University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava

Billy Woods: Virtuoso of Intertextuality

Intertextuality in Rap Lyrics — A Case Study of Billy Woods's Lyrics

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Photo 1 as well as the cover photo: Armand Hammer's (Billy Woods and Elucid) live concert in Vienna, September 2019. Personal archives.

Photo 2: Billy Woods (left) and Jožef Kolarič (right) in Vienna, September 2019. Personal Archives.

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Chapter 1 1

Hip-Hop is Intertextuality........ 1

Chapter 2 4

Development of hip-hop from the 70s to early 80s 4

Chapter 3 10

Develpoment of hip-hop from the 80s to today........ 10

Chapter 4 17

The Form of Rap 17

Chapter 5 21

Intertextuality in hip-hop from the 1980s to the 90s 21

Chapter 6 28

Intertextuality in hip-hop from the 1990s to today........ 28

Chapter 7 36

Billy Woods........ 36

Chapter 8 38

Life in the inner-city........ 38

Chapter 9 43

Analysis of the song “Tinseltown” 43

Chapter 10 49

Africa........ 49

Chapter 11 52

Analysis of the song “Cuito Cuanavale” 52

Chapter 12 60

Violence in rap 60

Chapter 13 63

Analysis of the song “Superpreator” 63

Chapter 14 71

Billy Woods from USA to Zimbabwe and back to USA 71

Chapter 15 75

Chapter 16 78

Billy Woods: the rapper........ 78

Chapter 17 83

Chapter 18 89

Billy Woods: the writer 89

Chapter 19 92

Chapter 20 96
    Parting Words 96
Bibliography 97
    Music: 97
    Film: 99
    Literature: 100

Chapter 1

Hip-Hop is Intertextuality

If[1,2] you have listened to any hip-hop album, you will have met with intertextuality. If you are a fan of hip-hop, you know intertextuality inside out even if you never heard of the word. Simply put, intertextuality means "a text within a text." But here, the text does not mean exclusively a written text: it can be music, customs, writing, etc.[3] Hip-hop is intertextual by its nature because it is a kind of music created with the help of other recordings. The technique for creating hip-hop music is called "sampling." Sampling means taking pieces of music, films and TV-shows and mashing them together to create a new song.[4]

Making music by using other recorded material has been present in hip-hop since it began. This was when DJ Kool Herc started throwing his block parties in the 1970s. He invented a technique that involves record spinning and called it "the merry-go-round." He took two of the same records and played the "break" part simultaneously. The "break" is the part at the beginning of the song when only the drum can be heard. People would respond to the break part the most. Therefore, DJ Kool Herc would play the break on the first record and afterwards the same break from the second record.[5] From this, we can see how hip-hop built its sound by using existing records to create something new – and this is basically intertextuality in practice.

The practice of sampling would only increase and develop further as time would pass. If we look at the late 80s, two examples of hip-hop groups mastering the sampling technique are Public Enemy and The Beastie Boys. What was different was how they approached sampling. Public Enemy started sampling records to create the so-called "wall of noise." With this "wall of noise," they tried to make non-musical sounds. They wanted Public Enemy to

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[1] The book is based on the author's MA thesis in English Studies at the University of Maribor titled *Intertextuality of Literature in Billy Woods's Lyrics*, for which the author received the Miklošič Award in 2017 for the best thesis of that year. The thesis was altered and expanded for the purpose of this book, but the basic tenets have remained the same.

[2] Parts of the chapter appear in the article by the author, "Billy Woods's Literary Intertexts." published in the *Text Matters: A Journal of Literature, Theory and Culture*. Text Matters No. 10, 2020.

[3] Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 94.

[4] Joseph G. Schloss, *Making Beats: The Art of Sample-Based Hip-Hop* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2004), 34.

[5] Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of a Hip-Hop Generation* (New York: St. Martin Press, 2005), 79-80.

stand out and be distinct from smoother music sampling such as Rakim's records.[6, 7] On the other hand, The Beastie Boys were similar to Public Enemy when it comes to sampling, but their aim was not to make noisy records. Instead, they tried to sample from as many sources as they could to create a musical collage. They did this on their second record *Paul's Boutique*.[8,9]What was interesting about the Beastie Boys at that time was that even their lyrics were referring to pop culture, books and music. They used what is known as "allusion." An allusion is nothing more than a reference to an actual historical person, event, work (of literature), etc.[10] Their lyrics were full of references to pop culture and books.[11] They were one of the earliest groups that packed their lyrics full of allusions. This would later be adopted by other rappers.

Yet, intertextuality was not only used in the form of sampling music or lyrics referring to other books. Anybody who has heard about rap has also heard of the Wu-Tang Clan. They are known for integrating the practice of sampling films into their records.[12] If we take a look at the group's albums released between 1993 and 2000, we see that all the records sample music and dialog from different films. The music is sampled for several reasons. In films the music is there to create a mood and invoke emotions. The viewer needs to connect emotionally with the film. Furthermore, the sounds in film are arranged systematically so that instruments mostly follow each other, and they do not overlap and leave space. This makes them ideal for sampling as the producer can isolate the sounds easily to extract them and make a beat. Those beats are suitable for rapping as they are made of samples that have space and the producer does not have to create space artificially. As a result, the rapper has enough space to rap freely over the beat as he pleases. On the other hand, the dialog is sampled because it matches the concept of the song or because it has some personal connection to the artists themselves.[13] Looking at three Wu-Tang Clan solo albums that sample films, GZA's

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[6] Dan Charnas, *The Big Payback: The History of the Business of Hip-Hop* (New York: New American Libaray, 2010), 181.

[7] Hank Shocklee, "The Noise And How To Bring It: Hank Shocklee Interviewed," Interview by John Tatlock, *The Quietus*, Feburary 4, 2015, http://thequietus.com/articles/17101-hank-shocklee-interview. (Accessed on October 30 2018).

[8] Beastie Boys, *Paul's Boutique* (Los Angeles: Capitol Records, 1989).

[9] "Beastie Boys." *All Music Guide to Hip Hop: The Defintive Guide to Rap & Hip-Hop*, eds. Vladimir Bogdanov, Chris Woodstra, Sephen Thomas Erlewine and John Bush. (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2003), 27-30.

[10] "Allusion." in M.H Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms/Seventh Edition* (Boston: Heine & Heine, 1999).

[11] Adam Bradley and Andrew DuBois, *The Anthology of Rap* (New Hampshire: Yale University Press, 2010), 130.

[12] Bradley and DuBois, *The Anthology of Rap*, 532-533.

[13] Zilla Rocca (rapper, music producer and writer) in discussion with the Author in October 2018.

Liquid Swords,[14] Raekwon's *Only Built 4 Cuban Linx…*[15] and Ghostface Killah's *Ironman*,[16] we can observe a pattern: all those records heavily rely on intertextuality to set the tone. *Liquid Swords* does so by sampling the dialog of the samurai film *Shogoun Assassin*.[17] The sampling of the films on the records *Only Built 4 Cuban Linx…* and *Ironman* are more connected to the topics on the records. The leading topic on the records is drug trafficking and showing off the drug-dealer lifestyle. *Only Build 4 Cuban Linx…* samples the film *Scarface*,[18] a film about a drug dealer and his rise to power. Finally, *Ironman* samples the film *The Education of Sonny Carson*,[19] a film about a young African-American man descending into gang life.

With Billy Woods's rapping, the use of intertextuality reaches its peak. He uses intertextuality in such manner that the listener can still enjoy the songs even if he/she is not aware of what they refer to. Billy Woods includes in his songs everything from historical figures to pop culture. What is interesting about his writing is that he combines the everyday realities of African-Americans with references to sports. At first glance, his writing may seem very difficult, but this is not the case. It even contains a healthy dose of dark humor. Anybody can listen to his music even if they do not know all the references because there are so many that it is likely that the listener will take something from the songs in any case. But before we look at Billy Woods's rapping, we have to take a look at hip-hop and how it developed.

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[14] GZA, *Liquid Swords*, (Santa Monica: Geffen Records, 1995).
[15] Raekwon, *Only Built 4 Cuban Linx…* (New York City: Loud Records, 1995).
[16] Ghostface Killah, *Ironman* (Razor Sharp Records, Epic Street, 1996).
[17] Robert Houston dir., *Shogun Assassin* (New World Pictures, 2006 (1980)).
[18] Brinan DePalma dir., *Scarface* (Ljubljana: Con Film, 2007 (1983)).
[19] Michael Campus dir., *The Education of Sonny Carson* (VCI Home Video, 2000 (1974)).

Chapter 2

Development of hip-hop from the 70s to early 80s

What we know today as hip-hop was developing in the United States between the late 60s and the early 70s. It is commonly known that hip-hop consists of DJing, graffiti writing, b-boying, and rapping. The South Bronx is the place considered to be the birthplace of hip-hop. During the late 60s and early 70s, New York was one of the most economically deprived areas of the United States and the Bronx borough was the epicenter of poverty. A big factor in the underdevelopment and poverty in the Bronx was the Bronx Expressway. This is a highway connecting New Jersey with Manhattan which was considered as one of the most difficult construction projects of that time. The problem with the Expressway was that it displaced around 60,000 residents. Those among them that were well-off moved to the suburbs, but the not-so-well-off, predominately African-Americans, Puerto Ricans and African-Caribbeans, were forced out into the so-called "towers-in-a-park," meaning large low-income public housing consisting of between 1200 and 1700 units. Job prospects in the Bronx were minuscule. The borough had lost 600,000 assembly jobs and 40% of the assembly sector was gone. Officially, the unemployment rate of young people was 60%, but the unofficial estimate was 80%. The poverty was used by people known as "slumlords" who rented cheap apartments they did not maintain. When the apartments became uninhabitable, they burned them to collect insurance money because that was be worth more than the apartments themselves.[20] Poverty contributed to the development of a strong gang presence in the Bronx, which added to the crime and violence in the already impoverished neighborhood. These were the conditions in which the youth movement, later to be called hip-hop, was formed.

It has to be noted that the individual elements (graffiti, DJing, breakdancing and rapping) of what would later become the hip-hop culture were already developing before DJ Kool Herc had thrown his first party. Graffiti writing existed for hundreds of years before hip-hop. Even considering this, the type of graffiti now associated with hip-hop was brought to New York by a writer named Top Cat from Philadelphia. where this type of graffiti had been present since 1967 and was created by writers such as Cornbread.[21] Beside graffiti, the first element of Hip-Hop that started its growth and had a direct influence on its development was DJing. In the early 70s, there were two types of DJs. First, there was the so-called “talking DJ.” In the 50s and the 60s, there was a boom of Black radio stations playing rhythm and blues and later rock and roll. The DJs playing the records on those stations were known to give commentary. This could include jokes, crude remarks or jabs to engage the listenership. The DJ was known to talk over the records. As those radio stations became more popular, they were overtaken by bigger companies that gradually played less and less black music. Those stations were white-owned and catered to a white audience. One of the last radio stations to be black-owned and to play black music was WBLS, which was informally called “Black Liberation Station.” The station employed a DJ named Frankie Crooker who would later become known as DJ Hollywood. At the same time, a boy named Anthony Holloway, who also went by the name of DJ Hollywood, would play in clubs and imitate Frankie Crooker. Frankie “DJ Hollywood” Crooker became famous for playing the mixes he discovered at the Charles Gallery club in Harlem. The technique used in Charles Gallery was called “bleeding beats.” It required two turntables that each had a volume knob, a mixer and headphones so that two different records could be listened to. In order to blend the beats, the DJ had to select two records with approximately the same tempo. The DJ then adjusted the speed of the records by playing one and at the same time listening through the headphones to the other. When a part with matching speed was found, he would release the record by rubbing it, and adjust the volume, and the beats on both records would match. But what made DJ Hollywood different was that he talked to the crowd. As time went on, he talked more and more over the beat and created his own routines. With his growing popularity, he became a regular DJ at a disco called A Bunch of Grapes, in which his call and response routines became the central performance. The problem with DJ Hollywood was that he was not accessible to a young audience. He played in clubs that one had to be eighteen years old to get in, while also having the finances and wearing the appropriate attire.[22]

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[20] Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop*, 10-18.

[21] Mickey Hess, introduction to *Hip-Hop in America: A Regional Guide*, (Santa Barbara: Greenwood Press, XI, 2010), X-XII.

Therefore it was not uncommon for young people to organize their own parties, and so we come to the second type of DJ, who organized parties in rec rooms and on the blocks. One such party was The Back to School Party organized by DJ Kool Herc, who is considered one of the forefathers of hip-hop. He was born Clive Campbell in Kingston, Jamaica, from where he immigrated with his family to New York in 1967. Before throwing “The Back to School Party,” he had been DJing for several years. The reason for throwing the party was that he wanted to help his sister Cindy purchase new clothes for school. A party on August 11 in 1973 on 1520 Sedgwick Avenue is now thought to be the catalyzing moment for the development of hip-hop. However, it was not solely this party that established his position as a pioneer of hip-hop. There was also his invention of the technique he called the "Merry-Go-Round" and the fact that he had a large sound system that allowed him to build an audience. This technique came into being when he observed that the dancers at his parties would dance more vigorously to part of the record called the "break." The break is the part of the record before any other instrument, but the drum can be heard. By playing the same two records one after another, DJ Kool Herc could extend the duration of the break. Later he assembled his own crew. Like DJ Hollywood before him, DJ Kool Herc also stimulated the crowd by himself. But in the mid-70s, this practice would shift to the rapper, and DJ Kool Herc used rappers such as Coke La Rock to stimulate the crowd because the DJ was too busy operating the turntables.[23,24] The people attending these parties were called b-boys. As the parties gradually grew out of rec rooms and moved into parks, the dance moves became more and more acrobatic and individual. At first, the dancers were predominately African-American, but later they were joined by Puerto Ricans. The b-boys were usually young children: if you were in your late teens, you were too old to be a b-boy. Breakdancing (b-boying and breakdancing mean the same type of dance: first it used to be called b-boying, but it was later rebranded as breakdancing for commercial purposes)[25] was by its nature a competitive activity. It was also considered a valid method of resolving conflicts between groups, which would therefore not end violently.[26,27]

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[22] Charnas, *The Big Payback*, 3-26.

The record-blending techniques and the merry-go-round were mastered and perfected by Grandmaster Flash and his protégé Grand Wizard Theodore. Grandmaster Flash was dissatisfied with DJ Kool Herc: he believed that Kool Herc's timing was off when playing his records. Grandmaster Flash improved the technique by adding an on-and-off switch to his turntables for better timing control. Grand Wizard Theodore later invented scratching. The invention was accidental as he was practicing his routines at home and had the volume of the music set too high. His mother berated him and told him to shut the music down. Theodore

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[23] Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop*, 67; 72-73; 79-82.

[24] Jim Fricke and Charlie Ahearn, *Yes Yes Y'all: Oral History Of Hip-Hop's First Decade* (Cambridge: De Capo Press, 2002), 77-81.

[25] Emmanuel Adelekun, "What's the difference between calling a breaker a B-Boy, B-Girl or breakdancer? Find out the history and meaning behind the different streetdance terms." *Redbull*, August 6, 2018, https://www.redbull.com/us-en/b-boy-and-b-girl-vs-breakdancer. (Accessed on January 22, 2019).

[26] Fricke and Ahearn, *Yes Yes Y'all*, 112-119.

[27] Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop*, 114-118.

was stopping the record with his hand as he was listening to her, and as he let the record go, it made a specific sound which he later perfected and called “scratching.”[28]

At the time, this youth movement was loosely connected but was not yet known as hip-hop. This can be attributed to two factors. One is the emergence of Afrika Bambaataa and the other is the New York blackout of 1977. Afrika Bambaataa was a gang leader and warlord of the street gang called Black Spades. He was an important figure in establishing the ideological framework of the hip-hop subculture and in connecting rapping, DJing, b-boying, and graffiti writing under one all-encompassing concept of hip-hop. Still, the transformation from gang leader to one of the central figures in early hip-hop did not happen overnight. He became a gang leader in the late 60s. As such, he was renowned for not being afraid to cross into territories of other gangs and negotiate with them. When in the early 70s the racial antagonism at Stevenson High School reached the boiling point and ended in a violent confrontation at a shopping center, the violence would not stop. It was Bambaataa who eventually concluded a peace treaty, and he started looking for alternatives for the gangs. Eventually, he found one in DJing and established the Bronx River Organization in 1971. The organization was intended to serve as a space providing an alternative to violence for gang members with the block parties it was organizing. However, the parties were not enough and Bambaataa needed a better organization, so he founded the Zulu Nation. There are several reasons for its foundation, starting with the death of Bambaataa’s cousin in a shootout with the police. A month later, a 14-year-old boy was killed by the police for joyriding. This incident was leading to the possibility of an all-out gang retaliation on the police. Bambaataa was the pivotal person in preventing such a scenario. In 1974, he won a trip to Africa and Europe, which broadened his horizons and showed him a plethora of different possibilities for how a person of color could live. In the mid-70s, he officially started the Zulu Nation, named after the Zulu warriors from South Africa. It was also the first organization trying to give hip-hop an official ideological framework. He established that rapping, DJing, b-boying and graffiti writing should be connected under the label “hip-hop.” The organization also had doctrines called the seven lessons, which were based on the mysticism of Elijah Muhammad and Dwight York. They took their interpretation of African history from the Nation of Islam, Z York’s interpretation of the Bible and the right to self-defense adopted from the Black Panthers.[29] Besides the ideology proposed by Bambaataa, one of the most important elements of hip-hop was an emphasis on the participants’ own individuality and originality that made everyone different from everyone else. Copying others was considered extremely negative.[30] In the early stages of hip-hop, the participants were of both genders and women had a strong presence.[31] The change of the gender of the participants towards predominantly male came with the development of rap industry.[32] The problem with early hip-hop music was that the equipment was not accessible to the average hip-hop consumer. It was expensive, and one needed someone to teach him/her how to use it. During the New York blackout of 1977, many people therefore took the opportunity to loot stores selling DJing equipment, taking everything from turntables to mixers to speakers. This resulted in an exponential increase in the number of local DJs and rappers. Afterwards, they operated not only in the Bronx and Manhattan – every neighborhood now had a DJ. This black-out was directly responsible for enabling hip-hop to spread across New York City and its development as a genre.[33]

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[28] Fricke and Ahearn, *Yes Yes Y’all*, 58-63.

[29] Chang, *Can’t Stop Won’t Stop*, 89-107.

As we can see, in the early stages of hip-hop, rappers did not play a prominent role in the movement. Rapping as we know it today developed from DJs encouraging the crowd to dance. As the routines of the DJs became more complex, the role of encouragement was transferred to the rappers and with time, their raps also became more complex. Still, it took several years for the first rap records to reach the market. One of the first rap recordings was "King Tim III (Personality Jock)" by The Fatbacks Band. The first commercially successful recording was "Rapper's Delight." This record was counter-intuitive to everything that hip-hop stood for at the time. It was released on Sugar Hill Records by Silvia Robinson, whose musical career had been declining and who was looking for new ventures. After seeing DJ Hollywood and similar acts, she instantly saw her opportunity. With the help of her son and his friends, she managed to find suitable rappers. One worked in a pizzeria. He auditioned in Robinson's car, and the two others who were hired happened to be passing by and were his friends. The three young men impressed her enough to sign them and name them the Sugarhill Gang. They rapped over an in-house band and did not use a DJ; furthermore, they took and recorded lyrics from other rappers in "Rapper's Delight," most notably from Casanova Fly (later known as Grandmaster Caz). Still, the record was the first one that charted. Although at the time, radio was hostile to rap, "Rapper's Delight" doesn't correspond to the ethos of the hip-hop subculture in the wider sense. It was, still, an important moment in history as it opened the doors for the music that followed. In the following years, many more records were released, such as Afrika Bambaataa and Soul Sonic Force's' "Planet Rock" and Grandmaster

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[30] Ibid., 111-114.

[31] Fricke and Ahearn. *Yes Yes Y'all*, 226-229.

[32] Dart Adams (hip-hop historian, music journalist) in discussion with the Author in May 2018.

[33] Fricke and Ahearn. *Yes Yes Y'all*, 132-133.

Flash and Furious Five's "The Message."[34] This was also the time of the first global tour for hip-hop acts to promote their work. With all this and the film *Wild Style*, hip-hop began to move outside New York.[35]

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[34] Charnas, *The Big Payback*, 29-72.

[35] Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop*, 182-184

Chapter 3

Develpoment of hip-hop from the 80s to today

One of the earliest record labels to focus on putting out rap albums was Def Jam Recordings. The producers of that generation did not come from lower socioeconomic classes. Def Jam was started by Rick Rubin in the 80s, with Russell Simmons, a local promoter and record producer. Russel's younger brother, Joey, wanted to rap with his friend Darryl McDaniels. Both Simmons brothers were from a middle-class family in Queens, and both their parents were employed.[36] Russell's early career was financed by his parents. He wanted to make rap that sounded and looked like the environment in which it was produced. He disliked the flamboyance of the Sugarhill Gang and Afrika Bambaataa. Joey and Darryl McDaniels would later form Run-DMC with Jam Master Jay and release a slew of successful singles before their first full-length album in 1984. Part of their appeal stemmed from dressing like regular people and wearing sneakers. The sound of their music was also a departure from what was usual for rap at that time. They did not use in-house bands, but rather drum machines, samplers, and scratching.[37] Rubin, on the other hand, was a student at New York University. His musical endeavors were generously supported by his parents, and he ran Def Jam Recordings out of his dorm room. At first, Rubin did everything by himself, producing the music that the rappers would rap over, designing the logo of the label, even selling the records. Russell and Rubin came into contact when Russell heard the record "It's Yours" by T La Rock and Jazzy Jay, which Rubin produced, and it was not long before they started working together. They wanted to put out the records by themselves because they thought they would be more successful, and they would be able to keep most of the profit. Soon, they were putting out music by rappers and rap groups such as LL Cool J and Beastie Boys.[38] Def Jam soon became one of the most successful labels in hip-hop.

From the mid-to-late 80s, many technological advancements made it possible for the rap genre to explode. Hip-hop was no longer locally bound and it gained nationwide recognition in the United States of America. In the late 80s, there was also a radicalization of rap. Rap groups became explicitly political, most notably Public Enemy and N.W.A. Both groups presented a side of the African-American experience in United States. Public Enemy's album *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back* was an important record that used new approaches to sampling, but its more important aspect was its lyrical content. Public Enemy aimed to incorporate the ideas of Civil Rights Movement leaders such as Malcolm X into their music to teach generations born after the Movement about the people at its center.

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[36] Nelson George, "Rappin' With Russell: Eddie Murphying the Flak Catchers," in *And It Don't Stop? The Best American Hip-Hop Journalism of 25 Years*, ed. Raquel Cepeda (New York: Faber and Faber, 2004), 42-46.

[37] Charnas, *The Big Payback*, 90-91; 112-117; 135-138.

[38] Ibid., 123-175.

N.W.A. was the opposite of Public Enemy. Their album *Straight Outta Compton* was made under different circumstances, presenting the violence that African-American communities suffered at the hands of the police and gangs. The record was violent and featured anti-police lyrics. N.W.A. were similar to Public Enemy in that they tried to educate, but their approach was completely different. The goal of their song "Fuck tha Police" was to promote greater awareness of police violence. As the 80s continued, rap trickled more and more into the foreground of mainstream American society.[39,40]

This was the period in which hip-hop also gained broader appeal to mainstream audiences, but in the late 80s it was still a niche genre. In the early 90s, however, rappers such as MC Hammer brought hip-hop fully into the mainstream. Nevertheless, the acceptance of MC Hammer by the pop audience was met with resistance. Hip-hop fans at the time did not recognize Hammer's contribution to making hip-hop more popular in the US mainstream. His critics thought his music had no value and was not listened to by hip-hop fans. While MC Hammer was not the only rapper flirting with a pop audience, the community's reaction to his music was still hostile. Similarly, mainstream rap artist Vanilla Ice was shunned even more. Some people thought that he was gentrifying hip-hop and making it more palatable to white audiences. However, the worst fears of the critics turned out to be baseless. In 1992, after he broke away from N.W.A., Dr. Dre released *The Chronic*. The record also featured rapper Snoop Doggy Dogg. With it, Dr. Dre popularized hip-hop even further and brought gangsta rap into the foreground.[41]

Gangsta rap was not the only type of rap developing at the time, despite Los Angeles being a major hub for gangsta rap music with rappers like Ice-T, Ice Cube, and Snoop Dogg. There was also a strong alternative scene represented by the Good Life Café. The Good Life Café was health food store and workshop in Los Angeles where young people could hone their rapping skills. One such group was Freestyle Fellowship, who were important in spreading non-gangsta alternative rap through Los Angeles.[42]

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[39] Ibid., 273.

[40] Chuck D, "Chuck D (Public Enemy)," Interview by *HalftimeOnline*, December 12, 2012, Transcript, http://halftimeonline.net/portfolio/chuck-d/. (Accessed December 5, 2018).

[41] Charnas, *The Big Payback*, 272-273; 277-82; 403.

[42] Bradley and DuBois, *The Anthology of Rap,* 387.

The growing presence and visibility of west-coast gangsta rap had an impact on New York. In the early 90s, hip-hop music became even harder and more aggressive. One of the most well-known groups from this era was Wu-Tang Clan, a group of nine rappers who each had a distinct rapping style.[43] First, they released their album *Enter the 36 Chambers,* which made it possible for each individual member to start a solo career with different labels. This allowed them to release a number of influential rap records between the mid-90s and the late 90s.[44]

Unfortunately, it was not the success of Wu-Tang Clan that stood out most in the 90s. It was the violent confrontation between the East coast and the West coast that led to the deaths of 2Pac Shakur and Biggie Smalls. Until the mid-90s, the hip-hop industry was small and the regional scenes were not quarreling with each other, but this would change during that period. Both 2Pac and Biggie were born in New York, but they came from very different backgrounds. 2Pac was born in prison to Afeni Shakur, a prominent member of the Black Panther Party who was in prison for conspiring to murder a police officer in New York, and for bombing department stores. In the 60s and 70s, she made a living giving lectures. Her life then became progressively more difficult as she became addicted to drugs, and she gradually fell into poverty. Afeni moved with 2Pac from New York to Baltimore in Maryland, but they did not stay there. 2Pac would settle in Los Angeles where he started his rap career, initially as a back-up dancer for the group Digital Underground, which became a starting point for his rap career.[45]

The Notorious B.I.G., better known simply as Biggie, was born in Brooklyn to an immigrant mother from Jamaica. He grew up with a single mother who doted on him. Still, whatever his mother provided was not enough for him. Biggie was attracted to the street life and after a short career as a drug dealer, he shifted his focus to becoming a rapper.[46]

By the mid-90s, 2Pac and Biggie had reached the peak of their popularity. They became involved in the most publicized argument in hip-hop history, and they personified the perpetuation of aggression within hip-hop in the media. Their argument popularized rap even more, but it also killed both of them in the process.[47] At the same time, other regions and cities started to produce groups more visible in the mainstream. One of those was Outkast in Atlanta.[48]

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[43] Ibid, 532.

[44] Alvin Blanco, *The Wu-Tang Clan and RZA: A Trip Through Hip-Hop's 36 Chambers* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2011), 27.

[45] Jeff Weiss and Evan Mcgavery*, 2Pac vs. Biggie: An Illustarted History of Raps Greatest Batlle* (Minneapolis: Voyageur Press, 2013), 4-8.

[46] Ibid., 11-16.

[47] Charnas, *The Big Payback*, 497-501.

In the late 90s, rap broke into the mainstream even further. With the success of Puff Daddy, rap was reached new audiences. Not everybody saw the success of rap as a positive development, however. Between the late 90s and the early 2000s, large corporations began to get heavily involved in the rap industry, but there remained a huge problem of redistribution of available resources to the rappers. Rappers such as Jay-Z, Eminem or 50 Cent, signed by major labels, had a disproportionate amount of media coverage and resources available.[49] On the flip side, to rappers not on a major label, access to those resources was limited. These limitations were partly overcome with the growing accessibility of the internet. This enabled rappers to sell and promote their music without depending on the media. Yet, this was a time in which mainstream and underground rap were more divided than at any other time in rap history.[50,51]

By the late 90s, rap was firmly in the mainstream, but at the same time, a parallel underground scene was developing as a reaction to mainstream rap: until the late 90s, hip-hop was seen as a subculture. As corporations became more involved, underground musicians and audiences felt more and more alienated, and many rappers did not feel that the mainstream properly represented hip-hop culture. This led to the development of a completely separate underground scene which was not fixed to any particular region. In New York, record labels like Rawkus Records put out records such as Company Flow’s *Funcrusher Plus* in 1997 and Black Star’s *Mos Def & Talib Kweli Are Black Star* in 1998.[52] These records launched the careers of El-P (a member of Company Flow) and Mos Def. In 2000 El-P launched his own record label called Def Jux which would become one of the most influential record labels of the early 2000s, putting out records such as *The Cold Vein* by Cannibal Ox and Aesop Rock’s

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[48] Matt Miller, “The Sound of Money: Atlanta, Crossroads of the Dirty South,” in *Hip-Hop in America: A Regional Guide*, ed. Mickey Hess (Santa Barbara: Greenwood Press, 2010), 467-494.

[49] Charnas, *The Big Payback*, 535-633.

[50] Anthony Harrison Kwame, *Hip Hop Underground: The Integrity and Ethics of Racial Identification* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009), 32.

[51] Dart Adams, “Independent As Fuck: 20 Essential Underground Hip Hop Releases From 1997,” *Festival Peak*, November 1, 2017, https://festivalpeak.com/independent-as-fuck-20-essential-underground-hip-hop-releases-from-1997-db1c5206a99e (Accessed December 5, 2018).

[52] ”A Beginner’s Guide to Rawkus Records: A look into the history, key players, and music of Rawkus Records,” *Pigeons and Planes*, September 6, 2013, https://pigeonsandplanes.com/in-depth/2013/09/rawkus-records-history/ (Accessed December 5, 2018).

Labor Days.[53] Similarly, in Los Angeles, the underground scene formed in the aftermath of Freestyle Fellowship and congregated around the Good Life Café.[54]

While this was happening, cities such as Minneapolis developed prominent hip-hop scenes. The independent record label Rhymesayers Entertainment was founded and became one of the most important labels in Minneapolis, shaping the hip-hop scene in the city by giving platforms to artists such as Atmosphere, Brother Ali and Eyedea. Their sound was influential in Minneapolis and became a model of how to run an independent label in the United States. What made them special was that they managed their groups like punk-rock bands. Their contracted artists would tour the United States and promote the label, and they gradually built their own fan base.[55,56]

In the South, independent rappers used a different approach; because they were far away from New York or Los Angeles, they needed to build their own labels and distribution methods. This usually meant that they had to press their CDs themselves and sell them out of their cars. Two labels that used these methods were No Limit and Cash Money Records, both from New Orleans. No Limit was founded by Master P in Los Angeles and moved to New Orleans in the early 90s but did not achieve success until the mid-90s. In New Orleans, Master P focused on selling his music in the local hoods. His aim was to make gangsta rap with local rappers and sell the music to the local population, together with his other ventures such as films and clouts. No Limit's model was adopted by Cash Money Records. They took the regional sound of bounce music and adapted it for hip-hop. Cash Money employed the producer Mannie Fresh, who was responsible for the label's signature sound. In the new millennium, Cash Money became the most recognizable label in rap industry. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for No Limit, which was unable to survive and had to close in the early 2000s.[57]

The development of the internet in the early 2000s changed the music industry. During the late 90s, sales declined as computers became more widespread: it was easy to burn blank

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[53] Jon Tanners, "Definitive Jux: Where Are They Now?," *Pigenos and Planes*, June 22, 2013, https://pigeonsandplanes.com/in-depth/2013/07/definitive-jux-where-are-they-now-2/ (Accessed December 5, 2018).

[54] David Diallo, "From Electro-Rap to G-Funk: A Social History of Rap Music in Los Angeles and Compton, California," in *Hip-Hop in America: A Regional Guide*, ed. Mickey Hess (Santa Barbara: Greenwood Press, 2010), 225-250.

[55] Justin Shell, "From St. Paul to Mineapolis, All the hands Clap for This: Hip-Hop in the Twin Cities," in *Hip-Hop in America: A Regional Guide*, ed. Mickey Hess (Santa Barbara: Greenwood Press, 2010), 363-388.

[56] Dan Rys, "How Rhymesayers Entertainment Survived 20 Years As An Indie Label," *BillBoard*, April 12, 2015, https://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/hip-hop/6785841/rhymesayers- entertainment-survived-20-years-indie-label (Accessed December 5, 2018).

[57] Ben Westhoff, *Dirty South: Outkast, Lil Wayne, Soulja Boy, and the Souther Rappers Who Reinvented Hip-Hop*, (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2013), 123-130.

CDs and make copies of the original music. With the emergence of the .mp3 format and the arrival of different file-sharing websites, it became easy to share files all over the world. This had a tremendous effect on record sales. The number of CDs sold fell drastically. Piracy, too, played a major part in the decline of the industry, which was unable to adapt to the new model of distribution. This problem was partially solved by Apple after they introduced the iTunes distribution model in 2003. By then, piracy was the most widespread method of downloading music. Not every artist was affected by piracy in the same manner though.[58] Mainstream artists were less affected in the long run than the smaller ones. Famous artists could earn profit from other sources. The smaller artists, on the other hand, who do not have as many platforms available to them, are hurt much worse.[59]

The 2010s were an interesting decade for hip-hop music, with less money in it than during the previous decades factoring the most. People interested in making money from music were driven away and did not pursue a career in the field.[60] Several important events happened in hip-hop during this decade. One was the revitalization of the East coast sound with Roc Marciano and Ka, whose careers began in the mid-90s, but who managed to reinvent their careers in the early 2010s. Roc Marciano revitalized the east coast sound and brought back the 80s pimp imagery of Ice-T.[61] Similarly, Ka adapted the mid-90s east coast hip-hop style and modernized the Wu-Tang Clan sound by not using drums on his songs.[62] Both Roc Marciano and Ka built their own niche audience. Another characteristic of this decade was that it was not only underground rap that was mostly driven by lyrics, but mainstream rap as well. Kendrick Lamar, for example, renowned for his mastery of lyrical expression, was one of the most commercially successful and critically acclaimed rappers of this decade. His 2017 record *DAMN* received the Pulitzer Prize for music.[63]

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[58] Jelle Janssens et al, "The Music Industry on (the) Line? Surviving Music Piracy in a Digital Era," *European Journal of Crime*, Criminal Law and Criminal Justice 17 (2009): 77–96.

[59] Amedeo Piolatto and Florian Schuett. "Music piracy: A case of 'The Rich Get Richer and the Poor Get Poorer.'" *Information Economics and Policy* 24 (2012): 30–39.

[60] Ross Gerber. "How The Music Industry Is Putting Itself Out Of Business." *Forbes*, 3 May, 2017, https://www.forbes.com/sites/greatspeculations/2017/05/03/how-the-music-industry-is-putting-itself-out-of-business/. (Accessed on March 24, 2019).

[61] Roc Marciano, "Roc Marciano Talks His New Album, His Favorite Future and Young Thug Songs, and ASAP Yams," *Complex*. Interview by Angel Diaz, February 26, 2017, transcript, https://www.complex.com/music/2017/02/roc-marciano-interview-rosebudds-revenge. (Accessed on December 5, 2018).

[62] Ka, "Ka: How New York MC Makes Understated Rap Minimalism." *RolingStone*. Interview by Elias Leight, August 31 2016, transcript, https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/ka-how-new-york-mc-makes-understated-rap-minimalism-249331/.(Accessed on December 5, 2018).

[63] Carl Lamarre, "Watch Kendrick Lamar Receive the 2018 Pulitzer Prize for Music," *Billboard*, 30 August, 2018, https://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/hip-hop/8458599/kendrick-lamar-pulitzer-prize-2018 (Accessed December 5, 2018).

In the 2010s, the most popular sub-genre of rap was trap music. Earlier, trap had been part of the southern hip-hop soundscape. The basis for trap music is the TR-808 drum machine, which used by Afrika Bambaataa in the 80s and in Miami Bass music. In the 90s, Cash Money used it for their signature sound. In the early 2000s, the term “trap music” was popularized by T.I., but trap did not really come into the mainstream until the early 2010s, predominately with rappers such as Wacka Flocka Flame and Gucci Mane.[64]

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[64] Shawn Setaro, “How Trap Music Came to Rule the World.” *Complex*, 14 February, 2018, https://www.complex.com/music/2018/02/how-trap-music-came-to-rule-the-world(Accessed December 5, 2018).

Chapter 4

The Form of Rap

Hip-hop[65], like any kind of music, has its own form. Music is measured with beats. One beat is a unit of measurement used for organizing music. Beats are then further divided into bars.[66] The most common time measurement in hip-hop is the “four on four” time, which constitutes one “bar” in a rap song. In order to write a complete rap verse, you need sixteen bars.[67] Needless to say, this rule is not set in stone and how well they stick to it varies from rapper to rapper.

Blockhead (who produced songs for Billy Woods and Aesop Rock) explains that if you are a hip-hop producer, you have to know how to count bars. It is one of the essentials for being able to properly structure a song. On the other hand, counting bars is not a necessary skill to have if you are a rapper. There are rappers who do not know how to count bars and are still considered great rappers. Let us look at examples of both kinds of rappers. Billy Woods is known for not knowing how to count bars, and he is aware of this. When his verse is written and he is satisfied with it, the verse is done. His polar opposite is Aesop Rock. Everything he writes is meticulously constructed so that it matches the tempo of the beat. This is tied to the fact that he also makes his own beats. Any rapper who makes his own beats has to be familiar with the bar structure. Those who do not make their own beats do not have to know how to count bars. Another important part of rapping is known as flow. “Flow” simply means the rhythm of the rapping.[68]

Additionally, there are also figures of speech that are commonly found in rap and are part of its structure. Rapping is colloquially referred to as rhyming. Rhyme is the most common speech figure in rap, and it is a very important part of its structure. Early rap used to have simple end rhymes, but as time progressed, the rhymes became more and more complex.[69] Whereas Run-DMC’s 1984 debut album[70] had simple end rhymes, in 1986, Rakim already advanced the form by using internal rhymes and advanced imagery on his record with

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[65] Parts of the chapter appear in the article by the author, “Billy Woods’s Literary Intertexts.” published in the *Text Matters: A Journal of Literature*, Theory and Culture. Text Matters No. 10, 2020.

[66] Catherine Schmidt-Jones and Russell Jones, Understanding Basic Music Theory (Houston: Connexions, 2007), 34-38.

[67] Dart Adams (hip-hop historian, music journalist) in discussion with the Author in May 2018.

[68] Blockhead (music producer) in discussion with the Author in September 2018.

[69]Paul Edwards, *How to Rap* (Chicago Review Press, 2009), 82-92.

[70] Run DMC, *Run DMC* (Profile Records, 1984).

Eric B. called *Paid in Full*.[71,72] By 1991, rhymes had developed even further with Organized Konfusion's *Organized Konfusion*[73] and Freestyle Fellowship's *To Whom It May Concern*.[74] Those records introduced complex rhymes, assonance, consonance and unconventional concepts of songs.[75,76] It still took these advanced rap forms until the mid-90s to break into the mainstream with records such as Nas's *Illmatic* [77] and GZA's *Liquid Swords*.[78,79,80] But rhymes are not the only common speech figure in rap – allusions and similes are just as common.[81] Again, as with the structure of other songs, no speech figure is mandatory. The use of speech figures is dependent on the rappers themselves.

One important aspect of rapping is storytelling, with emphasis on the authenticity of the rapper. This is known in hip-hop as "keeping it real."[82] The artist strives to tell the most authentic story he or she possibly can. Of course, this does not mean that all rap songs are autobiographical. Storytelling in rap has been popular and widespread ever since the record *The Great Adventures of Slick Rick* by Slick Rick came out.[83,84] Under its influence, raps now describe events that are understood as possible to happen. Because of this, people sometimes misunderstand what is fact and what is hypothetical in rap songs. This confusion regarding the realness of the narrative arises because most rap songs are told from a first-person perspective.[85] Even Ice Cube distanced himself from some of his violent lyrics because of their violent content. He claims his stories were fictional and that he does not harbor

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[71]. Eric B. & Rakim, *Paid in Full* (4th & Broadway, 1987).

[72] "Eric B & Rakim." *All Music Guide to Hip Hop: The Defintive Guide to Rap & Hip-Hop*, eds. Vladimir Bogdanov, Chris Woodstra, Sephen Thomas Erlewine and John Bush. (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2003), 158-159.

[73] Organized Konfusion, *Organized Konfusion* (Burbank: Hollywood Records, 1991).

[74] Freestyle Fellowship, *To Whom It May Concern* (Minneapolis: Beats & Rhymes, 1991).

[75] "Freestyle Fellowship." *All Music Guide to Hip Hop: The Defintive Guide to Rap & Hip-Hop*, eds. Vladimir Bogdanov, Chris Woodstra, Sephen Thomas Erlewine and John Bush. (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2003), 179.

[76] "Orgnaized Konfusion." *All Music Guide to Hip Hop: The Defintive Guide to Rap & Hip-Hop*, eds. Vladimir Bogdanov, Chris Woodstra, Sephen Thomas Erlewine and John Bush. (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2003), 368-369

[77] Nas, *Illmatic* (New York: Columbia, 1994).

[78] GZA, *Liquid Swords* (Santa Monica: Geffen Records, 1995).

[79] "Genius." *All Music Guide to Hip Hop: The Defintive Guide to Rap & Hip-Hop*, eds. Vladimir Bogdanov, Chris Woodstra, Sephen Thomas Erlewine and John Bush. (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2003), 191-192.

[80] "Nas." *All Music Guide to Hip Hop: The Defintive Guide to Rap & Hip-Hop*, eds. Vladimir Bogdanov, Chris Woodstra, Sephen Thomas Erlewine and John Bush. (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2003), 345-346.

[81] Edwards, *How to Rap*, 44-47.

[82] Davarian L. Baldwin. "Black Empires,White Desires: The Spatial Politics of Identity in the Age of Hip-Hop." ," in *That's the Joint! The Hip-Hop Studies Reader*, eds. Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal (New York: Routledge, 2004), 160.

[83] Slick Rick. *The Greate Adventures of Slick Rick* (Def Jam, 1988).

[84] "Slick Rick." *All Music Guide to Hip Hop: The Defintive Guide to Rap & Hip-Hop*, eds. Vladimir Bogdanov, Chris Woodstra, Sephen Thomas Erlewine and John Bush. (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2003), 439-440.

[85]Greg Dimitrakis, "Hip-Hop: From Live Performance to Mediated Narrative," in That's the Joint! The Hip-Hop Studies Reader, eds. Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal (New York: Routledge, 2004), 428.

immeasurable hostility against women, and that he should have been more clear in his writing about what is fictional and what is not.[86]

One of the methods for realistically distinguishing between the voice of a rap song and the person rapping was developed by Daniel Dumile, who provided a simple solution for the problem: he started rapping in the third person. For his albums, he invents different characters and raps from their perspective. The most prominent three are MF DOOM (on *Operation Doomsday, MM…FOOD*)[87,88], King Geedorah (on *Take Me To Your Leader*)[89] and Viktor Vaughn (on *Vaudeville Villain*).[90] Dumile maintains that using the characters makes it easier for him to distance himself from the story.[91] He pushed the character narrative of MF DOOM even further as he dropped the MF for the record *Born Like This*. He argues that he rapped from the perspective of MF DOOM for a long time, so he wanted to become more personal as the character DOOM so that the audience could become acquainted with a different side of the character.[92]

During the course of development of rap writing, different archetypes of rappers developed. Archetypes are simply common themes, character types and motifs found in different works.[93] In hip-hop music, there are archetypes for both male and female rappers, even though rap is a male-dominated genre. Male rapper archetypes include the philosopher king, the playa/pimp, the dope boy/trap star and the hustler. Each has its own meaning. A philosopher king is a rapper focussing on intellect and vulnerability. He provides commentary on the world around him and on how he perceives it. Examples include Jay-Z, Nas and Billy Woods, among others. A playa/pimp is a rapper whose focus is on what it means to be a man in hip-hop, and on the importance of being able to get women. Braggadociousness and male dominance is important for this archetype. Examples of playas/pimps include Ice T and Roc Marciano. A Dope boy/trap star is a rapper who raps about selling drugs and promoting the drug culture, such as Gucci Mane and Cheef Keef. The last archetype, the hustler, is a rapper who focuses on his own success, is ambitious and smart. Typical hustlers are Biggie Smalls and Master P.[94]

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[86] Alan Light, “About a Salary or Reality? Rap’s Recurrent Conflict,” in That’s *the Joint! The Hip-Hop Studies Reader*, eds. Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal (New York: Routledge, 2004), 145.

[87] MF DOOM, *Operation Doomsday* (Metal Face Records, 2016 (1999)).

[88] MF DOOM, *MM…FOOD* (Mineapolis: Rhymesaysers Entertainment, 2004).

[89] King Geedorah, *Take Me To Your Leader* (London: Big Dada, 2003).

[90] Viktor Vaughn, *Vaudeville Villain* (Sound Ink Records, 2003).

[91] MF DOOM, 2011, “DOOM Lecture (Madrid 2011) | Red Bull Music Academy”. Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JGu0ao_rdAk. Uploaded on 14 May 2015. (Accessed on Januray 21, 2019).

[92] MF DOOM, “Impending (MF) DOOM: The Daniel Dumile Interview,” *Medium*. Interview by David Ma, January 10, 2018, transcript, https://medium.com/@_davidma/impending-mf-doom-the-daniel-dumile-interview-ee3a07b21c3f. (Accessed on Januray 21, 2019).

[93] “Archetype.” in *M.H Abrams, A Glossary of Literary Terms/Seventh Edition*, (Boston: Heine & Heine, 1999).

Female rapper archetypes include the Queen Mother, the fly girl, the sista with attitude and the lesbian. Queen Mothers are female rappers who built their images on the principles of Afrocentrism, by their dressing styles and intellects, such as Queen Latifah. Fly girls wear fashionable clothes, hairstyles and jewelry, based on the blaxploitation films of the 70s. Typical fly girls include Sha Rock and Cardi B. Sistas with attitude are known for their aggressive lyrics as well as their subversive, defiant attitudes. These include rappers such as Roxanne Shante, MC Lyte and Lauryn Hill. These categories came into existence during the 80s. The last archetype to emerge was that of the lesbian in the 90s, an interesting archetype that addresses the problems one faces as a homosexual and an African-American woman. Rappers such as Queen Pen fall into this category.[95] None of the above-mentioned archetypes are fixed; rappers can take on attributes from more archetypes than one, and they can change the archetypes they belong to over the course of their careers. Some do not fit any of the archetypes at all.

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[94] Regina N Bradley, “Barbz and Kings: Explorations of Gender and Sexuality in Hip-Hop,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hip-Hop*, ed. Justin A. Williams, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015) ,303-305.

[95] Cheryl L. Keyes, “Empowering Self, Making Choices, Creating Spaces: Black Female Identity via Rap Music Performance,” in in *That’s the Joint! The Hip-Hop Studies Reader*, eds. Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal, (New York: Routledge, 2004), 267-274.

Chapter 5

Intertextuality in hip-hop from the 1980s to the 90s

Now[96] that we have seen how hip-hop developed, let us take a look at how different media such as books, films, and cartoons have been integrated into rap. I describe this process as intertextuality. As we go along, we will also see where Billy Woods features within this development, and how he should not be considered an outlier, but rather an expansion of the already existing forms in rap. Let us therefore look at the way's intertextuality has appeared on different rap records over time.

In the 1980s, literature was integrated into rap by people applying general literary concepts to rap lyrics, as can be seen on the Public Enemy and Ice T records. Allusion and intertextuality occurred, but it was not until the Beastie Boys released *Paul's Boutique* that the frequency and the effectiveness of allusions really took off. Two people who influenced rap the most with their writing are Malcolm X and Iceberg Slim. Regarding Malcolm X, the idea was to bring awareness of the Civil Rights Movement and its leaders to the generation born after it had been active. Iceberg Slim, on the other hand, was a direct influence on Ice-T. In the end, it was the Beastie Boys who achieved the level of diversity of literary allusions and intertextuality that still influences rap writing today.

Public Enemy — *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back* (1988)[97]

In the late 1980s the first "mature" rap records emerged. One was *It Takes a Nations of Millions to Hold Us Back* by Public Enemy. This album is considered by many to be the record that radicalized rap by combining advanced forms of sampling and radical lyrics.[98] Furthermore, it started what would later become political rap. The theoretical and ideological concepts on the record were borrowed from Malcolm X and Minister Farrakhan.[99] Still, Public Enemy were not really the first rap group to start making political rap. Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five had released "The Message"[100] earlier, one of the first examples of rap songs with a truly political topic, but it was nowhere near as radical as Public Enemy was later. The frontman of Public Enemy, Chuck D, once said that he meant to include Black Nationalism in his lyrics because he once met a young black person who asked him who Malcolm X was. The person even called Malcolm X "Malcolm the Tenth." Chuck D was convinced afterwards that he needed to educate young people in black history.[101] Besides occasional allusions to Malcolm X and other important black activists, there are no other literary allusions on the record. Still, most of the songs address general ideas about Black Nationalism and calls for the emancipation of African-Americans. It was quite common at the time for rappers or rap groups to rap about Black Nationalism and the civil rights leaders. The group Boogie Down Productions, for example, reenacted the famous photo of Malcolm X standing by the window with a rifle[102] and adapted a Malcolm X[103] quote for their album title *By All Means Necessary*.[104]

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[96] Parts of the chapter appear in the article by the author, "Literary Intertextuality in GZA, MF DOOM, Aesop Rock and Billy Woods Lyrics." published in the *XA Proceedings* Issue 2, 2019.

[97] Public Enemy, *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back* (New York City: Def Jam, 1988).

[98] Bradley and DuBois, *The Anthology of Rap*, 248-249.

[99] Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop*, 269-272.

[100] Grandmaster Flash and Furious Five, "The Message" (Engelwood, NJ: Sugar Hill Records, 1982).

Ice-T — *Rhyme Pays* (1987),[105] *Power* (1988)[106]

Ice-T was one of the rappers influenced by the works of Iceberg Slim and his novel *Pimp: The Story of My Life*.[107] In fact, his name is an allusion to Iceberg Slim. However, Ice T was wrong about Iceberg's ideas when he was young. He had believed he was into the pimp lifestyle portrayed in the novel, but later realized that it was the writing itself that he found most interesting.[108, 109] He adopted Iceberg Slim's texts into his own rap songs on his records, whose main topics are drug dealing and pimping. Two songs on his debut record *Rhyme Pays,* "6'n The Mornin'" and "Pimpin Ain't Easy"[110] are very clearly about pimping. Also, taken out of context, the title of *Power's* "I'm Your Pusher/Pusherman"[111] has a double meaning. It can refer either to a drug dealer or to a pimp, but it is later revealed that it refers to a drug dealer. The song “Soul on Ice”[112] from the album with the same name is how Ice-T imagines what a dialog between Iceberg Slim and other pimps would be like.

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[101] Chuck D, "Chuck D (Public Enemy)," Interview by *HalftimeOnlin*e, December 12, 2012, transcript, http://halftimeonline.net/portfolio/chuck-d/.(Accessed on January 21, 2019).

[102] Hans J. Massaquoi, "Mystery of Malcom X," *Ebony Magazine*, September 1964, 46.

[103] Malcolm X, *Malcolm X Speaks: Selected Speeches and Statements: Edited with Prefatory Notes* by George Breitman. (New York: Grove Press, 1990), 96.

[104] Boogie Down Productions, *By All Means Necessary* (New York: Jive, 1988).

[105] Ice-T, "6 'N The Mornin #2", "Pimpin Ain't Easy #4," in *Rhyme Pays* (New York: Sire Records, 1987).

[106] Ice-T, "I'm Your Pusher/Pusherman #7", "Soul on Ice #12," in *Power* (New York: Sire Records, 1988).

[107] Iceberg Slim, *Pimp: The Story of my Life* (New Orleans: Cash Money, 2011 (1967)).

[108] Ice-T. "Ice-T on His Documentary Iceberg Slim: Portrait of a Pimp, the Book That Changed His Life, and Why He's Not Glamorizing Crime." Interview by Julie Miller, *Vanity Fair*, 19 September, 2012, transcript, https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2012/09/ice-t-iceberg-slim-portrait-of-a-pimp-documentary-toronto-international-film-festival. (Accessed on January 21, 2019).

[109] Ice-T. "Interview: Ice-T Talks To S&A About Doc 'Iceberg Slim: Portrait of a Pimp' & Parallels To Iceberg's Life." Interview by Vanessa Martinez, Indie Wire, 18 July, 2018, transcript, http://www.indiewire.com/2013/07/interview-ice-t-talks-to-sa-about-doc-iceberg-slim-portrait-of-a-pimp-parallels-to-icebergs-life-opens-fri-235958/.(Accessed on January 21, 2019).

[110] Ice-T, "6 'N The Mornin #2", "Pimpin Ain't Easy #4," in *Rhyme Pays*, op.cit.

[111] Ice-T, "I'm Your Pusher/Pusherman #7," in *Power*, op.cit.

Beastie Boys — *Paul’s Boutique* (1989)[113]

Literary allusions were used in rap music before the Beastie Boys, but in their record *Paul’s Boutique*, the number of literary allusions was something of a novelty.[114] What set Beastie Boys apart from other rappers and rap groups was the fact that their allusions and intertextuality were not random – instead, they fit into the broader context of the song. There are three ways in which they use allusions: to make references to pop-culture differently than other rappers would, to provide more content to the lyrics, and to refer to works of literature. If we look at the song “Egg Man,”[115] there is an allusion to the nursery rhyme *Humpty Dumpty*.[116] In the song, each of the three verses describes an accident with an egg. In the second, Humpty Dumpty falls from the wall and breaks his leg. Other songs on the album contain many more allusions used in a similar manner, such as “High Plains Drifter.” Here, the Beastie Boys allude to *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas,* a novel by Hunter S. Thompson,[117] in the line: “Fear and loathing ‘cross the country, listenin’ to my 8-track.”[118] In both the song and the novel, the text describes a road trip, and the characters in Thompson’s novel commit crimes and abuse drugs, which also happens to the speakers in the song. There is a common theme to the intertextuality on *Paul’s Boutique* youth delinquency, drug consumption, crime and road trips. With *Paul’s Boutique,* the Beastie Boys laid the groundwork for the use of allusions and intertextuality, which rappers picked up later.

In the 90s the stylistic possibilities of rap expanded, and most of the techniques used today originate from this time. It is not surprising that allusions and intertextuality became more diverse during the period, and references to religious texts also became commonplace in rap. We will now look at three of the most influential records of the time: Nas's *Illmatic*, GZA's *Liquid Swords* and Company Flow's *Funcrusher Plus*.

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[112] Ice-T, “Soul on Ice #12,” in *Power*, op.cit.

[113] Beastie Boys, “Egg Man #4”, “High Plains Drifter #5 in *Paul’s Boutique* (Los Angeles: Capitol Records, 1989).

[114] Bradley and DuBois, *The Anthology of Rap*, 130.

[115] Beastie Boys, “Egg Man #4”, in *Paul’s Boutique*, op.cit.

[116] Lewis Caroll. 1991. “CHAPTER VI. Humpty Dumpty” *Through the Looking Glass* (The Project Gutenberg EBook of Through the Looking Glass, by Charles Dodgson, AKA Lewis Carroll). Release Date: February, 1991 [EBook #12] Last Updated: October 6, 2016, http://www.gutenberg.org/files/12/12-h/12-h.htm (Accessed on October 10, 2018).

[117] Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998 (1971)).

[118] Beastie Boys, “High Plains Drifter #5.” Op.Cit.

Nas — *Illmatic* (1994)[119]

Illmatic is one of the most important rap records of the 90s. It was praised for its poetic sophistication and is still regarded as highly influential.[120] It became a reference for rappers in terms of style and technique. One of its most notable features was the introduction of the letter form into rap in the song "One Love,"[121] and allusions to black leaders such as Malcolm X in the song "Halftime"[122] – similar to what was previously done by Public Enemy. The most notable literary allusion is in the song "The World Is Yours" in the line: "stabbin' women like the Phantom."[123] Here, Nas looks back on himself coming of age in Queens. The uppermost layer of meaning is about sex, since "stabbing" is a slang term for intercourse.[124] On another level is an allusion to the novel *Phantom of the Opera* by Gaston Leroux.[125] The second allusion is to the comic book hero The Phantom.[126] The third is an allusion to the unsolved 1946 Texas murder case, in which all the victims were women.[127]

Wu-Tang Clan

The Wu-Tang Clan are another influential 90s rap group with nine individual rappers who each had his own style of rapping. Their style tied eastern mysticism to stories of crime from their communities.[128] Their records abound with intertextuality; they sample a variety of films, but the group did not shy away from using literary intertextual references either; they integrated into the songs allusions to the Five-percenter doctrine and ideology.

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[119] Nas, "Halftime #4, The World is Yours#5" in *Illmatic*, op.cit.

[120] Bradley and DuBois, *The Anthology of Rap,* 459.

[121] Micheal E. Dayson, "'One Love,' Two Brothers, Three Verses," in *Born to Use Mics: Reading Nas's Illmatic*, eds. Micheal E. Dayson and Sohail Daulatzai (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2010).

[122] Nas. "Halftime #4," in *Illmatic*, op.cit.

[123] Nas, " The World is Yours#5" in *Illmatic*, op.cit.

[124] Jonathon Green, A Timeline for Slang terms for Sexual Intercourse: part 1 The Basics, 2013-2016, http://timeglider.com/timeline/962856e2d593150e. (Accessed on January 21, 2019).

[125] Gaston Leroux, *The Phantom of the Opera* (London: Penguin, 2012).

[126] Lee Falk, *The Phantom* (Sydney: Frew Publications, 1936).

[127] Prudence Mackintosh, "Texarkana Murder Mystery: Has a local author settled once and for all the identity of the infamous "Phantom Killer?" *Texas Monthly,* December 2014. https://www.texasmonthly.com/the-culture/texarkana-murder-mystery/ (Accessed on December 5, 2018).

[128] Bradley and DuBois, *The Anthology of Rap,* 532 -533.

The Five percenters are a branch of the Nation of Islam founded by Clarence 13X (originally Clarence Edward Smith). He formed his own organization because he regarded the doctrine of Nation of Islam too rigorous, and his attitude attracted young male followers. His teachings were modeled after the Nation of Islam and Malcolm X's departure from it. According to the doctrine of the Nation of Islam, people are divided into three groups: 85% are the uncivilized who do not know God and are therefore mentally impoverished and slaves. 10% are rich slaveowners of the impoverished who teach them false knowledge. The remaining 5% are those who do not believe the lies of the 10% and teach the truth, that the true God is the black man. Clarence 13X expanded this interpretation to the members of the Nation of Islam: he saw the 85% as the non-ruling members of Nation of Islam and 10% as the ruling part of the organization (including the leader Elijah Muhammad and his inner circle).[129] Two of the main concepts of the Five Percenter ideology were the "Supreme Alphabet" and the "Supreme Mathematics," which were based on a dialog between Elijah Muhammad and his master. In "Supreme Mathematics," each number from zero to nine is assigned a meaning (for example, "one" means "knowledge"). The "Supreme Alphabet" does the same for the twenty-six letters of the English alphabet, with A representing Allah, and so on.[130] Clarence 13X also maintained that African-Americans were the original men.[131]

There was also a strong patriarchal relationship between men and women within the organization. Men were referred to as "Gods" whereas women were "Earths." The role of women in the organization was to be wives and mothers and to take care of the children.[132] The Five Percenters were highly influential for rap musicians from the late 80s until the 90s including Rakim, Big Daddy Kane, Brand Nubian and the Wu-Tang Clan.[133] From 1993 to 2000, they released a series of successful records, including GZA's *Liquid Swords*.

GZA — *Liquid Swords* (1995)[134]

There are two types of intertextuality on this record. First is the sampling of the dialog in the film *Shogun Assassin,*[135] which portrays the life of a wandering ronin (a samurai without a master) with his son and their fight for survival. The second is literary intertextuality, which can be observed in the song titled “Cold World”. Its first two lines are a reference to the English poem “A Visit from St. Nicholas”[136] by Clement Clark Moore. Compare:

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[129] Micheal Muhamed Knight, *Five Percenters: Islam Hip Hop and the Gods of New York* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2007), 32-37.

[130] Ibid., 52-54.

[131] Ibid., 55.

[132] Ibid., 208-210.

[133] Ibid.,177-186.

[134] GZA, "Living in the World Today #3", "Cold World #5", "Labels #6." in *Liquid Swords,* op. cit.

[135] Robert Houston, dir., *Shogun Assassin* (Atlanta: New World Pictures, 2006 (1980)).

“Cold World”

> It was the night before New Year’s, and all through the fucking projects
> Not a handgun was silent, not even a Tec[137]

“A Visit from St. Nicholas”

> Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the house
> Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse[138]

Intertextual references and allusions to the Five-Percenter ideology feature throughout the record. Men are referred to as Gods throughout, for example. Additionally, on the song “Living in the World Today,” references to the supreme alphabet are included: in the line, “Father You See King the Police,”[139] the first four words are references to the supreme alphabet – Father, which represent F, You which is U, See as C, and King as K.[140] The letters spell out the word Fuck, and the line becomes “fuck the police.”

On the song “Labels,”[141] which criticizes the recording industry of the mid-90s, intertextuality consists of the names of prominent record labels integrated into the song lyrics. This stylistic technique was used again in 2013 by the rapper Ka’s in *The Night’s Gambit*[142] and the song “Off the Record.” Here, Ka describes his experiences growing up in Brownsville and mentions the names of important rap records. On *Known Unknowns*[143] (2017), Billy Woods raps about violence in rap music, specifically on the song “Superpredator.” He references the titles of famous rap songs that were known for their violent content. Furthermore, he incorporates references to literary theory, such as to Chekov’s gun.[144]

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[136] Clement Clarke Moore, “A Visit from St. Nicholas,” at *Poetry Foundation*, https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43171/a-visit-from-st-nicholas. Last access July 15 2018.

[137] GZA, “Cold World #5”, in *Liquid Swords*, op. cit.

[138] Clement Clarke Moore, “A Visit from St. Nicholas,” at *Poetry Foundation*, https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43171/a-visit-from-st-nicholas. Last access July 15 2018.

[139] GZA, “Living in the World Today #3” in *Liquid Swords*, op. cit

[140] Micheal Muhamed Knight, *Five Percenters: Islam Hip Hop and the Gods of New York*, 53-54.

[141] GZA. “Labels #6.” in *Liquid Swords*, op. cit.

[142] Ka, “Off the Record # 11,” in *The Night's Gambit* (Ironworks Records, 2013).

[143] Billy Woods, “Superpredator #5” in *Known Unknowns* (New York: Backwoodz Studioz, 2017).

[144] Donald Rayfield, *Anthon Chekhov* (London: Faber and Faber, 2013), 275.

Liquid Swords is not the only Wu-Tang Clan record to make use of intertextuality: almost every Wu-Tang-Clan-related album released between 1993 and 2000 contains examples.

Chapter 6

Intertextuality in hip-hop from the 1990s to today

During[145,146] the late 90s, the rap industry was divided into two parts: mainstream and underground. Mainstream rap enjoyed all the resources and exposure, leading to a reaction from the underground scene that consequently tried to be as avant-garde as possible, in order to differentiate itself from the mainstream.[147] The 2000s brought about more complex intertextuality with rappers such as Daniel Dumile and others such as Aesop Rock, Cannibal Ox, Billy Woods and Ka, who were all adept at advanced usage of intertextual references and allusions.

Company Flow – *Funcrusher Plus* (1997)[148]

Funcrusher Plus contains many diverse literary allusions, from the novel *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*[149] to the novel *Fahrenheit 451*.[150] Here the allusions are used to emphasize the rhyming skills of the rappers. For example, in "Vital Nerve": "Doc Jekyll when I burn your paragraph down to a haiku."[151] Here, the lyrics use the allusion to Doctor Jekyll, who transformed into Mr. Hyde to commit crimes, to show how superior his rapping is. He is convinced that he does not need to transform to be a better rapper, and he boasts about how he is able to say as much in a haiku as other rappers can in a whole paragraph.[i152]

MF DOOM – *Operation Doomsday* (1999)[153]

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[145] Parts of the chapter appear in the article by the author, "Billy Woods's Literary Intertexts." published in the *Text Matters: A Journal of Literature, Theory and Culture*. Text Matters No. 10, 2020.

[146] Parts of the chapter appear in the article by the author, "Literary Intertextuality in GZA, MF DOOM, Aesop Rock and Billy Woods Lyrics." published in the *XA Proceedings* Issue 2, 2019.

[147] Matthew Oware, "(Un)conscious (popular) underground: Restricted cultural production and underground rap music," *Poetics* 42, no.1 (February 2014): 60-81.

[148] Company Flow, "Vital Nerve #13," in *Funchruscher Plus* (New York: Rawkus Records, 1997).

[149] Robert Louis Stevenson, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (Project Gutenberg's Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, by Robert Louis Stevenson), Posting Date: December 18, 2011 [EBook #42] Release Date: October 1992. Last Updated: July 1, 2005, http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/42/pg42-images.html. (Accessed on January 21, 2019).

[150] Ray Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001).

[151] Company Flow, "Vital Nerve #13," in *Funchruscher Plus*, op.cit.

[152] "Haiku." in *M.H Abrams, A Glossary of Literary Terms/Seventh Edition* (Boston: Heine & Heine, 1999).

[153] MF DOOM, "The Time We Faced Doom (Skit) #1," "Doomsday #2," "Go with the Flow #6," in *Operation Doomsday* (Metal Face Records, 2016 (1999)).

A substantial change occurred in the late 90s with MF DOOM, who broke the existing norms of rap music. Rap as a genre originally put a lot of emphasis on authenticity and "realness."[154] It was important for rappers to rap about topics they had actually experienced or were exposed to. In rap, there is also a strong emphasis on first-person narrative, but this does not mean that rap is non-fictional. (It can be, as in "Murder Was the Case[155] by Snoop Dogg.) This tendency was completely disregarded by Daniel Dumile. He decided to fictionalize all the narratives on the records and did so consistently, unlike other rappers who only did so occasionally. Most of his narratives were written from the perspective of MF DOOM, Viktor Vaughn or King Geedorah. The first two are based on Marvel comic book villains and the last on Godzilla's arch-enemy, King Ghidorah—a three-headed space dragon.[156] Stylistically, Dumile does not narrate from the first-person perspective but from the third-person perspective to emphasize the character-driven narrative and to distance himself from the story. With the introduction of fictional characters, he parodies one of the core concepts of rap. He also uses allusion and intertextuality to add additional layers of interpretation to his writing. What is more, Dumile usually does not use traditional rap structure in his songs. Most notably, he tends to avoid writing refrains and writes his songs as one verse.

The title of the record is an allusion to the British mission to liberate Norway from the German occupation, which was given the codename "Operation Doomsday."[157] It is also an allusion to the novel *Doomsday Conspiracy* by Sidney Sheldon.[158] The skits of the record sample the dialog from the novel. In the song "Doomsday," he alludes to Sheldon. In "Go With the Flow," there is a paraphrase of the phrase Sherlock Holmes uses in "Adventure VII. The Crooked Man"; "I have the advantage of knowing your habits, my dear Watson," and "Elementary."[159] Those utterances are paraphrased into "For one flow that's elementary my dear Watson."[160] In the song, the speaker points out that having a good flow is something obvious and necessary to have in order to be a rapper, in the same manner as Sherlock Holmes explains basic concepts to Watson.

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[154] Miles White, *From Jim Crow to Jay-Z: Race, Rap, and the Performance of Masculinity* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 96-97.

[155] Snoop Doggy Dogg, "Murda Was the Case" (Los Angeles: Death Row Records, 1994).

[156] MF DOOM. 2011. "DOOM Lecture (Madrid 2011) | Red Bull Music Academy". Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JGu0ao_rdAk. Uploaded on 14 May 2015. (Accessed on January 21, 2019).

[157] Paradata, "Norway (Operation Doomsday)." Available at https://www.paradata.org.uk/event/norway-operation-doomsday. (Accessed on November 17, 2018).

[158] Sidney Sheldon, *Doomsday Conspiracy* (New York: William Marow, 1991).

[159] Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, "Adventure VII. The Crooked Man" in *Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes*. (Project Gutenberg's Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes, by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Release Date: March 1997 [EBook #834], Last Updated: March 6, 2018), 156-157. (Accessed on January 21, 2019).

[160] MF DOOM, "Go with the Flow #6," in *Operation Doomsday,* op.cit.

Later instances of Dumile incorporating literature into rap can be found on his records *Vaudeville Villain*[161] and *Born Like This*.[162] On *Vaudeville Villain*, he alludes to the Vaudeville Theater that was popular in the United States in the late 19th century and the early 20th century. It was a theater performance comprised of different, unrelated acts.[163] *Vaudeville Villain* is a collection of songs that all feature unrelated absurd stories. On *Born Like This*, Dumile samples in "Cellz" Charles Bukowski reading his poem "Dinosauria We"[164] from the documentary *Born into This*.[165] The verses in the song continue using the same cadence in the following stanzas.

Cannibal Ox – *The Cold Vein* (2001)[166]

Cannibal Ox are a duo from the early 2000s consisting of the rappers Vordul Mega and Vast Aire. Their seminal record, *The Cold Vein,* produced entirely by El-P, was important because it broke established norms of what street rap could or should be. Critically acclaimed when it was released, it only won more acclaim as the time went on. By end of the decade it was considered to be one of the best albums released in the 2000s.[167,168] In the lyrics, the duo rapped about inner-city life in New York. They combined Five-Percenter imagery and abstract imagery of street life with a permanent atmosphere of impending doom. They compared the African-American experience to birds, because both are always present in the city and nobody cares what happens to them, yet they are still able to endure. The aim of the duo was to combine beauty and sorrow in poetic raps,[169] which is why it is not surprising that the record abounds with references to books, mythology, anime and film.

The song "Battle for Asgard" is important because of its form. It was one of the earliest rap songs featuring four different rappers, who told a coherent story of a frontline of a sci-fi war in comic-book-like setting. The first allusion is in the title, a reference to Asgard, a holy place in Norse mythology where the gods reside.[170] Then, one of the lines alludes to the novel *Phantom of the Opera*:[171]

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[161] Viktor Vaughn, *Vaudeville Villain* (Sound Ink Records, 2003).

[162] DOOM. "Cellz #10," in *Born Like This* (London: Lex Records, 2009).

[163] "Vaudeville entertainment" in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Last modified August 21, 2017. https://www.britannica.com/art/vaudeville. (Accessed on January 21, 2019).

[164] Charles Bukowski, "Dinosauria We," in *The Last Night of Earth Poems*. E-book. (New York: Harper Collins e-books, 2007 (1991)).

[165] John Dullaghan, dir. *Born Into This* (New York: Magnolia, 2006).

[166] Cannibal Ox, "Battle For Asgard #10" and "Ridiculoid #12." in *The Cold Vein*, (New York: Def Jux, 2001).

[167] Christopher Dare. " Cannibal Ox: The Cold Vein." in *Pitchfork*, 15 May 2001, https://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/1284-the-cold-vein/. (Accessed on January 21, 2019).

[168] "The 200 Best Albums of the 2000s" in *Pitchfork*, 2 October 2009, https://pitchfork.com/features/lists-and-guides/7710-the-top-200-albums-of-the-2000s-20-1/?page=3. (Accessed on January 21, 2019).

[169] El-P. 2013. "El-P Lecture (New York 2013) | Red Bull Music Academy." Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UQkoC5jbmOE. Uploaded on 11 May 2015. (Accessed 20 November 2018).

> Ninja in the night with the phantoms
> Amped up, set off operas[172]

The speaker describes a stealth ambush by undercover assassins who detonated a bomb near an opera house. The word play takes the individual words apart to put them in a new setting.

On "Ridiculoid," there is a complex intertextuality in the line:

> And they say productivity is up this month but I've lost my passion
> Sick of waiting in line for my weekly chocolate ration[173]

It refers to George Orwell's *1984*. The novel is set in a futuristic society where three empires, Oceania, Eurasia and Eastasia, are in perpetual war. The protagonist Winston Smith lives in Oceania, an empire controlled by an unnamed party. The society is divided into strict social classes: the Inner Party (upper class), the Other Party (middle class), and the Proletariat (lower class). Winston belongs to the middle class and is one day waiting for his chocolate ration, thinking about the reason why it had been reduced.[174] *1984* is one of the most common novels to be adopted into rap lyrics by different rappers, including Billy Woods.

Aesop Rock — *Labor Days* (2001)[175] and *Skelethon* (2012)[176]

Aesop Rock is known for his dense lyrics and abstract imagery. In 2017, a study on the size of the vocabulary of rappers was published, and it shows that Aesop Rock uses the largest number of unique words among all rappers.[177] Aesop Rock's writing uses obscure allusions to give additional meaning to his writing and to highlight his skill as a rapper. On the song "Save Your Self," Aesop Rock raps about being a better rapper than his contemporaries.

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[170] Asgard in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Last modified February 16, 2018. https://www.britannica.com/topic/Asgard. (Accessed on January 21, 2019).

[171] Gaston Leroux, *The Phantom of the Opera* (London: Penguin, 2012).

[172] Cannibal Ox, "Battle For Asgard #10" in *The Cold Vein*, op.cit.

[173] Cannibal Ox, "Ridiculoid #12." in *The Cold Vein*, op.cit.

[174] George Orwell, *1984* (London : Penguin, 2008).

[175] Aesop Rock, "Save Yourself #3" in *Labor Days* (New York: Def Jux, 2001).

[176] Aesop Rock, "Gopher Guts #15," in *Skelethon* (Minneapolis: Rhymesayers Entertainment, 2012).

[177] Matt Daniels, "The Largest Vocabulary in Hip Hop," *The Pudding*, February 2017, https://pudding.cool/2017/02/vocabulary/index.html. (Accessed on January 21, 2019).

> Spitting like a dragon with a similar demeanor
> Stood innocent bystand, witness the die-hard fans turn Rip Van[178]

He likens himself to a dragon to claim that he "breathes fire" to turn fans away from other rappers. He uses the idiom "to sleep on it" in the meaning of postponing something[179] with the allusion to Rip Van Winkle. [ii][180]

Aesop Rock's literary allusions become even more complex in his later work. On his record *Skelethon,* he uses allusions to give his texts additional layers of interpretation. On the song "Gopher Guts," where the speaker raps about a divorce and about the effect it had on its mental health, he/she alludes to the novel *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*[181] in the following line:

> Got a little plot of land where authority isn't recognized
> Contraband keeping the core of his Hyde Jekyllized[182]

The speaker uses the allusion to *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* to lay bare his/her mental health. The head of the voice is described as a "plot of land." Medication is "contraband," and the mental issues are Dr. Jekyll, for the effects of the medication, and Mr. Hyde for the symptoms of mental issues, referring to the fact that Dr. Jekyll was good-natured but had to transform into Mr. Hyde to be able to do bad deeds.

Billy Woods is probably the most proficient user of intertextual references: they are among the distinguishing features and his writing. He uses them to portray different experiences and to give his writing additional layers of meaning. He alludes to different works of art to portray the difficulties of being an African-American, his experience about growing up in Zimbabwe, and his attitude towards rap. Some examples of the way he updated the use of allusion in rap are listed below:

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[178] Aesop Rock, "Save Yourself #3, in *Labor Days,* op.cit.

[179] "Sleep on it" in *The Free Dictionary*. https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/sleep+on+it. (Accessed on November 17, 2018).

[180] "Rip Van Winkle" in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Last modified July 13, 2016. https://www.britannica.com/topic/Rip-Van-Winkle-short-story-by-Irving. (Accessed on January 21, 2019).

[181] Stevenson, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. op.cit.

[182] Aesop Rock, "Gopher Guts #15," in *Skelethon,* op.cit.

Armand Hammer — *Race Music* (2013)[183]

A defining feature of Woods's style is the combination of popular culture and classical literature. One example is from Armand Hammer – a duo which Woods is one half of – on the record *Race Music* in the song "Toad and Frog are Friends." The first four lines combine allusions to Fredrick Douglass and rappers with references to rap records.

> Unpublished but ghostin' for Fredrick Douglass
> Trust/, I could write your whole album
> Eazy-Duz-It
> Raiders snapback with the Jheri Curl[184]

The speaker says that he/she is ghostwriting for Fredrick Douglass, who was an abolitionist, writer, and fighter for the equality of African-Americans.[185] This can be interpreted to mean that the speaker is continuing the emancipatory work of Fredrick Douglass. The next line claims that the speaker would be able to write other people's records, which the third line reaffirms with a reference to the title of Eazy-E's *Eazy-Duz-It*.[186] The concept of ghostwriting is preserved and can be seen as a commentary on the practice of ghostwriting in rap music. It is well known that Eazy-E did not write his own raps, which were actually written by Ice Cube. This is referred to in the last line, which describes Ice Cube's appearance at the time when he was still a part of N.W.A.[187]

Billy Woods – *Today, I Wrote Nothing* (2015)[188]

Woods also adopted some stylistic approaches from other writers. On *Today, I Wrote Nothing*, he adapted a collection of short stories into rap form. Daniil Kharms was a Russian absurdist writer who, in the 1920s, was part of UBERIU, a collective of avant-garde writers from Leningrad (St. Petersburg). After the collective later disbanded, Kharms went on to write children's literature. Throughout his career, he was in conflict with the Soviet authorities and was imprisoned several times. He died in prison in 1942. Kharms is stylistically hard to define, as his fiction is absurd and nonsensical. In a sense, it is meta-fiction (writing about writing) parodying and satirizing the existing forms of fiction and their structure with added slapstick humor.[189] On *Today, I Wrote Nothing*, Billy Woods adopts Kharms's writing style. He breaks every existing rap norm and writes very short rap songs.

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[183] Armand Hammer, "Toad and Frog are Friends #5," in *Race Music* (New York: Backwoodz Studioz, 2013).
[184] Armand Hammer, "Toad and Frog are Friends #5," in Race Music, op.cit.
[185] Gene A. Jarrett, "Fredrick Douglass" in *The Wiley Blackwell Anthology of African American Literature*, Vol.1 1746-1920, ed. Gene A. Jarrett (Malden: John Wiley & Son, 2013).
[186] Eazy-E, *Eazy-Duz-It* (Los Angeles: Ruthless Records, 1988).
[187] Charnas, *The Big Payback*, 268-269.
[188] Billy Woods, "Dreams Come True #13," in *Today, I Wrote Nothing* (New York City: Backwoodz Studioz, 2015).

Daniil Kharms:

> Today, I wrote nothing. It doesn't matter.[190]

Billy Woods — "Dreams Come True":

> Caught feelings off an old picture, hit her up like,
> I still miss ya. Two words: Nigga. Please. Fair enough.[191]

Woods was aware that he was adapting Kharms's work. He was experiencing writer's block at the time when he read *Today, I Wrote Nothing*, and it occurred to him that he could do in rap what Kharms did in fiction writing. He decided that he would intentionally break the traditional structure of rap and not think about how to write but simply write (see chapter 17).

Dr. Yen Lo — *Days With Dr. Yen Lo* (2015)[192]

Ka is another rapper who adapted a novel into rap, but his approach was different from Woods's. He teamed up with Preservation in 2015 to record *Days With Dr. Yen Lo* as a group with the same name, "Dr. Yen Lo." The two decided to loosely base the recording on the novel *The Manchurian Candidate* by Richard Condon,[193] a Cold War novel about a US soldier named Robert Shaw who is kidnapped and indoctrinated during the Korean War by the Communists. After his indoctrination, he becomes a sleeper agent, unaware of his condition.[194] The novel was adapted into a film in 1962, with the same name.[195] The title of the recording is an allusion to one of the antagonists in the novel, Dr. Yen Lo, who is the scientist who brainwashes Shaw. The enumeration of the songs on the record is also an allusion to the novel – the numbers of the songs on the record do not follow a chronological order, like the novel, where events also do not unfold chronologically. Finally, most of the songs on the record sample the music or the dialog from the film version of the novel. However, the sampling of the dialog is mostly for aesthetic purposes, as the concepts from the novel do not have much in common with the concepts on the record, which focus mostly on street crime and its consequences.

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[189] Daniil Kharms, *Today I Wrote Nothing: The Selected Writings of Daniil Kharms*. Translated by Matevi Yankelevich, (New York: Ardis Publishers, 2009), 12-17.

[190] Ibid., 120.

[191] Billy Woods, "Dreams Come True #13," in *Today, I Wrote Nothing*, op.cit.

[192] Dr. Yen Lo, *Days With Dr. Yen Lo* (Pavlov Institute Records, 2015).

[193] Ka and DJ Preservation. 2015. "Ka & DJ Preservation "Days With Dr. Yen Lo" Interview | Rap Is Outta Control." Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D_KxSxs4OA8. Uploaded on 23. 7. 2015. (Accessed 15 June 2021).

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[194] Richard Condon, *The Manchurian Candidate* (London: Orion Publishing Group, 2004).
[195] John Frankenheimer, dir. *The Manchurian Candidate* (Los Angeles: MGM Home Entertainment, 1962).

Chapter 7

Billy Woods

Billy Woods was born in the United States but moved with his family to Zimbabwe as a child in the 80s. His mother is a professor of English literature whereas his father was a supporter the Zimbabwean independence struggle from abroad. The political obligations of Billy Woods's father took him and his family to Zimbabwe (see chapters 14 and 15), where they lived in Harare until the father's death. In the late 80s, Billy returned to United States while still a teenager. He lived in Maryland, D.C. and in New York, where he started his career as a rapper with the encouragement of Vordul Mega of Cannibal Ox. In the early 2000s he founded the record company Backwoodz Studioz. On his first two records, called *Camouflag*[196] and *The Chalice*[197] released in 2003 and 2004 respectively, all the elements of his mature style of rapping are already present. He was rapping about the same topics (the problems of African-Americans in the United States, the liberation of Africa; he was also already using intertextual references in his lyrics) he would be rapping about in his later work (see chapters 18 and 19).

It was not until forming the group Super Chron Flight Brothers that he would start to gain widespread recognition. The group was founded in mid-2000s by Woods and the rapper Privilege. They released the albums *Emergency Powers: The World Tour*[198] and *Cape Verde*.[199] Their aim was to combine tragedy and comedy in their songs and to be as direct and blunt as possible. For this reason, the group decided to use the sad and happy face of Sock and Buskin masks as their logo. Buskin represents tragedy with the sad face,[200] while Sock represents comedy and dons the happy face.[201] The group disbanded in 2010, mainly due to personal problems Privilege was facing (see chapter 17).

Woods's career did not end when the group disbanded. In 2012, he returned with *History Will Absolve Me,*[202] which received critical acclaim. The most surprising part of the success story of *History Will Absolve Me* is that it is a deeply politicized rap album. Woods raps about everything, from the hardships faced by African-Americans to the liberation of African countries. He takes shots at every rap cliché possible and at the same time provides commentary on the rap scene of the time. *History Will Absolve Me* was also the record on which Woods perfected the art of intertextuality and using allusions. However, he does so in such a manner that the listener is still able to enjoy the songs even if he/she does not recognize the references (see chapter 19). What Woods thought would be the end of his music journey was in fact a new beginning.

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[196] Billy Woods, *Camouflage* (New York: Backwoodz Studioz, 2003).
[197] Billy Woods, *The Chalice* (New York: Backwoodz Studioz, 2004).
[198] Super Chron Flight Brothers, *Emergency Powers:The World Tour* (New York: Backwoodz Studioz, 2007).
[199] Super Chron Flight Brothers, *Cape Verde* (New York: Backwoodz Studioz, 2010).
[200] "Buskin" in *The Methuen Drama: Dictionary of the Theatre*, ed. Jonathan Law (London: Bloomsbury Drama, 2011), 84.
[201] "Sock" in *The Methuen Drama: Dictionary of the Theatre*, ed. Jonathan Law (London: Bloomsbury Drama, 2011), 472.
[202] Billy Woods, *History Will Absolve Me* (New York: Backwoodz Studioz, 2012).

In 2013 he made two important musical decisions. The first one was connecting with the producer Blockhead and the second was the formation of the duo Armand Hammer. Blockhead and Woods had had a mutual friend who put them into contact.[203] They made two full-length albums together, *Dour Candy*[204] in 2013 and *Known Unknowns*[205] in 2017. In 2015 Woods released *Today, I Wrote Nothing*[206], an album that pushes the boundaries of rap structure forward. In 2019 he released two albums, the well-received *Hiding Places*[207] fully produced by Kenny Segal and the equally good but challenging *Terror Management*[208]. In addition, Woods formed Armand Hammer with Elucid, who was featured on *History Will Absolve Me*. Also with Elucid, he doubled down on the aggressiveness and political content on *Race Music*.[209] Armand Hammer is one of his most radical periods. Elucid and Woods contrast each other's rapping style: Elucid uses religious imagery and connects it to the everyday life of African-Americans while Woods's manner of writing is indirect because of his references, and at the same time amusing because of its dark humor (see chapter 17). Armand Hammer later released four more records, *Rome*[210], *Paraffin*[211], *Shrines*[212] and *Haram*,[213] *Haram* being entirely produced by the world-famous producer and touring DJ of Eminem, The Alchemist. Finally, in late 2020, Woods and the poet and rapper Moor Mother released the highly praised album *Brass*.[214]

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[203] Blockhead (music producer) in discussion with the Author in September 2018.
[204] Billy Woods, *Dour Candy* (New York: Backwoodz Studioz, 2013).
[205] Billy Woods, *Known Unknowns* (New York: Backwoodz Studioz, 2017).
[206] Billy Woods, *Today, I Wrote Nothing* (New York: Backwoodz Studioz, 2015).
[207] Billy Woods & Kenny Segal. *Hiding Places* (New York: Backwoodz Studioz, 2019).
[208] Billy Woods. *Terror Manegemnt*. (New York: Backwoodz Studioz, 2019).
[209] Armand Hammer, *Race Music* (New York: Backwoodz Studioz, 2013).
[210] Armand Hammer, *Rome* (New York: Backwoodz Studio, 2017).
[211] Armand Hammer, *Paraffin* (New York: Backwoodz Studioz, 2018).
[212] Armand Hammer, *Shrines* (New York: Backwoodz Studioz, 2020).
[213] Armand Hammer & The Alchemist. *Haram* (New York: Backwoodz, 2021).
[214] Moor Mother & Billy Woods. *Brass* (New York: Backwoodz Studioz, 2020).

Chapter 8

Life in the inner-city

Now that we know where hip-hop originated, how intertextuality in hip-hop works, and where Billy Woods fits into the bigger picture, we can ask the question why hip-hop started in the Bronx and why there was so much poverty and unemployment in that area at the time. To be able to do so, we need to look at race relations in the United States. The United States of America can be classified as a race regime. A race regime is, in short, any political system made up of racialized institutions such as schools, law enforcement, jurisdiction, and public services, relations, where one group, usually white, has power over others, usually non-white, ideas such as belief in racial superiority, and procedures, how whites and non-whites act in public spaces.[215]

Slavery in the colonies that would later form the United States existed since the seventeenth century. The colony of Virginia required slave labor to function. European settlers wanted to extract the natural resources, for which they needed labor power which was provided in the form of slave labor. At first, the slaves were Native Americans and Africans, both groups seen as inferior by the Europeans. The slaves grew crops such as tobacco on plantations, but one problem with tobacco was that it required a substantial amount of land. This resulted in conflict between Native Americans and European settlers for land. As the plantations expanded, it turned out that Native Americans were not suitable for plantation work, since they were familiar with the territory, and could rebel and retaliate if necessary. Therefore, slaveowners turned to Africans. Slaves were considered property and could be killed if the owner deemed it necessary. Slavery went on until the thirteen colonies decided to declare independence from England in 1776. The United Kingdom recognized the independence of the United States in 1783 and the United States Constitution was drafted and ratified in 1788. The problem the newly-formed country faced was whether they should consider the slaves citizens of the United States or not. In the end, they decided for the latter option, but slavery continued to be a subject of debate. The North and the South had two distinct views on slavery:[216] The Southern states were predominantly pro-slavery – in the opinion of well-off Southerners, keeping slaves was the only way to keep making a profit from plantations. In addition, whites who did not own slaves feared competition for jobs, as well as a possible retaliation of freed slaves. In the states where slaves were the majority of the population, whites feared they would lose political power if the slaves were freed.[217] The treatment of slaves was bad – they were not allowed to move freely, have a family, practice religion or have access to education. On a whim, their owners could have them beaten to death. In the Northern states, African-Americans were not slaves, but their treatment was still far from ideal. They could not vote, they had the worst jobs, they were the first to be fired, and they could not get into the same schools, housing or public facilities as whites-People who opposed slavery and wanted to abolish it were called "abolitionists".[218]

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[215] Jill Vickers and Annette Isaac, *The Politics of Race: Canada, the United States, and Australia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 52-54.

[216] Vivienne Sanders, *Access to History: Race Relations in the USA 1863-1980* (London: Hodder Education, 2006), 6-9.

The fate of slavery as an institution was finally decided by the American Civil War. In the mid-19th century, there was a growing divide between the North and the South. In the North, there was a growing opposition to slavery. The North had several reasons for opposing slavery. Abolitionists had turned people against slavery, and Northerners feared the number of slave-owning states would increase and that they would consequently gain more political power within the Union, and that slave labor could make it difficult for poor whites to find work. There was also an objection from the South to non-whites living on territories where whites wanted to live. The tensions escalated when Missouri wanted to join the Union while keeping slavery legal. This ended with the Missouri Compromise in 1820, which allowed Missouri to join and allow its citizens to keep their slaves. On the other hand, Maine also joined, but as a free state.[219] The tensions between pro-slavery and anti-slavery forces eventually led to the Civil War. The Republican Party opposed slavery while the southern states were pro-slavery. The South decided to secede and form the Confederate States of America. War broke out, and after four years of fighting, the North under Abraham Lincoln's leadership emerged victorious.[220]

After the Civil War, President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation which declared that slaves in the Confederate States would be free, but if a Union state practiced slavery, it was allowed to keep it, and the states occupied by the Union States were also allowed to keep the slaves. In practice, this meant that no slaves were freed.[221] The Civil War was followed by a restructuring of the southern states, as the old system was obsolete. Several problems arose, one of the most prominent being that African-Americans wanted the right to vote and to be treated equally. This was during the time of the introduction of the 14th and 15th Amendments to repeal the restriction of voting for people based on their race or former status as slaves. Despite this, true emancipation of African-Americans was not achieved, because the amendments were not enough to contribute to any substantial change in society. African-Americans still did not receive equal education to whites, and white leadership remained practically ubiquitous with non-white political leaders a small minority: the Republican Party still favored white candidates, the few African-Americans leaders were too moderate, and African-Americans were widely perceived as less capable leaders.[222]

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[217] Ibid., 10.
[218] Ibid., 10-15.
[219] Ibid., 17-18.
[220] Ibid., 19-20.
[221] Ibid., 22-26.

However, some gains for African-Americans were achieved: they were allowed to move freely from the South to the North, and education became more accessible, which led to the emergence of an African-American professional class, including teachers, lawyers, doctors and business owners. This progress was followed by a strong backlash from some whites, who tried to prevent African-Americans from voting so they could keep their exclusive representation in office. Later, discrimination against African-Americans became legal with the Jim Crow laws, which enabled complete segregation between the white and black populations in all public spaces, from education to transport. Segregation was additionally enforced by hate groups such as the Ku Klux Klan, and lynching.[223]

Segregation and discrimination encountered resistance from two leading schools of thought that emerged from the emancipation of African-Americans, those of Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois. Washington was a former slave who, with his education and a successful career as a teacher, was appointed the head of the Tuskegee Institute. He argued that the best opportunity for African-Americas lay in learning a trade useful to industry which would allow them to improve their economic status. DuBois was the first African-American to obtain a PhD from Harvard; he believed in getting equal civil rights and in fast integration into society.[224]

During the first half of the 20th century, further progress was achieved for the African-American community. They were granted more rights in employment and education, but they were still segregated and forced to live in poor but expensive housing. Lack of opportunity in the South resulted in the Great Migration, in which 60 Million African-Americans moved to cities in the North.[225] The First and the Second World War granted additional freedoms to African-Americans: because of labor shortages, they were allowed to get jobs in the military and industry. Nevertheless, after the war, they still were not entitled to the same benefits as white people. Even the New Deal did not reach and affect African-Americas to the same degree as it affected whites, especially in the South.[226]

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[222] Ibid., 27-29.
[223] Ibid., 29-31.
[224] Ibid., 46-54.
[225] Ibid., 64-66.

In the second half of the 20th century, the most important movement in the history of African-American emancipation in United States took place, the Civil Rights Movement. The Civil Rights Movement has its origins in the aftermath of the Second World War as African-American veterans were returning from their service. They could not get the same employment opportunities as whites, and at the worst of times, they were also attacked.[227] The antagonisms between African-Americas and whites continued into the 50s. A victory was achieved with the Brown case of 1954, which helped to desegregate schools.[228] In the following years, the movement gained momentum. Different leaders appeared, the most famous among them Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King Jr., and Malcolm X. Parks was the fulcrum of the Montgomery Bus Boycott. She refused to move to the allocated black section in the back of the bus upon orders from the driver, and her actions led to the systemic boycott of the buses.[229] Martin Luther King Jr. is unquestionably the most famous civil rights leader. He argued for non-violent protests and led marches, the most well-known the March on Washington, where he also delivered his famous “I Have a Dream” speech.[230] The Civil Rights Movement was not completely non-violent. A more radical approach was proposed by Malcolm X, who was critical of Martin Luther King Jr. and his non-violence. He advocated for violent retaliation by African-Americas against whites if the situation required it.[231] Probably the most radical group within the Civil Rights Movement was the Black Panther Party. They were known for defending their right to bear arms, which led to violent confrontations between the Black Panther Party and the police.[232]

Two of the key achievements of the Civil Rights Movement were the desegregation of education and the passing of the Civil Rights Act in 1964 and the Voting Rights Act in 1965. With the Civil Rights Act, segregation in public spaces officially ended. The Voting Rights Act forbade racist tests such as the constitutional interpretation and literacy tests which had targeted African-Americans and prevented them from registering to vote.[233] Opportunities for African-Americans increased with polices like affirmative action. Such a policy does not eradicate racism, but it gives a chance to people who otherwise would not have one. The changes were carried out on the federal level, giving access to federal jobs to African-Americans. It also enabled giving federal grants to companies employing people from disadvantaged communities. Similar polices were introduced in universities.[234] Nevertheless, there are still areas of public life where African-Americans are disproportionally affected, such as incarceration: it is well-known that African-Americans are punished more severely than whites for committing the same crime.[235]

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[226] Ibid., 83.
[227] Ibid., 91.
[228] Ibid., 101.
[229] Ibid., 105-106.
[230] Ibid., 120 -148.
[231] Ibid., 154-156.
[232] Ibid., 163-164.
[233] Ibid., 182-184.

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[234] "Affirmative Action" in *Dictionary of Race Relations and Ethinic Relations*, ed. Ellis Cashmore (London: Talor and Francis e-Libaray, 2003).

[235] Michael Tonry, *Punishing Race: A Continuing American Dilema* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 36-40.

Chapter 9

Analysis of the song “Tinseltown”

Tinseltown:[236]

They used to clown the kid like “scared money don’t make money”
Now they doing bids, right?
That’s why conventional wisdom don’t do nothing for me
Marvin Harrison passed the iron to Dungy
quiet ones be the shooters/he who dares wins
I’m down here with the losers
They robbed that whiteboy cause this aint Hoosiers
and stay looking for cracks like jewellers
Pressing
like army recruiters/manuever underwater/Afghani in the scuba
four Nigerians one computer/travailler/middle of the day
steak for two Peter Luger
AK-47 wit The Cheese/smoked gouda
only priorities is right now/the near future
Optomistic?
Every morning between my first sip of coffee/last digit on my scratch-off ticket
Middle Passage I had the sour rationed
the rest got scurvy and ricketts
Just another missive from the edge of irrelevance
I been on that Ralph Ellison so nowadays flow meticulous
ridiculous embellishments
[chorus]
They said it’s easy money but I just can’t truss it
She said I love you honey but I just can’t truss it
He said those his boys not to worry
just can’t truss it

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[236] The lyrics of “Tinseltown” are reproduced with the consent of Billy Woods.

They said come through errything lovely
just can’t

Pedal to the metal
enthusiastically peddle crack over instrumentals only to backpedal
when the narcs come knocking
any resemblance to real events is merely coincidental
Motherless child/Hansel & Gretel/abandoned in the ghetto
fear not a wicked witch but a clever Geppetto
have him holding the bag/her on stage in stillettos
separating Canaanites from they shekels/nigger pennies
add up if you the neighborhood Gordon Gekko
wooden nickels of that sour crunch like a good pickle
more flights than Biggles but at tonight’s show he play Don Rickles
salt on your game kosher/for putting his name too low on the poster
drunk as a fish harping that no respect Dangerfield
After the last drink ticket argument settles
jump behind the wheel and it’s
Pedal to the metal

In his song “Tinseltown,”[237] Woods illustrates various aspects of illicit activities connected with race relations. The title of the song is ironic because “Tinseltown” is another name for Hollywood.[238] At first, illicit activities may seem lucrative and a means to achieve wealth and power, but it is difficult to be a successful criminal, and leading a life of crime often ends with the death of the perpetrator. Similarly, Hollywood promises aspiring actors fame and fortune, but it is extremely difficult to be successful in Hollywood’s film industry – the chance of becoming wealthy and famous is minuscule, and most actors eventually fail.[239]

The song starts out with the idiom “scared money.” The stanza goes: “scared money don’t make money/now they doing bids, right?” “Scared money” denotes somebody who is afraid of taking risks.[240] The speaker in the song is in a company of people that encourage him/her to take risks and carry out illicit activities. In the line, it is not clear if he/she did eventually commit a crime, because he/she questions why he/she should do that if those who have taken the risks are in prison. This is described as "doing a bid," which means spending time in prison.[241] The next line questions conventional wisdom.

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[237] Billy Woods, “Tinseltown #9,” *Dour Candy*, op. cit.
[238] “Tinseltown” in *Oxford dictionary*, https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/tinseltown. (Accessed on October 8 2018).
[239] Kristen J. Warner, “Strategies for Success? Navigating Hollywood’s “Postracial” Labor Practices,” in *Precarious Creativity: Global Media, Local Labor*, ed. Michael Curtin and Kevin Sanson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016), 173.

The song continues with allusions to Marvin Harrison and Tony Dungy in the next line: "Marvin Harrison passes the iron to Dungy," which means the same as "Harrison gives a gun to Dungy." The slang word "iron" is used for a gun.[242] Harrison was a highly successful football player and Dungy was his coach.[243] Despite Harrison's illustrious career as a football player for the Indianapolis Colts,[244] he was allegedly involved in a gunfight. This shows that there is no clear path to becoming a criminal: getting involved in crime ultimately depends on the circumstances one finds oneself in. With the omission of the first names, Harrison and Dungy become everyday people in the inner city about to commit a crime. In the rest of the stanza, the allusion to Harrison is continued with the line "quiet ones be the shooters." Harrison was modest in his private life and it was a surprise when the allegations to being in a gunfight emerged.[245] The stanza further comments on the unpredictable character of criminal behavior by using the cliché of silent people being potential killers.

The song continues with the two men being dissatisfied with their present situation, which is why they decide to rob a white person. They justify their decision by stating that life is not like *Hoosiers*[246], a film about a fictional high school basketball team from Indianapolis that, under the guidance of a retired navy officer, wins the state championship. In the case of criminals (unlike in the film), being guided by a white person does not guarantee success. References to *Hoosiers* continue in the following stanzas. There is a reference to an army recruiter, which is an allusion to the coach from *Hoosiers*. The verse continues with a series of crime-related images with the emphasis on the black market involving monetary exchange and fraud. As an officer is exploring illicit activities, he/she will encounter criminals. This is shown through the imagery of the military and the Afghan people, hence it is possible to interpret this part as a reference to the United States' interference in the Middle East. Over the years, the United States financed various militant groups in order to expand their global influence, such as the Mujahedeen in the Russian war with Afghanistan. That act made possible the rise of Osama bin Laden and severely backfired in the early 2000s.[247]

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[240] "Scared Money," at *dictionary.pokerzone*, http://dictionary.pokerzone.com/Scared+Money (Accessed on March 12, 2019).

[241] Keesha M. Middlemass and John S. Calvin, "Doing a Bid: The Construction of Time as Punishment," *The Prison Journal* 96, no. 6: 793-813.

[242] "Iron" at *dictionary.com*, http://www.dictionary.com/browse/iron. (Accessed on 8 October 2018).

[243] Kevin Bowen, "Toney Dungy: Colts Head Coach 2002-2008," at *colts.com*, http://www.colts.com/news/longform/dungy.html. (Accessed on October 8, 2018).

[244] Kevin Bowen, "Marvin Harrison: Colts Wide Receiver 1996-2008," at *colts.com*, www.colts.com/news/longform/harrison.html. (Accessed on October 8, 2018).

[245] Jason Fagone, "The Dirtiest Player," *GQ*, February 1, 2010, http://www.gq.com/story/marvin-harrison. (Accessed on 8 October, 2018).

[246] David Anspaugh, dir., *Hoosiers*, (Los Angeles: MGM, 1986).

There is a type of fraud referred to in the song called internet phishing, which involves sending a letter to someone asking for personal information and bank account numbers to be sent back to the one who sent the letter.[248] The idea behind this is short-term success and monetary gain. The allusion and imagery used are connected to the high-end steak restaurant Peter Luger[249] and the double entendre of Gouda, which can be understood as a type of cheese as well as a slang term for money.[250] This interpretation is supported by the statements in the following stanzas explicitly stating that the main concern is the near future, and the line ends with what seems a rhetorical question, "Optomistic? [sic]" The question is then sarcastically answered by the speaker scratching lottery tickets in the morning.

The first verse ends with the speaker preparing to continue with crime. The metaphor of "Middle Passage" is used. The Middle Passage was the transatlantic voyage that slaves were forced to take from Africa to America, infamous for the inhumane conditions in which the slaves were transported.[251] Many did not survive the voyage because of weather, disease and insufficient accommodation. For the speaker, the Middle Passage is the steps which they must take before committing a crime. He even comments on the state of the competition. The imagery stays within the context of seafaring, referring to diseases that historically affected sailors, scurvy and rickets, which were caused by lack of vitamins and poor nutrition.[252] The verse concludes with the speaker looking inwardly. He/she concludes that in the long run, he/she is irrelevant. An allusion to the African-American writer Ralph Ellison is made, implicitly referring to his best-known work *The Invisible Man*,[253] a novel describing the issues that African-Americans faced during the early 20th century. The protagonist of the novel is metaphorically invisible to the society in which he lives. In the same way, a criminal must be invisible to be able to commit the crime.

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[247] Panagiotis Dimitrakis, *Secret War in Afghanistan: The Soviet Union, China and Anglo-American Intelligence in the Afghan War* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2013), 183.

[248] "Phishing" in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Last Updated 14 September 2017. (Accessed on November 2, 2018).

[249] Marena Cosmos, "Peter Luger Steak House," https://peterluger.com/our-story/. (Accessed on October 8, 2018).

[250] Lisa J. Green, *African American English* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 22. Available at https://assets.cambridge.org/97805218/14492/sample/9780521814492ws.pdf (Accessed on 8 October 2018).

[251] "Slave/slavery," in Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts, eds. Bill Ashcroft et al (New York: Routledge, 2007).

[252] Johathan Lamb, Interview by Simon Worrall, *National Geographic*, January 15, 2017, transcript, https://news.nationalgeographic.com/2017/01/scurvy-disease-discovery-jonathan-lamb/. (Accessed on October 8, 2018).

[253] Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: The Modern Library, 1992).

The chorus of the song uses the same slang term as the opening line: “They say it’s easy money but I just can’t truss it.” In both cases, the speaker is confronted by a woman who does not have faith in his position or his acquaintances. It does not matter if it is referring to easy money or an easy situation that he/she is about to put him/herself into. This is also a reference to the Public Enemy song, “Can’t Truss It” from *Apocalypse 91…The Enemy Strikes Black*,[254] which is a song about questioning official narratives. It also showcases that the speaker is not a trustworthy person and does not trust other people, as he questions everybody who gives him a proposition.

The second verse continues the narrative on illicit activities. Both stanzas describe a drug dealer whose home is raided by the police; he denies any connection to any criminal activity. Literary allusions to Grimm Fairy Tales are used to depict crime in African-American communities. An allusion to Hansel and Gretel[255] portrays exploited parentless children; Hansel represents the boys who are exploited for drug trafficking, and Gretel represents girls who are exploited in adult entertainment. The exploiters are also portrayed through allusions. The visible danger of the inner-city is rendered through the wicked witch, which means that it can be avoided. On the other hand, invisible danger is rendered through an allusion to Geppetto from The *Adventures of Pinocchio*,[256] which illustrates how covert dangers are more nefarious because they are difficult to detect.

However, the next line comments on crime as not being lucrative and claims that there is a high possibility of perpetrators being prosecuted by the police. Nevertheless, the line after that contradicts the comments by adding that if a person is driven by greed, crime might be profitable; this is supported with an allusion to Gordon Gekko from the film *Wall Street*,[257] a fictional Wall Street banker who manipulated stocks to profit at the expense of others. It must be noted, however, that he lost everything in the end.

The last few lines expand the narrative of success in an informal economy. The speaker is under substantial influence of marihuana, which can be seen from the line “more flight than Biggles." Biggles was a fictional British First World War fighter pilot appearing in the collection of short stories entitled *The Camels are Coming*.[258] "Flight" also means a strain of marihuana.[259] The last allusions are to stand-up comedians Don Rickles and Rodney Dangerfield. Rickles is used to portray the exaggerated glamour of illicit activities as he was known for using stereotypes in his humor.[260] In the end, illicit activities do not bring either wider social acceptance or respect, similarly to Dangerfield's comedy act, which was known for being self-deprecating and for the phrase "I don't get no respect."[261] The verse ends with the speaker continuing to pursue crime. This can be read as follows: the allure of the profitability of both show business and crime is so strong that the potential negative consequences do not prevent individuals from pursuing either.

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[254] Public Enemy, “Can’t Truss It #4.” in *Apocalypse 91... The Enemy Strikes Black* (New York: Def Jam, 1991).

[255] Jacob Grimm et al, *The Original Folk and Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm: The Complete First Edition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

[256] Carlo Lorenzini, *The Adventures of Pinocchio* (The Project Gutenberg EBook of The Adventures of Pinocchio, by C. Collodi--Pseudonym of Carlo Lorenzini). Release Date: January 12, 2006 [EBook #500]. Last Updated: November 11, 2016, http://www.gutenberg.org/files/500/500-h/500-h.htm. (Accessed on 9 October 2018).

[257] Oliver Stone, dir., *Wall Street* (Los Angeles: 20th Century Fox, 2006 (1987)).

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[258] William E. Johns, *The Camels are Coming* (New York: Red Fox, 1993).

[259] "Flight Cannabis Strain," *Cannasos.com,* https://cannasos.com/strains/hybrid/flight (Accessed March 12, 2019).

[260] "Don Rickles" in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Last Updated 30 August 2018. (Accessed on Oktober 9, 2018).

[261] "Rodney Dangerfield" in *Encylopaedia Britannica*. Last Updated 1 October 2018. (Accessed on October 9, 2018).

Chapter 10

Africa

Billy Woods spent most of the 1980s in Zimbabwe. His father supported the Zimbabwe's struggle for independence and was a member of the ZANU-PF party. He was not directly involved in the fighting, but rather supported the struggle in exile. After the country gained independence, he moved there with his family. Woods's mother continued her academic career in Zimbabwe, teaching at the University of Zimbabwe. The family lived in Zimbabwe for a decade, but after Woods's father passed away in the late 80s, they moved back to the United States. Taking all this into account, it is not surprising that colonialism in Africa is a common topic in Woods's songs. However, before we take a closer look at his writing, we need learn about some basic concepts about the context of the civil wars in Zimbabwe and Angola –one of the common topics he deals with, and alludes to, in his work. This will also introduce the next chapter, in which the "Cuito Cuanavale" is analyzed.

Angola was a Portuguese colony from the late 19th century until the middle of the 20th century. Its natural resources were used to fuel Portugal's economic development.[262,263] Zimbabwe, on the other hand, was colonized both for settlement and extraction of wealth. Before independence, Zimbabwe was called South Rhodesia, and later just Rhodesia.[264] After the Second World War, colonialism was not seen as a viable economic model.[265] Across Africa, various struggles for independence took place in the second half of the century, commonly known as the post-colonial period.[266,267]

In the 50s and the 60s, Angola experienced economic growth and its people saw this as an opportunity for social advancement, resulting in a period of political unrest and growing anti-colonial sentiment.[268] The three main factions in the fight for Angolan independence were the MPLA (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola), the FNLA (National Front of Liberation of Angola) and the UNITA (National Union for the Independence of Angola). Those groups were in constant conflict and rivalry, caused by ethnic, social and political

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[262] "Colonialism" in Ashcroft et al, *Post-Colonial Studies*.

[263] Fernando A. Guimarães, *The Origins of the Angolan Civil War: Foreign Intervention and Domestic Political Conflict* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2001), 4-14.

[264] Norman H. Murdoch, *Christian Warfare in Rhodesia-Zimbabwe: The Salvation Army and African Liberation, 1891-1991* (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2015), 1-7.

[265] Robert, C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Intruduction* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2001), 17.

[266] "Post-colonialism" in Ashcroft et al, *Post-Colonial Studies.*

[267] Guimarães, *The Origins*, 14-15.

[268] Ibid., 22.

differences. In spite of these differences, Angola managed to gain independence in 1975, but being independent did not deescalate the political tensions within the country, and the conflict between MPLA, UNITA and FNLA turned into a full-blown civil war.[269] Portugal's retreat created a power vacuum that was seen by the global superpowers as an opportunity to expand their influence in Africa. Each factions drew support from abroad; MPLA was supported by the Soviet Union and Cuba,[270] UNITA was supported by the United States and South Africa, and FNLA was supported by Congo and China.[271, 272]

With the interventions of global superpowers came the phenomenon Woods, among others, criticizes in his work: neocolonialism. Even after a colonized country has gained independence, it is still affected by the global markets run by their former colonizers. The internal affairs of the country can be directly or indirectly dictated by the ex-colonizer,[273] which can very clearly be seen in the case of the civil war in Angola. The war did not remain an internal affair, but soon became a proxy war between the United States, the Soviet Union and others who saw it as an opportunity to establish their influence. The Angolan civil war lasted from 1975 and 2002, with MPLA emerging as the victor.[274]

A similar sequence of events took place in Zimbabwe. An oppressive colonial regime was met with resistance and desire for independence. First, Ian Smith, a white ex-pilot and farmer, struggled to gain independence from Britain, and succeeded in 1965, when Rhodesia declared independence. Smith's goal was to establish a white minority rule similar to that in South Africa.[275] The non-white majority opposed this, and they formed various guerrilla movements to fight for their own independence. The two prominent guerrilla movements were ZANLA (Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army)/ZANU (Zimbabwean African National Union) led by Robert Mugabe, and ZAPU (Zimbabwe African People's Union)/ZIPRA (Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army) led by Joshua Nkomo.[276,277] ZANLA/ZANU enjoyed international support from China and ZIPRA/ZAPU from the Soviet

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[269] Ibid., 31.
[270] Ibid., 73.
[271] Ibid., 81.
[272] Ibid., 108.
[273] "Neo-colonialism/neo-imperialism" in Ashcroft et al, *Post-Colonial Studies*.
[274] "Angolan Civil War (1975-2002): A Timeline of Events" at *South African History Online*, last modified August 31 2018, https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/angolan-civil-war-1975-2002-timeline-events. (Accessd on October 7, 2018).
[275] Murdoch, *Christian Warfare*, 112-113.
[276] Norma J. Kriger, *Gurrrilla Veterans in Post-War Zimbabwe: Symbolic and Violent Politics, 1980-1987* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 26.
[277] Ibid., 28.

Union.[278] In 1980, the second independence was achieved, but conflict between the different political parties continued in the newly independent country, of which Robert Mugabe became the president.[279]

The relationship between intertextuality in hip-hop is similar to the relationship between post-colonialism and hip-hop. Hip-hop, an African-American art form started by the African diaspora in the impoverished communities in the Bronx, is post-colonial by nature, but the similarity between hip-hop and African post-colonialism do not stop here. We also need to take into account the historical position of the United States as a former colony and later, colonizer. The slavery in the country shaped the life and politics of African-American communities for centuries. Hip-hop and the African-American experience go hand in hand – they cannot be separated, and hip-hop will likely be a post-colonial art form for as long as it exists.

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[278] Ibid., 24.

[279] Ibid., 29.

Chapter 11

Analysis of the song "Cuito Cuanavale"

Cuito Cuanavale:[280]

They want it one way
but it's another
They want it one way
but it's another
They want it one way...

Through the looking glass
Robert Mugabe watches Bob Marley perform Zimbabwe
feelin' out of body
fresh out the bush still see the bodies/Pompeii
History Will Absolve Me/prolly
Botched robbery
Tupac in the lobby
true believers, Ian Smith on my left
dying breath cursing these niggers
African chess in the beds of dry rivers
a stick traces plans in the silt
Angolan land but the links Cuban built
neat trick
Now China owns the dam your blood still gets spilt
game sewed like an AIDS quilt
Daniel Day crazy straw up in your milk
There Will Be Oil
Dragonteeth sown in the soil
planes overhead, day and night
les miserables

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[280] The lyrics of "Cuito Cuanavale" are reproduced with the consent of Billy Woods.

he did it for a crust of bread and paid the price
I rep my era
bridge the gap
between Marachera and Sweatshirt
paperback Secret Sharer
admittedly it aint his best work
Network Haqqani
ISI let them boys cook
deplorable
but truth be told
we all love to see the white man shook

They want it one way
but it’s another
They want it one way
but it’s another
They want it one way
but it’s another
They want it one way
but it’s another
They want it one way
but it’s another
They want it one way
but it’s another

Earlier, we looked at concepts related to post-colonialism. Now, we can see how Woods integrated the civil wars in Angola and Zimbabwe into his writing by means of allusions and intertextuality. Colonialism is a common concept in Woods’s writing because of his personal experience. One of the songs where it features prominently is “Cuito Cuanavale.”[281] Woods makes different allusions to history, film and literature to explain concepts that might appear difficult at first glance, but which can easily be explained with the right allusion and context.

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[281] Billy Woods, “Cuito Cuanavale #15,” in *Dour Candy*, op. cit.

The first allusion to the civil war in Angola is in the title of the song – "Cuito Cuanavale" – which refers to the battle of Cuito Cuanavale in 1988, one of the turning points in the civil war and still an influential event in South African history. The two opposing forces, UNITA and MPLA, fought at the Lomba River near the town of Cuito Cuanavale. In the battle, UNITA was aided by South Africa and MPLA by Cuba and the Soviet Union. Both sides claimed victory in the aftermath. MPLA and Cuba claimed that South Africa failed to besiege the air force base, occupy Cuito Cuanavale and aid UNITA. South Africa, on the other hand, claimed that their aim was to block the enemy and hinder its use of the air force base, since any unnecessary action might have jeopardized the negotiations between Angola, Cuba and South Africa.[282] The negative consequences of colonialism is the main concept of the song and is further developed in the refrain and verse.

The refrain, "They want it one way/but it's another," is an allusion to the television series *The Wire*. In the fourth episode of the fourth season, there is a scene where the drug dealer Marlo and a security guard interact in a store. Marlo is stealing lollipops in front of the security guard, who confronts him. He tells Marlo that he is aware of his status as a drug dealer, but that he nevertheless should not steal right in front of him and should not disrespect him openly. Marlo ignores him at first, but as the security guard pushes him further, Marlo retaliates with "You want it to be one way, but it's the other way."[283] Marlo wants to assert his authority, because earlier in the episode Marlo was robbed by Omar, another character, in a game of poker with other drug dealers, and lost his dignity. With robing the store, he reasserts his pride by showing the security guard that good people do not win – he does. This scene builds on the previous concepts of two sides having a different perspective of the same situation. The security guard sees it as his duty to confront the shoplifter, even if it is Marlo the drug dealer. At the same time, Marlo, an established drug dealer who has a lot of money, does not mind that he is stealing right in front the security guard as he does not recognize his authority and wants to regain his lost dignity. The security guard sees himself as the authority and wants to be shown a certain amount of respect, but Marlo goes against this notion and demonstrates that the security guard does not hold any power and that good people do not win. The refrain is also a reference to the battle of Cuito Cuanavale, as both sides there fought for a specific outcome, but neither was able to achieve it.

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[282] "Battle of Cuito Cuanavale 1988." at *South African History Online*. (Accessed on October 7, 2018).

[283] *The Wire*, season 4 episode 4 "Refugees", created by David Simons, October 1 2016, HBO.

The opening line reads “Through the looking glass/Robert Mugabe watches Bob Marley preform Zimbabwe.” It is an allusion to the civil war in Zimbabwe. In 1980, when independence was won, Marley was invited to play at the independence concert after the flag of Zimbabwe was raised.[284] One of the songs he performed was “Zimbabwe” from the record *Survival*.[285] The song was dedicated to the newly independent country. The allusion to Robert Mugabe is used and expanded by including a reference to the novel *Through the Looking-Glass, and what Alice Found There* by Lewis Carroll.[286] In the novel, Alice observes through the looking-glass the Queen and a world different from her own. In same manner, Robert Mugabe was watching a new Zimbabwe being built after the war. The allusion is continued with Mugabe having an out-of-body experience in the same manner as the one Alice had when she was dreaming of Wonderland. Mugabe is remembering his own experiences from the liberation war. The war casualties are portrayed through an allusion to Pompeii, or more specifically, to the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 CE. The city was destroyed by debris and the cloud of volcanic ash, which preserved the infrastructure and the corpses of the people who were unable to escape.[287] Furthermore, it refers to another of Woods’s songs, “Pompeii” from *History Will Absolve Me*,[288] in which he parallels two stories that do not end as the protagonist wishes they would. In the first verse, a soldier is described who committed atrocities during the war and was tried for war crimes later in his life. This is juxtaposed to the second verse describing a man who becomes a drug dealer and dies because of it.

Mugabe’s reflection continues with an allusion to Fidel Castro’s speech *History Will Absolve Me*, which was given by Castro in prison after the failed rebellion against the Batista regime in 1953. While he was on trial, he defended himself and delivered the speech in which he confessed to the attempt at rebellion. Nevertheless, he condemned the Batista regime, proposed an alternative for how Cuban society should be run, and concluded the speech with the statement that judges might sentence him for his actions, but in the end, history would absolve him.[289,290] This ties in with the allusion to the Angolan civil war, as Cuba was one of the countries involved. The concept of negative consequences of colonialism is advanced in the same line, which ends with the word “prolly,” indicating Mugabe’s self-doubting. The reflection is a foreshadowing of the future and a comment on the consequences of post-colonialism. History did not absolve Castro, nor will it absolve Mugabe, because both abandoned their principles and became authoritarian rulers of their countries. This is further explained in the second line of the stanza, with the phrase “botched robbery,” which can be interpreted as a reference to the incompetent governments of Mugabe and Castro. Both started out as liberators of oppressed people, yet, after establishing new governments in their respective countries, they also abused their power to repress the population. On the other hand, “botched robbery” could be a reference to the colonization of Africa that ended with the liberation movements in the colonies.

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[284] Thobile Hans, “Bob Marley Serenades Zimbabwe on Its Birth,” at *cnbcafrica.com*, April 18, 2017, http://www.cnbcafrica.com/trending/forbes-africa/2017/04/18/bob-marley-serenades-zimbabwe-birth. (Accessed on October 9, 2018).

[285] Bob Marley, “Zimbabwe,” in *Survival* (London: Island Records, 1979).

[286] Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass* (The Project Gutenberg EBook of Through the Looking Glass, by Charles Dodgson, AKA Lewis Carroll). Release Date: February, 1991 [EBook #12] Last Updated: October 6, 2016, http://www.gutenberg.org/files/12/12-h/12-h.htm. (Accessed on 10. October 2018).

[287] “Pompeii” in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Last Updated 26 September 2018. (Accessed on 10 October 2018).

[288] Billy Woods, “Pompeii #12,” in *History Will Absolve Me*, op. cit.

[289] “Chronology” in *Fidel Castro Reader*, eds. David Deutschmann and Deborah Shnookal (North Melbourne: Ocean Press, 2008), 11.

This interpretation is supported by lines that include an allusion to the shooting of 2Pac at the Quad Record Studios in 1994, which was not successful, leaving 2Pac alive and hungry for revenge.[291] In the same manner, the colonizer wanted to kill off or subjugate the native population, but did not succeed, and the natives retaliated. In the second line, the memory of the liberation of Zimbabwe is evoked by a reference to the book *The True Believer*[292] by Eric Hoffer, which explains how mass movements are formed and how they work. The speaker refers to one of leading parties, ZAPU, which started out as a movement and was a major force in the liberation of Zimbabwe.[293] The next allusion is to Ian Smith[294] condemning Africans on his deathbed, referring to them as “niggers,” and to his rule over Rhodesia.

In the following lines, post-colonialism and its consequences are portrayed. The rivalry between the global superpowers and how they exert influence over Africa is referred to as “African chess,” with the two players being the United States and the anti-communist West versus the Soviet Union and other communist countries. The “dry river” is a reference to guerrilla warfare. Also alluding to the civil war in Angola, there is a mention of Raekwon’s record *Only Built 4 Cuban Linx…*.[295], referring to the Cuban support of MPLA in the war and

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[290] Fidel Castro, “History Will Absolve Me,” in *Fidel Castro Reader*, eds. David Deutschmann and Deborah Shnookal (North Melbourne: Ocean Press, 2008), 127.

[291] Charnas, *The Big Payback*, 474-475.

[292] Eric Hoffer, *The True Believer*, (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, (1951) 2002).

[293] Kriger, *Gurrrilla Veterans*, 23.

[294] Murdoch, *Christian Warfare*, 112-113.

[295] Raekwon, *Only Built 4 Cuban Linx…*.op.cit.

the communist self-interest. The original title of the record, *Only Built 4 My Cuban Linx Niggas*,[296]was censored before it was released.

The speaker is aware of the ulterior motives described in the previous stanza because the first line in the next one reads “neat trick,” which alludes to the after-effects of post-colonialism in Africa. After their independence, the newly formed countries entered the global economy, and their former allies started investing in Africa. This pattern can still be seen in the global trade between African countries and China. Initially, China supported the liberation of colonies, as with Angola, and today, China is one of the main investors in the same countries that it helped to liberate. One of the factors according to which China chooses its investments is the stability of the government. The inner workings of the country are not as important, and the country must also abound in natural resources. The Chinese investments were criticized by the former Governor of Nigerian Central Bank, Sanusi Lamido Sanusi, who explained that China invests in mining and builds the infrastructure, but uses its own labor force and equipment without teaching new skills to the local population. Sanusi concludes that China takes the resources and imports manufactured goods back to Africa, therefore reestablishing old colonial practices.[297] The line ends with “your blood still gets spilt,” meaning that despite new investments in the economy, violence continues to be a problem in the country because as long as the government is not threatened, investors ignore the internal struggles of the population. Post-colonialism is further laid bare as the song progresses. The problems of Africa are explained through the metaphor “game sewed like an AIDS quilt.” A quilt is a type of blanket with multiple layers,[298] like the structure of the systemic problems in post-colonial African countries. The problems are multi-layered, connected to the colonial past and the present, with internal violence and non-functioning institutions, which are in some cases maintained or perpetuated by neocolonialism.

The neo-colonial extraction of natural resources is depicted with intertextual references to the film *There Will Be Blood*[299] with the title paraphrased as “there will be oil” – thus emphasizing a reference to the novel *Oil*,[300] on which the film was loosely based. *There Will Be Blood* depicts the rise of Daniel Plainview, played by Daniel Day Lewis, a businessman who invested in natural resources and became rich when investing in oil in the late 19th century in the western United States. Plainview's business approaches were questionable. The scene from the film which is alluded to in the song is the one where Plainview meets a priest who came to sell Plainview land and Plainview explained how he deceived the priest as a child. The young priest persuaded his father to sell their land to Plainview. From this land, Plainview then extracted all the oil and rendered it worthless. In the same manner, neo-colonialism extracts resources from countries until there is nothing left to extract; the consequence for Africa is the wars for resources.

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[296] Ryan Pinkard, “Rewind: Raekwon’s Only Built 4 Cuban Linx…,” *Tidal*, August 5, 2015, http://read.tidal.com/article/rewind-raekwons-only-built-4-cuban-linx.(Accessed October, 10 2018).

[297] Wenjie Chen et al, “Why Is China Investing in Africa? Evidence from the Firm Level,” August 2 2015, brookings.edu., 6-8. https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Why-is-China-investing-in-Africa.pdf. (Accessed October 10, 2018).

[298] “Quilt” at *oxforddictionaries*, https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/quilt. (Accessed on 26 March, 2019).

[299] Paul T. Anderson, dir., *There Will Be Blood* (Los Angeles: Ghoulardi, (2007) 2008).

[300] Upton Sinclair, *Petrolej [Oil]*, (Ljubljana: Cankarjeva Založba, 1955).

An allusion to Victor Hugo's novel *Les Misérables* is used to describe the colonial struggles in African society. In the novel, Jean Valjean was incarcerated for nineteen years for stealing a loaf of bread.[301] African colonies were managed in such a manner that as much of their resources as possible could be extracted. If individuals broke the colonially imposed rules, they would be severely punished.

In the final few lines, Woods places himself directly in the song and states that he is a representative of his generation in the lineage of post-colonial experience. He alludes to this through the rapper Earl Sweatshirt, whose father is the late South African writer Keorapetse Kgositsile[302], and the late Zimbabwean writer Dambudzo Marechera.[303] Woods falls in the generation between Earl Sweatshirt and Dambudzo Marechera—he is older than Earl Sweatshirt and younger than Marechera.

The last allusion in the song is to Conrad's novel *The Secret Sharer*,[304] which is connected to allusions to the ISI and Haqqani Network. The ISI and Haqqani network was part of the war in Afghanistan. In the 70s, the king of Afghanistan was overthrown in a coup conducted by Afghan officers trained in the Soviet Union under the leadership of Sadar Mohammad Daoud, the prime minister of Afghanistan at the time. In the country, there were ongoing conflicts between Islamist groups and the Communists. First, Daoud suppressed the protests of the Islamists and later banned the Communist parties. The increased financial investment of the Soviet Union into Afghanistan was alarming to Iran and Pakistan. Pakistan decided to invest in Afghanistan to diminish the influence of the Soviet Union. This was brought to the attention of the United States, who wanted Afghanistan to address the question of the Pashtunistan and Baluchistan tribes. The United States wanted to increase aid to those tribes. The Baluch region of the Baluchistani was in Pakistan; therefore, this provoked a reaction from Pakistan. With the help of its own Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISI), and with the support of the CIA, Iran provided arms to the Mujahideen.[305] From those Mujahedeen, the Haqqani Network emerged; it was used to fight the Soviet Union in the 80s and contributed to the emergence of al-Qaeda.[306]

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[301] Victor Hugo*,* *Les Misérables* (New York: Vintage Books, 2008), 166.

[302] Dimitri Ehrlich, "Earl Sweatshirt" at *Interviewmagazine.com*, October 7, 2013, http://www.interviewmagazine.com/music/earl-sweatshirt/# (Accessed on October 10, 2018).

[303] Dambudzo Marachera, *The House of Hunger* (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2013), 1.

[304] Joseph Conrad, 2009. *The Secret Sharer* (The Project Gutenberg EBook of The Secret Sharer, by Joseph Conrad, Release Date: June 18, 2009 [EBook #220]). Last Updated: November 17, 2012, https://www.gutenberg.org/files/220/220-h/220-h.htm. (Accessed on 10 October 2018).

The unpublicized relationship between the United States and the sponsored Islamists is compared to the aforementioned novel *The Secret Sharer*, in which the captain of the ship takes on board a man accused of killing a member of his crew. The captain decides to hide him on the ship and later helps him escape without the crew being aware of it. Similarly, to support their agenda, countries are willing to make decisions that, if made public, would not be supported by the population. In the same manner, post-colonialism is implemented outside the West. Global superpowers invest in militant political groups for profiteering reasons regardless of the consequences this might have on the local population, even if it means collaborating with extremists and consequently proliferating their agenda. The final three lines of the song emphasize this by calling the acts deplorable; nevertheless, all parties involved are satisfied. Extremists get to further their agenda by using the finances gained from the West to attack the West. On the other hand, the governments in the West exploit those attacks to increase control over the population in their own territories. The last line of the song reads “we all love to see the white man shook.” This is a reference to the Mobb Deep song “Shook Ones Pt. II” from the album *The Infamous*[307] – keep in mind that “shook” means “scared” in informal English.[308]

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[305] Dimitrakis, *Secret War*, 1-7.

[306] “Haqqani Network” in *Mapping Militant Organizations*, at stanford.edu, updated November 7, 2017. https://web.stanford.edu/group/mapping militants/cgi-bin/groups/view/363. (Accessed on October 10, 2018).

[307] Mobb Deep, “Shook Ones Pt.2 #15,” in *The Infamous* (New York: Loud Records, 1995).

[308] ”Shook” at *oxforddictionaries.com*, https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/shook Accessed on 10 October 2018. (Accessed on October 10, 2018).

Chapter 12

Violence in rap

There are many preconceived notions about violence in rap, some justified, others not. It would be wrong to assume that rap and violence are not connected: the origin of violence goes back to the origins of hip-hop. In this chapter, however, we will look at how rap and violence are connected, so that we can then see how Woods integrated different violent events into his work. Looking at the development of hip-hop, it is clear that it has always been connected to violence, but how the violence was manifested differed between the parts of its development.

In the early 70s, when hip-hop was still just a youth movement, there was a strong presence of gang activity in the Bronx. Afrika Bambaataa's founding of different organizations to tackle this problem, and also b-boying (see chapter 2), gradually replaced gang confrontations. Still, the Bronx remained the most impoverished area of New York and the gangs did not disappear overnight. DJs were in constant danger when they were organizing the early parties. Sound systems were a valuable commodity, which made a DJ a potential target for a robbery. Therefore, security had to be hired, and because no formal security services existed in the Bronx, DJs hired former members of gangs for protection from other gangs. Not surprisingly, those former gang members got into confrontations with their ex-rivals, which would end up in fights, with the result that hip-hop parties had a reputation of being dangerous.[309]

Its association with violence did not stop as hip-hop developed. In the late 80s, there was a series of violent events: in Los Angeles in 1987, gang fights broke out; in Connecticut, a boy was killed at a rap concert, and in Nashville, two girls were trampled to death after another concert. These accidents reached their unfortunate peak in 1988 at the Saturday-night homecoming show where one person was killed and many more were injured. These accidents reflected poorly on hip-hop, and many prominent rappers came together to try to improve its image. The movement was called *Stop the Violence*, and the song "Self Destruction" was made to raise awareness of black-on-black crime and raise funds for anti-violence programs.[310]

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[309] Fricke and Ahearn, *Yes Yes Y'all*, 90-93.

[310] Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop*, 274.

From the 80s onwards, many rappers found themselves in altercations with the law over gun charges while many others passed away because of gun violence. The most infamous gun-related deaths in hip-hop were the deaths of 2Pac Shakur and the Notorious B.I.G., also known as Biggie. In 1994 2Pac was shot five times at the Quad Record Studios. This shooting is considered to be the starting point of the war between the two. Coincidentally, Biggie and Puff Daddy were recording in the same studio. At the time, 2Pac was facing rape charges and, as he was awaiting his sentence, he said in an exclusive interview that there was a possibility that Biggie and Puff Daddy were complicit in the ambush. Biggie and Puff Daddy denied involvement. The conflict escalated when 2Pac was signed by Suge Knight. At the 1995 Source Awards, Suge Knight publicly criticized Puff Daddy and the way he handled his artists.[311] The conflict was perpetuated further by *Vibe Magazine* giving platforms to 2Pac and Biggie, who exchanged verbal blows.[312] It ended with 2Pac's shooting in Las Vegas in September 1996. A few months later in early 1997, Biggie was also shot in Los Angeles at a *Vibe Magazine* afterparty.[313]

The deaths of the two most prominent artists had a profound effect on the rap industry. After his death, Death Row records sold millions of 2Pac records.[314] The death of Biggie Smalls caused Puff Daddy's career to skyrocket.[315] But in spite of all the bloodshed during the 90s, gun violence in rap did not stop. The most well-known gun incident in rap during the 2000s was 50 Cent being shot nine times in front of his grandmother's house. The incident was not a random act of violence: 50 Cent was already notorious in the music industry as well as on the street. He wrote provocative songs such as "How to Rob (An Industry Nigga)" and was fighting with Ja Rule. The fight between Ja Rule and 50 Cent resulted in physical confrontations between them. 50 Cent's antics did not fare any better on the streets. With the song "Ghetto Quran," he made enemies out of the drug dealers he mentions. All of these are seen as possible reasons why 50 Cent was shot.[316]

In modern rap, gun violence remains a problem. Several cases have happened in the last few years. In 2016, Troy Ave was involved in two incidents involving gun violence. First, he was arrested for attempted murder at a T.I. concert at the Irving Plaza in May,[317] with the charges dropped in early 2017 and his bodyguard instead charged with the murder.[318] Then, on Christmas day in 2017, Troy Ave was shot at in his car at an intersection.[319] In 2018, the 20-year-old rapper XXXtentacion was shot in a drive-by shooting.[320] Events similar to these are referred to in Billy Woods's song "Superpredator." His allusions describe some of the most notorious cases of gun violence in rap music.

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[311] Charnas, The Big *Payback*, 474-476.
[312] Ibid., 496-497.
[313] Ibid., 498.
[314] Ibid., 500.
[315] Ibid., 501
[316] Ibid., 584-585.
[317] Ashley Southall et al, "Rapper Troy Ave Is Arrested After Fatal Shooting at T.I. Concert," *New York Times*, May 26, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/27/nyregion/rapper-troy-ave-is-arrested-in-fatal-shooting-at-ti-concert.html?&moduleDetail=section-news-

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1&action=click&contentCollection=N.Y.%20%2F%20Region&region=Footer&module=MoreInSection&version=WhatsNext&contentID=WhatsNext&pgtype=article (Accessed on December 5, 2018).

[318] Joe Blistein, "Rap Personality Taxstone Charged in Fatal Shooting at T.I. Show," *Rolling Stone*, January 18, 2018, https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/rap-personality-taxstone-charged-in-fatal-shooting-at-t-i-show-110363/ (Accessed on December 5, 2018).

[319] Lauren del Valle, "Brooklyn rapper Troy Ave shot again," *CNN Entertainment*, December 27, 2016,https://edition.cnn.com/2016/12/26/entertainment/troy-ave-rapper-shot-trnd/index.html (Accessed on December 5, 2018).

[320] Jon Caramanica and Joe Coscarelli, "XXXTentacion, Rapper Accused of Violent Crimes, Shot Dead at 20," *New York Times*, 18 June, 2018. (Accessed on January 21, 2019).

Chapter 13

Analysis of the song “Superpreator”

Superpreator:[321]

He killed what he loved,
So had to die

Let off in the club mad loud.
Don’t errybody go get sad now
Used to listen to Bacdafucup
Before they clapped Mac’s truck up
Kool G Rap to us, Fredrick Douglass
With a Dutch

Criminal Minded, dead men pose
9 Milli go hard like the beat to Super Hoe
Lean out the car one eye closed and wash
Negroes off the block like a fire hose
Same rhyme necks shine and glow
We shoulda knowed since 14 To the Dome
Nah, nah since D-Nice had beef in the Homes
Since Noreaga tapin’ her, rapin’ her since they
Caught Lamont out on his own
Since Shyne wasn’t tryna go out like
Wolf Jones
You nobody till
Wish a nigga will
Hellz Wind whip through Killah Hills
Tall tales ex-dealers deal All hail
Entourage exchanging rounds

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[321] The lyrics of “Superpredator” are reproduced with the consent of Billy Woods.

In ya gentrified downtown
Mayor frown, guns found

Shot’s fired, shots fired, shots fired

Chekhov put Jay TEC on Nas’ dresser
Suppressor on the heckler
Prey Secular
Lay em down like Mecca
Superpredator
Layer gun sounds for texture
If it ain’t broke, cut the record
Burnt toast, cold breakfast
One entry, no exit
Your favela open carry like Texas
Settled it
With gunshots in ya setlist
No idle threats, straight genocide
Homie can rhyme
Fingers twisted into a sign of the times
Since DMX had blood in his eye
Who paid for Jam Master Jay to die
Get it how you live, right?
Send troubled young men to son crib
Wipeout, settle into that bid for life
Watch from cage, niggas ride ya wave
Like halfpipe, catchphrase merchandise
You was half right

The ever-present violence in rap is described in “Superpredator.”[322] Its lyrics are filled with allusions to famous incidents with guns. However, this is not a mere gimmicky display of different allusions: instead, it is a critique and commentary on, first, the relationship the rap audience has with violence in rap, and, second, on how the death of African-American men can be seen as entertainment without being taken seriously even when it happens in front of people's faces.

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[322] Billy Woods, “Superpredator #5” in *Known Unknowns*, op. cit.

The title of the song "Superpredator" is a reference to the 90s the term was coined as a scare word to bring awareness to the increasing levels of violence of juvenile delinquents in the inner city, and to the question of tackling the problem. At the time it was claimed that violence was on the increase (which was proven wrong in the early 21st century) among different groups, which was supposed to lead the juveniles into criminal behavior. By the late 90s, the term fell out of use. [323]

The refrain of the song, "He killed what he loved,/so he had to die" is a reference to a line in Oscar Wilde's poem *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, "The man had killed the thing he loved/And so he had to die."[324] This can be applied to rappers who remain committed to rap even though there is a possibility of getting murdered if they get involved with the wrong people.

The song starts with a prelude describing a shooting in a club. The speaker says he used to listen to Onyx's 1993 album *Bacdafucup*.[325] The allusions in the song are arranged in a loose chronological manner. Onyx are known for their grimy narratives about life in the inner city and the aggressive way they deliver them. One of the songs from *Bacafucup* is "Throw Your Gunz." The group was at one point involved in a gun accident because they used live ammunition on stage for the Source Awards in 1994 while performing "Throw Your Gunz."[326] The next allusion is to Mac Dre, a rapper with a long history of breaking the law, who was once arrested for an attempted bank robbery. The song refers to the time when he was shot and killed in his van.[327,328] The speaker ascribes to the rapper Kool G Rap[329] the same significance as to the abolitionist Fredrick Douglass.[330] Kool G Rap is considered one the best rappers that was active in the late 80s and the early 90s.[331] Yet, his proficiency in rapping was in contrast with his extremely violent and misogynistic lyrics. The speaker calls him "Kool G Rap to us Fredrick Douglass with the Dutch". Kool G Rap performed a song called "Go For Your Guns" on the album *Live and Let Die* in 1992.[332] A Dutch is a type of cigar.[333]

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[323] Matthew M. Le Claire, "The Use Of The Term "Superpredator": History And Application" at *huffingtonpost*, October 20, 2017, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/matthew-m-le-claire/the-use-of-the-term-super_b_12526462.html?guccounter=1&guce_referrer_us=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLmNvbS8&guce_referrer_cs=5nYkx43-TFhZOm066c1aYw (Accssed on March 12, 2019).

[324] Oscar Wilde, "The Ballad of Reading Gaol" at *poets.org*, https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/ballad-reading-gaol. Accessed on 17 November 2018.

[325] Onyx, "Throw Ya Gunz #3," in Bacdafucup (New York: JMJ Records, 1993).

[326] Christopher Pierznik, "In Appreciation Of: Sticky Fingaz," at *hiphopgoldenage.com*, January 25, 2017, http://hiphopgoldenage.com/appreciation-sticky-fingaz/. (Accessed on December 5, 2018).

[327] "Rap Singer Indicted in Conspiracy to Rob Bank," *LA Times*. April 12, 1992, http://articles.latimes.com/1992-04-12/local/me-146_1_rap-singer (Accessed on December 5, 2018).

[328] "Rapper Mac Dre Killed In Kansas City," *Billboard*, February 11, 2004, https://www.billboard.com/articles/news/65810/rapper-mac-dre-killed-in-kansas-city (Accessed on December 5, 2018).

[329] Bradley and DuBois, *The Anthology of Rap*, 193-194.

The first verse opens with "Criminal Minded dead man pose", a reference to the 1987 record *Criminal Minded* by Boogie Down Productions.[334] On the album cover, there are two of the three members, KRS-One and Scott La Rock, sitting behind a table with guns and ammunition. This was the only Boogie Down Productions record on which Scott La Rock was alive. He was shot when he tried to intervene in a fight between D-Nice, the third member, and a local drug dealer in 1987.[335] The allusions to *Criminal Minded* continue with the next line, "9 Milli go hard like the beat to Super Hoe." It refers to two songs, "9mm Goes Bang" and "Super Hoe," the first about killing a drug dealer with a 9mm pistol and the second a diss-track directed towards MC Sean.

What follows is a description of a person killing African-Americas without remorse. The speaker does not express any surprise at the development of violence. There is an allusion to *14 Shoots to the Dome* (1993) by LL Cool J.[336] This has historical connections to the hip-hop landscape. When LL Cool J first started rapping, he was only fifteen and was known to rap about girls,[337] but when Onyx came onto the scene, everything changed: many mainstream rappers started rapping about guns, even those who had never rapped about them, such as LL Cool J.[338] The lines after that return to the allusion to D-Nice and the feud in which Scott la Rock died.

The next section of the song moves to the late 90s. The listener is given the perspective of "Lamont." This is a reference to the shooting of Big L, who was an important rapper in the late 90s before getting shot nine times in a drive-by shooting, allegedly for something his brother did.[339] The imagery in the line comes from the Capone-N-Noreaga song "Parole Violators"[340]; the line reads "Since Noreaga tapin' her, rapin' her." It refers to the Tragedy Khadafi line that depicts raping a woman in the song mentioned earlier. The next line is an allusion to the 2000 Shyne incident, in which the rapper Shyne shot up a club after a provocation: "Since Shyne wasn't trying to go out like/Wolf Jones." The provocation was aimed at Puff Daddy[341] as "Wolf Jones" was one of his bodyguards. He was present at the shooting in 2000 and killed in 2003.[342] The concept of gaining fame after death is established with the line "you nobody till," which is a reference to the Biggie song, "You're Nobody (Til Somebody Kills You)."[343]

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[330] "Fredrick Douglass" in *The Wiley Blackwell Anthology of African American Literature*, op. cit.

[331] "Kool G Rap." *All Music Guide to Hip Hop: The Defintive Guide to Rap & Hip-Hop*, eds. Vladimir Bogdanov, Chris Woodstra, Sephen Thomas Erlewine and John Bush. (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2003), 265-267.

[332] Kool G Rap & D.J. Polo, "'Go For Your Guns' #11," in *Live and Let Die* (New York: Cold Chillin', 1992).

[333] "Dutch Masters" at *dutchmasters.com*, https://www.dutchmasters.com/. Accessed on March 12 2019. (Accessed on March 12, 2019).

[334] Boogie Down Productions, "9mm Goes Bang #3, Super-Hoe #9," in *Criminal Minded*, (New York: B-Boy Records, 1987).

[335] Charnas, *The Big Payback*, 190-191.

[336] LL Cool J, *14 Shots To The Dome*, (New York: Def Jam, 1993).

[337] Bradley and DuBois, *The Anthology of Rap*, 209.

[338] "LL Cool J." *All Music Guide to Hip Hop: The Defintive Guide to Rap & Hip-Hop*, eds. Vladimir Bogdanov, Chris Woodstra, Sephen Thomas Erlewine and John Bush. (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2003), 287-288.

The last references can be found in the line "Hells Wind whip through Killah Hills." They refer to the 1995 GZA song "Hell's Wind Staff / Killah Hills 10304"[344] from the record *Liquid Swords*, which is a song about a hitman for hire. The verse ends with an all-out shooting in downtown, which serves as a commentary on selective criticism of violence related to rap music. The real-life violence in rap music is usually discussed only if it happens in high-profile areas as could be seen with regard to the Troy Ave shooting that happed in the Irving Plaza. Irving Plaza is concert venue in an affluent neighborhood in Manhattan where many different high-profile bands play. The Troy Ave shooting was seen as bad for business and therefore, different public figures took a stance and commented on the shooting.[345,346] In the song this is portrayed with the lines; "Entourage exchanging rounds/In ya gentrified downtown/Mayor frown, guns found." It must be noted that such occurrences happen all the time in rap music (see Chapter 12), but only get covered when they happen in affluent areas.

The second verse opens: "Chekov put Jay TEC on Nas' dresser." The first reference is to an element of the theory of Anton Chekov's drama called Chekov's gun, which states that if there is a gun in one scene, it should also be shot in one of the scenes in the future. More generally, there should not be any prop on the stage if it is not going to be used.[347] The line is also a reference to an argument between Jay-Z and Nas.[348] When Jay-Z released his diss-track "Takeover," he rapped the line "I showed you your first TEC on tour with Large Professor."[349] Jay-Z was dissing Nas for not having street credibility, only rapping about what he saw, and for not being personally criminally-minded. Jay-Z claims that before Nas met him, he had never seen a gun. It was a jab at the Nas line on *Illmatic* on the song "Represent," "Nas is a rebel of the street corner/Pulling a TEC out the dresser; police got me under pressure."[350] Large Professor later confirmed that Jay-Z indeed showed Nas a TEC on his tour, but claimed that he was not sure if it was really the first time Nas saw a gun.[351]

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[339] Sha Be Allah, "Today In Hip Hop History: Big L Was Shot And Killed In Harlem 19 Years Ago," *The Source*, February 15, 2018, http://thesource.com/2018/02/15/today-hip-hop-history-big-l-shot-killed-harlem-19-years-ago/. (Accessed on March 12, 2019).

[340] Capone-N-Noreaga, "Parole Violaters #4," in *The War Report* (New York: Penalty Recordings, 1997).

[341] Charnas, *The Big Payback*, 584.

[342] "Man Arrested In Connection With Murder Of P.Diddy's Former Bodyguard," *Allhiphop,* November 12, 2003, https://allhiphop.com/news/man-arrested-in-connection-with-murder-of-p-diddy-s-former-bodyguard-7nq2q4eptEi2iN48eKrElA/ (Accessed on December 5, 2018).

[343] The Notorious B.I.G. "You're Nobody (Til Somebody Kills You) CD 2 #12" in *Life After Death* (New York: Bad Boy, 1997).

[344] GZA, "Hell's Wind Staff / Killah Hills 10304 #9" in *Liquid Swords*, op. cit.

[345] Ray, Waddell. "How Did the Irving Plaza Shooting Happen? 'A Man Had a Beef and a Gun'" *BillBoard*, 26 May 2016, https://www.billboard.com/articles/news/7385931/irving-plaza-shooting-safety-security-experts. (Accessed on March 13, 2019).

[346] "Irving Plaza Hisotory." *Mercuryeastpresent*, http://www.mercuryeastpresents.com/irvingplaza/venueinfo. (Accessed on March 13,2019).

"Superpredator" continues with the speaker killing a person, and then the speaker is referred to as a superpredator. He/she continues to intertwine the real-life violence with making of rap records; "Layer gun sounds for texture/if it ain't broke cut the record." The lines describe the common practice in rap music of sampling the gun noises.[352] The next line continues the gun imagery with "burned toast/cold breakfast." The speaker describes getting revenge with shooting a gun; the slang word "toast" is used, which means a gun.[353] "Cold breakfast" is a reference to the proverb "Revenge is a dish best served cold"[354] meaning that the time for revenge the most appropriate when some time passes between the time a person is wronged and the time of vengeance.

In the next few lines the speaker describes a rap show that he/she attends and the contradictions he/she sees. The lines describe the show like so: "with gunshots in ya setlist/no idle threats, straight genocide/homie can rhyme." The observed rapper is a proficient rapper, yet he convincingly raps only about killing African-Americans. The imagery ends with the line "fingers twisted in the sign of the times." There are several possible layers to the reference. First it refers to literal twist fingers in signs – meaning gang affiliation signs.[355]

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[347] Rayfield, *Anthon Chekhov*, 275.

[348] Bianca Giulione. "A Brief History of the Nas vs. JAY-Z Beef." *Highsnobiety*, June 20 2018, https://www.highsnobiety.com/p/nas-jay-z-beef/. (Accessed on November 21, 2018).

[349]Jay-Z, "Takeover #2," in *The Buleprint* (New York: Rocca-A-Fella Records, 2001).

[350] Nas, "Represent #9" in *Illmatic*, op. cit.

[351] "Large Professor on The Combat Jack Show Ep. 2 (Jay-Z dissing Nas on 'Takeover') | Complex" on Youtube, Uploaded on 14 March 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WZ4EHHjV9J4. (Accessed on October 16 2018).

[352] Paul Edwards, *How to Rap 2* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2013), 126.

[353] "Toast" *Urbanthesaurus*, https://urbanthesaurus.org/synonyms/pistol. (Accessed on March 13, 2019).

[354] "Revenge is a dish best served cold." The Phrase Finder, https://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/revenge-is-a-dish-best-served-cold.html. (Accessed on March 13, 2019).

[355] *Gang Awareness Guide*. Provided by the New Jersey Department of Education, https://www.nj.gov/lps/gang-signs-bro.pdf. (Accessed on March 13, 2019).

Second, it can refer to the passage in Matthew 16:2–3 in the Bible, a passage about two religious groups coming to Jesus and asking him about the existence of heaven. To this, Jesus replies:

> "When it is evening, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.' "And in the morning, 'There will be a storm today, for the sky is red and threatening.' Do you know how to discern the appearance of the sky, but cannot discern the signs of the times?[356]

The third possible reference is the Prince album *Sign o' the Times*.[357]

The speaker winds up in prison and a reference to blood in DMX's eye is made. This is also a reference to several accounts. First, it refers to the cover of DMX's first solo album *Flesh Of My Flesh Blood Of My Blood*.[358] On the cover of the album DMX is covered in red paint that represents blood. The second reference is to DMX's jail time. DMX was in jail many times in his life for various offences from the late 90s onwards, including possession of drugs, animal cruelty, parole violations and tax fraud.[359,360,361] Lastly, it refers to the book *Blood in My Eye* by George L. Jackson in which he discusses several issues from class struggle to fascism.[362] The next reference is to Run-DMC's murder of Jam Master Jay, who was killed in 2002 in his studio; the murder has not been solved yet.[363,364]

The last but one reference is a rhetorical question that is at the same time an intertextual reference to the Hot Boys' debut album *Get It How U Live!!* and the eponymous song, which is about dealing drugs and its possible negative consequences.[365] Hot Boys used to be the flagship group of Cash Money Records. They were important for launching the career of Lil Wayne.[366]

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[356] "Matthew 16," *biblestudytool*s, https://www.biblestudytools.com/nas/matthew/16.html. (Accessed on March 13, 2019).

[357] Prince. *Sign "O" The Times*. (Paisley Park, 1987).

[358] DMX. *Flesh Of My Flesh Blood Of My Blood*. (New York: Def Jam, 1998).

[359] Josh Grossberg, "DMX: Just Say No to Guns," *eonline*, January 11, 2002, https://www.eonline.com/news/42707/dmx-just-say-no-to-guns (Accessed on December 5, 2018).

[360] "Rapper DMX held on animal cruelty, drug charges," *CNN*, May 9, 2008, http://edition.cnn.com/2008/SHOWBIZ/Music/05/09/dmx.dogs/ (Accessed on December 5, 2018).

[361] Brendan Pierson, "Rapper DMX sentenced to one year in prison for tax fraud," *Reuters*, March 28, 2018, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-people-dmx/rapper-dmx-sentenced-to-one-year-in-prison-for-tax-fraud-idUSKBN1H43DJ (Accessed on December 5, 2018).

[362] George L. Jackson. *Blood in My Eye*. (Black Classic Press, 1990).

[363] Charnas, *The Big Payback*, 605.

[364] Opheli Garcia Lawler, "Jam Master Jay's murder investigation declared a cold case," *Fader*, October 29, 2017, https://www.thefader.com/2017/10/29/jam-master-jays-murder-investigation-declared-a-cold-case (Accessed on December 5, 2018).

[365] Hot Boys, "Get It How U Live!! #10" in *Get It How U Live!!* (New Orleans: Cash Money Records, 1997).

[366] Birdman and Slim, "Birdman & Slim on Cash Money's Wild Two Decades of Success: 'We Did It Our Way'," Interview by Dan Rys, *Billboard*, August 5, 2017, https://www.billboard.com/articles/news/magazine-feature/7785072/birdman-slim-cash-money-anniversary-interview (Accessed on December 5, 2018).

The final few lines are “Send troubled young men to son crib/Wipeout, settle into that bid for life/Watch from cage, niggas ride ya wave/Like halfpipe, catchphrase merchandise.” This is an allusion to the rapper Max B. Max B is an influential rapper that was associated with Dipset in mid-2000s. His trademark phrase was “the wave,” with which he described his style. However, in 2009 he was incarcerated on account of several charges, murder and robbery being two of them. Nevertheless, his slang and music were influential even when he was in prison and many mainstream rappers used his image to further their careers.[367]

In the song, it is possible to observe a legitimate overview of how fictional violence in rap overlaps with real-life violence. It is this unpredictability and the actual possibility of real violence connected with rap that makes the genre so appealing to the listener. The song is also a love letter to rap music as whole – despite all of its contradictions, rap is still a highly enjoyable genre of music. In the end, we have to keep in mind that a lot of violence in rap is exaggerated and that we should not take everything at face value, as rap as a genre does take some artistic licenses in depicting violence.

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[367] Paul Thompson. “Ride the Wave: Understanding Max B, the Influential Rapper Who Sparked Kanye West and Wiz Khalifa’s Twitter Spat,” *Vulture*, 28 January, 2016, https://www.vulture.com/2016/01/guide-to-max-b-who-sparked-the-kanye-wiz-spat.html. (Accessed on 13 March, 2019).

Chapter 14

Billy Woods from USA to Zimbabwe and back to USA

When[368] I was writing this book, Billy Woods was kind enough to agree to a lengthy discussion about his life and writing.[1] We spoke about how growing up in Africa affected him, what experiences he had there, why his parents moved to Zimbabwe and why they left. An important aspect of this conversation was his return to America and the difficulties that he faced. The following chapters are an adapted transcript of the interview.

Jožef Kolarič: I read that you spent your childhood in Zimbabwe. Could you tell me how growing up in Africa influenced your writing?

Billy Woods: What a big question! Certainly my experiences in Africa are a huge part of the person I am. I spent many of my formative years there, and my music is ultimately greatly affected by that time, because it greatly shaped me as a person. If you are looking for a more specific example, I would say that it discouraged me from blind idealism. I think that it taught me to look at everything critically; your identity, your opinions, your politics… I learned that there are many ways to live, and I also learned that people are the same, everywhere, in good and bad ways. It probably also helped that my mother was not from Zimbabwe, so I always had that duality, the insider who is never quite inside, the outsider who is never fully outside. These are powerful lessons to learn at a young age. I would also say that coming *back* to America after that experience was as big of a learning experience as moving to Zimbabwe in the first place.

JK: I also read that your parents fought in the Rhodesian Bush War. Both your parents are, or were intellectuals (your father was also in exile). Could you explain about what they did there – were they engaged in the conflict directly or did they help to rebuild the country, or both?

BW: Those are two different experiences. Again, my mother is not from Zimbabwe. She was involved in the same way lots of outsiders were: if you marry somebody, and they are passionate about something, you probably get involved as well. She was beginning her career as a professor, having two children and was doing all those things… Of course, she was conscious of lots of things, but although she was politically-minded and conscious person, my mother was very much a person of literature, the stage, writing and poetry. Those were her love and what she was focused on. I think she was involved, but it was not her main concern. As for my father's part: he was an intellectual and a writer. I know that they did while they were involved, although there are probably things I don't know about because my father is dead. I'm sure she wasn't asking about every single thing that happened, and my father might not have been willing to disclose the events that may or may not have been dangerous. I know that they helped with fundraising and organizing. Other exiles would also come and stay with them at times, so it was that kind of situation. My father was definitely not fighting, although he went back during the peace talks. But I didn't go there until independence.

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[368] Parts of the interview were translated into Slovene and published by *Revija Razpotja*. Billy Woods,. Interview by Jožef Kolarič. Translated by Katja Pahor. *Razpotja*: Revija Humanistov Goriške, no. 30 (December 2017): 86-89.

JK: Why did you leave Zimbabwe? In the first few years, the country was quite prosperous.

BW: Yes, the country was doing well. We left because my father died and my mother never liked it there. Imagine if you married a woman from France and she came with you to live in Slovenia. You met in France and you had children. Then, Slovenia carries out a revolution and you get into the government. She doesn't like Slovenia. It is fine, but once you are dead, she doesn't have any reason to stay. My parents did not have a great marriage either. Once my father was gone, she was more than happy to leave a country she never really liked and where she wasn't from.

JK: That is a great story. I have always thought that the reason why you left Zimbabwe had a more political background, since Zimbabwe did turn into a one-party state in late 80s.

BW: This is the part of history people will try to change. At the time, from the internal point-of-view and also in the context of that specific part of the world, what was going in in Zimbabwe was seen as a positive development. It was viewed as the end of both the post-liberation civil war and the ethnic strives with the country. I still remember the time when it happened: to me, it felt like a big positive achievement. The violence that was going on in the countryside was going to stop, and it felt like the country was better prepared to prevent similar internal divisions. The relationship with South Africa was still a big problem, though. There was this fear that Zimbabwe was going to fall down the rabbit hole of South African interference and the internal strife that happened in Mozambique. But when Zimbabwe declared independence, its political picture was viewed as one of a unity government with Joshua Nkomo, the other political leader who had been in exile after the problems started. It certainly didn't felt like bad news. It felt like: finally it's over, there's going to be peace and we are going back to what we were doing before. It didn't feel like a negative development at the time. Robert Mugabe was widely liked.

JK: What are some things you still remember from when you were and still living in Zimbabwe?

BW: This is a difficult question. It was a very long time ago, and the time I remember most is when I was a part of a family unit. Once we moved to the United States, my sister went to boarding school and my father was dead, obviously. I do associate that time with my extended family because they were also around. There are so many things – some are outdated in certain parts of the world, like the drive-in movie theaters. We still had milk men who brought the milk in the morning. You dropped the empty milk bottle on the side of the road and the milkman dropped a new milk bottle in the morning… which seems quaintly British now. There are the weird little things like that. We used to go to the drive-in movies with my friends and older brothers and sisters, which is a very American thing to do. The theater in Zimbabwe is the only drive-in theatre I went to, because by the time I came to USA, the drive-ins where kind of done. I remember as a child the relics of the war and the other wars that were raging. To a little boy, army and war are the things that seem exciting, but also scary when you find yourself in the actual military situation. As a kid I used to be disappointed because my dad didn't kill anybody! When you're five, your understanding of these things is in the context of G.I. Joe. I also remember being an outsider, which is how I always felt there. I was traveling to the rural areas a lot with my father, and I was unable to communicate with people because I didn't speak the language. Sometimes we would go to some rural area in the middle of nowhere and my father would be attending to some business. I spent hours there playing with the local kids and realized that they were wearing the only clothes they had. The youngest children were scared and were watching me from the house, and those didn't really have any clothes. To me, this meant realizing just how much more one can have than other people do. There is too many things to tell you about: my dogs, my friends, my uniform from when South Africa attacked, the fights and attacks, the city, the Britishness of Zimbabwe as well as the Africanness. There are a lot of things to love about that country, and also a lot of things that sucked.

Chapter 15

JK: On[369] the song "Bleachwater,"[370] you say somewhere that you were in a pool while somebody was pouring bleach into that pool. Is that a true story?

BW: Yes, that's a funny story from Zimbabwe. I had an American friend whose family worked in Zimbabwe. When he came to my school, I immediately wanted to be friends with him. I always felt very American when I was there. This is something I realized later: you feel the most connected to the place you are from, when you go away. Nothing will make me feel more American than leaving America. So when this kid came to my school, we instantly started hanging out and instantly became really good friends. We started to hang out at his house. His mother was from different African country and his father was a New York Jew. They both worked for the USA, good people. The kid was one of my best friends for the duration of the time he was there. His parents had a really nice house, obviously: it belonged to the US government. People don't realize how well you can live in a gated community. Across the street, there was this white dude with his kids. I don't remember… it was so weird! I don't remember why that is both funny and sad. My friend's house didn't have a pool, so we would sometimes go to swim across the street in this neighbor's pool. My friend knew the kid who lived across the street, so we could go swim in their pool, but when we did so, his dad would come outside and put chlorine into the pool. We were young, so I don't think we made any connection. We were annoyed; I just thought it was weird. I remember telling my mom. That was the interesting thing in Zimbabwe: in a lot of ways, white racism had been defanged. At least for a person in a position of some privilege. I can't say that was true for everybody, but there was noting a white person could do to me. It was interesting how my mother reacted. It's funny: what a sad pathetic person he was, but his behavior wasn't like the one you find here. We didn't need to go swimming in his pool. I'm sure he felt he possessed some applied superiority, but I never even considered it. I hadn't been living in America or any other white country long enough to absorb the idea. I found it amusing that people could think that they were better than me because they were white. If somebody does something like that in the United States, this only adds humiliation on top of the history of things that happened. At that particular place and at that particular time, for me and my particular class, or position within the country – this was when I realized that somebody was being racist. Some of the White Africans would only be briefly removed from living in the Apartheid. People would sometimes be racist in a very open way, which is not like the way people were, or are reluctant to be in America. I was taking a bus to Bulawayo as I was a teenager and I sat down on a charter bus. I was probably thirteen. Well, as soon as I sat down, a woman there sucked her teeth in disgust, a sort of visceral disgust, and muttered a racial comment. I was embarrassed, but mostly thinking about how pathetic that was. I was a little kid anyway, the point for those sorts of hooks to catch, because I hadn't had any feeling of being naturally inferior as a black person.

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[369] Parts of the interview were translated into Slovene and published by *Revija Razpotja*. Billy Woods, Interview by Jožef Kolarič. Translated by Katja Pahor. *Razpotja*: Revija Humanistov Goriške, no. 30 (December 2017): 86-89.

[370] Elucid. "Bleachwater #6," in *Save Yourself* (New York: Backwoodz Studioz, 2016).

JK: You also said that it was difficult readjusting to the life back in the United States. What was the most challenging part of moving back there?

BW: In my head I have always been an American. I very much thought about myself as an American back then: it was my point of identification. Once I got back here, obviously, we would go back all the time. It was like visiting your family. My mother's family lives in the US. They themselves are immigrants and so were your mother's friends, and because of that I did not actually get a really good view of what it would be like to live there. Once we actually came back here, I had a British accent. I was a kid. In Zimbabwe, being twelve years old means you're a kid. In America, thirteen-year-olds, especially a lot of young black people, had more adult experiences. I did have some adult experiences, but I was still just a kid while American kids at thirteen were already hustling and all sorts of shit when I came. My problems about fitting in were mostly just small things. I had a strange accent. I came from a culture in Zimbabwe. I always prided myself on being smart and doing well in school, whereas here in the United States, people were saying "You're trying to be white if you tried to ask the teachers questions in school." I had dealt with racism before for sure, but I had never dealt with that aspect of it that I encountered here. My whole family was different, too. I went from being with the nuclear family and also the wide extended family, to just me and my mother. It was a challenge. Culturally, coming back was a challenge identity-wise: there were aspects of being black in America that I had no idea about. In terms of day-to-day life, there was a challenge with the different modes of masculinity here. How different life was on every single level presented a challenge to me. Here, I wasn't in any way a privileged person… but don't get me wrong there never was a day that there would be no food to eat in my house. But I understand that there were people much worse off. In Zimbabwe, we had a lot of privileges we didn’t have here. We had a maid, a gardener and a big house. Here, I had to cook all our food and do our laundry as my mother was working full time and expected a lot from me. I grew up with a lot of violence in Zimbabwe, but it was different from the violence I encountered here. Every aspect of life was different.

Chapter 16

Billy Woods: the rapper

The conversation[371] then turned to his rap writing and rap influences. He thoroughly described how Chuck D, Vordul Mega, MF DOOM and Ghostface Killah had influenced him, his rapping and how he integrates intertextuality into his writing. He described his writing process and the stylistics choices that he makes in his writing.

JK: When you were in college, you studied creative writing and political science. Were you already rapping at the time? When did you start to rap actively?

BW: I met a girl, and through her, I met Vordul Mega and some other people who then blew my mind. I was really into hip-hop but I had no exposure to the bustling underground scene. There was no internet – it is crazy to think about how different life used to be. I knew nothing, even as big-time rap fan. I'm sure I did see a Freestyle Fellowship video, but I definitely didn't know anything about Company Flow or The Juggaknots record… I didn't know any of those records, let alone the rap that wasn't put out on records. I had never been to a rap show of any kind.

JK: But isn't Washington D.C. a predominantly African-American city?

BW: Yes, it is, but Washington D.C. had a very distinct culture, especially in terms of music. Most Black Americans in D.C. listen to the local type of music called Go-go. People do listen to hip-hop if it is on the radio, but Go-go is the urban music of choice. It's all live instruments and based around parties, and call and response. There was no real indie scene, certainly not in D.C. There wasn't one even on the mainstream level, even when D.C. was the nation's murder capital. The generation growing up at the time I was there was not one defined by gangsta rap stars. In Marilyn, where I went to high school, the culture was also very diffused and young. I was getting all my rap from TV and the radio, but during the same time, Rap City was founded in D.C. At first, they didn't have much programming, but the show was still four hours long. If a band had the budget for a video, I probably saw their music on Rap City. I was exposed to stuff like The Coup – I was really into them. I guess they were on Wild Pitch Records, and they also did have a couple of videos. I would go and buy their shit whenever I could, and it was the same with Cypress Hill. Earlier when I was younger, the main artist I listened to was D-Nice, and Public Enemy were also big for me. Then also Ice Cube and Da Lench Mob: that was my engagement point with music. At the time, some quite obscure stuff would also get on TV. There was this D.C. group called Questionmark Asylum. They had one good single and I bought their album. It was not a good album, but that was how I was interacting with music. When I came to New York, I met all those people through this girl, Brooke, who Vordul also shouts out on *The Cold Vein*. I was like, "people you know can rap!" Until then, I never even thought of that. As far as writing and political science are concerned, those are my courses of study, nothing else.

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[371] Parts of the interview were translated into Slovene and published by *Revija Razpotja*. Billy Woods, Interview by Jožef Kolarič. Translated by Katja Pahor. *Razpotja*: Revija Humanistov Goriške, no. 30 (December 2017): 86-89.

JK: You are the first rapper I became aware of that consistently integrates literature into his writing. However, the interesting part about you is that you do not use it like rappers from previous eras, that is, to bring more diversity into your similes and allusions by borrowing some from pop culture. The records best comparable to yours that also integrated literature into rap would be *Funcrusher Plus*,[372] *Operation Doomsday*,[373] *The Cold Vein*[374] and *Labor Days*.[375] Your writing seems to be a continuation and modernization of the stylistic choices on those records. Did you consciously decide to upgrade the preexisting forms?

BW: Those records are all very important, both for my development as an artist and for the genre itself, although for different reasons. Still, I loath to say that that was my approach. My relationship with literature is entirely the result of my upbringing – my mother has a PhD in English literature as well as being an author; my father was also an academic (until he wasn't) and when I was a child, the books were like a religion to my family. So, my use of literature in rap was simply inspired by the fact that literature was an inextricable part of who I am. I probably read more as a child than I do now.

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[372] Company Flow, *Funcrusher Plus*, op. cit.
[373] MF DOOM, *Operation Doomsday*, op. cit.
[374] Cannibal Ox, *The Cold Vein*, op. cit.
[375] Aesop Rock, *Labor Days*, op. cit.

JK: In the song “BBC,”[376] you allude to *Heart of Darkness*[377] by Joseph Conrad. As far as I know, this was one of the first songs of yours that used intertextual references to emphasize its post-colonial aspect. In 2004, this was a novelty in rap content and since then, it has become a recurring theme in your songs. From 2003 to 2010, post-colonialism was present in your songs; even if it was not central. But since *History Will Absolve Me,*[378] it has become a staple in your songs. Was it challenging to explore a new topic in rap that had not been explored before? What were the initial difficulties that you faced? How did your writing change over the years?

BW: Hmm… I have not considered the central idea here [that there was a shift in my allusions to post-colonialism on *History Will Absolve Me*, AC] before, but it may be so… although I’m tempted to say that I probably just got better at writing, and thus those ideas were able to be integrated into the work in more nuanced ways. Also, I spent a lot of that time rapping in groups, so my ideas often needed to be subsumed within the bigger concepts. On *HWAM*, I was a much more mature artist than on *Camouflage*, much of which I wrote when I was between 22 and 23 years old. And frankly, I was still trying to figure out how to make songs, and at the same time trying to refine these concepts. I would also say that *Camouflage* was greatly affected by the immediacy of 9/11. We were working on it just across the river when the towers were knocked down, and we completed the album in the shadow of the attacks and the resulting American invasions. The immediacy of it perhaps overshadowed some of the post-colonial discourse that has always been always in my work, and perhaps even the stuff that made it onto the album.

As far as initial difficulties are considered, I didn’t think about it being ‘something new’ at the time, I was simply writing the things I thought about and read about and talked about with people. I do remember hearing Immortal Technique’s album *Revolutionary Vol. 2* and thinking “Well, this is popular *and* overtly political, but it’s not the same thing I do.” I’m not slighting his work, but I felt my approach has always been somewhat nuanced and indirect, and his was the opposite; bellicose, didactic and confrontational. That was really when I started to realize that what I did might have trouble finding an audience. Which turned out to be true.

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[376] Billy Woods, “BBC (Backwoodz Broadcasting Corp.) #5” in *The Chalice*, op.cit.
[377] Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (New York : Dover publications, 1990).
[378] Billy Woods, *Histroy Will Absolve Me*, op. cit.

JK: You mentioned that *Camouflage*[379] was affected by 9/11, and that your approach made it difficult to find an audience. I find it extremely brave that you made songs like “Poli-Sci”[380] or later “First Blood,”[381] but wouldn’t such songs alienate the audience even more? Are those topics deliberately chosen as a provocation? Why write from an extremist perspective, considering the context in which they were released?

BW: I think that I realized pretty early on that I was only going to have any success by doing the things that interested me. I was never going to attract people whose primary interest was in “technical proficiency” or, to use the parlance of our times, “bars” [laughter]. I also saw a lot of post-9/11 “politically minded” rap suddenly appear, and most of it was very shallow and derivative of people like *Immortal Technique*. I also knew that I was not going to make that sort of music no matter what. So, I just did what I did, understanding that it was entirely possible for it to be ignored, but feeling like that was my best shot and, more importantly, true to me as a person and an artist.

JK: You seem to have been greatly influenced by MF DOOM. Some of your songs use similar structures, other have similar topics (“Meat Grinder”[382] and “Ca$h 4 Gold,”[383] for example), and your last record *Today, I Wrote Nothing*[384] is structurally similar to *Madvillainy*.[385] Could you explain what you find intriguing about MF DOOM?

BW: My three greatest influences within the genre are MF DOOM, Vordul Mega and Chuck D. Chuck is one because he was my first rap idol. I used to pore over his lyrics when I was buying the cassettes. Public Enemy was the group brought me to rap music and among them, Vordul Mega was the one who taught me to rap, made me believe I could do it, and lent his support at crucial times early on. He also turned in one of the true virtuoso rap performances of his era on *The Cold Vein*, and this record has always provided a guide for me to try and bring that level of pathos to my projects, even if I couldn’t match that level of technical [sic] skill. DOOM and I share a common un-commonality – he is also the child of a Zimbabwean father and a Jamaican mother who grew up in the United States, so that was one thing. More importantly, he is arguably the best rapper of his era and his ability to be original, to wield unusual skill and yet never sacrifice his creativity, has always inspired me. He also made his own rules regarding the song structure, the concepts, choruses, and all of that appealed to me because I felt like he showed that you could be unorthodox and still be ill. You didn't have to sound like Nas, or have a chorus, or have your face on the cover of the album… you just needed to make ill music. On top of all that, he had an unerring ability to hide pain inside humor, and vice-versa, which is everything to me. He is a *huge* influence and I try to acknowledge that all the time.

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[379] Billy Woods, *Camouflage,* op. cit.

[380] Billy Woods, “Poli-Sci #8,” Camouflage, op. cit.

[381] Super Chron Flight Brothers, “First Blood #8,” *Emergency Powers: The World Tour,* op. cit.

[382] Madvillan, “Meat Grinder #3,” in *Madvillany* (Los Angles: Stones Throw, 2004).

[383] Billy Woods, “Ca$h 4 Gold #4,” in *Histroy Will Absolve Me,* op. cit

[384] Billy Woods, *Today I Wrote Nothing,* op.cit.

[385] Madvillan, *Madvillany,* op.cit.

That aside, *TIWN* is structured that way because of the Daniil Kharms book from which the title is taken, not at all because of *Madvillainy*. Also, I would question whether "Meat Grinder" and "Ca$h 4 Gold" really have the same concept.

Chapter 17

JK: You[386] said that you admire the work of Ghostface Killah, MF DOOM and Aesop Rock. Can you explain what you find so intriguing about them?

BW: I wouldn't say that Aesop Rock is one of my greatest influences. I would, however, say that he is somebody whose music I really enjoyed. But, about him being an influence on my music… I only started to listen to him when I was already well-formed. I would put Public Enemy above Aesop Rock as an influence. For example, Vordul Mega – he was an actual person that would sit and rap with me. We would rap together a lot. I maintain that his performance on *The Cold Vein* is the best that anybody has ever rapped. It is up there in terms of pushing boundaries stylistically, as well as being incredibly dope, full of information and senses and colors. It was really interesting, and it hit my sweet spot. I remember his early work and him telling me about when he learned to stop shouting. Whereas he was still shouting in early, *Atoms Family* stuff, he just hit the spot with *The Cold Vein*. I understand that now that I am an artist: you find your voice at your particular moment at time. *The Cold Vein* was that time for him. He was still getting a lot of information but was stylistically more challenging, his flows were more agile, and his styles were more interesting because he was not shouting. I learned a lot from that dude. Sometimes there are people who do something really incredible and unique. It doesn't necessarily inspire anybody else to do something good, but that doesn't make what they are doing any less good. On the other hand, there are people who do something that changes the frame for everybody. I don't think any side is better or worse. Lots of people try to write like Hemingway and a lot fewer people try to write like Flannery O'Connor or William Faulkner, but that doesn't make Hemingway any better than Faulkner. William Faulkner burst a million sons. Even James Baldwin put William Faulkner as one of his literary fathers. Flannery O'Connor doesn't have that many. But all that matters is that we know how the roots of literature and art have developed. It doesn't matter if an artist was good or not. Sometimes people are just doing things that are too difficult to imitate. Going back to Aesop Rock: he is an interesting example. Imitating Aesop Rock will make you suck, but he is great. You can't see many Aesop Rock clones that were birthed from the tree directly. The influence is there, but is second-hand. With some people, it just doesn't work if you try doing it like them: you just sound like a copy. I think Aesop is that type of artist. You can learn a lot by seeing how he does his craft, but you can't ape what he is doing. Most people can't even rap like that, let alone write.

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Sometimes I see people compare Elucid and Aesop. I can see why people would do that: they are interesting when juxtaposed. They both have deep voices capable of doing a lot of different things. They can switch up their flow and go nuts. They can do a lot stylistically, they both would veer between imagery and opaqueness in their rhymes, but other than that, they are not that similar. And I read these things where they say, "Elucid is clearly influenced by Aesop Rock, or Cannibal Ox" – that is just not right. But people don't like to think. You have to think hard. People just believe a first thought is actually good, that it is probably just OK. If they thought some more, they would probably think of a better analogy and wouldn't be saying the same thing. Anybody who has 30 seconds can say "that sounds like Def Jux." Well here is what I think: first, second and third, there would be markers, and there would be some substance to that idea. But people will often go for the easy sort of things. I doubt that Elucid owns an Aesop Rock album. And I can tell you for sure that he doesn't know the lyrics to any Aesop Rock song. That is not really where Elucid is coming from at all. But people make their own impression and superimpose it on something, which I think is always dumb.

MF DOOM was really an artist that shattered the blackboard with his ability to create a persona. If you want to take it to the technical level, MF DOOM's making himself a character in his own songs was the impetus for so many people to refer to themselves in the third person in rap. Crazy! MF DOOM was rapping to you in a third person, about shit that DOOM does, and that shit was bugged. The style was just crazy. The intersection of humor, politics, social awareness and street shit. He is a fucking 80s rapper, there is a fair amount of 80s rap shit. DOOM was one of the greatest to do it in my time, and of all time. It does not mean much saying for him to be one of my influences. 20% of people rapping were influenced by him.

Ghostface was definitely an influence. This is because of Vordul – I will tell you exactly what happened. We were in Harlem in my apartment. It was me, him and Alexander Richter that night in 1999 or 1998. Ghost was not even a thought when the Wu dropped to me. After *Cuban Linx* I thought, "the dude was dope," and after the *Ironman*… At the time *Ironman* disappointed me, but Vordul fucked with *Ironman* heavy. I would hear *Ironman* from his perspective. He got me approaching the lyrics differently and thinking about the lyrics differently. That shit makes sense, you just have to put it together. I remember there was song called "Cobra Clutch." It came out before *Supreme Clientele*, it was on a street mix-tape or it was on the *No Pork on My Fork* mix-tape that Vordul had. “Cobra Clutch” was just insane, it was something that seemed like a crazy stream of non sequiturs over a repetitive a tonal beat. He would just listen to me and explain why this was the greatest thing ever, this shit was fucking ill. After a while, I would just sit there and listen to it. I would still be thinking, “Ghostface is dope,” and then I moved back to D.C. And right when I moved back to D.C., *Operation Doomsday* drops, *Supreme Clientele* and *The Cold Vein* came out. I had to place a special order for it because they didn’t have any of those type of stores in D.C. I didn’t have the internet yet. *Supreme Clientele* was supposed to come out in December, and it didn’t. I rode my bike to the mall and learned that it had been pushed back. It came out next year when I was back in D.C. in 2000. Since I knew Vordul, I had heard some of those things. *Supreme Clientele* blew my mind. I had already started studying how Ghostface was putting his shit together. That was the highpoint of his employment of that particular style. After *Supreme Clientele,* Ghostface moved away from it in a lot of ways. Whenever he would do it later, it was as if he was poking fun at it, but at the time, I think, it was deadass earnest.

JK: In 2009, MF DOOM sampled Bukowski’s “Dinosauria We”[387] in his song “Cellz,”[388] and in the same year you released “The Man Who Would Be King.”[389] In your song, the chorus is a verse of the poem “White Man’s Burden”[390] by Rudyard Kipling. Is this a coincidence or did you improve and expand the concept initiated by MF DOOM?

BW: Coincidence. Growing up with two parents who were born into British colonialism outright and growing up in a newly liberated British colony (we moved to Zimbabwe when I was five) meant that I was intimately familiar with that poem from a young age.

JK: There is one stylistic choice that I noticed in the form of your songs. You tackle one topic from two different direction in each verse. Some of your songs that apply this method are “Pompeii,” “Human Resources,”[391] “Poachers” and “Lucre.”[392] What makes this method suitable for rap writing?

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[387] Charles. Bukowski, “Dinosauria We,” in *The Last Night of Earth Poems,* op. cit.

[388] DOOM, “Cellz#10,” in *Born Like This,* op. cit.

[389] Billy Woods, “The Man Who Would Be King #3” in *Hostory Will Absolve Me,* op. cit.

[390] Rudyard Kipling, “VII. The White Man’s Burden (from ‘The Five Nations’),” The Project Gutenberg EBook of Kipling Stories and Poems Every Child Should Know, Book II, by Rudyard Kipling, (Relesed, November 30, 2009 [EBook #30568], Boston: The Riverside Press Cambridge), http://www.gutenberg.org/files/30568/30568-h/30568-h.htm. (Accessed on November 21, 2018).

[391] Billy Woods, “Pompeii #12, Human Resources #18,” in *History Will Abslove* Me, op. cit.

[392] Billy Woods, “Poachers #7, Lucre #14,” in *Dour Candy,* op. cit.

BW: Well, the verse-chorus-verse structure certainly encourages it, but I would also just say that it’s reflective of how I think about things. Juxtaposing and inverting ideas is just part of how I approach them. I don’t like to let the audience become too comfortable with the thought that they are on the right side, or that the narrator is who they may initially take him/her for.

JK: In the past, you have been part of both Super Chron Flight Brothers and Armand Hammer. I also observed that you were stylistically closer to Privilege: you both used intertextuality in your writing, but there is a clear difference between yours and Elucid’s writing. Elucid uses shorter lines or fewer words (sometimes long polysyllabic words) and has this religious undertone to his writing. You, on the other hand, produce dense intertextual writing that is not always direct (you are more direct on Armand Hammer than in your solo work). How did your approach to writing change when you were working with groups in the past (Super Chron was still dark music, but at times employed a fair amount of juvenile humor) and now (Armand Hammer is dark music, but the humor is also much darker)?

BW: About the first part, I would say that your assessment on Elucid and I is correct. Privilege and I were very different. His style was much more conversational. His ability to deploy different sort of styles of rapping was closer to Elucid than me. Especially at that time, there were significant differences between us. Privilege was much younger than me. I think we both did a lot of stuff conceptually. I drove the records a lot more. He has often lived with me. We were young, we didn’t have that much stuff to do. We wrote a lot of things together and wasted a lot of studio time, sitting in the studio together in totally different working processes. I did a lot more conceptual heavy lifting on the Super Chron record, which is the not case here. I was a different person. Privilege was a different person from Elucid. He was a very musical guy; like Elucid, he had a musical background. He could play instruments and was very creative. He approached his stuff from a very particular angle. He was smart and intellectual, he talked about books in the way that was intellectual challenging, but it didn’t come off that way. Their personalities were different. There was an aspect to Privilege that was all about a Black American kid who kind of fucked it up. Regarding how he approached stuff and his rapping, Elucid is much more like a mystic, or a shaman, who manages to keep everything very grounded in the now. This is something I really like about him. He is not just someone who comes out and says some mystical mumbo jumbo. Elucid comes and brings everything back to Earth or takes things from Earth and pushes them further out, and I really appreciate that. I don’t think Privilege was even at a right point in his life to be doing anything like that. They were having two completely different working relationships with me. Privilege was super talented, but he was only able to touch the surface of what he might be able to do.

I knew him from before. We were friends. He was like a little brother, a little bit of a protégé, and we met through music. I was already an adult when I met him. I guess the group broke up because, part of me wants to say that, it wasn’t terribly successful. The overwhelming issue was that things were going on in Privilege’s personal life that just overwhelmed his responsibilities as far as the group was concerned. Our personal relationship changed and afterwards, there was no real coming back from that. We spoke, but I have no problem with the guy. It has been put into the past. By that time, a lot of time had passed.

My conception of Super Chron Flight Brothers was on its face. It was supposed to be somewhat funny and juvenile, with a bunch of serious things – the whole thing with comedy and tragedy masks. I think Armand Hammer also has music that’s funny. When working on Super Chron records, I had it at the forefront of my mind when putting together comedy and tragedy, with comedy always having an edge over tragedy.

JK: Your raps are mostly fictional; however, there are stanzas in your songs that clearly refer to personal events (for example, “Frog and Toad are Friends,” “Duppy,”[393] “Freedman’s Bureau,”[394] “Central Park,”[395] etc.) Do you intentionally avoid writing about your life or do you only put some of it into stanzas when it makes sense in the context of the whole song?

BW: I write about my life all the time, be it directly or indirectly. I am tempted to say that ultimately, every writer is writing about their life, whether they realize it or not, but to try and avoid abstraction, I would say that I don’t spend much energy focusing on what or where to reveal something about myself. I am always writing the stories or ideas that I am experiencing, or thinking about, or remembering, or they were told to me in some way that inspired me. For example, “Woodhull” is about a public hospital I have been to many times. It’s very visceral to me, and reflects a lot of experiences I had there, but how could anyone else know that? And would it matter if they did? Other times, a song like Elucid’s “Bleachwater” is about things I read about and thought about, but it is all stuff I had been thinking about mixing with things I experience… Where do you draw that line? Everything I write, ultimately, is personal.

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[393] Armand Hammer, “Frog & Toad Are Friends #5, Duppy #8,” *Race Music*, op. cit.
[394] Billy Woods, “ Freedman’s Bureau #8,” in *Hostory Will Absolve Me*, op. cit.
[395] Billy Woods, “Central Park #6, in *Dour Candy*, op. cit.

JK: Do you consider yourself a writer first and then a rapper, or is rap the preferred medium in which you write?

BW: Those are two different things. I write as my day job, and I still consider writing for rap to be writing, but it’s a specific thing with its own logic and rules. It’s like being a person who writes both novels and poems: to some extent, each medium in which I write has its own internal logic, and I approach them differently, and for different reasons.

Chapter 18

Billy Woods: the writer

Growing up with a mother who is also a literature professor, Billy Woods was introduced to a lot of writing that would later become important for his formation. He describes here how individual authors influenced him, and also about what he likes and dislikes about them.

JK: From[396] a textual perspective, you are one of the most potent rappers I have ever had the privilege to listen to. In the interviews in the past, you claimed that east-coast rap and the Western literary canon have had a huge influence on you. Could you elaborate? Did those influences shape your rap writing? In what manner does literature influence your writing and how does other people's rap influence yours? Is there any difference between the two sources of influences or does it depend on the song you are writing?

BW: This, like the question about growing up in Africa, is not something that can be quantified. Reading, both inside *and* outside of the Canon, has been a huge shaping influence on me as a person, for my whole life, simply because it is part of how I learned to look at the world and experience it. People read certain things that shift their perception of the world and themselves in ways that are irreversible. It's impossible to say who I would be if I had never read all the books I have read, but I certainly would not be who I am today.

JK: You also said that James Baldwin, Cormac McCarthy and Doris Lessing, among others, have influenced you. Can you elaborate on how those writers have influenced you?

BW: I guess they were good writers. I grew up with all kinds of authors. I remember reading Richard Wright at a very young age. I don't remember when I read Zora Neal Hurston, but it wasn't that early in my life. I remember Baldwin's work and also reading Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*. That book seemed crazy to me. But I liked Wright more than I liked Ellison at the time. It's important to remember that I was quite young; I was probably ten years old when I read *Invisible Man*. I might have liked it more if I had approached it a little older. Then I read *Tell Me How Long the Train Has Been Gone* – it just wiped all those other books out of my mind. Of course, now that I am older, I have a more nuanced view, but there is some truth to that old view as well. The boldness, first off all… The way James Baldwin wrote is just better, no matter if this sounds stupid. He accomplished more in fewer words. His sentences are works of art. How many times did his sentences say something that I wished I would have said first! When you read a well-written sentence by Baldwin, you think, "Damn that a good one!" His pages abound with those at times, and you just have to appreciate it. That is, a certain use of a word, a moment where he describes a twist of somebody's mouth or something: that is really, really good. His ability as a writer combined with the unique views he held about many things and the urgency he wrote with have all captivated me to a level that has pushed a lot of things aside for me at the young age.

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Mark Twain was pretty influential for me as well. My mother gave me his books when we were little. I like Mark Twain a lot. The writers still to my taste, like Charles Dickens and Mark Twain, were given to me by my mother when I was still a child. I like *Great Expectations*. When you live in a British colony like that, the life there will be like a *Great Expectations* TV movie. I liked *Great Expectations* and *Oliver Twist*, but *David Copperfield* was the one I would always get bored of.

As per McCarthy, when he's at its best, other people's work pales in comparison to him to a certain extent. He is able to pare something down until it seems very bare an unadorned, yet find a way to make it beautiful and elegant at the same time. You have to be really good to do that. While we are on the subject of giving credit to people who put a lot of lines together: Roc Marciano and MF DOOM are both people who said many things. You can pick one of their lines and think, "Man, there is a lot of going on in there, and it's really dope." With McCarty, I also sense this sort of elevation of style and purpose. The style is crazy; in works like *Blood Meridian*, it is stripped away. But everywhere you turn, there are some beautiful turns of phrases and the like. It seems as if you are reading this scorched Earth stripped down… He doesn't even use quotations marks! The characters don't have names either. It almost exists in suspended time of its own, which I find cool. I find it interesting that McCarthy's work is both well-written and also an elevation of style.

I need to go back and read more of her work… One of my favorite works used to be *The Grass is Singing* by Doris Lessing. It was also my mother who gave me this book, as well as another story she printed out for a class she was teaching. I must have been nine or ten at the time. The story is about a white boy in Rhodesia who sneaks out of the house. "Sunrise on the Well," the title was. He sneaks out with the dogs and a gun to go and be free. He gets the whole experience: he ends up stumbling upon a dying antelope that was shot. It is a powerful little story. I remember talking to my mother about it after she gave it to me. Afterwards, I stared reading Doris Lessing a lot. *The Grass is Singing* is one of my all-time favorites. I read *The Golden Notebook* a long time ago. I have also been re-reading Richard Price. Oh, and Flannery O'Connor was one of the main people I thought about when working on *Today, I Wrote Nothing.*

JK: You also said that you met Dambudzo Marechera?

BW: My mother was at the department where he went into school in Zimbabwe. His book was also influential for me. I still think about his work and the time when my mother gave it to me. Again, I was still young, probably about eleven or twelve. It happened right around the time my dad died. We were still in Zimbabwe. The story she gave me first was "House of Hunger," or maybe one of his short stories she had printed up. I read it and thought it didn't have any social value, in the sense I understood the concept then. I didn't address colonialism. It was a story that seemed removed from post-colonial thought and from all that I was familiar with. At first, it seemed kind of frivolous. Or rather, it was sorted and frivolous, which of course I read as sorted and frivolous. In the context of post-colonial Africa, much of the writing I encountered was political in a more obvious way, and a lot of less drunk. It was startling to me. Then, I remember, I read "House of Hunger" when I was back in the United States. Well, I started it in Zimbabwe in finished it in the United States. I started to have more mature thoughts about post-colonial Africa, especially regarding what it needed in terms of literature and voices. I wasn't twelve years old anymore, and I understood how it was valuable that there were no sacred cows in a novel. His books are visceral, and they see you.

Chapter 19

JK: Your writing[397] is highly political, but on the other hand, you avoid the usual trappings of political rap (antisemitism, blatant generalizations, giving the listener the feeling that he/she is right, preachy voice, contradictions). What is your approach to writing about political topics?

BW: I had the benefit of thinking about a lot of things for longer than most people. Most of the ideas I had as twelve-year-old were therefore long gone by the time when I was nineteen. I also, compared to other people, had more of an impetus to think because of the places where I grew up. The people there made it necessary to be politically and socially engaged. The conflicts and differences between Zimbabwean and American experiences shape you as a person. I think that some people just didn't really start thinking about different things until pretty late in life. But your early ideas are not very interesting, as everyone who wrote a journal at fifteen and read it later will tell you. I was basically able to let ideas stew. Part of my approach is that I was already doing basic political analysis when I was fourteen. I then got better at it because I paid a lot of money to a college. There is also the fact of my mother being a feminist writer. I am not saying that it is impossible to go through my work and perhaps find some failed analysis or idea. This is obviously possible. But I think that I was more aware of the problems than most people from the beginning, which is just lucky for me – most people don't come from that sort of situation at all.

JK: What I also observed is that many of your songs contain humor and self-deprecation. How important is humor in your writing?

BW: I think a lot of what I do is funny while a lot of it is also sad. I think it's sad and funny at the same time, and it usually is. I think I'm a funny person. I like humor, but how I use it depends on the project. *Today, I Wrote Nothing* is not funny, it is pretty dark. *Known Unknowns* has a lot of funny shit, though.

JK: Your writing can be quite dense, but on your record *Today, I Wrote Nothing*[398] you omitted your usual dense writing for short stories without any specific structure. You said it was influenced by Daniil Kharms and Flannery O'Connor. You also said that it was a record that was recorded and released quickly. Can you describe your process of making your records (with regard to your standard approach and how it was different with *Today, I Wrote Nothing*)?

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[397] Parts of the interview were translated into Slovene and published by *Revija Razpotja*. Billy Woods, Interview by Jožef Kolarič. Translated by Katja Pahor. *Razpotja*: Revija Humanistov Goriške, no. 30 (December 2017): 86-89.

BW: I tried to approach that when I was reading Daniil Kharms. I would be writing sudden fiction, doing things and letting them go… I was trying to keep the things short and concise and not write any more than I needed to. That was really all there was to my approach, and it didn't really go too far beyond that.

JK: Can you explain your writer's block before you published *Today, I Wrote Nothing*?

BW: I don't know how to explain it, beyond the fact that I felt like I wasn't getting any new ideas and I didn't feel very inspired. It happens… it just lasted for a little while and I started to get worried.

JK: You use a lot of intertextual references in your writing, but what is interesting is that you combine literature with pop-culture (e.g., "Hemingway shotguns through the nose/Ghost's voice, Rae's flow"[399]). Is there any specific reason for it?

BW: It's funny… I didn't read a lot of Hemingway. I read him really late. His novels were pretty cool, but they were not really my style. I probably read three works in a year and a half, and what I read was what made it in there. The only time I think about references is when I decide not to include them. Using references comes to me naturally, as an idea.
I went to school with a lot of people who loved theater, and my mother was one of them as well. I know all about the idea about you putting a gun in a scene and how it relates to "Jay TEC on Nas's dresser" (see Chapter 13) ... I don't know how I came up with that. It must have been one of those light bulb moments.

JK: On one Armand Hammer song you said, "NGE is a schism."[400] The Five Percenters are usually regarded positively in hip-hop, so why did you decide for this take and called their separation from the Nation of Islam a schism?

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[398] Billy Woods, *Today I Wrote Nothing*, op. cit.
[399] Billy Woods, "Bush League #1" in *Known Unknows*, op. cit.

BW: Yes, “Sunni’s Blue’s.” It’s a play on the James Baldwin story “Sonny Blues,” which I changed for religious connotations. I was trying to blend in the history of the black diaspora to some extent, with religion and skepticism, exploitation and violence. Combine all that and you have the image of the wandering Jew, of the Nazis, and of genocide. The idea of the Carpetbagger, the idea of whites from the north that would come and make money from the reconstruction. The lion of Judah… I wasn’t really talking about Haile Selassie as much as I was talking about the diasporas seeking connection with home, and all the ways in which people create mythology, create worlds and gods around themselves, if they have been robbed of their own mythology. It’s just how human beings work. I was trying to bring those things together. Wallace Muhammad, I think, is a fascinating historical figure. It’s actually amazing that nobody made a movie about this guy. He probably wasn’t even black, which I find fascinating; somebody like that is fascinating to me. He is there for the connection to Z York. Z York wanted to get a Liberian visa over him. So much diaspora bound and rebound upon that moment between two people, who are obviously horrific criminals, on a Monrovian beach, where the slaves left from so long ago…

JK: On your record *The Chalice* in the song “Capture the Flag,”[401] you shout out Edward Said, and in the song “Invasion” you rap, “In Africa we patient, fam. Things Fall Apart/we take the pieces and make art. Edward Said, I took/ his thesis and made darts.”[402] Did his work have any personal influence on you or your writing?

BW: Ha, that’s an old one. I read *Culture & Imperialism* – which my mother gave me as a teenager – then later *Orientalism*, and some essays in college… or maybe I have that backwards. Either way, it was influential in terms of being some of the more interesting post-colonial writing I remember reading as a young man. I don’t think I can point or draw a straight line from those books to particular songs. It was influential in the sense of shaping my worldview and ability to think critically. I have a different relationship to those books now than I did when I first read them. All of these things are alive, as am I, for the moment, and my relationship with them is always changing and nuanced. Or so I hope!

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[400] Armand Hammer, “Sunni’s Blues #4,” in *Race Music,* op. cit.

[401] Billy Woods, “Capture The Flagg #3,” in *The Chalice*, op. cit.

[402] The Reavers, “Invasion #8,” in *Terror Firma* (New York: Backwoodz Studioz, 2005).

JK: Intertextual references to literature are common in your writing. The integration of them into your songs is seamless; even if the listener does not know all the references, he/she can enjoy the song. How difficult is it to write in such manner, and does the usage of intertextual references cut down the number of syllables in the stanza/song?

BW: Writing stuff in a way that someone is able to not know that they are missing references, but still understand (on some meaningful level) and enjoy the song is, I have realized, the most important thing. It is quite difficult at times, and I'm not always successful. But it is the most important thing. The value of the work cannot lie in having an encyclopedic [sic] knowledge of the proverbial canon; that would be gimmicky and quite dull. Hopefully one doesn't need to smoke a lot of weed or live in New York or be familiar with geopolitics to enjoy my music… but if you do, you might get something out of it that others miss.

JK: In which manner are the literary allusions chosen: do they depend on the theme of the song, the context of the stanza, or is there other way?

BW: I don't decide that there is a "time to use a literary allusion" – that would be awful, I think. I'm just writing and expressing ideas and thoughts, and they come when they fit or work. I don't think about it in that way when I am working on songs, unless a specific allusion is the overarching concept of the song.

JK: How much do you think literature has influenced rap? Do rappers in general see themselves as writers or is this largely an individual choice?

BW: For the first part of this question, I am not sure how to quantify that, but certainly it has on some level, because literature is part of our wider culture. So yes, it has influenced rap, but so has TV and movies. Rap necessarily draws on the wider culture because it is such a referential art form. And for the second part: I can't speak for other people, but I do.

Chapter 20

Parting Words

At first glance, hip-hop, post-colonialism and intertextuality do not have much in common. Furthermore, applying some esoteric theory to hip-hop can be off-putting, but the same cannot be claimed for intertextuality and post-colonialism. The beauty of hip-hop music is that it can make difficult concepts more accessible. In the end, we can see that hip-hop is post-colonial and intertextual by its nature; therefore, it is important to understand those concepts in order to understand rap.

Throughout this book we have seen how intertextuality, post-colonialism and hip-hop are intertwined with each other and how it is impossible to separate them. Hip-hop is an African-American art form that can be best understood when we look at race relations in the United States. It was poverty and lack of opportunity that birthed the ingenuity of blending records with equipment that was available to people with next to no resources. The result was intertextuality on all levels of production, musical and textual.

Most hip-hop artists and their audiences do not need advanced literary degrees to grasp the concept of creating references. With the progression of time, intertextuality in rap developed on its own. The first generation simply used two of the same records and created simple routines to keep the party going, but with each next generation, something was added that they deemed necessary. Chuck D wanted Malcolm X, the Beastie Boys wanted Hunter S. Thompson, Wu-Tang Clan combined martial arts films with the inner-city, Nas wrote to prison and nobody knows who the real Daniel Dumile is. Having intertextuality in rap is as natural as breathing air.

Of course, when Billy Woods met Vordul Mega and when Vordul taught him how to rap, another machine was set into motion. Nobody in 2003 knew that Billy Woods would reinvent the usage of intertextuality in hip-hop. Complex topics became accessible when football players and historic figures met in songs or even within a line. Now, we have the privilege to observe Chekov, Jay-Z and Nas in the same line combining drama theory and rap. We can see that Billy Woods in not some kind of outlier, but part of an ongoing process that has been present in rap since its very beginning. Hopefully, this book has made hip-hop, intertextuality and post-colonialism as a whole more approachable, and that it will encourage readers and listeners to understand better the hip-hop culture.

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[i] Haiku is a short form of traditional Japanese poetry consisting of seventeen syllables arranged into three lines that have five, seven and five syllables respectively.

[ii] “Rip Van” is the protagonist of a children’s story in which he oversleeps the revolutionary war in the United States.

Jožef Kolarič holds a Masters’ degree in Intercultural German and English studies. Currently, he is an internal PhD student in the department of German Studies at the University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava in Slovakia. His research focusses on language change in rap and rap writing. His PhD thesis is titled “Rap in German Language a Space of Language Contact” (original title: “Deutschsprachiger Rap als Raum für Sprachkontakte”). For his Masters’ thesis, “Intertextuality in Billy Woods’s Lyrics,” he received the Miklošič award for best thesis in 2017. He has published articles in scholarly journals in Croatia, Germany, Poland, Slovakia and Turkey.

Billy Woods: Virtuoso of Intertextuality

Jožef Kolarič

Jožef Kolarič´s book shines a light on an important and very prolific figure in avant-garde hip-hop: the elusive (and one might almost say mysterious), yet critically acclaimed Billy Woods, who most certainly deserves the spotlight, given the important role he played and still plays in forming and re-forming the art form of hip hop and rap.

The book is conceived partly as a compact narrative history of hip hop and rap from the late 70s to today, which provides a much-needed overview and context for the analysis that follows and constitutes the next chapters of this more general, introductory part of the book. This analysis takes its vantage point in the phenomenon of intertextuality, which lies at the core of hip hop music – regarding both the musical, technical aspect of it (in the form of sampling) and of course the lyrical, textual aspect of pop culture and literary references.

Kolarič again provides an overview of the use of intertextuality in hip hop, starting in the 1980s and focusing on seminal representatives such as Public Enemy, Ice-T, Beastie Boys, Nas and the Wu Tang Clan. He then continues with the 1990s and early 2000s and takes a closer look at the use of intertextuality in the works of artists like Company Flow, MF DOOM, Cannibal Ox, Aesop Rock and then segueing over to Armand Hammer, one of Woods´ collaborative efforts (in this case with fellow East Coast rapper Elucid). He ends the chapter with the analysis of Woods´ Today, I Wrote Nothing, preparing the ground for a deep-dive into 3 of Woods´ lyrics: Tinseltown (from the 2013 LP Dour Candy), Cuito Cannavale (from the same album) and Superpredator (from the 2017 LP Known Unknowns).

He chose these 3 songs because they feature the ample and creative use of intertextuality, which is so representative of Woods´ style. Another reason is the fact, that he connects these songs to different aspects of Woods´ personal life and work, interweaving them with social and cultural history. The analysis of Tinseltown is part of the chapter entitled Life in the inner city, which takes a look at the Black history of America, thus providing context for the understanding and interpretation of the song, as well as for the use of intertextuality in it. The analysis of Cuito Cannavale is tied into the chapter entitled Africa, in which Kolarič explains Woods´ personal ties to the continent, specifically to Zimbabwe, where he spent his childhood and how growing up there informed his political opinions and worldview, specifically regarding neo- and post-colonialism. The analysis of Superpredator is integrated into the chapter Violence in Rap, which offers insight into this problematic aspect of rap culture and sets the background for the in-depth look at all the examples of intertextuality in the song and their interpretation in connection with Woods´ style of juxtaposing different positions without picking sides, thus forcing the listener/reader to think for her/himself.

At this point the book takes an interesting turn, as the author changes from narrative history and analysis to the form of interview and lets the reader experience Woods´perspective and his complex and original way of thinking through his own words. The comprehensive interview is divided into following parts: Billy Woods from USA to Zimbabwe and back to USA, Billy Woods: the rapper and Billy Woods: the writer.

Kolarič asks Woods all the right questions, giving him space to elaborate on his (for a rapper) rather untypical family background and how it informed his rapping style, as well as on his musical heroes, mentors and influences. His intertextuality is multifaceted and stems from many different sources, including literature and political writings, but also pop and street culture. His affinity to literature – so Woods – can be attributed largely to his mother´s influence, who has a PhD in English Literature and is herself an author. And his interest in politics was in part motivated by his father´s activism. These 3 chapters add a special value to the book and represent a rare learning experience for both the reader and the author of the book, who had the unique opportunity to check first hand, if his interpretation and view of the artist´s work coincides with the author´s own view and understanding.

The book certainly achieved the goal of connecting hip hop to the concepts of intertextuality and post-colonialism, making both more approachable for the average listener. It also highlights the role that Woods played in reinventing the use of intertextuality in hip hop, proving that "he is not some kind of outlier, but part of an ongoing process that has been present in rap since its very beginning".

Melanija Larisa Fabčič

Billy Woods: Virtuoso of Intertextuality

Jožef Kolarič

In a world where rap is the most popular genre of music while its origins and even contemporary significance is frequently misunderstood, rap and linguistics researcher Jožef Kolarič's monograph on one of the genre's most ingenious protagonists is a very welcome one indeed. Following the unifying thread of intertextual references in the texts by the rapper Billy Woods, Kolarič guides the reader through various aspects of rap, starting with its history and moving towards its form and poetic devices (where the most attention is paid to intertextuality in rap) as well as the people who perform rap music and listen to it. Throughout the book, the character of Billy Woods is present and illuminated as Kolarič brilliantly suffuses his extensive knowledge of rap and rappers with Woods's personal biography to present the reader with a thorough and critical analysis of Woods's contribution to rap.

The book is divided into thematic units, each of which is covered in one or two chapters. Kolarič begins with what one can call a literary-historical approach to rap lyrics. The reader is acquainted with the idea of intertextuality and how it relates to rap (Chapter 1), the genre's beginnings and its leading figures such as Afrika Bambataa, DJ Kool Herc, Grandmaster Flash and later MF DOOM, and the groups N.W.A. and the Wu-Tang Clan (Chapters 2 and 3), followed by the traditional form of rap (Chapter 4). Rap's literary history is complemented by its socioeconomic counterpart: a recount of the historical developments on the American Eastern Seaboard in the 1960s, such as the growing poverty, the systemic oppression of African Americans, or infrastructure projects such as the Bronx Expressway. Kolarič shows how all this history has influenced rap in the previous decades and, ultimately, how it has directly or indirectly influenced Billy Woods.

This is important for two reasons. First, it allows Kolarič to elucidate why Woods's poetry is a different rap than what one was used to in the previous century, which he does in his analysis of Woods's Today, I Wrote Nothing and Armand Hammer's Race Music. Second, Kolarič's historical approach allows the reader to understand where the prevailing themes, motifs and sentiments arise from while also providing an insight into the rich history of sampling, parodying, dissing as well as more traditional intertextual references that rap has cultivated throughout its existence. Because of this, Kolarič is able to invoke in his readership an informed opinion about all aspects of rap without being moralistic or biased.

The book continues with a chapter on Billy Woods where relevant biographical data are given. Thus, the reader learns about his early upbringing in Zimbabwe and subsequent relocation to the United States, about his father's political activism and also about his venture into rap, his early influences, subsequent collaborations and solo projects. This all becomes relevant in the ensuing thematic units, all of which include two chapters. Kolarič follows a pattern wherein he first gives an informed analysis of a relevant issue in the first chapter of a thematic unit, then begins the second chapter with song lyrics, which are then analyzed with the help of what the reader has just learned. Thus, "Life in the Inner City" first familiarizes one with the continuous mistreatment of African Americans and their resistance to it (Chapter 8) and in Chapter 9, "Tinseltown", a song by Billy Woods related to the issue at hand, is analyzed. Similarly, Chapter 10 provides a detailed account of colonialism in Africa and its geopolitical consequences in the 20th century while Chapter 11 analyses "Cuito Cuanavale", a song which is ultimately about a battle for Angolan independence. The final thematic unit deals with violence in rap and addresses "Superpredator", which is a reference to a label frequently attributed to youth delinquents in. It is in these thematic units that Kolarič's sharp, yet objective analyses provide an important rectification to the rather widespread conservative vilifying of rap.

In the final part of the book, Kolarič makes a rather unusual approach to step back and allow his readership to hear from the man himself: the final three chapters are all transcripts of the interviews Kolarič has had with Woods regarding his artistic formation, including his upbringing, the relationship with his mother, who happens to have a PhD in English Literature, and his influences both musical and literary. These interviews are informative and well-structured, and it is also worth pointing out that Woods's vernacular diction has mostly not been glossed over in the transcript, for which Kolarič must be commended. Finally, Kolarič's parting words reiterate the contiguity of the processes active in the development of rap, and also stress that Woods, while enormously influential, is not an "outlier" for breaking the rap form or using specific intertextual references, yet is an enormously interesting figure whose songs become more and more intriguing the more one knows about them. Kolarič's book is a phenomenal tool to achieve this.

Matjaž Zgonc