, Kristeva, Foucault, Derrida, and Lacan.

<sup>24</sup> Nolan, *The Prestige*, 2006.

## White

As part of the LP's introduction, the lyrics of 'White' serve a decodifying purpose of enabling a deeper understanding of meaning throughout the trilogy, artistically revealing research-based critical processes discussed and developed in the thesis whilst also outlining plotlines and structure of *S.T.A.R.V.E* and *Houses*. As with much of *Uzumaki*, 'White' exhibits a conscious use of lyrical repetition (cyclicity), poetic ambiguity, and various forms of intertextuality and allusion relating to classic and popular culture, as a means of situating my creative process, and locating my artistic affiliations.

*'— incorporated presents an unabridged recording of...*

Rhyme writer

I built a step-by-step textbook (Al, R)<sup>25</sup>

Rule number uno

*...Copyrighted nineteen seventy-seven...*

I built step-by-step booklet for you to get

Rhyme writing

*...This recording is copyrighted nineteen ninety-nine' (Au, N-r).*<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> Candidly exploring the intricacies of successful crack dealing in 90s New York, B.I.G.'s 'Ten Crack Commandments' is one of his most lauded tracks: 'I been in this game for years/it made me an animal/there's rules to this shit, I made me a manual/A step-by-step booklet for you to get/your game on track, not your wig pushed back'. For 'White', I have drawn upon B.I.G.'s ironic idea of presenting a step-by-step manual for listeners to better themselves as drug dealers, and applied it to my idea of using the *CAPsule* LP as manual for understanding the further inner workings of the rest of my trilogy.

<sup>26</sup> Here, in an ironic gesture towards the backwards logic of copyright law (according to my practicing of the art of sampling), I employ a sample taken from an audiobook recording of Elmore Leonard's *The Hunted*, narrated by Mark Hammer (Maryland: Recorded Books Incorporated, 1999) pertaining to the strict forbiddance of its use in any other recording. By using this sample, I hope to highlight the outdated nature of copyright law and its culpability in stifling creative culture. Using this current sample in an ironic manner, I attempt to show how a previously-released recording can shape and form new meaning within a new work, illustrating how modern forms of sampling can be a source of great creative innovation, and have an undeniably meaningful impact on the listener as an educational tool. As oft noted by Professor Larry Lessig, draconian laws relating to copyright continue to strangle many creative individuals' ability to form new art. See Lawrence Lessig, 'Laws that Choke Creativity', 15<sup>th</sup> November 2007 <[youtube.com/watch?v=7Q25-S7jzgs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Q25-S7jzgs)> [accessed 8 August 2022].

Rule number uno

Never let no one know (AI, R)<sup>27</sup>

Unless you wanna take the powder from off the moth's wing,  
Unless you wanna blur out the patterns of feathers upon a hawk  
Never talk on this written offspring<sup>28</sup>

*'The uzumaki is sublime'* (Au, N-r)<sup>29</sup>

I converse with my thoughts in a spiral<sup>30</sup>  
And interpret the verse ever fluid  
Like a passage from the Holy Koran or the Bible<sup>31</sup>

Legend of the talkin' book<sup>32</sup>  
Told by the meek that you least expected to inherit,  
Cus you're driven by ignorance plus fear  
And all is a threat when it's imbedded.

But now, back to the lecture at hand  
Perfection impossible, I let them understand  
From a flawed man's perspective  
I spit in six million ways<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> Here, I allusionally quote from B.I.G.'s 'Ten Crack Commandments' ('Rule number uno/never let no one know/how much dough you hold, cus you know...') in order to consolidate my drawing upon it for purposes noted in footnote 25.

<sup>28</sup> This line evokes Ernest Hemingway's notion of purposefully not communicating details of his writing process whilst work is still in development, for fear of removing 'whatever butterflies have on their wings and the arrangements of hawk's feathers if you show it or talk about it.' See Ernest Hemingway, 'Preface', in *Ernest Hemingway on Writing* ed. by Larry W. Phillips and Mary Welsh Hemingway (New York: Touchstone, 2002), p. 1.

<sup>29</sup> Higuchinsky, *Uzumaki*, 2000.

<sup>30</sup> As a nod to the previous track 'Uzumaki', this allusion (and others like it later on the LP) acts as a kind of lyrical breadcrumb, deepening connections between lyrics/songs that otherwise may remain separate if listened to as standalone pieces. Using subtle references and allusions in this way provides further depth to the intratextual and intertextual techniques employed within the *CAPSule* project.

<sup>31</sup> Here, I allude to the Koran and Bible as texts containing passages that are consistently reinterpreted, and liken this process to listeners' varied interpretations of my lyrics.

<sup>32</sup> Reference to an aspect of critical research undertaken during the literature review for this thesis: Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s observation of a trope employed by several early African American authors in *The Signifyin(g) Monkey*, whereby these authors claim that the Bible 'talked' to them as part of a religious experience. By introducing areas of critical study into my lyrics, the proactive listener is made aware of my artistic intentions to broaden the possibilities of *CAPSule* as a tool for emotional and intellectual development. This research is particularly relevant to my work when viewing *CAPSule* as a kind of speaking textbook, or manual, akin to the above trope. See Henry Louis Gates Jr., 'The Trope of the Talking Book', in *The Signifyin(g) Monkey: A Theory of African American Literary Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 139-184.

<sup>33</sup> This line plays on a Cutty Ranks lyric: 'six million ways to die, choose one' ('A Who Seh Me Dun', *Six Million Ways to Die*, Priority Records, 1996). Ranks's line is digitally quoted by Dr Dre for 'Serial Killa' on Snoop Dogg's

without contraceptive. (AI, R)<sup>34</sup>

'Choose one' (Au, N-r).<sup>35</sup>

Plus, I sow two seeds  
Each to a separate breed of rich heritage  
Yeah, and they each grow strong  
But just so I don't go wrong, I let 'em tell it now.<sup>36</sup>

Rhyme writing

I built a step-by-step textbook for you to... (AI, R)

Rhyme writer

I built a step-by-step... (AI, R)

Yo, this is how it should be done

These spoken polemics identical to none (AI, R)<sup>37</sup>

And served up in the form of a trilogy  
Akin to the Holy Ghost, Father, and Son.<sup>38</sup>

Akin to the speak no

Hear no, and see no<sup>39</sup>

---

*Doggystyle* (Death Row, Interscope, 1993). Informed listeners will make the connection between this allusion and the following allosonic quotation of Snoop Dogg (noted in the footnote below). In referencing iconic '90s rap icons such as Snoop and B.I.G. for this introductory song, the intention is to provide the listener with contextual clues as to my artistic affiliations, and to make assumptions of my artistic intentions and objectives regarding my work(s), which I then expand on across the album, connecting them to a wider field of artistic and literary influences.

<sup>34</sup> This verse allosonically quotes a passage from Snoop Dogg's verse on 'Nothin' but a 'G' Thang' (*Tha Chronic*, Death Row, Interscope, 1992): 'But, uh, back to the lecture at hand/perfection is perfected, so I'ma let 'em understand/from a young G's perspective'. Here, in similarity to my employment of B.I.G.'s verse taken from 'Ten Crack Commandments', I have subverted much of the meaning of Snoop's words to further express my perspective as a rhyme writer/emcee, and the functions of this LP as a rap-informed manual. Dr Dre, 'Nothin' but a 'G' Thang Ft. Snoop Doggy Dogg', *Tha Chronic* (Death Row, Interscope, 1992).

<sup>35</sup> Snoop Dogg, 'Serial Killer'.

<sup>36</sup> Using the metaphor of procreation (sowing seeds) and following my subversion of Snoop's lyrics taken from 'Nothin' but a 'G' Thang' ('without contraceptive'), this stanza addresses structural and narratorial aspects of the *CAPSule* trilogy (the 'two seeds' I address in this stanza refer to *S.T.A.R.V.E.* and *Houses*, which I allude to as manifesting in 'daughter' and 'son' in the following stanza).

<sup>37</sup> Allosonic quotation of Rakim's famous line 'this is how it should be done/this style is identical to none', from 'I Know You Got Soul' (*Paid in Full*, 4<sup>th</sup> & B'way, 1987). Here, I convert Rakim's lyric from 'style', to 'spoken polemic' to highlight my intentions of aligning classic rap lines with literary concepts.

<sup>38</sup> Referring to a historical trilogy of sorts, I mention the Holy Trinity in order to foreshadow paternal themes running throughout *CAPSule*, particularly *Houses's* reliance on aspects of fatherhood and paternity.

<sup>39</sup> Again, alluding to a historical trilogy, or trio, here I reference the ancient Asian pictorial maxim of three monkeys: a proverb that states 'see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil'. In addition to highlighting the structural artistic triad that forms *CAPSule*, I present the technique of prosopopoeia, as a means of either avoiding or emphasising the idea of 'evil' during 'White', in similarity to 'Ghosts' ('like father like...', see the first track from *Houses*, p. 177, footnote 9).

Addressed behind closed doors like keynote  
Antidote  
Attacking from all sides,  
To entropic outcomes like chemo.

Sequestering To Achieve Real Valid Exclusivity  
I'm livin' nil-by-mouth  
By-product of a ten-year purgatory  
Decline of a good mind 'til it's lights out.

Self-imposed, abstract vignettes of a kinfolk  
With lone wolf syndrome.  
Wounded animal, I'm on the outskirts  
Outcast of the mass<sup>40</sup>

Contrast with that Joycean day-in-the-life<sup>41</sup>  
Of the same brain situated way later in life,  
Middle age now a father of two.  
Good dad, mad city,<sup>42</sup> never far from the truth.

That's a Linear narrative,  
On a quest for the mortgage and similar challenges.  
It's a study of character...

Rhyme writer

I built a step-by-step booklet for you to get... (AI, R)

---

<sup>40</sup> This stanza (and the one immediately above it) artistically addresses aspects of plot and structure of *S.T.A.R.V.E.*, as a means of aiding the listener's understanding of the LP in relation to *CAPsule*. Beginning by revealing the meaning behind the *S.T.A.R.V.E.* acronym (Sequestering To Achieve Real Valid Exclusivity), I set the tone of the LP by alluding to Gary Oldman's *Nil by Mouth* (20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, 1997), foreshadowing the dark, gritty, and melancholic aesthetic feel of the album, and highlighting themes of drug and alcohol addiction within it. Noting the LP's relation to a kind of 'purgatory', and the 'decline of a good mind', I also detail how *S.T.A.R.V.E.* is presented in 'abstract vignettes', portraying a 'lone wolf' who falls foul to a 'self-imposed' form of isolation.

<sup>41</sup> As part of my artistically addressing aspects of plot and structure relating to *Houses* (during this stanza, and the one below it), I allude to James Joyce's use of a day-in-the-life narrative technique during *Ulysses* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) which I drew upon heavily for narrative purposes during *Houses*.

<sup>42</sup> Further detailing the structure and plot of *Houses*, I now allude to Kendrick Lamar's *good kid, m.A.A.d city (GKMC)* (Aftermath, Interscope, 2012). This line highlights narrative similarities between *Houses* and *GKMC* (particularly the use of day-in-the-life narrative), whilst marking the blatant contrasts my LP simultaneously presents in relation to it. Further artistic detailing of *Houses* in these passages reveals that the protagonist is the same as that from *S.T.A.R.V.E.* ('of the same brain') but depicted at a time 'way later' in his 'life', when the now 'middle aged' man, a 'father of two', is on a family-orientated trajectory towards the middle classes ('on a quest for the mortgage and similar challenges') that starkly contrasts the ticking time bomb mentality of his previous self in *S.T.A.R.V.E.*

Rhyme writing

I built step-by-step textbook

Rhyme writer

I built a step-by-step booklet for you to translate

*'Back to subject, you can't catch wreck, you  
must get respect, to earn respect' (Au, R).<sup>43</sup>*

---

<sup>43</sup> This passage digitally quotes the late rap artist Phife Dawg, from A Tribe Called Quest ('Hot Sex', *Midnight Marauders*, Jive, 1993). Here, Phife's words are used as a way of cementing my status as a rapper with a history of technical prowess and critical 'wreck/respect' in the UK. In doing so, I attempt to create a valid critical position for *CAPsule*, opening a space for it to be understood as a highly important, complex, and meaningful part of my corpus.



## Pequod

‘Pequod’ draws on Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick*<sup>44</sup> for deeper contextual meaning. As with Captain Ahab and his quest to find and destroy the near-mythical whale in Melville’s novel, ‘Pequod’ gestures towards a similar feat regarding the speaker’s search for a near-unattainable level of artistic achievement. As well as directly alluding to Melville’s text during the second half of this song, the sonic quality of the music sample employed here also draws upon this theme in its imitation of whale song.

Pick them vinyl sleeves up from Robs. *‘What? Disappointed?...*  
These Flyknits on my feet, cushion soft. *...What did you expect?...*  
We flip them rhymes and beats up for cost *...For me to levitate or lift a jet?...*  
Yeah, *...You are witnessing an incredible feat!...*  
Double fees *...If you don’t believe me?...*  
Whodini Gandalf *...Then try it...*  
*...But with your eyes closed’ (Au, N-r).<sup>45</sup>*

Grand,  
Language of the Gods,<sup>46</sup>  
I crack the Heavens open ‘til it’s raining hella cats and dogs  
Never passing bucks  
Never passing blame  
Knowing admitting my faults is fundamental to enable change

---

<sup>44</sup> Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*.

<sup>45</sup> As on the conclusion of ‘Unborn Seed’, (see *Houses*, pp. 193-194, footnote 59), a sample from Alfonso Cuarón’s *Roma* (Buena Vista International, Netflix, 2018) is used to further deepen the meaning behind the message in the lyrics of ‘Pequod’. Here, the idea of *Uzumaki* containing a literary trick, or complex hidden message of some sort (as highlighted by initial samples and lyrical foreshadowing provided at the early stages of the LP), is continued in the *Roma* sample. Deepening the complexity of this ‘trick’, the message contained in this sample is obscured for many listeners by being delivered in Spanish.

<sup>46</sup> Continuing the theme of unattainable achievement drawn upon throughout ‘Pequod’, I here refer to the historical idea of a divine language which predates and supersedes human speech. In addition, I also make reference to a ‘Language of the Gods’, or divine language as spoken by specific powerful characters in Daisuke Nishio’s popular animation *Dragon Ball Z* (Cartoon Network, 1996).

And I develop quick,  
Seldom will I struggle.  
If the burden's at my feet  
Then I will tell them of these troubles  
Never hid behind  
Universal coping mechanisms  
My ability to learn is based upon them negative decisions

And the problems caused by them  
Obvious to I, that once you're bitten then you're twice shy  
So, when the shit has hit the fan,  
Well then you clean it.  
Take responsibly for where you drop and where you leave it.  
Simple and plain,  
Recognise your movements on the map.  
Plus the part you're playing:  
Causes and effect, the actions, and the act.

Matter fact, I let 'em stay cold  
You're no spring chicken, babe in arms, only days old.  
Spent enough time upon the globe to know the difference.  
To be stood up and counted or a victim.

I lift this shit up off my chest like a bench press,  
Then throw it to the ground like a broken vow  
Dead in value.  
What you witness is the strength of a human soul  
Strung across these 44 signatures,  
I speak my mind.  
What I'm asking for is four minutes of your time.  
To go in the stu in dark and return at daylight.  
For a patron of this art to enlist these visions,  
And place them blank cheques into both my hands stretched.

I snap over these lines like a hamstring,  
Shadow boxing special techniques<sup>47</sup> into early hours.  
Heavy hittin' from this page to the wall of sound  
And knowledge I retain  
Will endow me with soul of Bowie.

---

<sup>47</sup> Reference to Wu Tang Clan member Raekwon's lyrically-intense track 'Guillotine (Swords)' taken from *Only Built 4 Cuban Linx...* (Loud, RCA, 1995). At the beginning of Raekwon's song, a passage is sampled from Tso Nam Lee's Kung Fu movie *Shaolin Vs. Lama* (The Ping Film Company, 1983): 'allow me to demonstrate the skill of Shaolin. The special technique of shadow boxing'. This quote is allusionally referenced here in order to equate my use of lyrical skills on 'Pequod' to those of highly trained martial artists.

*'And so, the universal thump is passed round' (Au. N-r).<sup>48</sup>*

Knowledge I retain will endow me...

*'Don't you know, you're life itself?' (Au, R).<sup>49</sup>*

I'm quick marching cross a road that's less travelled  
While these knuckle draggers concentrate your focus on the gravel.  
Up the creek without a paddle so I navigate these waters like  
Ishmael upon the starboard of the Pequod<sup>50</sup>

I stays Ahab, chasing down legends of the deep<sup>51</sup>  
I don't cease with the speech, I'm tryna see God.  
Until the Porche horse is on the key fob  
Still, the solid ground is what I seem to keep my feet on.  
Knowing I'm a sand grain inside a desert plain,  
And this shit contains meaning only if its set aflame.

Weak links up in the chain  
Are soon broken and forgotten like,  
Like slicing avocado when it's rotten—  
Have to drop that.  
Maintain within the stop gaps  
Until you gain strength and burn brighter on the come back  
Have to drop that.  
Maintain within the stop gaps  
Until you gain strength and burn brighter on your return.

I lift this shit up off my chest like a bench press  
Then throw it to the ground like a broken vow  
Dead in value  
What you witness is the strength of a human soul  
Strung across these 44 signatures,

---

<sup>48</sup> This digital quotation draws upon Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, specifically the Recorded Books audio version of the text narrated by Frank Muller (Maryland: Recorded Books Incorporated, 2008). Here, the idea of the 'universal thump' is articulated in relation to themes of moral responsibility and karma provided throughout the song. I have also employed this quote as a way of defining my music (and hip hop in general), 'universal thump' relating in part to De La Soul's *Mosaic Thump* (*Art Official Intelligence: Mosaic Thump*, Tommy Boy, Warner Bros., 2000), an album title that uniquely describes rap as a genre often constituting a mosaic-like array of sonic samples driven by a thumping bass line/kick drum. Here, my musical definition is shortened, or narrowed, to just 'thump', but simultaneously broadened, to encompass a 'universal' appeal.

<sup>49</sup> Sample of David Bowie's voice from his version of 'Wild is the Wind' (*Changes Two: Bowie* (RCA Records, 1981) reflecting the speaker's previous statement: 'knowledge I retain will endow me with soul of Bowie'.

<sup>50</sup> Another reference to Melville's *Moby Dick*, this time to its protagonist Ishmael. Here, I again use an element of Melville's text to articulate the speaker's attempted journey towards an unachievable feat, akin to Ishmael's trip with Captain Ahab to destroy the Whale.

<sup>51</sup> Directly after referencing Ishmael, I again refer to Melville's text, this time by likening my lyrical journey to being 'like Ahab, chasing down legends of the deep'. This passage continues the theme of attempting the impossible, consolidated by the following line: 'I don't cease with the speech, I'm tryna see God'.

I speak my mind.  
What I'm asking for is four minutes of your time.  
To go in the stu in in dark and return at daylight.  
For a patron of this art to enlist these visions,  
And place them blank cheques into both my hands stretched.

I snap over these lines like a hamstring,  
Shadow boxing special techniques into early hours.  
Heavy liftin' from this page to the wall of sound  
knowledge I retain  
Will endow me with soul of Bowie

[*Silence*]

knowledge I retain will endow me.

## Red

During ‘Red’, I allude to various classical and more contemporary cultural forms, authors, films, characters, and literary concepts, aligning myself with them in an attempt to illustrate my own powers as a rap lyricist, employing the ‘spirit of competition’ trope.<sup>52</sup> In contrast to many rappers’ uses of this trope to align themselves with lyrical authority by alluding to popular cultural icons, literary heroes, and symbols of honour, I here make multiple references to Thomas Harris’s psychological horror novel, *Red Dragon*<sup>53</sup>, aligning myself with the psychopathic serial killer antagonist Francis Dolarhyde. Using Dolarhyde’s narcissistic notion of self-importance, and his distorted view of his psychological and physical power over his victims and the world, I attempt to illustrate my powers as a rap lyricist.

‘Chapter four’ (Au, N-r).<sup>54</sup>

‘I do see!...

More than us.

...Uzumaki!...

More than music, royal flush.

...Sometimes it makes me dizzy, I must admit!’ (Au, N-r).<sup>55</sup>

More than us.

Every verse like a stroke from Goya’s brush.

Pray the lord my soul to keep,<sup>56</sup> I’m rolling deep.

More than mortal, more than music, more unique.

---

<sup>52</sup> As Nelson George argues, rappers lay much emphasis on the theme of competition in their craft: ‘Hip-hop is a world of I opposing I over microphones aimed like Uzis. [It] exists in a state of perpetual combat, constantly seeking sucker MCs to define itself against (*Hip Hop America*, 2001, 87)’. David Diallo, ‘Intertextuality in Rap Lyrics’, *Association Francaise d’Etudes Americaines*, 142 (2015), pp. 40-54 (p.41).

<sup>53</sup> Thomas Harris, *Red Dragon*.

<sup>54</sup> Using the audio version of Elmore Leonard’s *The Hunted* (Maryland: Recorded Books, 1999), I again try to lift, or jar, the listener out of any reverie and alert them to my idea that this LP—alongside its two counterparts—is a piece of literature, akin to a novel (or multi-layered poem). Hearing the digital quotation of ‘Chapter Four’, the listener equates the LP to a book and an LP at the same time.

<sup>55</sup> Using Higuchinsky’s *Uzumaki* film adaptation again, the idea of this LP’s spiral-like concepts and cyclicity is reiterated.

<sup>56</sup> Allusion to a children’s Christian bedtime prayer (‘Now I lay me down to sleep/I pray the Lord my soul to keep’) that was quoted by Snoop Dogg for ‘Murder Was the Case’ (*Murder was the Case*, Death Row, Interscope, 1993).

More you reap the more you sew,<sup>57</sup> more you need.  
Mortal man I'm digging new ditches.

'I am the dragon' (Au, N-r).<sup>58</sup>

Patent AF1's in grey and bronzes,  
Living certified now watch him re-up funds and spray up hundreds.  
I'm still uploaded—been upgraded, spinning Stars of David,  
Cap 'the Cobra' Froch, I'm fresh up out the box, my heart's The Matrix.<sup>59</sup>

Works of art the likes you've never seen,  
That bleach and powder fresh human condition, crystal Medellin.  
Intravenous served up in your veins until this earth is painless,  
Tryna serve 'em something more than pure that's worth its weight in pages.

Diesel Grand, I'm Hideo Kojima,<sup>60</sup>  
Metal Gear and Guyver,<sup>61</sup> one last slug up inside the chamber.  
Final words and last requests before these credits rolling,  
Your choice to be king was soon regretted now your head is rolling.

Watch me string up pearls of wisdom till these heavens open,  
Every sentence counting, eighty-five percent is never spoken.  
See some of those you know was exposed, disclosed, and broken  
So while I'm still up in these skies I plan upon exploding.

'Open your eyes!' (Au, N-r).<sup>62</sup>

Red Giant, watch him burn forever (Red Giant, watch him burn forever)  
Red Dragon, you lot owe me awe (Red Dragon, you lot owe me awe)<sup>63</sup>  
Dust to Ashes now I'm setting fires (Dust to Ashes now I'm setting fires)  
Phoenix from the flames in this Holy war (Phoenix from the flames in this Holy war).

---

<sup>57</sup> Allusion to a Christian proverb 'Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap'. See Galatians 6.7 (KJV).

<sup>58</sup> The first of several references to Thomas Harris's psychological horror novel *Red Dragon*. This sample is taken from the audiobook version, narrated by Alan Sklar (Random House Audiobooks, 2006). Here, this sample foreshadows a theme set out in the chorus of 'Red' (to follow) that also (allosonically) quotes from Harris's novel: 'you lot owe me awe'.

<sup>59</sup> Allusion to Nelson Shin's animated film *Transformers the Movie* (De Laurentiis Entertainment Group, 1986), in which the powerful moral core and energy source of the Autobot robots (the 'matrix') is kept inside the chest plate of the Autobot leader, Optimus Prime, akin to a heart.

<sup>60</sup> Allusion to the Japanese video game designer Hideo Kojima, author and developer of iconic video games such as *Metal Gear Solid* (Konami, 1998) and *Death Stranding* (Sony/505 Games, 2019).

<sup>61</sup> Allusion to Katsuhito Akiyama's *Guyver: The Bioboosted Armor* (Manga Entertainment, 1989), a Japanese anime series in which a school student finds a prototype of a powerful suit of armour. Here I equate my lyrical skills to the Guyver armour.

<sup>62</sup> An additional allusion to Harris's *Red Dragon*, this time using Michael Mann's film adaptation *Manhunter* (De Laurentiis, 1986) as precursor to the track's chorus, which draws heavily on the Harris text.

<sup>63</sup> Reference to a passage from Harris's *Red Dragon* (London: Corgi Books, 1992) in which the antagonist, Francis Dolarhyde, makes a speech to Freddie Lounds, one of his victims, before murdering him ('*You owe Me awe*', p. 174).

Red Giant watch him burn forever (Red Giant watch him burn forever)  
Red Dragon you lot owe me awe (Red Dragon you lot owe me awe)  
Dust to Ashes now I'm setting fires (Dust to Ashes now I'm setting fires)  
Phoenix from the flames in this Holy war (Phoenix from the flames in this Holy war).

You stand a million miles from this existence,  
Poles apart—we read from separate rules and altered hymn books.  
Close comparisons reveal we're cut from different fabrics,  
And time will tell what's underneath these rhymes is far from simple.

Theories of omission's demonstrated.<sup>64</sup>  
You scope the tops of ice bergs, I clock what's far below them,  
Words that hold symbolic meanings far below the surface  
Whilst your lines are throwaways, to no avail, them verses worthless.  
Strung together lacklustre with no conviction,  
You lack the final touch, that eloquence, the je ne sais quoi,  
Oafish with the pen, you gather dust, stuck in the quicksand  
While I'm lightning with that spoken word, you call him Ip Man.<sup>65</sup>

Quick to absorb the core recording vocal strychnine.  
Plenty walk the walk but most fall when it comes to talking.  
That's when the distances between become deserts and oceans,  
'Til the essence of this art form will rain and Heaven's open.

Red Giant watch him burn forever (Red Giant watch him burn forever)  
Red Dragon you lot owe me awe (Red Dragon you lot owe me awe)  
Dust to Ashes now I'm setting fires (Dust to Ashes now I'm setting fires)  
Phoenix from the flames in this Holy war (Phoenix from the flames in this Holy war).

Red Giant watch him burn forever (Red Giant watch him burn forever)  
Red Dragon you lot owe me awe (Red Dragon you lot owe me awe)  
Dust to Ashes now I'm setting fires (Dust to Ashes now I'm setting fires)  
Phoenix from the flames in this Holy war (Phoenix from the flames in this Holy war).

*'I am the dragon...*

More than music, royal flush.

*...And you call me insane?...*

More than us,  
Mortal man, Goya's brush

*...It is in your nature to do one thing correctly...*

I'm rolling deep  
More than mortal more than music, more unique.

---

<sup>64</sup> Reference to Ernest Hemingway's literary theory of omission in writing. See Chapter One, p. 41 for further details on this concept.

<sup>65</sup> Allusion to the famously lightning-fast martial artist Donnie Yen, star of the biographical martial arts *Ip Man* film series. See Wilson Yip, *Ip Man* (Mandarin Films, 2008).

More you reap the more you sew, the more you need.  
Mortal man I'm digging new ditches.

*...Before me, you rightfully tremble...*

More than music, royal flush.

*...Fear is not what you owe me...*

More than us,  
Mortal man, Goya's brush

*...You and the other pismires.  
You owe me awe' (Au, N-r).<sup>66</sup>*

---

<sup>66</sup> Consolidating this song's focus on the darker side of power (in my case, lyrical power), the protagonist of Harris's *Red Dragon*, Francis Dolarhyde, makes a speech (performed by Alan Sklar and slightly edited for cohesion) based on his feelings of superiority over humans.



## Green

'Green' attempts to further public awareness of rap lyricism as an intellectual art form, engaging with discussions regarding the human condition such as mortality, faith, addiction, desire, and questions of existence. In conjunction with the other LPs in the trilogy, songs such as 'Green' help to highlight the artistic and intellectual depth achievable when practicing rap.

*'Rap...there's a funny one.  
I found it never quite grew out of its adolescence' (Au, N-r).<sup>67</sup>*

[Music begins]

*'And what was your topic?  
Eh, he said, matre, eh, Meister Eckhart' (Au, N-r).<sup>68</sup>*

So how do I define conviction?  
Time...

So how do I define conviction?  
a rose thorn dug deep within my system.  
Gritted teeth, clamped jaws, and cold sweats,  
turning Hurt and Greif into a feeling akin to relief.<sup>69</sup>

---

<sup>67</sup> Further deepening my aspirations for this LP to connect with pre-existent intellectual aspects of the hip hop genre, I employ a quote from Hiro Murai's, *Atlanta* ('Teddy Perkins', 20<sup>th</sup> Television, 2018). Here, a bizarre character loosely based on Michael Jackson (played by Donald Glover, also known as the rapper Childish Gambino) is heard professing that rap never quite made it out of an adolescent stage of artistic development. Ironically, this quote is immediately followed by what I consider to be the most intellectually-dense, thought-provoking song on *Uzumaki*.

<sup>68</sup> Using a quotation from Julia Kristeva ('On Julia Kristeva's Couch', *YouTube*, 19<sup>th</sup> October 2013 <[youtube.com/watch?v=b-AzikJn\\_uc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b-AzikJn_uc)> [accessed 16 June 2022]), I foreshadow an intellectual discussion to follow in 'Green' that relates to an individual's questioning of the existence of God, and religious faith in general. Simultaneously, a link between 'Green' and 'Wi(n)dow', a track taken from the *S.T.A.R.V.E.* LP (see pp. 151-156, particularly footnote 38), is opened here, in Kristeva's mentioning of Meister Eckhart. As noted in the lyric transcriptions of 'Wi(n)dow', Eckhart's theological ideas surrounding mortality and the afterlife are highlighted in several vocal samples taken from Adrian Lyne's psychological horror film *Jacob's Ladder* (Tri-Star Pictures, 1990). For 'Green', Eckhart's ideas are again elucidated upon, this time through Kristeva's anecdote. Whilst not equating directly to the discussion opened on 'Wi(n)dow', Kristeva's words underline that Eckhart's teachings are an important part of the puzzle that is *CAPsule*.

<sup>69</sup> This line alludes to a technique used by rappers such as MIKE and Navy Blue, who refer to using 'hurt', memory of personal trauma, to provoke artistic creativity (see Chapter Three, 'Then Came the Hurt: Expressing Trauma Through Performative Lyrical Quotation', pp. 107-112 for further details). This idea is reiterated throughout 'Green' in lines such as 'spill out this guilt through the syntax', 'this is self-help I prescribe like a sick note', and 'Caged animal/Head and Heart aching in the [mic] booth'.

I'm like a stranger walking into church.  
Graham Greene, *End of the Affair*<sup>70</sup>  
And nothing's certain.  
Staring up in disbelief at this Holy Virgin,  
weighing truths against them fictions, crucifying.

Like I'm viewing human history  
from a mental fortress.  
Vats of boiling oil  
placed on every wall—  
well acknowledged  
I divide my time from this written portrait,  
and the real life I'm caged in until I'm taken.

Once again, I am reiterating.  
How do I define conviction?  
I'm deliberating.  
Guess the reason that I'm skirting round the question  
cus I personify the term in every given statement.

I refuse to let my body be a shell I'm cased in.<sup>71</sup>  
I refuse to let this free will become a pavement  
I cannot just leave these powers to be devoured  
by the same demons I compete with every waking hour.

So that's how I define it.  
Cool Hand Luke with the spade or the shovel.<sup>72</sup>  
And I'll be laying out this gravel fast as you can follow.  
Lyrics keep my mind full when my body's hollow.

---

<sup>70</sup> Here, I utilise a scene from Graham Greene's novel *The End of the Affair* (London: Vintage Books, 2001) in which the protagonist, Maurice Bendrix, attends a church in search of his lover. Whilst there, he questions the idea of religious faith, and his belief in God. This scene, and the overarching themes that stem from it, link each album from the *CAPSule* trilogy, as each LP delves into similar areas of theological debate, particularly *Uzumaki*.

<sup>71</sup> This line (alongside others such as 'lyrics keep my mind full when my body's hollow') serves to highlight an underlying idea articulated during 'Green' regarding the attributes of the soul and mind being slave to the physical restraints of the body. This idea links with Andrew Marvell's poem 'A Dialogue between the Soul and the Body', in which he articulates similar themes: 'O, who shall from the Dungeon raise/A soul enslaved so many ways?'. See Andrew Marvell, *Selected Poetry and Prose* (London: Methuen & Co, Ltd., 1986, p. 17).

<sup>72</sup> Here, I continue my theme of the mind's and soul's enslavement to physical limitations, but this time broaden this concept to include the enslavement of mind and soul to governing bodies. Using a scene from Stuart Rosenberg's, *Cool Hand Luke* (Warner Bros. Pictures, 1967), in which the film's protagonist, Luke, a rebellious and non-conformist victim of the US prison system, and his prison inmates/chain gang attempt to pave a road faster than the police guards can follow. Whilst Luke and his friends achieve this feat, the victory is hollow and rewards are fleeting: Luke is destined to be under the control of governing bodies, no matter how hard he tries to evade or escape them. I liken this scene to my ventures as an artist: consistently trying to reach further with my art, but always with an understanding that I, like most, am subject to physical and societal constraints.

Yeah, that's how I define it:  
Cool Hand Luke with the spade or the shovel.  
And I'll be laying out this gravel fast as you can follow.

*'A path opens to those who are honest' (Au, N-r).<sup>73</sup>*

Once again, define conviction.  
Like chopping onions in the hottest part of Hell's kitchen.  
Staying poker faced  
even when your nerves twitching.  
Seeing crystal clear  
even when this Hurt blurs your vision.

Forever you'll be treading water.  
But thinking BIG enough<sup>74</sup>  
to separate survival from a mere mortal.  
Even when your brain and all else failing,  
And all Hell's breaking loose.  
I maintain the welterweight belt for self,  
staying intact.  
Spill out this guilt through the syntax,  
see this was never just rap.  
This is self help  
I prescribe like a sick note.  
Striving upstream, I keep writing for my kinfolk.

Until you see them silver lines reappearing  
high on the horizon  
And your peers are still none the wiser.  
Clamped up, locked deep within the gut  
I keep it under wraps,  
salt poured deep into the cut  
And let the thunderclaps roll across acres in the booth—  
Caged animal,  
Head and Heart aching in the booth.  
Sustenance used, like a babe taking to the boob,  
Nutrients took from the track's lifeblood.

---

<sup>73</sup> Using a quote from Josef Kubota Wladyka's, 'Read the Air' (*Tokyo Vice*, Warner Bros, 2022), a Japanese proverb referring to using the spoken truth as a means of finding one's way is employed to deepen the honest sentiment provided in 'Green'.

<sup>74</sup> This line refers to a track featuring a verse from the late Notorious B.I.G. (Pudgée Tha Phat Bastard, 'Think Big, ft. Lord Tariq & Notorious B.I.G.' (Perspective Records, Mecca Don Records, 2007)), and also to the endeavors of B.I.G.'s son, CJ Wallace, and 'his search to understand his responsibility to the legacy of his late father'. Wallace's enterprise, Think BIG, is now a company specialising in 'the healing power of CBD'. Here also, a link can be drawn between this line and themes of the paternal bond, and the father-son relationship exhibited throughout *Houses*. 'Heritage', Think BIG <[comethinkbig.com/about](http://comethinkbig.com/about)> [accessed 12 August 2022].

Seeing past next meals  
knowing that the recipe is complex  
as all my past conquests.  
I'm ruminating.  
Hollow victory, after hollow victory.  
Stacked high, 'til it fills my soul up, literarily.

Headphones is on blast  
Twenty-four-seven like, tryna stop my mind from wandering  
and blocking out the light.  
Anything to take my mind's eye off staring at the void.  
Damned if you do, and if you don't  
then you're unemployed.  
I stand within view,  
'til it's blurred and you're seeing double.  
Cool Hand Luke,  
With the spade or the shovel.

And I'll be passing out this gravel  
Fast as you can follow.  
Lyrics keep my mind full.

*'Meister Eckhart is a very important...*

Lyrics keep my mind full when my body's hollow

*...err, mystic in Germany in the 12<sup>th</sup> century...*

Lyrics keep my mind full

*...who said this very interesting statement...*

Lyrics keep my mind full when my body's hollow

*...I asked, I asked God...*

Lyrics keep my mind full

*...To make me free from God' (Au, N-r).<sup>75</sup>*

One shot and one brandy glass.  
A wee nip of fire water, pure antidote  
to cut through the myalgia and the clouds  
cus in all other aspects of this life  
My hands are tied.

Sick and tired of wrestling the hands of time.  
My biceps flex  
but no matter how I grip,

---

<sup>75</sup> Following the autasonic quotation of Julia Kristeva at the beginning of this track, an additional sample now discloses information regarding the theological works of Meister Eckhart. Here, Eckhart's ideas on true freedom meaning being 'free from God' are articulated, and utilised as a way to strengthen themes referred to throughout 'Green'. Kristeva, 'On Julia Kristeva's Couch'.

the sand grains' slipping through my clenched fists.  
Spilling into seems in the pavement  
I'm unable to retrieve from.

Tables turned, and them keys locked  
to these exits, within minutes of knowing I've eavesdropped.  
On a conversation that was never meant for my ears.  
Based around the fact that my practice and my ideas  
hindered by a life learned, and life long  
Affliction to my own fears.  
From this bubble what you don't see is.  
Even on my best days it's like these things are poison to me:  
People and Pain are poisonous.

*'This ends side two of cassette one of —.  
Please, fast forward to the end before loading cassette two' (Au, N-r).<sup>76</sup>*

---

<sup>76</sup> Once again, elements of Leonard's *The Hunted* are used to jar the listener out of any reverie. Here, a voice draws the listener out of the LP (breaking the fourth wall again) and urges them to 'please, fast forward' the (non-existent cassette) album they are currently listening to. This sample continues the idea that *Uzumaki* is a manual of sorts, requiring actions and thinking beyond the remits of a normal LP listening experience, as well as signifying the end of side one.

## Frost

Relying heavily on Christopher Nolan's *Prestige* and Robert Frost's 'Acquainted with the Night' to highlight *Uzumaki*'s continued use of intertextuality and allusion, 'Frost' discusses artistic legacy, artistic transcendence, and the use of music as catharsis. The quoted artistic works during 'Frost' also spotlight multiple intratextual links strategically placed throughout *CAPsule*, as detailed in the gloss notes.

*'Every magic trick consists of three parts, or acts.  
The first part is called The Pledge.  
The magician shows you something ordinary' (Au, N-r).<sup>77</sup>*

I don't think that I can do a vibe like this any justice,  
Leicester to the borders of Notts, I record where the cusp is.  
On the crest of a wave, on the edge bleeding, where the rush lives.  
Reaching for them gut feels, the goosebumps, and the hunches.

I use this here like a GP giving out medication<sup>78</sup>  
And steer myself clear of the clouds, the doubts and the hatred.  
Cus it's like, I can almost see through them cement walls  
Of this life, and I can almost see future is these thoughts.

But it's distorted, a way of escaping is all that I wish for.  
Pinning my hopes on a rhyme wrote, all off a vibe and a biro  
Taking advice from the great minds, I am writing what I know,  
So, my son and my daughter can one day look upon some of my corpus.

---

<sup>77</sup> During 'Frost', a series of digital quotations from Nolan's *Prestige* are used as a way (again) to emphasise the hidden or secret elements within *Uzumaki*. Over the course of the song, four strategically-placed vocal samples gesture towards the idea that 'Frost' (and *Uzumaki* as a whole) contains an elaborate, three-part lyrical trick of some kind.

<sup>78</sup> Drawing on the same theme of using rap as a cathartic tool for personal healing in the wake of trauma (introduced on the previous track 'Green', see p. 240, footnote 69), this line contains an intratextual link to 'terrace l' (from *S.T.A.R.V.E.*), in which the LP's protagonist, 'P', notes his being prescribed a form of antidepressant as a means of alleviating his poor mental health ('so the doctors gave me that prescription bullshit/but it just don't work until I'm feeling nothing', see p. 168). Here, in opposition to P's negative experience with prescription drugs, the speaker on 'Green' advocates for the use of his own kind of self-administered medication, one which involves using his artistic (writing) process. An additional link to Chapter Three's focus on using 'hurt' as an artistic catalyst can be found here, specifically in a quotation from Earl Sweatshirt which sums up the sentiment provided throughout 'Green' and during the current passage of 'Frost': 'Rap helps me figure out life, it's the medium I use to sort life out' (see Chapter Three, 'Then Came the Hurt', p. 107).

When my body is dormant, I live by the force of my service and body of work  
Montana quote: hand on my balls, and of course I will honour my word<sup>79</sup>

Acquainted with night<sup>80</sup>

*'The second act is called The Turn' (Au, N-r).*<sup>81</sup>

Black Thinsulate wool hat, Fruit of the Loom T shirt,  
That's fruit of my labour, no trust for a suit and tie stranger.  
Top of my chosen field, leader, in my own genre  
Built up in the image of a thousand dead poets,<sup>82</sup> brothers and fathers.

Mothers and daughters, and this blood stays thicker than water.  
Still picking them locks 'til I open the box, and I'm lifting the lid on Pandora.<sup>83</sup>

*'The magician takes the ordinary something,  
and makes into something extraordinary' (Au, N-r).*<sup>84</sup>

Yeah  
Acquainted with night  
Yeah  
Grand.

A4s on the floor of this attic, like leaves, caught on the breeze,  
And of course, I respond to the source of the panic  
Forever I'm drawn to the eye of the storm.

I have been one, acquainted with the night  
I walked out in the rain...

---

<sup>79</sup> Allusion to an oft-cited character in the American rap psyche, Tony Montana, protagonist of Brian De Palma's *Scarface* (Universal Pictures, 1983). During an iconic scene in this film, Montana states 'all I have in this world is my balls and my word, and I don't break 'em for no one!'. For instances of Montana's psychological influence on rap lyricism, see Geto Boys, 'Balls and My Word' (*Making Trouble*, Rap-A-Lot, 1987), and Nas, 'The World is Yours' (*Illmatic*, Columbia, 1994).

<sup>80</sup> As a way of linking back to *S.T.A.R.V.E.* (specifically the track 'Slow Poison'), and its use of Robert Frost's poem 'Acquainted with the Night' (see pp. 166-167, footnote 75), I employ quotations from the same poem several times throughout 'Frost'. As well as providing inspiration for the track's title, these quotations aid the listener to understand the levels of intertextual engagement taking place within 'Frost', in conjunction with the strategic placement of Nolan's *Prestige* film samples.

<sup>81</sup> *The Prestige*.

<sup>82</sup> Whilst referring to Peter Weir's film *Dead Poets Society* (Buena Vista Pictures, 1989) in which an English teacher inspires his pupils through poetry, this line gestures towards my being influenced by a multitude of artists, authors and poets during the making of *CAPSule*. Here, in similarity to a line taken from 'Uzumaki' ('stood upon the shoulders of Goliaths', see p. 224, footnote 9), I suggest that my intertextual engagement with and allusions to works by a plethora of artists throughout *CAPSule* is akin to building a platform that heightens the emotional/intellectual impact of my trilogy. These engagements also serve as a vital component in the trilogy's functioning.

<sup>83</sup> After comparing my intertextual artistic engagements to a paternal/maternal lineage/legacy, I allude to the ancient Greek myth of Pandora's box as a way of noting my continued attempts to unlock an artistic formula, even if it leads to unforeseen problems.

<sup>84</sup> *The Prestige*.

*'But you wouldn't clap yet,  
because making something disappear isn't enough.  
You have to bring it back' (Au, N-r).<sup>85</sup>*

---

<sup>85</sup> The concluding line 'you have to bring it back' is particularly important during this final vocal sample taken from Nolan's *Prestige*, as it indicates the act of repetition ('with a difference; the same and yet not the same') as an important part of Signifyin(g) in rap music (see Potter, *Spectacular Vernaculars*, p. 27). Here, I echo a sentiment made during the introductory song from *Uzumaki*, 'Uzumaki' ('repetition plus revision', see p. 224, footnote 14). By immediately preceding this vocal sample with lines from Frost's 'Acquainted', I hope to have already instilled the significance of repetition regarding this project in the mind of the listener/reader (Frost's words are repeated during *S.T.A.R.V.E.*'s 'Slow Poison', see pp. 166-167, footnote 75). Use of Frost's poem on 'Slow Poison' serves as one of the intertextual highlights of the trilogy, enabling the listener a far deeper sense of understanding (and pathos for) *S.T.A.R.V.E.*'s protagonist, and the LPs' narrative. Bringing this pathos back during 'Frost' underlines the importance of this technique to the *CAPSule* trilogy.



## Gold

Again, relying on the well-established spirit of competition trope to continue a discussion relating to artistic legacy and creative intention, ‘Gold’ ups the ante on literary allusion by making multiple references to authors of various literary genres, incorporating texts that range from the ancient to the contemporary. The ‘postmodern mixture of high-low’ cultural references in ‘Gold’ is in line with Casey Michael Henry’s idea of modern rap lyricism bringing together a ‘mixture of lyrical structures and pop cultural references’, to create ‘a range of cultural touchstones’.<sup>86</sup> In the final third of the song, a series of artistic allusions drawn from the 1980’s and 1990’s help locate the speaker’s musical upbringings within these decades (‘nostalgia bars for those trapped in/the eight-owes and nine-owes in shelltoes and slabs of vinyl’).

*‘Simone Naked. Cell Block J Hobby Room’,  
I wanna buy it.  
– It’s not for sale  
– Yes, it is  
No, it isn’t.  
Yes, it is.*

No doubt, I’ll be your enemy

*It is.*

*All artists sell all their work, it’s what makes you an artist; selling it.*

I’ll be your focus point

*You don’t wish to sell it, don’t paint it.  
Question is...*

Gusto. Yeah.

*What’s your price?’ (Au, N-r).<sup>87</sup>*

My human race membership expired back in ‘06

---

<sup>86</sup> Casey Michael Henry, ‘Et Tu, Too?: Kendrick Lamar’s ‘To Pimp a Butterfly’ and the Revival of Black Postmodernism’, *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 26<sup>th</sup> July 2015 <[lareviewofbooks.org/article/et-tu-too-kendrick-lamars-tpab-and-the-revival-of-black-postmodernism/](http://lareviewofbooks.org/article/et-tu-too-kendrick-lamars-tpab-and-the-revival-of-black-postmodernism/)> [accessed 12 November 2018], p. 9.

<sup>87</sup> Following immediately from ‘Frost’, a new digital quotation taken from Wes Anderson’s *The French Dispatch* (Searchlight Pictures, 2021) is employed in conversation with the final *Prestige* passage and themes contained in *Uzumaki* pertaining to artistry/artistic legacy. Engaging in a debate regarding the financial motivation of an artist, a fictional piece discussed during this passage (‘Simone Naked Cell Block J Hobby Room’) is presented here as a metaphor for my art (*CAPSule*), and my struggle to put a price on the literary work I have created.

I'm Boston dynamics made.  
 Ex-machina, writing like I'm Philip K.<sup>88</sup>  
 But recognised as one of Britain's leading rhymers of his age  
 Lessons learned only if the iris and the mind is willing  
 Sifting through them rare and precious metals since beginnings  
 Undergrounded like I'm Dostoyevsky with them hidden notes,<sup>89</sup>  
 Below the surface as a metaphor, a Killing Joke<sup>90</sup>  
 I'm getting closer to the point of ripping open higher forms  
 Akin to building up a forcefield for when them beats drop.  
 Kristeva, semiotics blazing<sup>91</sup> with the statement  
 I'm still innovating, literary jouissance.<sup>92</sup>

'Uzumaki, huh?' (Au, N-r).<sup>93</sup>

I been a beast with inner peace lost  
 Golding's Lord of the Flies shit is still my ethos<sup>94</sup>  
 Illest composition, non-permission sample chopping  
 Ample opportunities to get your coin up.

Or would you rather keep your house in order?  
 When I set this genesis ablaze  
 It's Sodom and Gomorrah<sup>95</sup>  
 Speaking from the cities of the plain  
 Across the River Jordan.

---

<sup>88</sup> Reference to science fiction author Philip K. Dick, whose novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2012) was adapted into the movie *Blade Runner* (Warner Bros., 1982) by Ridley Scott. In another veiled attempt to join *Uzumaki* with its trilogy counterparts, I make a tenuous link between Dick's work and digital quotations from Denis Villeneuve's *Blade Runner 2049* (Sony Pictures Releasing, 2017) employed at the beginning and end of *S.T.A.R.V.E.* (see 'Jar', p. 142, and 'Writeful Owner', p. 169).

<sup>89</sup> As part of the wordplay involved with this track, I make reference to my own underground status as rap artist by alluding to Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *Notes from Underground* (*Notes from Underground and The Double*, London: Penguin Classics, 2009).

<sup>90</sup> In conversation with my previous exclamation of being an 'underground' artist (an individual typically unconcerned with commercial/financial success), I highlight the ironies involved in having to attach a 'price' to my work, whilst still attempting to remain true to my no-sell-out roots as a 'killing joke'. To do so, I allude to Alan Moore's one-shot Batman graphic novel *The Killing Joke* (New York: DC Comics, 1988).

<sup>91</sup> Allusion to Julia Kristeva's theoretical work on semiotics/semi-analysis as a link to my critical thesis (for further details, see Chapter Three, pp. 109-110).

<sup>92</sup> Here I gesture towards Roland Barthes's theoretical text *The Pleasure of the Text* (trans. by Richard Miller, New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1975) relating to the notion of bliss a listener/reader might feel when actively involved with the decoding of a text, as opposed to being passively involved within it.

<sup>93</sup> Higuchinsky, *Uzumaki*, 2000.

<sup>94</sup> Addressing themes of morality and immorality, and my struggle to live as a free-thinking individual within various (seemingly inescapable) social structures noted throughout the trilogy (especially during *Houses*), I here make the link between issues addressed in my work and William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (London: Faber & Faber, 2012). Simultaneously, I attempt to reinterpret Golding's title somewhat, by using it to reinforce my status as an elite rap lyricist. In hip hop dialect, to be 'fly' means to have a unique and impeccable style, so being 'lord of the fly' would equate to being a most unique, and impeccably stylish individual.

<sup>95</sup> Allusion to two of the five cities of the plain referenced in Genesis 13.12 and 19.29. In correspondence with the preceding line ('when I set this Genesis ablaze'), I equate my lyrical power to that of God sending angels to destroy these sin infested places.

All my lyric sheets are stacked thick as pages from the Torah.<sup>96</sup>

Rules of engagement,  
A higher form of lexicon superb,  
Cold polemic.  
Verbal vanguard  
This revolution never televised.<sup>97</sup>

Deiseler hunting deer up like Rob Deniro,  
Barrel spinning, red bandana Christopher Walken.<sup>98</sup>  
And these lyrics bespoke for Russian Roulette  
Them hollow tip, dum dum, melon splitters  
I'm reaching new depths.  
Preaching from the turntables 'til the cheques clear.  
Shelling off that premo product to fill up summer seasons.  
Hibernating past winters like I'm Hova,<sup>99</sup>  
Then spraying speakers up with Encona, June until October.

And I retain this mean average  
Spread across the months so that's equating up to hella data.  
Without change, medium's remaining pen and paper,  
It's how I keep my inner space more than Dennis Quaid was.<sup>100</sup>

Nostalgia bars for those trapped in  
The 80's and 90's in shell toes and slabs of vinyl.  
Circle bald patches from the head spins on linos,  
I been rhymin' out the livest since Hawaii 5-0's,<sup>101</sup>

---

<sup>96</sup> Here, I equate my lyrical output (written work) with the Torah, a compendium of all twenty-four books of the Hebrew Bible.

<sup>97</sup> Foreshadowing a passage from 'X', the track immediately following 'Gold' ('Still pursue a dream aiming to achieve/what is never written or retained or released/articulating what has to be seen just to be believed/commentating deep from the ravine'), I use Gil Scott-Heron's idea of a revolutionary event being seen, experienced, or heard in person (see 'The Revolution Will Not Be Televised', *Pieces of a Man* (Flying Dutchman, 1971), as opposed to being something a person can passively observe without physically taking part in.

<sup>98</sup> Here I equate my lyrics to high calibre bullets ('hollow tips' and 'dumdums'), and my writing process to that of a deadly game of Russian roulette, as depicted in a haunting scene between Robert Deniro and Christopher Walken in Michael Cimino's *The Deer Hunter* (EMI International, 1979). Use of Walken's name in my lyrics is also relevant here in terms of my alluding to a previous music release, 'Swagbasco' (Cappo and Sam Zircon, *Un:Programmable Raw*, Boot Records, 2014), published on the same record label (Boot Records) owned by the producer of 'Gold' (Dr Zygote is producer of 'Gold', and also co-owner of Boot Records). Those familiar with my previous works will make this lyrical and musical connection.

<sup>99</sup> Homage to a passage taken from a JAY-Z verse on DMX's 'Blackout' (*Flesh of My Flesh, Blood of My Blood*, Def Jam, Ruff Ryders, 1998): 'I'm a monster, I sleep whole winters, wake up and spit summers'. This line epitomises the trope of self-valorisation in hip hop music, as notable in many aspects of the rap genre. I use this line to achieve a similar goal of making my lyrics as impactful as possible.

<sup>100</sup> As introduction to the following few passages that relate to eighties and nineties popular culture, I begin here with a play-on-words allusion to Joe Dante's *Inner Space* (Warner Bros. 1987).

<sup>101</sup> Allusion to the original police procedural drama, Leonard Freeman's *Hawaii 5-0* (CBS Productions, 1968-1980), a television series that was often shown throughout the eighties as a rerun.

Since Mercury and Alkaline was sudden Impact,<sup>102</sup>  
Since Jean Claude and Van Damme was Double Impact.<sup>103</sup>  
Since the days of dunce hats,  
And rubber chin straps  
I been Dave Lynchin' getting paid to rinse them instrumentals.<sup>104</sup>

I stays phat.  
Hook and verse bridges getting higher than some wage gaps  
With more speeches than Obama plus Martin Luther,<sup>105</sup>  
And more movements on the parchment than the Karma Sutra<sup>106</sup>

So time is now to get your house in order  
When I set this genesis ablaze  
It's Sodom and Gomorrah.  
Speaking from the cities of the plain,  
Across the River Jordan  
All my lyric pages stacked thick.

Rules of engagement.  
A higher form of lexicon superb,  
Cold polemic.  
Verbal vanguard.  
This revolution never televised, never.

Code of practice,  
A higher form of canonised discourse and panegyrics.  
Verbal vanguard.  
This revolution never televised.

*'Listen, what about the other clones?'*

No doubt, I'll be your enemy.

---

<sup>102</sup> Allusion to pioneering UK rap group, Gunshot (MC Mercury, MC Alkaline, Q-Roc, DJ White Child Rix, and DJ/MC Barry Blue), who were originally called Sudden Impact, and were prolific artists during the nineties.

<sup>103</sup> Here I refer to Sheldon Lettich's *Double Impact* (Columbia Pictures, 1991), starring Jean Claude Van Damme.

<sup>104</sup> In a form of metonymy, I equate David Lynch's legacy as an experimental and thought-provoking film and television director to a mode of artistic practice in its own right. Here, I suggest that to 'Dave Lynch' is to create with a unique experimental flair, which is what I hope to achieve during *Uzumaki* and the whole trilogy.

<sup>105</sup> Here, I allude to my power with words again, this time name checking two high-profile American political figures known for their ability to create and present powerful speeches: Martin Luther King, and Barack Obama. See Barack Obama, *Speeches* (Christchurch, NZ: Canterbury Classics, 2020), and *A Call to Conscience: The Landmark Speeches of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. by Clayborne Carson and Kris Shepard (New York: Hachette Book Group, 2001).

<sup>106</sup> Allusion to the *Karma Sutra*, an Indian Sanskrit text that focuses on sexuality, eroticism, and life fulfilment. As with previous allusions to canonical religious texts throughout *Uzumaki* (The Bible, The Quran, The Torah), I attempt here to equate my lyrical prowess to this text's historical weighting, while simultaneously being aware it must fall short in that regard. In the case of this passage, I define my music in terms of 'movements' (likening my lyrics/music to either classical music, or as a way of describing being emotionally 'moved'), and compare the amount of these 'movements' contained in my music to that of the many different sexual movements (positions) depicted in the *Karma Sutra*.

I'll be your focus point  
I'll be your bitter pill.  
I'll be your poster boy

*...We might not be the first two to be woken up...*  
*...You said that, that model  
had already been started when you got here,  
well, who started it?...*  
*...There might be others up here right now...*  
*...think about it' (Au, N-r).<sup>107</sup>*

---

<sup>107</sup> Using a passage from Duncan Jones's *Moon* (Sony Pictures Classics, 2009), in which the protagonist (played by Sam Rockwell) speaks about his fear of being cloned, I refer to debates on the ethical employment of repetition and imitation (sampling, borrowing, quoting) in rap music, and the effectiveness of intertextuality (and remix culture) in an artistic context. The following line is particularly effective when summing up my argument: 'You said that, that model had already been started when you got here, well who started it?'. This line links directly with the artistic notion of nothing being unique, or one-of-a-kind, and no idea being wholly new. All ideas were 'already started' beforehand in some way, and owe a debt to someone, regardless of how original they seem. This notion is articulated by Nas on 'No Idea's Original' (*The Lost Tapes*, Ill Will, Columbia Records, 2002). See Chapter One, pp. 47-50.

## X

Demonstrating my lyrical and performative diversity over a differing tempo to that of the majority of *Uzumaki*'s musical instrumentation, 'X' continues to mix classic and contemporary cultural references, whilst further divulging my artistic process. Towards the end of the song, in the following passage: 'I cop second-hand breaks from a car boot in Colwick Park/Then I turn Bach into modern art', I attempt succinctly to illustrate the creative process of sampling – in effect, turning one person's trash into another's treasure.

I'm like Malcolm<sup>108</sup>  
Dangerous force with the mind 'til I'm 5000.  
flying north of these mountains,  
Coughing up raw for the hawks and the falcons.  
Aiming my sights on a few,  
speak for the many when I shower down flames,  
Like a wild Dhalsim.<sup>109</sup>  
Sharp with them darts, I'm a marksman  
Louder your chat, more I confirm...

*'Alpha 1-9ner this is Condor, over... (Au, N-r).*<sup>110</sup>

Your downfall guaranteed:  
Liam Nieson in *The Grey*<sup>111</sup>  
Lethal with the take  
even when the stakes getting high,  
Luck runnin' dry,  
Never will I take another side,  
Never run and hide.

---

<sup>108</sup> In an act of allosonic quotation, I utilise a lyric from Ghostface Killah's 'Malcolm' ('I'm like Malcom, out the window with the joint') (*Supreme Clientele*, Epic, Sony, Razor Sharp, 2000). Whilst Ghostface uses his lyric to evoke the iconic 1964 *Ebony* Magazine cover image of Malcolm X glancing out of a window whilst brandishing a firearm, I re-interpret the quote as a form of homage to the verbal power of both Malcom X and Ghostface Killah in their inspirational speech-making capacities.

As the title and containing lyrics allude, I also refer here to Malcolm X's book, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*.

<sup>109</sup> Allusion to the flame throwing yogi character from popular early-nineties video game *Street Fighter II* (Capcom, 1991).

<sup>110</sup> During several breaks in the lyrics of 'X', I draw on an inconsequential scene from Denis Villeneuve's *Arrival* (Paramount Pictures, 2016), in which radio communication transmissions can be heard between 'Captain Mark' and 'Condor'. Due to one of my artistic nicknames being 'The Iron Condor', or 'Condor' since the early 2000s, I have used these samples to refer to this alias.

<sup>111</sup> Here I refer to the protagonist of Jo Carnahan's *The Grey* (Entertainment Film Distributors, 2012), John Ottway (played by Liam Neeson), who, whilst mortally wounded fighting off a pack of wolves, realises his immediate demise is inevitable. This allusion draws upon my preceding lyric, 'your downfall guaranteed'.

Any moves made I will evade and counter  
Long haul to the finish line.  
Long haul to the finish line...

*...Alpha 19ner, this is Condor, come in...*

Innovate and break ground

Diesel Omega, you see the aura.  
Supreme and Air Jordan, new T's on order.  
Took me twenty years plus  
Just to push up on the cusp,  
Took me twenty years more  
Just to reach the border.  
Now I hit the ground runnin'  
'til I reach a thousand and one  
And run up on that 88 mile an hour.<sup>112</sup>  
Rather chase up a ghost  
Than my own self-image,  
Stretching it to the limits with this fire power.  
I stack words for the workforces,  
guess I'm getting paid by the hour.  
I stack words for the workforces...

*...Captain Mark, Condor?...*

Lost faith and restored faith,  
Came a long way from the bailiffs and court dates.  
Still pursue a dream, aiming to achieve  
What is never written or retained or released.  
Articulating what has to be seen  
Just to be believed,  
Commentating deep from the ravine  
Commentating deep from the ravine.  
Commentating deep...

*...Not received transmission — — ...' (Au, N-r).<sup>113</sup>*

November Golf 'till my last rights,  
Never took flight, never migrated.  
Insular vision of life, translated onto lined pages  
Now placed on fireplaces.  
So burn slow with them paranoias,  
Trapped in, 'til your thoughts turn habanero.  
Contents under pressure in a cold sweat,  
Full of near misses and a story never told yet.

---

<sup>112</sup> Allusion to Steven Spielberg's science fiction movie *Back to the Future* (Universal Pictures, 1985), in which an automobile (the DeLorean) is adapted into a vehicle for time travel. With the use of a 'flux capacitor', the DeLorean is only capable of time travel when it reaches eighty-eight miles per hour.

<sup>113</sup> *Arrival*.

November Golf 'til my last rights  
Never took flight, never migrated  
Never took flight...

*'The pen is the tongue of the soul' (Au, N-r).*<sup>114</sup>

Notts City oligarch  
Otto Herman Kahn in them Walley Clarks  
I cop second-hand breaks from a car boot in Colwick Park  
Then I turn Bach into modern art  
Still blessed with a voice

Accurate to a fraction...

...technician and specialist  
Catching some air, yeah.<sup>115</sup>

*The pen is the tongue of the soul (Au, N-r).*<sup>116</sup>

Putting all of my affairs in order  
Before the bloke with scythe and cloak gives the call up.  
Melting like Dahli pictures  
And these memories passing me by  
'til I can hardly picture  
Lost people in them old frames.  
Harder now just to put a face to the name  
Feelin' something in the air,<sup>117</sup> yeah that must be change.  
Heavy feeling in my heart, yeah, that must be, reign.  
Heavy feeling in my heart, yeah, that must be, reign.

November Golf 'till my last rights,  
Never took flight, never migrated.  
Insular vision of life, translated onto lined pages,  
Now placed on fireplaces

---

<sup>114</sup> As a means of reinforcing a message regarding the powerful implications of the spoken and written word peppered throughout the *Uzumaki* LP, here I utilise a classic novel, Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote* (narrated by George Guidail, Maryland: Recorded Books, 2003).

<sup>115</sup> Here, I again gesture towards the lyrics of another of my own releases, a song titled 'Slum Village' (*Village Live is Five*, Village Live, 2020) in which I state: 'Decimal points/accurate to a fraction, verse perfect, weapon of choice/Professor of voice, Lecturer, technician and specialist/catching some air over the precipice'.

<sup>116</sup> Repeating the same *Quixote* quote ('the pen is the tongue of the soul', footnote 114), I here utilise a youthful female voice (Teresa Naves) to deliver the line, in opposition to my previous use of Guidail's mature male version. This repetitive technique is employed mainly to illustrate the universal power of words, and to demonstrate the ongoing impact of this passage on generations to come. See 'The pen is the tongue of the soul; as are the thoughts engendered there, so will be ...', *YouTube*, 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2018 <[youtube.com/watch?v=O8YsX-3YYIQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O8YsX-3YYIQ)> [accessed 17 June 2022].

<sup>117</sup> In a reference that links with 'Sessy Lu', from *Houses* (see p. 199, footnote 68), I allude to Phil Collins's, 'In the Air Tonight' (*Face Value*, Virgin, Atlantic, 1980) to illustrate a sense of change depicted in my lyrics. As with 'Sessy Lu', I also use this lyric to allude to Beanie Seigel's 'Feel it in the Air' (*The B. Coming*, Dame Dash Music Group, Def Jam, 2005), a rap song echoing Collins's artistic expression.



[Music Fades]

So burn slow with them paranoias.  
Trapped in, 'til your thoughts turn habanero.  
Contents under pressure in a cold sweat  
Full of near misses and a story never told yet.  
Full of near misses and a story never told yet.

[Music ends]

*'I've made sacrifices.*

- *No.*

- *Yes.*

- *It takes noting to steal another man's work.*

- *It takes everything' (Au. N-r).<sup>118</sup>*

---

<sup>118</sup> Continuing from my use of a quote from Duncan Jone's *Moon*, in which the ethical use of sampling/borrowing and the employment of previously published material in new art is debated, I now introduce a contextually pivotal sample regarding *Uzumaki's* artistic standpoint, taken (again) from Christopher Nolan's *The Prestige*. Here, Christian Bale's character, Alfred Borden, is heard saying 'it takes nothing to steal another man's work', to which Hugh Jackson's character, Robert Angier, replies, 'it takes everything'. In this brief exchange, *Uzumaki's* overall message regarding the multifarious technique of sampling (viewed by some as a form of intellectual property theft) as an important and legitimate art form is succinctly summarised. This quote is immediately followed by one of the most intertextually centred pieces in the trilogy, 'Z', which—in order to be fully understood—requires a previous knowledge of the sonic and lyrical legacy of JAY-Z.

## Z

Written in the form of a polemic addressing elements of the media (journalists, bloggers, music critics) that consistently negatively judge artists and their creative works without having any experience of creating art themselves, ‘Z’ aligns itself with artists such as Method Man, who states his contempt for media commentators in general (‘Dig it, F a rap critic/he talk about it while I live it’).<sup>119</sup>

*‘Your job is to tell the truth, right?  
That’s your job...*

Yeah

*...I’m not gonna have you twisting everything I say...*

November

*...So the next time, it’s finished...*

November Golf

*...You don’t get let back in. Ok?...*

Yeah

*...I’m making that clear to you...*

Cough up a lung<sup>120</sup>

*...You don’t get back in. Finished’ (Au, N-r).<sup>121</sup>*

Grand

So, while I’m speaking lines from this attic  
You lot are preaching fake religion to them rented seats  
Sending messages like gold dust  
To a room that’s blessed with much applause  
But that sound filled with lies and falsehoods

*‘Revenga!’ (Au, N-r).<sup>122</sup>*

Watch how I pace make.

---

<sup>119</sup> See Method Man & Redman, ‘How High’, *The Show: The Soundtrack* (Def Jam, 1995).

<sup>120</sup> Allosonic quotation of a lyric taken from JAY-Z’s ‘Where I’m From’: ‘cough up a lung, where I’m from, Marcy son, ain’t nothing nice’. Here, I adapt JAY-Z’s line addressing his upbringings in the Marcy Projects, Brooklyn, New York, to address my own upbringings in Nottingham (‘November Golf’). In an additional allusion to ‘Where I’m From’, I use the exact same drum break/solo that comprises the song, a sample found on Yvonne Fair’s ‘Let Your Hair Down’ (*The Bitch is Black*, Motown, 1975) to create the musical accompaniment for ‘Z’.

<sup>121</sup> In an address to music journalists and critics who choose to ignore my music and/or misconstrue my words, I have employed the words of Alex Ferguson during one of his notorious tirades at the sports press. Here, the former Manchester United manager asserts his control over the press by telling them that if they misconstrue his words again, they will be banished from his press conferences. Similarly, I want to prevent journalists, critics, and industry professionals who spread negative and ignorant opinions from having access to my music. Alex Ferguson, ‘Fergie Rages at Press over United Lies’, *YouTube*, 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2010 <[youtube.com/watch?v=0XPInFCIM3Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0XPInFCIM3Q)> [accessed 17 June 2022].

<sup>122</sup> In alignment with the revengeful sentiment presented in the lyrics for ‘Z’, and following on from the initial sample of Alex Ferguson, I employ a sample from Brian De Palma’s *Scarface*, in which the protagonist Tony Montana’s best friend, Manolo, calls out ‘revenge’ to a treacherous fellow prison inmate before killing him.

Switch the piece meal up for your king's feast,  
I'm eight-eight.  
Meaning it's golden era when I hold this pen and scrawl out  
Château de Nerf du Cap  
Onto this curb I pour out.

Pollock, Rothko.  
Working on a giant scale  
In block colours plus the paint flecks.  
Yes  
Spraying them downpours,  
Desert storms and Indian summers  
Until I'm taking rain checks.

Still I'm rising like the tide  
Laced up in them Kaiser 5's  
Like I'm playing 5-a-side.  
Industrial strength spiel tapered by design,  
Ain't nothing changing but them Lowry painted skies  
And them pound signs.

*...Fed up having to read papers and quotes...*

Yeah, November Golf

*...Things I said, and I know I've said,  
you completely twist it round...*

Yeah.

*...Lies' (Au, N-r).<sup>123</sup>*

Reporting from November Golf, the city of legends,  
This runs in my blood stream.  
Reporting from November Golf, the city of legends.

Grand  
Pitch and prose always picture perfect.  
No sooner than I post these poems, then my pockets been picked.  
They're watching close for new developed flows  
And distant glimpses of this Raph Saadiq shit,  
Instant Vintage.<sup>124</sup>

Instant playback,  
Realest in amongst the made up  
Like I'm Jordan linked with Space Jam.  
From twenty-three my palms dusty off them crates dug  
Living off-line,  
No more I chase a wage from Facebook.

---

<sup>123</sup> Ferguson, 'Fergie Rages at Press'.

<sup>124</sup> Here I refer to R&B singer Raphael Saadiq's LP, *Instant Vintage* (Universal, 2002), to infer my own music is 'instant vintage'.

Nah,  
I'm done with chasing sales  
Off them poachers  
While you lost your focus tryna chase your tails.  
I'm more corrosive than the caustic soda  
When I pour this venom pure and potent  
On these poor excuses for performers.

Dignity written throughout my corpus.  
I'm stacking bars up 'til I've built this fortress  
A wall of sound that's never falling short  
Of this accord  
And what is scrawled upon them bricks and mortar's  
Dolce et Decorum<sup>125</sup>

*'Your job is to tell the truth.  
That's your job as a journalist.  
And if you can't do that, you're in the wrong job. Ok?  
I make that clear' (Au, N-r).<sup>126</sup>*

Cough up a lung...  
Reporting from November Golf, the city of legends,  
This runs in my blood stream.  
Reporting from November Golf, the city of legends.

Yeah  
Whilst you are still in ear shot,  
I will lay them jewels down.  
I pioneer that free speech,  
While you lay them rules down.  
They gather round the same plates,  
I watch as they wolf down.  
Revenge a dish I serve cold...

*'So, the ideal about it:  
Every, all word that you speak,  
Everything that you, that you say  
Will, in the day of judgment,  
You will have to give an account of' (Au, N-r).<sup>127</sup>*

---

<sup>125</sup> Allusion to Wilfred Owen's poem 'Dulce et Decorum est' (*Norton Anthology of Poetry*, p. 1387) in which Owen challenges the idea of war and death being an honourable and glorious sacrifice. Due to the poem's detailed imagery, and the author's depth of artistic technical ability, I wanted to pay homage to Owen during 'Z', as both lyrics address themes of honour and 'dignity'.

<sup>126</sup> Ferguson, 'Fergie Rages at Press'.

<sup>127</sup> Using a quote taken from a YouTube video made by Zadok Amram, in which he explains his definition of the biblical passage 'by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words, thou shalt be condemned' (Matthew 12.37, KJV), I again allude to the powerful impact of the spoken and written word as articulated throughout the *Uzumaki* LP. See 'For By Thy Words Thou Shalt be Justified and by Thy Words Thou Shalt be Condemned', *YouTube*, 14<sup>th</sup> May 2021 <[youtube.com/watch?v=TKctkBzpwNc&t=40s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TKctkBzpwNc&t=40s)> [accessed 17 June, 2022].

## Berry

As the final track from *Uzumaki* (except for ‘Glaze’, a ‘hidden’ track presented after a length of silence on conclusion of ‘Berry’), ‘Berry’ uses sampled quotes from Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451* at the end of the song (in conjunction with my own original lyrics) that serve to explain my overall artistic intentions for *CAPsule*. As the quote details, ‘everyone must leave something behind when he dies’, and this trilogy (and the techniques developed within it) is my offering to the rap world as a template for further artistic innovation, research, and practice.

*‘Why do you always have to paint from nature?  
- I feel lost if I don’t have something to look at.  
I need something to see, there’s so much to see.  
Every time I look, I see something I’ve never seen before...’*

Prestige.

*- ...Yes, but what you paint, what you do belongs to you.  
You don’t need to copy anything  
- I don’t copy  
- I know, but, why don’t you paint what’s in your mind?  
- what your brain sees’ (Au, N-r).<sup>128</sup>*

Diose

*‘Diose, internash.  
I speed past  
Scintillate/skillet the bars  
Hit the breaks, you hit the dash’ (Au, R).<sup>129</sup>*

Yeah

When the dust lays calm and the smoke clears,  
I just hope that what I wrote within each coda is still pure.  
Knowing I’ve set a task for myself that’s akin to the prestige  
And these words serving as breadcrumbs for the truth that I bring forth

---

<sup>128</sup> Linking with previous quotes placed strategically throughout *Uzumaki*, this extract of a fictionalised discussion between Paul Gauguin (Oscar Isaac) and Vincent van Gogh (Willem Dafoe) on the artistic process continues the theoretical debate on the ethics of imitation, originality, and (as highlighted in the quote) the idea of ‘copying’ in the creation of art. See Julian Shnabel, *At Eternity’s Gate* (Curzon Artificial Eye, 2019).

<sup>129</sup> In similarity to an intratextual reference made during ‘X’ (‘still blessed with a voice/accurate to a fraction [...] technician and specialist/catching some air’, see p. 255), I allude to one of my previous works as a means of establishing the extensive nature of my musical career. However, this time I digitally quote my work, rather than allosonically quoting (or re-reciting) it. See Cappo, ‘Live Intro’, *Genghis* (Son Records, 2010).

What I place in the ground is last vow  
A capsule to record and preserve any last words...

*'The uzumaki as art? I see' (Au, N-r).<sup>130</sup>*

Looking up ways I can reach  
More than one wave with the brief.  
More than way to relate  
Tryna situate a name to the face now,  
Do I put it in a box, let it gather dust?  
Or release, put it all up in the eye of the public?  
I'll be on the middle ground, living in the gaps,  
Swimming in the grey lines, knowing I'm

Prestige of the piece  
tryna keep moveable feasts,  
still, I hold keys and fully believe in the speech.  
'Til I cease breathing, I keep bleeding, that shit is deep  
Sand grain on the beach,  
I'm a sand grain on the beach.  
Still, I hold keys and fully believe in the speech,  
'Til I cease breathing, I keep bleeding  
That shit is...  
Deep

*'Everyone must leave something behind when he dies  
A child, or a book, or painting. Or a house...'<sup>131</sup>*

Prestige

*...Or a wall built...*

Grand  
Yeah  
When the hype wears down and you press pause

*...Something your hand touched some way...*

I just hope every note will remain raw<sup>132</sup>

*...So your soul has somewhere to go when you die...*

Knowing I've set a task for myself now

*...And when people look at that tree*

---

<sup>130</sup> Higuchinsky, *Uzumaki*, 2000.

<sup>131</sup> This passage includes the word 'house', which, when taken in context of the *CAPSule* trilogy, will serve as an intratextual link to *Houses*.

<sup>132</sup> Allusion to a track by Busta Rhymes, 'Everything Remains Raw' (*The Coming*, Elektra, 1996), that defines the term 'raw' (i.e., authentic, unfiltered, real, rugged), used often in hip hop vernacular.

*or that flower you planted...*

That's akin to me breaking the fourth wall

*...You're there...*

Yeah,

What I place in the ground is a glass jar.

*...It doesn't matter what you do...*

A capsule to preserve any last words

*...so long as you change something  
from the way it was before...*

And the trust that you worked for a just cause.

*...into something that's like you  
when you take your hand away' (Au, N-r).<sup>133</sup>*

You may have won now but you can't win 'em all

Result of my environment

You may have won now but you can't win the war

Result of my environment

You may have won now but you can't win 'em all

Result of my environment

You may have won now but you can't win 'em...

Result of my environment

*[Music ends]*

Result of my environment,

Result of my environment.

Result of my environment,

Result of my environment.

*'...He'd have told them more if they'd wanted to wait and listen...*

*...Chapter Eleven' (Au, N-r).<sup>134</sup>*

---

<sup>133</sup> In one of the more intricate samples woven into the LP, I employ a passage from Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (narrated by Christopher Hurt, Blackstone Audio Books, 2005), triggered to play between the gaps of my lyrics, forming a kind of convoluted conversation. The sample refers to themes of creativity, originality, artistic legacy, and repetition and revision that are drawn upon throughout the LP. See Raymond Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451*, p. 147.

<sup>134</sup> Occurring after an extended gap of silence on conclusion of 'Hem' (in order to signify a mock ending to the LP), this sample, taken from Leonard's *The Hunted*, is again employed to engage the audience in a form of active listening. Here, as the narrator Mark Hammer explains, if the listeners are patient ('if they'd wanted to wait and listen'), and maintain their concentration on events of the LP, they will be rewarded with an additional track that serves as encore.

## Glaze

Presented in the form of a secret, or ‘hidden’ track, ‘Glaze’ consolidates further intratextual links between *Uzumaki*, *S.T.A.R.V.E.*, and *Houses* (as explained in the following gloss notes). ‘Glaze’ makes sweeping cultural allusions throughout, from Scarlet Johansson’s performance in *Under the Skin* to the written works of Tolstoy, from Mikhail Bakhtin’s literary theory to the lyrics of The Notorious B.I.G., and from the production skills of Berry Gordy to the poetic sensibility of Lord Byron, before utilising an end passage taken from Nolan’s *Prestige* to signpost a final message of warning, or caveat, regarding the artistic value of sampling.

Under your skin like it’s iron filings,  
The soundtrack is Johansson sat in the transit.<sup>135</sup>  
Plus, the product stay pure  
So, I follow close  
‘Til these beats bury me deep within this blackness.

‘Til I’m tone def and off key.  
VET on this pitch, Lewandowski.  
Leather seats, while I type like I’m Tolstoy.  
Or Bakhtin and Kristeva<sup>136</sup>  
With illest flava.

I grip languages in iambics,  
‘Til it drops, either like swish  
Or some bricks.  
Orson Welles, hella swell with these accapellys

---

<sup>135</sup> Reference to Jonathan Glazer’s film *Under the Skin* (StudioCanal, 2013), in which an alien disguised as a woman (played by Scarlett Johansson) lures unsuspecting men into her transit van, takes them to her hideout, and engulfs them in a pitch-black dimension, ultimately using them for fuel. Here, I try to artistically summarise the plot of *Under the Skin* as a metaphor for how I am drawn towards the instrumental music of the current track being played (‘the soundtrack is Johansson sat in the transit [van]’), before being engulfed completely by the music (‘til these beats bury me deep within this blackness’). An important additional link can be made during this stanza. Here, I gesture towards ‘Drip’, a song taken from *S.T.A.R.V.E.* that uses several digital quotations of Johansson’s character, i.e., the voice of the alien (see pp. 143-147). For the active listener, this gesture leads to a deeper understanding of how and why these samples have been used, and to what ends. This internal link to another track from my trilogy is the first of several that occur throughout ‘Glaze’, either linking back to another track taken from the trilogy, or linking both with a track and my critical thesis.

<sup>136</sup> For the second time in *Uzumaki* (not including my digital quotation of her voice in ‘Green’, see p. 240 and p. 243), I name check Julia Kristeva (see ‘Gold’, p. 249, footnote 91 for initial reference). Here, I pay homage to Kristeva’s (and Mikhail Bakhtin’s) pioneering research into the plurality of speech and language, and the notion of intertextuality in literature. This allusion also links with critical research involved in this thesis’s introduction (pp. 7-10) and Chapter Three (pp. 109-110).



I drop lyrics off and on like a light switch.

Click...click.

Either leaving them enlightened  
or in the darkness.

I'm melancholic with this art

Le Miserable<sup>137</sup>

Tryna stay Dylan or Lamar<sup>138</sup>

That's a living martyr.

I send these rhymes into orbit like

Yang Li Wie, Gagarin, Michael Collins.<sup>139</sup>

Still committed to these metronomes

Berry Gordy, Motown production lines.<sup>140</sup>

And these rhymes heading skyward bound

'Til my rep's lifted high, like the price of knowledge.

Still committed to these metronomes

Holland, Dozier, Holland, we put in work<sup>141</sup>

Now, as the ink turns dry

And these notes grow bigger<sup>142</sup>

Than a double X vintage retro Hilfiger,

I conduct lifelines like currents from a pylon

---

<sup>137</sup> Allusion to Claude-Michel Schönberg's stage adaptation of Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* (London: Penguin Classics, 2015 [1980-]), employed here to highlight the often-melancholic tone of my artistic output (linking with themes of the *Les Mis* play and novel).

<sup>138</sup> Here (as with my earlier allusion to Kristeva), I namecheck Kendrick Lamar for the second time during *Uzumaki* (see 'Uzumaki', p. 224, footnote 12, for initial reference). This time around, I note him in comparison to Bob Dylan as 'a living martyr' regarding his powerful songwriting. As also noted earlier, repetition of specific names/titles during *Uzumaki* serves to highlight their overall importance to the project. For further details on Lamar's moving, intellectually inspiring lyrical output, see Chapter Two of this thesis.

<sup>139</sup> Whilst referencing astronauts from three international superpowers (China, Russia, and the USA) as a way of elevating my rhymes 'into orbit', I intratextually engage with *S.T.A.R.V.E.* in my reference to Michael Collins. Collins is mentioned during 'Wi(n)dow' (see p. 152, footnote 33) and also digitally quoted in the silence before 'Slow Poison' begins (see p. 161, footnote 56) during *S.T.A.R.V.E.*

<sup>140</sup> Allusion to Berry Gordy, the founder of the Motown record label. Here, I compare my capacity for lyrical output to the Motown group, who were famous for their ability to produce lyrics, making hit after hit at a rapid rate during the sixties.

<sup>141</sup> As with the above reference to Berry Gordy, I again allude to the Motown era of song writing, this time to a production team consisting of Lamont Dozier, and brothers Brian and Eddie Holland.

<sup>142</sup> Using a form of allosonic quotation, I employ the same rhyme scheme, or flow, as Snoop Dogg on 'Ain't No Fun (If the Homies Can't Have None) ft. Nate Dogg, Kurupt & Warren G' (*Doggystyle*, Death Row, Interscope, 1993). Adapting Snoop's lyrics from 'Now, as the sun rotates and my game grows bigger', to 'Now, as the ink turns dry and these notes grow bigger', I pay homage to Snoop's influence on my rhyming techniques/delivery. Simultaneously, however (and in a similar way to how I subverted Snoop's lyrics during 'White', see p. 229, footnote 34), I have subverted much of the meaning of Snoop's words to further express my perspective as a rhyme writer/emcee. As with previous namechecks (Kristeva and Lamar) during 'Glaze', I repeat Snoop's flow/lyrics as a way of concretising his influence on my songwriting and performative strategies. Whilst not voicing his name in the same way as previously mentioned authors/artists, my repeated quoting of his works serves to highlight his importance to this project.

Leaving more sparks than a Milton or Byron.<sup>143</sup>

Spill with more bile, more acid, more vibrant,  
Flow projectile, ectoplasm sliming.  
Every day/night, writing rhymes off a stipend.  
Heavyweight title fight, Mike Gerrard Tyson.

Seve Ballesteros, the grey Audemar watch  
Matching exact with the hand brake and gear box.  
Fitted ball cap  
With the patch is New Era,  
Fake Jordan badges, that's forty-two lira.

Underside peak the colour of pool tables,  
I garner my speech the same as how Cool J does.  
Same as how JAY does, or Jada,<sup>144</sup>  
I labour to elevate each and all points with the cadence.

Lace up the Max's and Champion reverse weave  
And bring nothing but the rash like it's herpes.  
Lifeblood upon the tracks like a burst vein,  
I'm ill mega dope down to the shirt sleeves.

I send these rhymes into orbit like  
Yang Li Wie, Gagarin, Michael Collins.  
Still committed to these metronomes  
Berry Gordy, Motown production lines.

And these rhymes heading skyward bound  
'Til my rep's lifted high, like the price of knowledge.  
Still committed to these metronomes  
Holland, Dozier, Holland, we put in work.

I send these rhymes into orbit like  
Yang Li Wie, Gagarin, Michael Collins.  
Still committed to these metronomes  
Berry Gordy, Motown production lines.

And these rhymes heading skyward bound  
'Til my rep's lifted high like the price of knowledge.  
Still committed to these metronomes,  
Holland, Dozier, Holland, we put in work

---

<sup>143</sup> Comparative allusion to two canonical literary figures, John Milton and Lord Byron.

<sup>144</sup> Here, in the same way as I compare myself to literary giants such as Milton and Byron in the previous stanza, I now compare my songwriting technique/writing process to that of LL Cool J, JAY-Z, and Jadakis, three giants of rap.

‘It took courage.  
It took courage to climb into that machine every night.  
Not knowing if I’d be the man in the box,  
or the prestige’ (Au, N-r).<sup>145</sup>

---

<sup>145</sup> In the final quote taken from Nolan’s *Prestige*, I make my closing statement on concepts and themes that have run throughout the trilogy such as creativity, originality, artistic integrity, and intertextuality, allusion, and sampling/borrowing in music and literature. Whilst critics might argue that my use of techniques such as repetition, adaptation, subversion, revision, and quotation for *Uzumaki* (and *CAPsule* as a whole) are forms of simplistic imitation, I choose to highlight these acts/techniques as integral to the complex inner workings of this artwork, in similarity to Richard Shusterman’s argument regarding the fine art of rap (see Richard Shusterman, ‘The Fine Art of Rap’, in *New Literary History*, 22 (1991), 613-632). I argue that without my employment of such techniques, the rich and meaningful tapestry of discourse regarding the human experience I have created in *CAPsule* could not be exacted/achieved. Aligning further with the quoted passage, I deem my efforts to produce a juxtaposed mosaic (or ‘universal thump’) of classical and contemporary cultural forms as the most ‘courageous’ and important musical achievement I have made to date, especially when metaphorically relating the speaker’s notion of ‘climbing into that machine every night’ to my frequent use of the Akai MPC 2000XL sampling machine I used to record the majority of this project. The speaker’s final words contain a summation of what it is like to create under the shadow of copyright law, and the prospect of being financially penalised for creating art with genuine intention, and I resonate strongly with the idea of sacrifice presented here, in relation to the many artists in the contemporary music sphere who use samples to create new art. In our attempts to push the boundaries of the technique of sampling as allusive and sometimes intertextually-focused artists, we face the dilemma of becoming ‘the man in the box’, being labelled a thief or imitator of previous artists/authors, and run the risk of being sued, muted, cancelled, or chastised. However, on the other hand (as the quote details), we also acknowledge the prospect of becoming ‘the prestige’, a recognised craftsperson, critically acclaimed author of sonic bricolage, and magician/chemist of cultural forms who can aid individuals and communities to gain a further understanding of the world around them. It is for the listener of *CAPsule* to choose which category I fall in to.

## Bibliography

Akoto-Abutiata, Dorothy BEA, *Proverbs and the African Tree of Life: Grafting Biblical Proverbs on to Ghanaian Eve Folk Proverbs* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill, 2014)

Alim, H. Samy, 'Bring it to the Cipher', in *Roc the Mic Right: The Language of Hip Hop Culture* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006) pp. 74-108

———, 'On Some Serious Next Millennium Rap Ishhh: Pharaoh Monch, Hip Hop Poetics and the Internal Rhymes of Internal Affairs', *Journal of English Linguistics*, 31 (2003), 61-84

Allanof, Gabe, 'Why Saba's 'PROM / KING' is the Best Anecdotal Rap Track of the Decade', *Gabe Allanof*, 19<sup>th</sup> May 2018 <[gabeallanof.com/music-journalism/2018/5/19/why-sabas-prom-king-is-the-best-anecdotal-rap-track-of-the-decade](http://gabeallanof.com/music-journalism/2018/5/19/why-sabas-prom-king-is-the-best-anecdotal-rap-track-of-the-decade)> [accessed 14 April 2022]

Allen, Graham, 'Transposition', in *Intertextuality: The New Critical Idiom* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 47-56

———, 'The Text Unbound: Barthes', in *Intertextuality: The New Critical Idiom* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 61-95.

Alvarez, Gabriel, 'The 100 Best Nas Songs: No. 45. "No Idea's Original" (2002)', *Complex*, 1<sup>st</sup> August 2017 <[complex.com/music/the-100-best-nas-songs/](http://complex.com/music/the-100-best-nas-songs/)> [accessed 1 October 2019]

Ammer, Christine, *The American Heritage Dictionary of Idioms* (New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013)

Ammer, Christine, *The Dictionary of Clichés* (New York: Sky Horse Publishing, 2013)

Amram, Zadok, 'For By Thy Words Thou Shalt be Justified and by Thy Words Thou Shalt be Condemned', *Youtube*, 14<sup>th</sup> May 2021 <[youtube.com/watch?v=TKctkBzpwNc&t=40s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TKctkBzpwNc&t=40s)> [accessed 17 June 2022]

Anderson, Benedict, 'Introduction', in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso Books, 2006), pp. 1-9

Ames, Elizabeth Keri, 'The Oxymoron of Fidelity in Homer's 'Odyssey' and Joyce's 'Ulysses'', *Joyce Studies Annual*, 14 (2003), 132-174

Apperson, George Latimer, Manser, Martin H., and Curtis, Stephen J., *Dictionary of Proverbs* (Ware, HRT: Woodsworth Editions Limited, 2006)

Arendt, Hannah, 'Ideology and Terror: A Novel Form of Government', *The Review of Politics*, 15 (1953), 303-327

Alim, H. Samy, *Roc the Mic Right: The Language of Hip Hop Culture* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006)

Bailey, Moya, 'Homolateral Masculinity & Hip Hop Culture', *Palimpsest: A Journal on Women, Gender, and the Black International*, Volume 2, Issue 2, 2013, pp. 187-199 (p. 188)

Banks, Alec, 'The Hidden Story Behind Kendrick Lamar's good kid, m.A.A.d city', *HighSnobiety*, 26<sup>th</sup> October 2016 <[highsnobiety.com/2016/10/26/kendrick-lamar-good-kid-maad-city-analysis/](https://highsnobiety.com/2016/10/26/kendrick-lamar-good-kid-maad-city-analysis/)> [accessed 27 February 2020]

Barthes, Roland, 'The Death of the Author', *Image, Music, Text* (London, HarperCollinsPublishers, 1977), pp. 142-149

———, 'The Grain of the Voice', in *Image, Music, Text* (London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 1977), pp. 181-188

———, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. by Richard Miller (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1975)

Beckett, Samuel, *Molloy* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1951)

———, *Malone Dies* (New York: Grove Press, 1953)

———, *Unnamable* (New York: Grove Press, 1956)

Benstock, Shari, 'The Printed Letters in *Ulysses*', *James Joyce Quarterly*, 50.1 (2013), 167-179

Benvenuto, Sergio, 'Freudian Models of Language: A Conversation', *European Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 1<sup>st</sup> May 1994 <[psychomedia.it/jep/number3-4/kristeng.htm](https://psychomedia.it/jep/number3-4/kristeng.htm)> [accessed 15 April 2022]

Bhabha, Homi K., 'Introduction', in *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge Classics, 2004), pp. 1-28

———, *KJV*, Genesis 6-9

———, *KJV*, Genesis 6.11-9.19

———, *KJV*, Genesis 13.12 and 19.29

———, *KJV*, Galatians 6.7

———, *KJV*, Psalms 23.4

Blue, Navy, 'Like My Mama', *Genius* <[genius.com/Mike-like-my-mama-lyrics](https://genius.com/Mike-like-my-mama-lyrics)> [accessed 16 April 2022]

Brackett, David, 'James Brown's 'Super Bad' and the Double-voiced Utterance', *Popular Music*, 11 (1992), pp. 309-324

Bradbury, Ray, *Fahrenheit 451*, nar. by Christopher Hurt (Blackstone Audio Books, 2005)

- Bradley, Adam, *Book of Rhymes: The Poetics of Hip Hop* (New York: Basic Civitas, 2009)
- Brecht, Bertolt, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic* ed. by Marc Silberman, Steve Giles and Tom Kuhn (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015)
- Bristout, Ralph, 'Kendrick Lamar's *Section.80*: Reagan Era Blues', in *Kendrick Lamar and the Making of Black Meaning*, ed. by Christopher M. Driscoll, Monica R. Miller, and Anthony B. Pinn (New York: Routledge, 2020), p. 20
- Bronte, Emily, *Wuthering Heights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020)
- Brueghel the Elder, Pieter, 'Landscape with the Fall of Icarus' (c. 1560)
- Bukowski, Charles, 'Alone with Everybody', *Love is a Dog from Hell* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1977), p. 97
- , 'oh yes', *War all the Time* (Santa Rosa, CA: Black Sparrow Press, 1993), p. 100
- Bungert, James, '“I got a bone to pick”: Formal Ambivalence and Double Consciousness in Kendrick Lamar's 'King Kunta'', *Society for Music Theory*, 1<sup>st</sup> March 2019 <<https://mtosmt.org/issues/mto.19.25.1/mto.19.25.1.bungert.pdf>> [accessed 20 September 2022].
- Burton, James D., and D'Errico, Mike), '“Rhymin and Stealin: Musical Borrowing in Hip-Hop,” by Justin Williams', *IASPM -US Interview Series*, 18<sup>th</sup> July 2019 <[iaspm-us.net/iaspm-us-interviews-series-rhymin-and-stealin-musical-borrowing-in-hip-hop-by-justin-williams/](http://iaspm-us.net/iaspm-us-interviews-series-rhymin-and-stealin-musical-borrowing-in-hip-hop-by-justin-williams/)> [accessed 5<sup>th</sup> April 2020]
- Barthes, Roland, 'The Death of the Author', in *Image, Music, Text* (London, HarperCollins Publishers, 1977), pp. 142-149
- Carroll, Lewis, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (Hampshire, UK: Pan Macmillan, 2015)
- Cent, 50, and Greene, Robert, *The 50<sup>th</sup> Law* (London: Profile Books, 2009)
- Cervantes, Miguel De Saavedra, *Don Quixote* (New York: Dover Publications, 2018)
- Cervantes, Miguel de, *Don Quixote*, nar. by George Guidail (Maryland: Recorded Books, 2003)
- Champagne, Rosaria, 'Oprah Winfrey's 'Scared Silent' and the Spectatorship of Incest', *Discourse*, 17 (1995), 123-138 (p. 130)
- Chang, Jeff, 'Making a Name: How DJ Kool Herc Lost his Accent and Started Hip Hop', in *Can't Stop Won't Stop: History of the Hip-Hop Generation* (London: Random House Group, 2007), pp. 67-89
- Chaucer, Geoffrey, 'Man of Law's Tale', *The Canterbury Tales*, ed. by Robert Boenig and Andrew Taylor (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Editions, 2012), pp. 124-145

——, *Troilus and Criseyde*, trans. by Barry Windeatt (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008)

‘Classic Crates Research Project’, *HARI: hiphoparchive.org*, 2016  
<[hiphoparchive.org/projects/classic-crates/intro](http://hiphoparchive.org/projects/classic-crates/intro)> [accessed June 2021]

Collins, Meredith K. Reffner, Riffe, Daniel, Kresovich, Alex, Carpentier, Francesca R. Dillman, ‘A Content Analysis of Mental Health Discourse in Popular Rap Music’, *JAMA Paediatrics*, 175 (2021), pp. 286-292

Cuddon, J. A., *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition, rev. by M.A.R. Habib (Chichester, WSX: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013)

Dante, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. by C. H. Sisson (London: Oxford University Press, 2008)

De Genova, Nick, ‘Gangsta Rap and Nihilism in Black America: Some Questions of Life and Death’, *Social Text*, 43 (1995), pp. 89-132

Demary, Mensah, ‘The Literary Genius of Kendrick Lamar: Mensah Demary on the Album as Novel’, *Literary Hub*, 27<sup>th</sup> May 2016 <[lithub.com/the-literary-genius-of-kendrick-lamar/](http://lithub.com/the-literary-genius-of-kendrick-lamar/)> [accessed 27 February 2020]

Denise, Lynnee, ‘We Gon’ Be Alright: Kendrick Lamar and the Story of a Conscious Gangsta Balled’, *DJ Lynnee Denise*, 15<sup>th</sup> April 2015 <[djlynneedenise.com/thought-blog/2015/4/15/dear-compton-kendrick-lamar-and-the-legacy-of-conscious-gangsta-rap/](http://djlynneedenise.com/thought-blog/2015/4/15/dear-compton-kendrick-lamar-and-the-legacy-of-conscious-gangsta-rap/)> [accessed 27 February 2020]

Diallo, David, *Collective Participation and Audience Engagement in Rap Music* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019)

——, ‘Intertextuality in Rap Lyrics’, *Association Francaise d’Etudes Americaines*, 142 (2015), 40-54

Dick, Philip K., *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2012)

Dodson, Aaron, ‘The Strange Legacy of Tupac’s ‘Hologram’ Lives on Five Years After its Historic Coachella Debut’, *The Undeclared*, 14<sup>th</sup> April 2017  
<[theundefeated.com/features/the-strange-legacy-of-tupacs-hologram-after-coachella/](http://theundefeated.com/features/the-strange-legacy-of-tupacs-hologram-after-coachella/)> [accessed 28 March 2020]

Dostoyevsky, Fyodor, *Notes from Underground and The Double* (London: Penguin Classics, 2009)

Doyle, Charles C., Mieder, Wolfgang, and Shapiro, Fred, *The Dictionary of Modern Proverbs* (London: Yale University Press, 2012)

Drake, David, ‘The Homage: Mafia Culture’s Influence on Rap Music’, *Complex*, 15<sup>th</sup> June 2015 <[complex.com/music/2015/06/mafia-culture-influence-on-rap-music/](http://complex.com/music/2015/06/mafia-culture-influence-on-rap-music/)> [accessed 11 October 2019].

Drucker, Jesse, 'Jay-Z's Kingdom Come Turns 15', *Albumism*, 20<sup>th</sup> November 2021 <[albumism.com/features/jay-z-kingdom-come-turns-15-anniversary-retrospective](http://albumism.com/features/jay-z-kingdom-come-turns-15-anniversary-retrospective)> [accessed 18 December 2021]

Dubois, W.E.B., *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Random House, Inc., 2003), p. 4  
Dyson, Michael Eric, 'One Love, Two Brothers, Three Verses', in *Born to Use Mics: Reading Nas's 'Illmatic'*, ed. by Michael Eric Dyson & Sohail Dualatzai (New York: BasicCivitas, 2010), pp. 129-151

Edwards, Paul, 'Rhyme Schemes', in *How to Rap: The Art and Science of the Hip-Hop MC* (Chicago, IL: Chicago Review Press, Incorporated, 2009), p. 97

Electronica, Jay, and JAY-Z, 'A.P.I.D.T.A', *Genius* <[genius.com/Jay-electronica-apidta-lyrics](http://genius.com/Jay-electronica-apidta-lyrics)> [accessed 17 April 2022].

Eliot, T. S., 'The Hollow Men', *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, ed. by Margaret Ferguson, Mary Jo Salter, and Jon Stallworthy (London: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2005), p. 1356

———, 'The Waste Land', *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, ed. by Margaret Ferguson, Mary Jo Salter, and Jon Stallworthy (London: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2005), p. 1344

———, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', *The Sacred Wood* (London: Faber and Faber, 1997), pp. 39-50

Ellison, Ralph, *Invisible Man* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984)

———, *Invisible Man* (Random House Audio, 2010)

Fiasco, Lupe, 'Dumb It Down', *Genius* <[genius.com/Lupe-fiasco-dumb-it-down-lyrics](http://genius.com/Lupe-fiasco-dumb-it-down-lyrics)> [accessed 27 December 2021]

Findlay, Mitch, 'Kendrick Lamar's 'M.A.A.D City' Birthed an Unreliable Narrator', *HotNewHipHop*, 4<sup>th</sup> November 2019 <[hotnewhiphop.com/kendrick-lamars-maad-city-birthed-an-unreliable-narrator-news.93872.html](http://hotnewhiphop.com/kendrick-lamars-maad-city-birthed-an-unreliable-narrator-news.93872.html)> [accessed 27 February 2020]

Floyd, Jr., Samuel A., *The Power of Black Music: Interpreting its History from Africa to the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995)

Fogarty, Mary, 'Each One Teach One: B-Boying and Aging', in *Aging and Youth Cultures: Music, Style and Identity*, ed. by Andy Bennet and Paul Hodkinson (London: Berg, 2012), pp. 66-79

Foster, Graham, 'Anthony Burgess and the Censorship of 'Ulysses'' *The International Anthony Burgess Foundation*, 12<sup>th</sup> September 2018 <[anthonyburgess.org/banned-books/anthony-burgess-censorship-ulysses/](http://anthonyburgess.org/banned-books/anthony-burgess-censorship-ulysses/)> [accessed 22 January 2022]

Frankl, Victor E., *Man's Search for Meaning* (New York: Pocket Books, 1985)



Frost, Robert, 'Acquainted with the Night', *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, ed. by Margaret Ferguson, Mary Jo Salter, and Jon Stallworthy, 5<sup>th</sup> edition (London: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2005), p. 1237

Gasteier, Matthew, *33/3: Illmatic* (New York: Continuum, 2009)

Gates Jr., Henry Louis, *The Signifyin(g) Monkey: A Theory of African American Literary Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014)

George, A.R., *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition, and Cuneiform Texts. Volume One* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

Ghansah, Rachel Kaadzi, 'When the Lights Shut Off: Kendrick Lamar and the Decline of the Black Blues Narrative', *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 31<sup>st</sup> January 2013  
<[lareviewofbooks.org/article/when-the-lights-shut-off-kendrick-lamar-and-the-decline-of-the-black-blues-narrative/](http://lareviewofbooks.org/article/when-the-lights-shut-off-kendrick-lamar-and-the-decline-of-the-black-blues-narrative/)> [accessed 27 February 2020]

Gilroy, Paul, '“Jewels Brought for Bondage”: Black Music and the Politics of Authenticity', in *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Verso: London, 1999), pp. 72-111

Glaude, Jr., Eddie S., 'Represent: Queensbridge, and the Art of Living', in *Born to Use Mics: Reading Nas's 'Illmatic'*, ed. by Michael Eric Dyson and Sohail Daulatzai (New York: BasicCivitas, 2010), pp. 179-195

Golding, William, *Lord of the Flies* (London: Faber & Faber, 2012)

Greene, Graham, *The End of the Affair* (London: Vintage Books, 2001)

Green, Leila, 'The Secret Writing Tips I Learned From Kendrick Lamar', *Electric Lit*, 19<sup>th</sup> April 2018 <[electricliterature.com/the-secret-writing-tips-i-learned-from-kendrick-lamar/](http://electricliterature.com/the-secret-writing-tips-i-learned-from-kendrick-lamar/)> [accessed 27 February 2020]

Guerra, Elijah, '“Sot's Skull Subsiding, Sweet Nothingness Betide Me”: Suttree and Sartrean Bad Faith', *MDPI*, 5<sup>th</sup> June 2017 <[mdpi.com/2076-0787/6/2/38/htm](http://mdpi.com/2076-0787/6/2/38/htm)> [accessed 9 October 2021]

Guillory, Margarita Simon, 'Can I be *both*?': 'Blackness and the Negotiation of Binary Categories in Kendrick Lamar's *Section.80*', in *Kendrick Lamar and the Making of Black Meaning*, ed. by Christopher M. Driscoll, Monica R. Miller, and Anthony B. Pinn (New York: Routledge, 2020), p. 26

Gutterson, David, *Snow Falling on Cedars* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009)

Hale, Andreas, 'How Kendrick Lamar's *good kid, m.A.A.d city* is Hip-Hop's *Pulp Fiction*', *Okayplayer*, 21<sup>st</sup> October 2017 <[okayplayer.com/music/good-kid-maad-city-retrospective-andreas-hale-kendrick-lamar-tde.html](http://okayplayer.com/music/good-kid-maad-city-retrospective-andreas-hale-kendrick-lamar-tde.html)> [accessed 11 February 2020]

Haley, Alex, *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* (New York: Random House, 1991)

Hambly, Matt, 'Michael Collins: Apollo 11 Pilot and 'Loneliest Man Ever' Dies Age 90', *New Scientist*, 29<sup>th</sup> April 2021 <[newscientist.com/article/2276248-michael-collins-apollo-11-pilot-and-loneliest-man-ever-dies-aged-90/](https://www.newscientist.com/article/2276248-michael-collins-apollo-11-pilot-and-loneliest-man-ever-dies-aged-90/)> [accessed 13<sup>th</sup> August 2021]

Hamsun, Knut, *Hunger: Warbler Classics Annotated Edition*, trans. by George Egerton (New York: Warbler Press, 2021)

Hardy, Thomas, 'A Foggy Night and Morning: Conclusion', *Far From the Madding Crowd* (1874) <[online-literature.com/hardy/madding/58/](https://online-literature.com/hardy/madding/58/)> [accessed 1 January 2021]

Harrison, Anthony Kwame, "'Cheaper than a CD, Plus We Really Mean It': Bay Area Underground Hip Hop Tapes as Subcultural Artefacts', *Popular Music*, 25 (2006), 283-301

Harris, Thomas, *Red Dragon* (London: Corgi Books, 1992)

———, *Red Dragon*, nar. by Alan Sklar (Random House Audiobooks, 2006)

Hart, Rachel, 'Man Down: The Evolution of Masculinity and Mental Health Narratives in Rap Music', *Reinvention: An International Journal of Undergraduate Research*, 12, (2019) <<https://reinventionjournal.org/index.php/reinvention/article/view/430/388>> [accessed 30 May 2023]

Hemingway, Ernest, *A Moveable Feast* (London: Arrow Books, 2004)

———, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (London: Arrow Books, 2004)

———, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, nar. by Campbell Scott (Simon and Schuster Audio, 2006)

Henry, Casey Michael, 'Et Tu, Too?: Kendrick Lamar's 'To Pimp a Butterfly' and the Revival of Black Postmodernism', *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 26<sup>th</sup> July 2015 <[lareviewofbooks.org/article/et-tu-too-kendrick-lamars-tpab-and-the-revival-of-black-postmodernism/](https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/et-tu-too-kendrick-lamars-tpab-and-the-revival-of-black-postmodernism/)> [accessed 12 November 2018]

Heywood, John, "'The Fourthe Chapter': A Dialogue conteinyng the number in effect of all the Prouerbes in the Englishe tongue", *Early English Books Online* <[quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A03168.0001.001/1:4.4?rgn=div2;view=fulltext](https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A03168.0001.001/1:4.4?rgn=div2;view=fulltext)> [accessed 22 December 2021]

Hill, Marc Lamont, 'Critical Pedagogy Comes at Halftime: Nas as Black Intellectual', in *Born to Use Mics: Reading Nas's 'Illmatic'*, ed. by Michael Eric Dyson & Sohail Dualatzai (New York: BasicCivitas, 2010), pp. 97-117

Hills, Darrius D., 'Loving [You] is Complicated: Black Self-love and Affirmation in the Rap Music of Kendrick Lamar', in *Kendrick Lamar and the Making of Black Meaning*, ed. by Christopher M. Driscoll, Monica R. Miller, and Anthony B. Pinn (New York: Routledge, 2020), pp. 187-189

Hillyard, Kim, 'Kendrick Lamar on New Single 'King Kunta': 'I Studied James Brown'', *NME*, 5<sup>th</sup> June 2015 <[nme.com/news/music/kendrick-lamar-57-1210694](https://www.nme.com/news/music/kendrick-lamar-57-1210694)> [accessed 5 February 2020]

Hodge, Daniel White, 'Hol' Up: Post-civil Rights Black Theology Within Kendrick Lamar's 'Section.80' Album', in *Kendrick Lamar and the Making of Black Meaning*, ed. by Christopher M. Driscoll, Monica R. Miller, and Anthony B. Pinn (New York: Routledge, 2020), pp. 42-43.

Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. by E. V. Rieu (London: Penguin Books, 2003)

Hugo, Victor, *Les Misérables* (London: Penguin Classics, 2015)

Hunt, John, 'Nighttown', *The Joyce Project*, 2014  
<[m.joyceproject.com/notes/150005nighttown.html](http://m.joyceproject.com/notes/150005nighttown.html)> [accessed 24 January 2022]

Hurston, Zora Neale, 'Characteristics of Negro Expression', in *Within the Circle: An Anthology of African American Literary Criticism from the Harlem Renaissance to the Present*, ed. by Angelyn Mitchell (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), pp. 79-97

Ito, Junji, *Uzumaki* (San Francisco, CA: Viz Media, 2001)

J., Miranda, 'Here are Hip-Hop Albums with Children on the Cover', *XXL*, 13<sup>th</sup> January 2015  
<[xxlmag.com/10-of-the-most-popular-albums-with-children-on-the-cover/](http://xxlmag.com/10-of-the-most-popular-albums-with-children-on-the-cover/)> [accessed 7 September 2022]

JAY-Z, 'Early This Morning', *Genius* <[genius.com/Jay-z-early-this-morning-lyrics](http://genius.com/Jay-z-early-this-morning-lyrics)> [accessed 10 October 2021]

Jeffries, Michael P., 'Introduction', *Thug Life: Race, Gender, and the Meaning of Hip-Hop* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), pp. 6-7

J.I.D., 'Lauder', *The Never Story* <[genius.com/Jid-lauder-lyrics](http://genius.com/Jid-lauder-lyrics)> [accessed 22 September 2020]

Joyce, James, *Ulysses*, nar. by Donald Donnelly (Maryland: Recorded Books, 1995)

———, *Ulysses: The 1922 Text* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008)

Kafka, Franz, *The Metamorphosis*, trans. By Susan Bernofsky, ed. by Mark M. Anderson (London: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2015 [1915])

Katz, Mark, 'Music in 1s and 0s: The Art and Politics of Digital Sampling', in *Capturing Sound: How Technology has Changed Music* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2010), pp. 146-177

Kemba, 'Daemons' *Genius* <[genius.com/Xxxtentacion-and-kemba-daemons-lyrics](http://genius.com/Xxxtentacion-and-kemba-daemons-lyrics)> [accessed 22 September 2020].

Kennedy, Gerrick, 'Nas: I'm Trying Not to Feel Bad About Being Happy', *i-D/Vice*, 14<sup>th</sup> December 2021 <[i-d.vice.com/en\\_uk/article/dypp3y/nas-interview](http://i-d.vice.com/en_uk/article/dypp3y/nas-interview)> [accessed 20 December 2021]

———, *The Bounded Text* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1981)

——, ‘Word, Dialogue, and Novel’, *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. by Toril Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 34-59

Krims, Adam, ‘A Genre System for Rap Music’, in *Rap Music and the Poetics of Identity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 46-93

——, ‘Music Analysis and Rap Music’, in *Rap Music and the Poetics of Identity* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2001), pp. 17-46

——, ‘The Musical Poetics of a ‘Revolutionary’ Identity’, in *Rap Music and the Poetics of Identity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 93-123

——, ‘The Second Overstanding’ in *The Gospel of Hip Hop: First Instrument, Presented by KRS ONE for the Temple of Hip Hop* (New York: powerHouse (pH) Books, 2009), pp. 102-143.

Lacasse, Serge, ‘Intertextuality and Hypertextuality in Recorded Popular Music’, in *The Musical Work: Reality or Invention?* ed. by Michael Talbot (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), pp. 35-59

Lair, Jess, *I Ain’t Got Much Baby—But I’m All I’ve Got* (New York: Random House Publishing Group, 1985).

Lala, ‘5 Things We Learned from Earl Sweatshirt’s Talk with His Mother at MOCA in L.A’, *Billboard*, 12<sup>th</sup> August 2019  
<[billboard.com/music/rb-hip-hop/5-things-we-learned-from-earl-sweatshirts-talk-with-his-mother-at-8545708/](https://www.billboard.com/music/rb-hip-hop/5-things-we-learned-from-earl-sweatshirts-talk-with-his-mother-at-8545708/)> [accessed 5 April 2022]

Lamar, Kendrick, ‘Writer at War: Kendrick Lamar’s XXL Cover Story’, *XXL*, 6<sup>th</sup> January 2015 <[xxlmag.com/writer-war-kendrick-lamar-own-words/](https://www.xxlmag.com/writer-war-kendrick-lamar-own-words/)> [accessed 12 November 2018]

——, ‘m.A.Ad city’, *Genius* <[genius.com/Kendrick-lamar-maad-city-lyrics](https://www.genius.com/Kendrick-lamar-maad-city-lyrics)> [accessed 22 September 2020]

——, ‘Mortal Man’, *Genius*, <[genius.com/Kendrick-lamar-mortal-man-lyrics](https://www.genius.com/Kendrick-lamar-mortal-man-lyrics)> [accessed 23 March 2020]

——, ‘Sing About Me, I’m Dying of Thirst’, *Genius* <[genius.com/Kendrick-lamar-sing-about-me-im-dying-of-thirst-lyrics](https://www.genius.com/Kendrick-lamar-sing-about-me-im-dying-of-thirst-lyrics)> [accessed 17 February 2020]

Languages, Cultures, and Societies, School of, ‘Purgatorio: Dante’s Ideas of Purgatory’, *University of Leeds* <[ahc.leeds.ac.uk/discover-dante/doc/purgatorio/page/2](https://ahc.leeds.ac.uk/discover-dante/doc/purgatorio/page/2)> [accessed 9 October 2021]

LeBeau, Ariel, ‘Here’s what went Down at Earl Sweatshirt’s Forum at MOCA’, 2020, *Highsnobiety* <[highsnobiety.com/p/earl-sweatshirt-moca-discussion-recap/](https://highsnobiety.com/p/earl-sweatshirt-moca-discussion-recap/)> [accessed 1 April 2022]

- Lee, Stan, and Kirby, Jack, *The Incredible Hulk* (New York: Marvel Comics, 1963)
- Leight, Elias, 'Ka: How New York MC Makes Understated Rap Minimalism', *Rolling Stone*, 31 August 2016 <[rollingstone.com/music/music-news/ka-how-new-york-mc-makes-understated-rap-minimalism-249331/](https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/ka-how-new-york-mc-makes-understated-rap-minimalism-249331/)> [accessed 29 March 2022]
- Leonard, Elmore, *The Hunted*, nar. by Mark Hammer (Maryland: Recorded Books, 1999)
- Lewis, H. R., 'An Examination of Kanye West's Higher Education Trilogy', in *The Cultural Impact of Kanye West*, ed. Julius Bailey (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp 65-77.
- Loux, Ann Kimble, '“Am I Father? If I Were?”: A Trinitarian Analysis of the Growth of Stephen Dedalus in ‘Ulysses’', *James Joyce Quarterly*, 22.3 (1985), 281-296
- Lugosi, Bela, 'The Tell-Tale Heart as Told by Bela Lugosi', *YouTube*, 31<sup>st</sup> October 2011 <[youtube.com/watch?v=x-jl0WyOkaA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x-jl0WyOkaA)> [accessed 11 August 2021]
- Maffesoli, Michel, 'Tribalism', in *The Time of the Tribes: The Decline of Individualism in Mass Society* (London: Sage Publications, 1996), pp. 72-96
- Mansbach, Adam, and Coval, Kevin, 'All the Words Past the Margins', in *Born to Use Mics: Reading Nas's 'Illmatic'*, ed. by Michael Eric Dyson & Sohail Dualatzai (New York: BasicCivitas, 2010), pp. 245-255
- Manser, Martin H., *Proverbs: Meanings and Origins of over 1,700 Sayings* (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 2007)
- Manser, Martin H., *The Wordsworth Dictionary of Idioms* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 2006)
- Marvell, Andrew, 'A Dialogue between the Soul and the Body', *Andrew Marvell: Selected Poetry and Prose* (London: Methuen & Co, Ltd., 1986), p. 17
- Mattesich, John J., 'This Flow Ain't Free: Generative Elements in Kendrick Lamar's 'To Pimp a Butterfly'', *Music Theory Online*, 25 (2019) <[mtosmt.org/issues/mto.19.25.1/mto.19.25.1.mattessich.html](https://mtosmt.org/issues/mto.19.25.1/mto.19.25.1.mattessich.html)> [accessed 9 September 2021].
- McCann, Mac, and Stout, Sean, 'Kendrick Lamar Talks Next Album, Eminem's Influence, and More in New Interview With Rick Rubin', *Complex*, 20<sup>th</sup> October 2016 <[complex.com/music/2016/10/kendrick-lamar-talks-next-album-eminem-influence-more-interview-rick-rubin](https://www.complex.com/music/2016/10/kendrick-lamar-talks-next-album-eminem-influence-more-interview-rick-rubin)> [accessed 14 April 2022]
- McCarthy, Cormac, *Suttree* (London: Picador, 2010)
- McDonald, Michael, 'I keep forgettin', *If That's what It Takes* (Warner Bros. Records, 1982)
- McRae, Donald, 'Marvin Sordell: 'I Felt Dead Inside. Writing is a way to get Emotions Out'' *The Guardian*, 10<sup>th</sup> September 2018 <[theguardian.com/football/2018/sep/10/marvin-sordell-interview-dead-inside-emotions-depression](https://www.theguardian.com/football/2018/sep/10/marvin-sordell-interview-dead-inside-emotions-depression)> [accessed 10 October 2021]

- Melville, Herman, *Moby Dick* (London: Wordsworth Editions, 2002)
- , *Moby Dick*, nar. by Frank Muller (Maryland: Recorded Books Incorporated, 2008)
- Mieder, Wolfgang, ‘Beating Swords into Plowshares: Proverbial Wisdom about War and Peace’, *Behold the Proverbs of a People: Proverbial Wisdom in Culture, Literature, and Politics* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2014), pp. 74-104
- , *Dictionary of Authentic American Proverbs* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2021)
- MIKE, and Navy Blue, ‘Like My Mama’, *Genius* <[genius.com/Mike-like-my-mama-lyrics](https://genius.com/Mike-like-my-mama-lyrics)> [accessed 16 April 2022].
- , *War in My Pen* <[genius.com/albums/Mike/War-in-my-pen](https://genius.com/albums/Mike/War-in-my-pen)> [accessed 28 April 2022]
- Miller, Monica R., ‘Can Dead Homies Speak?: The Spirit and Flesh of Black Meaning’, in *Kendrick Lamar and the Making of Black Meaning*, ed. by Christopher M. Driscoll, Monica R. Miller, and Anthony B. Pinn (New York: Routledge, 2020), p. 159
- Miller, Monica R., ‘Conclusion: KENosis: the meaning of Kendrick Lamar’, in *Kendrick Lamar and the Making of Black Meaning*, ed. by Christopher M. Driscoll, Monica R. Miller, and Anthony B. Pinn (New York: Routledge, 2020), pp. 334-335.
- Mirsky, Mark Jay, *The Drama in Shakespeare’s Sonnets: ‘A Satire to Decay’* (Lanham, MD: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2011)
- Moore, Alan, *The Killing Joke* (New York: DC Comics, 1988)
- Moore, Marcus J., *The Butterfly Effect: How Kendrick Lamar Ignited the Soul of Black America* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2020)
- Murai, Hiro, ‘Teddy Perkins’, *Atlanta* (20<sup>th</sup> Television, 2018)
- Murray, Albert, ‘The Dynamics of Heroic Action’, in *The Hero and the Blues* (New York: Random House, 1995), pp. 36-65
- Nas, ‘Book of Rhymes’, *Genius* <[genius.com/Nas-book-of-rhymes-lyrics](https://genius.com/Nas-book-of-rhymes-lyrics)> [accessed 8 May 2020]
- , ‘Bridging the Gap’, *Genius* <[genius.com/Nas-bridging-the-gap-lyrics](https://genius.com/Nas-bridging-the-gap-lyrics)> [accessed 11 October 2019]
- , ‘My Country (Ft. Millennium Thug)’, *Genius* <[genius.com/Nas-my-country-lyrics](https://genius.com/Nas-my-country-lyrics)> [accessed 3 October 2019]
- , ‘N.Y. State of Mind’, *Genius* <[genius.com/Nas-ny-state-of-mind-lyrics](https://genius.com/Nas-ny-state-of-mind-lyrics)> [accessed 6 March 2020]



——, ‘No Idea’s Original’, *Genius* <[genius.com/Nas-no-ideas-original-lyrics](https://genius.com/Nas-no-ideas-original-lyrics)> [accessed 2 October 2019]

——, ‘One Love’, *Genius* <[genius.com/Nas-one-love-live-lyrics](https://genius.com/Nas-one-love-live-lyrics)> [accessed 4 October 2019]

——, ‘Purple’, *Genius* <[genius.com/Nas-purple-lyrics](https://genius.com/Nas-purple-lyrics)> [accessed 3 October 2019]

——, ‘We Will Survive’, *Genius* <[genius.com/Nas-we-will-survive-lyrics](https://genius.com/Nas-we-will-survive-lyrics)> [accessed 3 October 2019]

——, ‘You’re Da Man’, *Genius*, <[genius.com/Nas-youre-da-man-lyrics](https://genius.com/Nas-youre-da-man-lyrics)> [accessed 1 October 2019]

Naves, Teresa, ‘The Pen is the Tongue of the Soul; as are the Thoughts Engendered There, so Will Be ...’, *Youtube*, 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2018 <[youtube.com/watch?v=O8YsX-3YYIQ](https://youtube.com/watch?v=O8YsX-3YYIQ)> [accessed 17 June 2022]

Neal, Mark Anthony, ‘‘Memory Lane’’: On Jazz, Hip Hop, and Fathers’, in *Born to Use Mics: Reading Nas’s ‘Illmatic’*, ed. by Michael Eric Dyson & Sohail Dualatzai (New York: BasicCivitas, 2010), pp. 117-129

Network, Shakespeare, ‘Richard Burton, Hamlet, Shakespeare, HD Restored Edition’, *YouTube*, 8th July 2020 <[youtube.com/watch?v=r0cB4gzFO1M](https://youtube.com/watch?v=r0cB4gzFO1M)> [accessed 1 August 2022]

Nielsen, Jack. J., *The Afrofuturism Cyclical of Past, Present, and Future in Kendrick Lamar’s ‘To Pimp a Butterfly’* (self-published, 2017)

Nietzsche, Friedrich, ‘Maxims and Barbs’, *Twilight of the Idols, or How to Philosophize with a Hammer*, trans. Duncan Large (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 5-11

Ohriner, Mitchell, ‘Critical Analysis: Situating Black Thought of The Roots within the Genre as a Whole’, in *Flow: The Rhythmic Voice in Rap Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 124-135

Ohriner, Mitchell S., ‘Flow and Free Rhythm in Talib Kweli’, in *Flow: The Rhythmic Voice in Rap Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 182-205

——, ‘Flow in Rap Music: Sources of Confusion and a Strategy for Clarity’, *Flow: The Rhythmic Voice in Rap Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 3-31

——, ‘Lyric, Rhythm, and Non-alignment in the in the Second Verse of Kendrick Lamar’s ‘Momma’’, *Music Theory Online*, 1<sup>st</sup> May 2018 <[mtosmt.org/issues/mto.19.25.1/mto.19.25.1.ohriner.html](https://mtosmt.org/issues/mto.19.25.1/mto.19.25.1.ohriner.html)> [accessed 14 April 2022]

Ortiz, Edwin, ‘30 Rappers Who Have Used The Notorious B.I.G.’s ‘Juicy’ Lyrics’, *Complex*, 10<sup>th</sup> September 2014 <[complex.com/music/2014/09/the-notorious-big-juicy-lyrics-as-used-by-30-rappers](https://complex.com/music/2014/09/the-notorious-big-juicy-lyrics-as-used-by-30-rappers)> [accessed 3 September 2022]

Orwell, George, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* [1949] (London: Penguin, 2003)

Oswald, John, 'Plunderphonics, or Audio Piracy as a Compositional Prerogative' *Wired Society Electro-Acoustic Conference*, 1985 <[plunderphonics.com/xhtml/xplunder.html](http://plunderphonics.com/xhtml/xplunder.html)> [accessed 27 December 2021]

Owen, Wilfred, 'Dulce et Decorum est', *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, ed. by Margaret Ferguson, Mary Jo Salter, and Jon Stallworthy, 5<sup>th</sup> edition (London: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2005), p. 1387

Perry, Imani, 'It Ain't Hard to Tell: A Story of Lyrical Transcendence', in *Born to Use Mics: Reading Nas's 'Illmatic'*, ed. by Michael Eric Dyson & Sohail Dualatzai (New York: BasicCivitas, 2010), pp. 195-213

Phillips, Travis 'Yoh', *The Book of Yoh*, ed. by Amir Ali Said (New York: Superchamp Books, 2017)

Pierre, Alphonse, 'Navy Blue Needs to get a Few things Off his Chest', *Pitchfork*, 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021 <[pitchfork.com/features/rising/navy-blue-sage-elsesser-interview/](http://pitchfork.com/features/rising/navy-blue-sage-elsesser-interview/)> [accessed 20 December 2021]

Pinn, Anthony B., and Driscoll, Christopher M., 'Introduction: K.Dotting the American Cultural Landscape with Black Meaning', in *Kendrick Lamar and the Making of Black Meaning*, ed. by Christopher M. Driscoll, Monica R. Miller, and Anthony B. Pinn (New York: Routledge, 2020), p. 1

Pinn, Anthony B., 'Real N\*\*\*a Conditions': Kendrick Lamar, Grotesque Realism, and the Open Body', in *Kendrick Lamar and the Making of Black Meaning*, ed. by Christopher M. Driscoll, Monica R. Miller, and Anthony B. Pinn (New York: Routledge, 2020), p. 231

Poe, Edgar Allen, 'The Raven', *Edgar Allan Poe: The Complete Stories* (New York: Random House, 1992 [1845]), pp. 716-719

———, 'The Tell-Tale Heart', *Edgar Allan Poe: The Complete Stories* (New York: Random House, Inc. 1992), p. 657

Potter, Russel A., *Spectacular Vernaculars: Hip-Hop and the Politics of Postmodernism* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995)

Professor, Large, 'One Plus One (Ft. Nas)', *Genius* <[genius.com/Large-professor-one-plus-one-lyrics](http://genius.com/Large-professor-one-plus-one-lyrics)> [accessed 1 October 2019]

Rakim, Eric B &, 'As the Rhyme Goes On', *Genius*, <[genius.com/Eric-b-and-rakim-as-the-rhyme-goes-on-lyrics](http://genius.com/Eric-b-and-rakim-as-the-rhyme-goes-on-lyrics)> [accessed 1 October, 2019]

———, 'Follow the Leader', *Genius* <[genius.com/Eric-b-and-rakim-follow-the-leader-lyrics](http://genius.com/Eric-b-and-rakim-follow-the-leader-lyrics)> [accessed 1 October 2019]

Ramsey Jr., Guthrie P., 'Time is Illmatic': A Song for my Father, a Letter to my Son', in *Born to Use Mics: Reading Nas's 'Illmatic'*, ed. by Michael Eric Dyson & Sohail Dualatzai (New York: BasicCivitas, 2010), pp. 61-75



- Rat Pack, The, 'Me and My Shadow', *Genius* <[genius.com/The-rat-pack-me-and-my-shadow-lyrics](https://genius.com/The-rat-pack-me-and-my-shadow-lyrics)> [accessed 10 October 2021]
- Rock, Jay, 'King's Dead (ft. Kendrick Lamar, Future, and James Blake)' *Genius* <[genius.com/Jay-rock-kendrick-lamar-future-and-james-blake-kings-dead-lyrics](https://genius.com/Jay-rock-kendrick-lamar-future-and-james-blake-kings-dead-lyrics)> [accessed 18 November 2020]
- Rollefson, Griffith, 'Hip Hop as Martial Art: A Political Economy of Violence in Rap Music' in *The Oxford Handbook of Hip Hop Music*, ed. by Justin D. Burton and Jason Lee Oakes, *Oxford Handbooks Online*, September 2018 <<https://europeanhiphop.org.files.wordpress.com/2018/12/HipHopAsMartialArt-OxfordHandbook-Rollefson.pdf>> [accessed 8 November 2021], p. 7.
- Rose, Tricia, "'All Aboard the Night Train": Flow, Layering, and Rupture in Postindustrial New York', in *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), pp. 21-62
- , 'Introduction', in *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), pp. xi-xvi
- Ross, Dax-Devlon, *The Nightmare & the Dream: Nas, Jay Z, and the History of Conflict in African-American Culture* (Jersey City, NJ: Outside the Box Publishing, 2008)
- Ross, Erik, 'The 50 Best Selling Rap Albums of All Time', *Complex*, 18<sup>th</sup> May 2013 <[complex.com/music/2013/05/the-50-best-selling-rap-albums/](https://complex.com/music/2013/05/the-50-best-selling-rap-albums/)> [accessed 2 November 2021]
- Rubin, Bruce Joel, *Jacob's Ladder* (New York: Applause Theatre Book Publishers, 1990)
- , 'PROM / KING', *Genius* <[genius.com/Saba-prom-king-lyrics](https://genius.com/Saba-prom-king-lyrics)> [accessed 18 November 2020]
- Salinger, J.D., *The Catcher in the Rye* (London: Penguin Books, 2010)
- Schloss, Joseph G., *Making Beats: The Art of Sample-Based Hip-Hop* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2014)
- Shakespeare, William, *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, ed. by Philip Edwards (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003)
- Shusterman, Richard, 'The Fine Art of Rap', *New Literary History*, 22 (1991), 613-632
- Sollers, Philippe, and Hallier, Jean-Edern, *Tel Quel* (Paris: Édition du Seuil, 1960 [-1982])
- Stokes, Martin, *Ethnicity, Identity, and Music: The Musical Construction of Place*, ed. by Martin Stokes (Oxford: Berg, 1994)
- Spears, Richard A., *McGraw-Hill's Dictionary of American Idioms: The Most Practical Reference to the Idiomatic and Verbal Expressions of Contemporary American English* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2005)

Sweatshirt, Earl, 'Shattered Dreams' *Genius* <[genius.com/15949949](https://genius.com/15949949)> [accessed 16 April 2022]

Tate, Gregory, 'An Elegy for *Illmatic*', in *Born to Use Mics: Reading Nas's 'Illmatic'*, ed. by Michael Eric Dyson & Sohail Daulatzai (New York: BasicCivitas, 2010), pp. 237-241

The Barber, Bobbito, 'Streets Disciple: Representing Queensbridge, New York, and the Future of Hip-Hop, Nas is in his Own State of Mind: An Interview', in *Born to Use Mics: Reading Nas's 'Illmatic'*, ed. by Michael Eric Dyson & Sohail Dualatzai (New York: BasicCivitas, 2010), pp. 225-237

The Notorious B.I.G., 'Come On (Ft. Sadat X)', *Genius*, <[genius.com/The-notorious-big-come-on-lyrics](https://genius.com/The-notorious-big-come-on-lyrics)> [accessed 1 October 2019]

*The Tibetan Book of the Dead* (London: Penguin Books, 2006)

Tolkien, J. R. R., *The Hobbit* (London: HarperCollins, 1995)

———, *The Lord of the Rings* (London: HarperCollins, 2002)

Vat, D.G., van der, 'Paternity in 'Ulysses'', *English Studies*, 19 (1937), 145-158

ViniVici, 'Nas Talks About Kendrick Lamar and the Challenges of Following up a Classic Album', *Complex*, 24<sup>th</sup> July 2014 <[complex.com/music/2014/07/nas-kendrick-lamar-interview](https://complex.com/music/2014/07/nas-kendrick-lamar-interview)> [accessed 20 March 2020]

Walker, Alice, *The Color Purple* (Salford: Phoenix Publishing House, 2011)

Waller, Margaret, 'Intertextuality and Literary Interpretation', in *Julia Kristeva: Interviews*, ed. by Ross Michael Guberman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), pp. 188-204.

Wang, Oliver, 'Rapping and Repping Asian: Race, Authenticity and the Asian American MC', *Alien Encounters: Popular Culture in Asian America*, ed. by Mimi Thi Nguyen and Thuy Linh Nguyen Tu (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2007), pp. 35-68

West, Cornel, 'Nihilism in Black America', in *Race Matters* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), pp. 17-31

Wick, Michele, 'Woolf, Creativity and Madness: From Freud to FRMI: Virginia Woolf's Suicide Note', *Smith.Edu* <[smith.edu/woolf/suicidewithtranscript.php](https://smith.edu/woolf/suicidewithtranscript.php)> [accessed 8 October 2021]

Williams, Justin A., 'Borrowing and Lineage in Eminem/2 Pac's *Loyal to the Game* and 50 Cent's *Get Rich or Die Trying*', in *Rhyming and Stealin': Musical Borrowing in Hip-Hop* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2013), pp. 140-167

———, 'Intertextuality and Lineage in the Game's 'We Ain't' and Kendrick Lamar's 'm.A.A.d City'', in *The Pop Palimpsest: Intertextuality in Recorded Popular Music*, ed. by Lori Burns and Serge Lacasse (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2018), pp. 291-313

——, 'Introduction', *Rhymin' and Stealin': Musical Borrowing in Hip Hop* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2013), pp. 1-20

——, 'Musical Borrowing in Hip-Hop Music: Theoretical Frameworks and Case Studies' (doctoral thesis, University of Nottingham, 2009)

——, 'Post-mortem Sampling in Hip-Hop Recordings and the Rap Lament', in *Death and the Rock Star*, ed. by Catherine Strong and Barbara Lebrun (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2015), pp. 189-201

——, *Rhymin' and Stealin': Musical Borrowing in Hip-Hop* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2013)

——, 'The Martyr Industry: Tupac Shakur, the Notorious B.I.G., and Postmortem Sampling', in *Rhymin' and Stealin': Musical Borrowing in Hip-Hop* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2013), pp. 103-140

Williams, William Carlos, 'Landscape with the Fall of Icarus', *Collected Poems 1950-1962* (New York: New Directions Books, 1962), p. 4

Wright, Richard, *Black Boy* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 1998)

——, 'The Foundation', *Genius* <[genius.com/Xzibit-the-foundation-lyrics](https://genius.com/Xzibit-the-foundation-lyrics)> [accessed 23 October 2019]

## Discography

B, Eric, & Rakim, 'I Know You Got Soul', *Paid in Full* (4<sup>th</sup> & B'way, 1987)

Baldwin, James, 'The Artist's Struggle for Integrity (*The Struggle*, 1963)', *YouTube*, 24<sup>th</sup> July 2015 <[youtube.com/watch?v=dU0g5fAA2QY](https://youtube.com/watch?v=dU0g5fAA2QY)> [accessed 13 June 2022]

Bastard, Pudgee Tha Phat, 'Think Big ft. Lord Tariq & Notorious B.I.G.', Perspective Records, Mecca Don Records, 2007)

Beyonce, 'Heartbeat', *Life is But a Dream* (HBO, 2013)

B.I.G., The Notorious, 'Ten Crack Commandments', *Life After Death* (Bad Boy, Arista, 1997)

Blow, Kurtis, '8 Million Stories', *Ego Trip* (Mercury, Polydor, 1984)

Navy Blue/Elsesser, Sage, *Song of Sage: Post Panic!* (Freedom Sounds, 2020)

Bowie, David, 'Wild is the Wind', *Changes Two: Bowie* (RCA Records, 1981)

Boys, Beastie, 'The New Style', *Licensed to Ill* (Def Jam, Columbia, 1986)

Boys, Geto, 'Balls and My Word', *Making Trouble* (Rap-A-Lot, 1987)

Brown, James, 'Funky Drummer (Part 1)' (King, 1970)

Bush, Kate, 'Wuthering Heights', *The Kick Inside* (EMI, 1977)

Cappo, *Dramatic Change of Fortune* (YNR, 2016)

——, *Genghis* (Son Records, 2010)

——, 'Live Intro', *Genghis* (Son Records, 2010)

——, Remulak, 'Slum Village', *Village Live is Five* (Village Live, 2020)

——, *The Codex EP* (Son Records, 1999)

——, Zircon, Sam, *Un:Programmable Raw* (Boot Records, 2014)

Collins, Phil, 'In the Air Tonight', *Face Value* (Virgin, Atlantic, 1980)

Coolio, 'Gangsta's Paradise', *Gangsta's Paradise* (Tommy Boy, Warner Bros., 1995)

Crew, Cash, 'High Power Rap', *High Powered Rappers* (Ol' Skool Flava, 1996)

Dan, Steely, 'Third World Man', *Gaucha* (MCA, 1980)

Deep, Mobb, 'Drop a Gem on 'Em', *Hell on Earth* (Loud, RCA, 1996)

——, 'Eye for an Eye (Your Beef is Mine) Ft. Nas and Raekwon', *The Infamous* (Loud, RCA, 1995)

——, 'It's Mine Ft. Nas', *Murda Muzik* (Loud, 1999)

——, 'Survival of the Fittest', *Tha Infamous* (Loud, RCA, BMG, 1995)

DMX, 'Blackout ft. JAY-Z & The Lox', *Flesh of My Flesh, Blood of My Blood* (Def Jam, Ruff Ryders, 1998)

Dogg, Snoop, 'Ain't No Fun (If the Homies Can't Have None) ft. Nate Dogg, Kurupt & Warren G', *Doggystyle* (Death Row, Interscope, 1993)

——, 'Down 4 My N's', *No Limit Top Dogg* (No Limit, Priority, 1999)

——, 'Lodi Dodi', *Doggystyle* (Death Row, Interscope, 1993)

——, 'Murder Was the Case', *Murder was the Case* (Death Row, Interscope, 1993)

——, 'Serial Killa', *Doggystyle* (Death Row, Interscope, 1993)

——, *The Game is to be Sold, Not to be Told* (No Limit, Priority, 1998)

Dre, Dr, ‘Nothin’ but a ‘G’ Thang ft. Snoop Doggy Dogg’, *The Chronic* (Death Row, Interscope, 1992)

Electronica, Jay, and JAY-Z, ‘A.P.I.D.T.A’, *A Written Testimony* (Roc Nation, 2020)

Eminem, ‘Stan’, *The Marshall Mathers LP* (Aftermath, Interscope, 2000)

Endeavours, The, ‘Shattered Dreams’ (Stop Records Inc., 1970)

Eurythmics, ‘Julia’, *1984: For the Love of Big Brother* (Virgin, 1984)

Fingaz, Sticky, *Black Trash: The Autobiography of Kirk Jones* (Universal Records, 2001)

Flash, Grandmaster, and the Furious Five, ‘The Message’, *The Message* (Sugar Hill Records, 1982)

Flex, Funkmaster, & Kap, Big, ‘Biggie/Tupac Live Freestyle’, *The Tunnel* (Def Jam, 1999)

Floyd, Pink, ‘One of the Few’, *The Final Cut* (Harvest, 1983)

Fong, Kevin, ‘Ep.07 Michael Collins: ‘The Third Man’’, *13 Minutes to the Moon*, [bbc.co.uk/programmes/w3csz4dq](http://bbc.co.uk/programmes/w3csz4dq) [accessed 10 October 2021]

Fair, Yvonne, ‘Let Your Hair Down’, *The Bitch is Black* (Motown, 1975)

Fresh, Doug E., and Ricky D, MC, ‘La Di Da Di’, *The Show* (Reality, Fantasy Records, 1985)

G. Warren, ‘Regulate (ft. Nate Dogg)’, *Regulate...G Funk Era* (Violator, RAL, 1994)

Gravediggaz, ‘Mommy, What’s a Gravedigga?’, *6 Feet Deep* (Gee Street, Island, PolyGram, 1994)

JAY-Z, ‘D’Evils’, *Reasonable Doubt* (Roc-A-Fella, Priority, 1996)

——, ‘Girls, Girls, Girls’, *The Blueprint* (Roc-A-Fella, Def Jam, 2001)

——, ‘Song Cry’, *The Blueprint* (Roc-A-Fella, Def Jam, 2001)

——, *The Blueprint* (Roc-A-Fella, Def Jam, 2001)

——, *The Blueprint 2: The Gift & the Curse* (Roc-A-Fella, Island, Def Jam, 2002)

——, *The Blueprint 3* (Roc Nation, Asylum, Atlantic, 2009)

——, ‘Where I’m From’, *In My Lifetime Vol. One* (Roc-A-Fella, Def Jam, 1997)

J.I.D., ‘Lauder’, *The Never Story* (Dreamville, Interscope, Spillage Village, 2017).

Killah, Ghostface, ‘Malcolm’, *Supreme Clientele* (Epic, Sony, Razor Sharp, 2000)

——, RZA, ‘I Can’t Go to Sleep (ft. Isaac Hayes)’, *The W* (Loud Records, 2000)

Kim, Lil, ‘In the Air Tonight ft. Phil Collins’, *Urban Renewal* (WEA, 2003)

KRS-One, ‘The MC’, *I Got Next* (Jive, BMG Records, 1997)

Lamar, Kendrick, ‘Alright’, *To Pimp a Butterfly* (Top Dawg Entertainment, Aftermath, Interscope, 2015)

——, ‘Chapter 6’, *Section.80* (Top Dawg Entertainment, 2011)

——, ‘For Free?’, *To Pimp a Butterfly* (TDE, Aftermath, Interscope, 2015)

——, *good kid, m.A.A.d city* (Top Dawg Entertainment, Aftermath, Interscope, 2012)

——, ‘Keisha’s Song (Her Pain)’, *Section.80* (Top Dawg Entertainment, 2011)

——, ‘m.A.A.d city’, *good kid, m.A.A.d city* (Top Dawg Entertainment, Aftermath, Interscope, 2012)

——, ‘Mortal Man’, *To Pimp a Butterfly* (Top Dawg Entertainment, Aftermath, Interscope, 2015)

——, ‘Sing About Me, I’m Dying of Thirst’, *good kid, m.A.A.d city* (Top Dawg, Aftermath, Interscope, 2012)

Man, Method, Redman, ‘How High’, *The Show: The Soundtrack* (Def Jam, 1995)

MIKE, ‘Get Rich Quick Scheme’, *Weight of the World* (10K, 2020)

——, and Navy Blue, ‘Like My Mama’, *War in my Pen* (10K, 2018)

——, *War in my Pen* (10K, 2018)

——, ‘More Gifts’, *Weight of the World* (10K, 2020)

Nas, ‘Album Intro’, *I Am...* (Columbia, 1999)

——, ‘Book of Rhymes’, *God’s Son* (Ill Will, Columbia, 2002)

——, ‘Bridging the Gap’, *Street’s Disciple* (Columbia, 2004)

——, ‘Fetus’, *The Lost Tapes* (Ill Will, Columbia, 2002)

——, ‘Halftime’, *Zebrahead (Soundtrack from the Original Motion Picture)* (Ruff House, Columbia, Sony, 1992)

—, ‘If I Ruled the World (Imagine That)’, *It Was Written* (Columbia, 1996)  
 —, ‘It Ain’t Hard to Tell’, *Illmatic* (Columbia, 1994)  
 —, ‘It Never Ends’, *The Lost Tapes 2* (Mass Appeal, Def Jam, 2019)  
 —, ‘Let There Be Light’, *Hip Hop is Dead* (Def Jam, 2006)  
 —, ‘Life’s a Bitch’, *Illmatic* (Ill Will, Columbia, 1994)  
 —, ‘Live N\*\*\*a Rap’ (Ft. Mobb Deep), *It Was Written* (Columbia, 1996)  
 —, ‘Mastermind’, *God’s Son* (Ill Will, Columbia, 2002)  
 —, ‘My Country (Ft. Millennium Thug)’, *Stillmatic* (Ill Will, Columbia, 2001)  
 —, ‘No Idea’s Original’, *The Lost Tapes* (Ill Will, Columbia, 2002)  
 —, ‘N.Y. State of Mind’, *Illmatic* (Ill Will, Columbia, 1994)  
 —, ‘No Idea’s Original’, *The Lost Tapes* (Ill Will, Columbia, 2002)  
 —, ‘One Love’, *Illmatic* (Ill Will, Columbia, 1994)  
 —, ‘One Time for Your Mind’, *Illmatic* (Columbia, 1994)  
 —, ‘Project Windows’, *Nastradamus* (Sony, 1999)  
 —, ‘Purple’, *The Lost Tapes* (Ill Will, Columbia, 2002)  
 —, ‘The Genesis’, *Illmatic* (Columbia, 1994)  
 —, ‘The Message’, *It Was Written* (Columbia, 1996)  
 —, ‘The World is Yours’, *Illmatic* (Columbia, 1994)  
 —, ‘Thugz Mansion (N.Y.) (Ft. Tupac and J. Phoenix)’, *God’s Son* (Ill Will, Columbia, 2002)  
 —, ‘We Will Survive’, *I Am...* (Columbia, 1999)  
 —, ‘You’re Da Man’, *Stillmatic* (Ill Will, Columbia, 2001).  
 Nijinsky, Vaslav, *The Rites of Spring* (Ballets Russes, 1913)  
 Nirvana, ‘Lithium’, *Nevermind* (DGC, 1991)  
 Palaces, Shabazz, ‘Are you... Can you... Were you? (Felt)’, *Black Up* (Sub Pop, 2011)

Poets, The Last, 'When the Revolution Comes', *The Last Poets* (Douglas, 1970)

Prince, 'When Doves Cry', *Purple Rain* (Warner Bros., 1984)

Prodigy (Mobb Deep), 'Drop a Gem on 'em', *Hell on Earth* (Loud, 1996)

Production's, Boogie Down, *Edutainment* (Jive, RCA Records, 1990)

Professor, Large, 'One Plus One (Ft Nas)', *The LP* (Geffen, MCA Records, Paul Sea Productions)

Prophets, The Watts, 'Part-ES', *Black Voices: On the Street in Watts* (Ala Records, 1969)

Quest, A Tribe Called, 'Hot Sex', *Midnight Marauders* (Jive, 1993)

Raekwon, 'Guillotine (Swords) Ft. Ghostface Killah, Inspectah Deck & GZA', *Only Built 4 Cuban Linx...* (Loud, RCA, 1995)

Rakim, Eric B &, 'As the Rhyme Goes On', *Paid in Full* (4<sup>th</sup> & B'way, Island, 1987).

——, 'Follow the Leader', *Follow the Leader* (Uni, MCA, 1988)

Rhymes, Busta, 'Everything Remains Raw', *The Coming* (Elektra, 1996)

Saadik, Raphael, *Instant Vintage* (Universal, 2002)

Saba, *Care for Me* (Saba Pivot LLC, 2018)

——, 'PROM / KING', *Care for Me* (Saba Pivot LLC, 2018)

Sabbath, Black, 'The Wizard', *Black Sabbath* (Vertigo, 1970)

Scott-Heron, Gil, 'The Revolution Will Not Be Televised', *Pieces of a Man* (Flying Dutchman, 1971)

Seigel, Beanie, 'Feel it in the Air', *The B. Coming* (Dame Dash Music Group, Def Jam, 2005)

Shakur, Tupac, 'Letter 2 My Unborn', *Until the End of Time* (Amaru, Death Row, Interscope, 2001)

Source, Main, 'Live at the Barbeque (Ft. Nas, Joe Fatal, and Akinyele)', *Breaking Atoms* (Wild Pitch, EMI, 1991)

Spirit, 'The Great Canyon', *Spirit* (CBS Inc., Epic, 1973)

——, 'Topanga Windows', *Spirit* (CBS Inc., Epic, 1973)

Sweatshirt, Earl, 'Grief', *I Don't Like Shit, I Don't Go Outside* (Tan Cressida, Columbia, 2015)



——, ‘Shattered Dreams’, *Some Rap Songs* (Tan Cressida, Columbia, 2018)

The Cecil Holmes Soulful Sounds, ‘I’m Gonna Love You Just a Little More Baby’, *Music for Soulful Lovers* (Buddah, 1973)

West, Kanye, *College Dropout* (Def Jam, Roc-A-Fella, 2004)

——, *Graduation* (Def Jam, Roc-A-Fella, 2007)

——, *Late Registration* (Def Jam, Roc-A-Fella, 2005)

White, Barry, ‘I’m Gonna Love You Just a Little More Baby’, *I’ve Got So Much To Give* (20<sup>th</sup> Century, 1973)

X, Sadat, ‘The Interview’, *Wild Cowboys* (Loud, RCA, 1996)

XXXTENTACION, ‘Daemons’, *Bad Vibes Forever* (Bad Vibes Forever, Empire, 2019)

Xzibit, ‘Eyes May Shine Remix (Ft. Mobb Deep)’ (Loud, 1996)

——, ‘The Foundation’, *At the Speed of Life* (Loud, RCA, 1996)

## Filmography

Akiyama, Katsuhito, *Guyver: The Bioboosted Armor* (Manga Entertainment, 1989)

*Arrival*, dir. by Denis Villeneuve (Paramount Pictures, 2016).

*At Eternity’s Gate*, dir. by Julian Schnabel (Curzon Artificial Eye, 2019).

*Bad Lieutenant*, dir. by Abel Ferrara (Aries Films, LIVE Entertainment, 1992)

*Beauty and the Beast*, dir. by Ron Koslow (Republic Pictures, 1987)

Berry, Matt, ‘Relaxation Podcast’, *YouTube*, 27<sup>th</sup> November 2009  
<[youtube.com/watch?v=bNc0ErvirBE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bNc0ErvirBE)> [accessed 22 January 2022]

*Blade Runner*, dir. by Ridley Scott (Warner Bros., 1982)

*Blade Runner 2049*, dir. by Dennis Villeneuve (Alcon Entertainment, Columbia Pictures, 2017)

*Blue Valentine*, dir. by Derek Cianfrance (The Weinstein Company, 2010)

Bragg, Melvin, 'James Joyce's 'Ulysses' (1987)', *YouTube*, 26<sup>th</sup> November 2018 <[youtube.com/watch?v=Ob3NWUtCCJI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ob3NWUtCCJI)> [accessed 11 March 2022]

C.K., Louis, 'Sex', *Word: Live at Carnegie Hall* (Pig Newton, 2012)

*Cool Hand Luke*, dir. by Stuart Rosenberg (Warner Bros. Pictures, 1967)

*Dead Poets Society*, dir. by Peter Weir (Buena Vista Pictures, 1989)

*Deep Throat*, dir. by Gerard Damiano (Bryanston Distributing Company, 1972)

*Double Impact*, dir. by Sheldon Lettich (Columbia Pictures, 1991)

*Enter the Void*, dir. by Gaspar Noé (Fidélité Films, Wild Bunch, 2009)

*Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, dir. by Michael Gondry (Focus Features, 2004)

*Eyes Wide Shut*, dir. by Stanley Kubrick (Warner Bros., 1999)

Ferguson, Alex, 'Fergie Rages at Press over United Lies', *YouTube*, 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2010 <[youtube.com/watch?v=0XPInFCIM3Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0XPInFCIM3Q)> [accessed 17 June 2022]

*First Man*, dir. by Damian Chazelle (Universal Pictures, 2018)

*First Reformed*, dir. by Paul Schrader (A24, 2017)

Freeman, Leonard, *Hawaii 5-0* (CBS Productions, 1968-1980)

*Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai*, dir. by Jim Jarmusch (Artisan Entertainment, 1999)

GQ, 'Kendrick Lamar Meets Rick Rubin and They Have an Epic Conversation', *YouTube*, 20<sup>th</sup> October 2016 <[youtube.com/watch?v=4IPD5PtqMiE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4IPD5PtqMiE)> [accessed 5<sup>th</sup> May 2020]

*Inner Space*, dir. by Joe Dante (Warner Bros. 1987)

*Ip Man*, dir. by Wilson Yip (Mandarin Films, 2008)

*Jacob's Ladder*, dir. by Adrian Lyne (Tri-Star Pictures, 1990)

Jennison, Gemma, Mackie, Anthony, *Man Down Programme* <<https://www.mandownprogramme.com>> [accessed 30 May 2023]

Kristeva, Julia, 'On Julia Kristeva's Couch', *YouTube*, 19<sup>th</sup> October 2013 <[youtube.com/watch?v=b-AzikJn\\_uc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b-AzikJn_uc)> [accessed 16 June 2022]

*Lost in Translation*, dir. by Sofia Coppola (Focus Features, 2003)

*Manhunter*, dir. by Michael Mann (De Laurentiis Entertainment Group, 1986)

*Moon*, dir. by Duncan Jones (Sony Pictures Classics, 2009)

Morris, Chris, and Iannucci, Armando, *The Day Today* (BBC 2, 1994)

*National Lampoon's Vacation*, dir. by Harold Ramis (Warner Bros., 1983)

*Nil by Mouth*, dir. by Gary Oldman (20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, 1997)

*Nineteen Eighty-Four*, dir. by Michael Radford (Virgin Films, 1984)

Nishio, Daisuke, *Dragon Ball Z* (Cartoon Network, 1996)

*Play Misty for Me*, dir. by Clint Eastwood (Universal Pictures, 1971)

*Robocop*, dir. by Paul Verhoeven (Orion Pictures, 1987)

*Rocky*, dir. by John G. Avildsen (United Artists, 1976).

*Roma*, dir. by Alfonso Cuarón (Pimienta Films, Esperanto Filmoj, 2018)

Saba, 'Saba on Kendrick Lamar's "The Heart Pt. 2"', *Pitchfork*, 11<sup>th</sup> July 2018  
<[pitchfork.com/tv/verses/saba-on-kendrick-lamars-the-heart-pt-2/](https://pitchfork.com/tv/verses/saba-on-kendrick-lamars-the-heart-pt-2/)> [accessed 22 September 2020]

*Scared Silent: Ending and Exposing Child Abuse*, dir. by Melissa Jo Peltier (King World, CBS Television, 1992)

*Scarface*, dir. by Brian De Palma (Universal Pictures, 1983)

*Shaolin Vs. Lama*, dir. by Tso Nam Lee (The Ping Film Company, 1983)

Shönberg, Claude-Michel, *Les Misérables* (1980)

*Street Fighter II*, prod. by Yoshiki Okamoto (Capcom, 1991)

*Svält*, dir. by Henning Carlsen (Athena Film, 1966)

*The Bonfire of the Vanities*, dir. by Brian De Palma (Warner Bros., 1990)

'The Castle', *Fargo*, dir. by Adam Arkin (FX, 2015)

*The Color Purple*, dir. by Steven Spielberg (Warner Bros., 1985)

*The Deer Hunter*, dir. by Michael Cimino (EMI International, 1979)

*The French Dispatch*, dir. by Wes Anderson (Searchlight Pictures, 2021)

*The Grey*, dir. by Jo Carnahan (Entertainment Film Distributors, 2012)

*The Odyssey*, dir. by Andrei Konchalovsky (Hallmark, American Zoetrope, 1997)

*The Prestige*, dir. by Christopher Nolan (Buena Vista Pictures, Warner Bros. Pictures, 2006)

*The Wizard of Oz*, dir. by Victor Fleming (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1939)

Thought, Black, 'Black Thought Freestyles on Flex: Freestyle 087', *Funk Flex Hot 97 Radio Show*, 14<sup>th</sup> December 2018 <[youtube.com/watch?v=prmQgSpV3fA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=prmQgSpV3fA)> [accessed 18 December 2021]

*Transformers the Movie*, dir. by Nelson Shin (De Laurentiis Entertainment Group, 1986)

*Two Billion Hearts: 1994 FIFA World Cup USA The Official Film*, dir. by Murilo Salles (Sport Target Media Productions, 1995)

*Ulysses*, dir. by Joseph Strick (British Lion Films, 1967)

*Under the Skin*, dir. by Jonathan Glazer (StudioCanal, 2013)

*Uzumaki*, dir. by Higuchinsky (Omega Micott, 2000)

*Widows*, dir. by Steve McQueen (20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, 2018)

Wladyka, Josef Kubota, 'Read the Air', *Tokyo Vice* (Warner Bros., 2022)

Wolfe, Tom, *The Bonfire of the Vanities* (Farrar Straus Giroux, 1987)

*Word is Bond*, dir. by Sascha Jenkins (Mass Appeal, 2018)