

***To Pimp A Butterfly*: Towards New Literacy Studies & Rap as Oral Literature**



Abstract

In this dissertation I will be covering the methods of communication within music and poetry. Specifically, I examine the oral characteristics and traditions that Kendrick Lamar employs in his album *To Pimp A Butterfly* and the use of jazz and be-bop in Langston Hughes' *Montage of a Dream Deferred*. I consider these facets of their art in relation to the conversation surrounding orality and literacy as acts of concerted protest. Walter J. Ong's text "Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word," serves as a theoretical foundation for exploring the conversation as communication evolves. Where Ong suggests that once literacy is introduced, orality disappears, Lamar and Hughes have both achieved social and academic praise for their respective forms of communication. With both artists retaining a strong relationship with their oral traditions, the taxonomy of orality and literacy can be redefined as holding a more symbiotic nature than previously understood. In assessing such a disparity, a more all-inclusive idea of literature can be established; one where music and oral literature can be read. Lamar stands out as a daring artist in his medium as his album takes concerted effort in using the oral propensities at its disposal to make its message heard. Similarly, Hughes' epic sheds light on the oral characteristics at work in poetry, by doing so Hughes reigns as a seminal figure of protest art and philosophy in the African American community. Through reading both and dissecting their traditional allusions and manifestations within their vernacular a significant case is built in justifying the coalescence of orality and literacy.

Table of Contents

Introduction: Literacy and Orality - The Bigger Picture	4
Prelude: Langston Hughes and the New Traditions of Black Expression.....	10
Chapter I - The Hegemony of Literacy and the Oral Practice as Protest.....	14
Chapter II: Part 1 - Conceit and Deceit.....	24
Chapter II: Part 2 - Anxiety and Double Consciousness.....	33
Chapter II: Part 3 - Unlearning and Teaching.....	39
Conclusion.....	48
Works Cited.....	51

Introduction: Literacy and Orality - The Bigger Picture

In 2016, American musician Bob Dylan won the Nobel Prize for Literature, spawning widespread debate over the decision to include music under the category of literature. The same year, after two years of catalogued unrest over the murders of African Americans by law enforcement, President Barack Obama legitimized the Black Lives Matter movement by saying it could “take America to new heights” (Lartey). Throughout national protests, the movement enlisted the song “Alright” by Kendrick Lamar as its anthem. Lamar’s subsequent album, *To Pimp a Butterfly*, went on to be a fully formed narrative that captures the duality of the African American experience by illustrating the injustices and pride that come with being a person of colour and also an American. Both Dylan and Lamar use poetry and poetic language as a means not only of communicating through music but also of protesting cultural conditions, including anti-Black racism in Lamar’s case. The intersection between communication and music is what I focus on in this dissertation. Put as a question: What means of communication does music offer and should its lyrics be taught as literature? Just as Dylan’s accolade is an academic acknowledgement of his songs’ political and cultural significance, Lamar’s work becoming a national anthem for what is currently on track to be one of largest civil rights movements in history, the Black Lives Matter movement, holds an important piece to the larger conversation of music’s social and political efficacy. Walter J. Ong’s seminal text, *Orality and Literacy: the Technologizing of the Word* provides a theoretical framework for discussing Lamar’s music in relation to music’s social function within society. In discussing the language of poetry, Langston Hughes and other intellectuals from the Harlem Renaissance add valuable insight for the degree to which music and orality work within poetry. While this dissertation does not claim that Lamar should acquire a Nobel Prize for Literature in order to justify music’s literary

capabilities, it will argue that he and his work, like Dylan's, "can be read and should be read, and [Lamar] is a great poet in the [African American and] English tradition" (Darius).

To lay out a foundation for studying Lamar and Hughes' together, it is useful to first understand what the conversation surrounding music and literature is today. Although Ong's work contains some cultural fissures, his text stands as an important jumping-off point for the larger conversation of language's evolution. In particular, Ong's technical assessment of the written word and its evolving function within society helps frame the trajectory of communication as it proliferates. Ong tracks the evolution of consciousness, from primary orality to nationwide literacy, as responsible for a fundamental shift in the way we process information. Milman Parry is credited as unveiling the importance of understanding the oral traditions that predate and influence literature (Ong 5). His largest contribution comes from his study of Homer's *Iliad and Odyssey*. In it, Parry discovers the text's composition to be a product of a longstanding oral tradition (Foley 4). This meant that the syntax and repetitious use of idioms evidenced the theory that the lines were recited over a long period of time and transcribed only once the technology of writing superseded orality. With this, we can see that there is a relationship between orality and literacy that holds more than a simple change of hand. Ong maintains that the shift from a primary oral culture, that is "cultures with no knowledge at all of writing," to a literate culture, one that is familiar with writing and reading, is linear (Ong 32). This linear - or sequential - relationship comes from Ong's belief that "once literacy is introduced, primary orality disappears" (McDowell 171). The assessment of this relationship implies a diametrically opposed product; ie. primary oral cultures cannot create the same type of work that a literate culture might. Ong posits that this is a result of primary oral cultures not being able to "study," where a literate culture is able to work referentially with the advent of writing. Although Ong

laments that while these primary oral cultures “learn a great deal and possess and practice great wisdom,” they remain primitive without writing (Ong 9).

This simple formula for mankind’s most prolific invention holds a problematic thesis. The notion that all cultures move from one form of communication to another with relative ease is preposterous; Ong knows this. He uses “secondary-orality” to refer to present-day work; in which “orality is sustained by telephone, radio, television or other electronic devices that depend for their existence and functioning on writing and print” (Ong 11). While this definition satiates certain products of a post-literate society, that is one in which literacy is universal, its emphasis on writing and print do not assess works that come from a dominant oral tradition. This logical ladder is another product of a system that retains an antiquated ideal of advancement that relies on a hierarchy to stake its claim. The extent of this mentality is deep-seated, “the hegemony of the written over the oral comes with the printing press, the dominance of capitalism, and colonization” (Thiong’o 71). Secondary Orality becomes an attempt at treating this displacement but ultimately falls in the same trap when considering rap.

Academic treatment of rap has largely perceived it as an oral tradition. As Malhotra argues in “My only weapon is force’: Rap as ‘Post-Literate Orality,” “[rap] is not simply an oral tradition in the sense that it is not pre-literate. It has been introduced to literacy and has yet resisted total incorporation into such a system” (Malhotra 2). While rap’s method of communication fits the first half of Ong’s secondary orality, it refrains from depending on writing and print for its existence as it works within the realm of orature. Where news anchors require the teleprompter to properly do the work, rappers traditionally use nothing but their voice to get their message across. While rappers do indeed write their lyrics, it is the articulation of the words that makes rap. But this distinction does not fully answer what place rap holds, as its contemporary creation does largely include the device of writing; removing it of any placement

within primary orality. Yet, as Malhotra pointed out, despite being fully literate, rappers engage dutifully in oral practices that can find roots in a primarily oral culture.

Aldon Lynn Nielsen, in his book “Black Chant,” uncovers the problematic premise that comes with Ong’s theory. In researching methods of pedagogy, Nielsen finds Lamen Kebe, an African slave who became a teacher in West Africa. Kebe instructed teachings of the Qur’an where “while mnemotechny was emphasized in learning the Qur’an, what was practised in Kebe’s schools was memorization by graphic reproduction, rather than oral presentation” (Nielsen 25). Nielsen finds this to be a testament for the degree to which orality and literacy can be used in harmony to teach. Where an oral presentation would require students to simply memorize the lines, the graphic reproduction, as Nielsen observes, is “part of an iterative continuum with orality” (25). With this, we can see that the introduction of literacy does not necessarily mean a complete obsolescence of orality and the traditions that come from it. So what then does one make of such a form of communication, one that advances with the invention of writing but articulates itself through a longstanding oral tradition? Such a question often instigates the systemic taxonomy of orality and literacy, ie. divvying up qualities in pursuit of an answer. To assess the question properly, however, requires a broader perspective - one that can encompass the complementary dynamics of orality and literacy.

Similar to Thiong’O and Nielsen, Brian Street sees the prescription of a universal allotment for literacy outperforming orality to be culturally insensitive. In his article, “Recent Applications of New Literacy Studies in Educational Contexts,” Street describes two schools of thought when dealing with the implications of literacy - both communally and academically. Ong’s model of Orality and Literacy follows an “autonomous” structure in that it “works from the assumption that literacy in itself - autonomously - will have effects on other social and cognitive practices” (Street 417). Street continues to explain that this model reflects the idea that,

irrespective of cultural and social conditions, literacy leads to “higher cognitive skills, improved economic performance, greater equality, and so on” (417). Indeed, Ong’s theory arbitrates this by enforcing a sequential idea of literacy; that it must come after orality means it must hold a connotation of advancement. This way of thinking, Street follows, “disguises the cultural and ideological assumptions that underpin it and that can then be presented as though they are neutral and universal” (417). Alternatively, Street, and others who question Ong’s progressive yet often universal treatment, prefer an “ideological” model when assessing literacy. This model, rather than blanketing the evolution of communication to fit Western practices, presents a multicultural awareness - “it posits instead that literacy is a social practice, not simply a technical and neutral skill, that it is always embedded in socially constructed epistemological principles” (Street 418). Street explains that the reason it is dubbed an “ideological” model comes inherently from the way in which literacy is proliferated. That Ong suggests its invention and growth is unbiased is incorrect.

Nielsen takes particular umbrage with Ong’s seeming ethnocentrism in this instance, as he instigates the previously cited idea of “study” that Ong lists as a reason for oral cultures to be seen as archaic compared to literacy’s products. Seeing it as a “categorical error,” Nielsen submits that Ong, “appears less strictly concerned with the largest of epistemological questions” (24), which, somewhat-crudely, devolves into questioning the authority that makes such universal claims, in this case that authority would be Ong himself. Street concludes that the real issue is in identifying “a desire for that [autonomous] view of literacy to dominate and to marginalise others” (418). Having understood this, the task of finding a better method of integrating literacy and orality can come in a few different approaches. One that Street recommends is the concept of literacy events/practices. The phrase comes from Shirley Brice Heath’s chapter in *Protean Shapes in Literacy Events*, that defines a literacy event as a

“conceptual tool useful in examining within particular communities of modern society the actual forms and functions of oral and literate traditions and co-existing relationships between spoken and written language” (350). Instead of prioritizing the written word, oral literature can introduce a new tool for pedagogy, one that is inclusive of every culture and the various methods of communication. All of this to say, teaching cannot be univocal. Street concurs by listing five reasons that mainstream education can benefit from this perspective. Dominant among them, for this paper’s purposes, is the last: “In order to build upon the richness and complexity of learners’ prior knowledge, we need to treat ‘home background’ not as a deficit but as affecting deep levels of identity and epistemology, and thereby the stance that learners take with respect to the ‘new’ literacy practices of the educational setting” (Street 420). In reading Lamar’s work, a primarily oral technique of communication, students coming from similar backgrounds become validated and can learn in a way that produces a more meaningful relationship with language.

Teaching rap might sound unconventional, but taking another look reveals a great deal of literary techniques and devices that students can be taught through a tactic similar in spirit to a literacy event. Susan Weinstein employs this by following students from inner-city Chicago tasked with composing “out-of-school” writing assignments that all work within the genre of rap (271). Upon completing the assignment, Weinstein found that “many of the writers had developed productive learning strategies and demonstrated sophisticated understandings of literary features such as figurative language, voice, and rhythm” (271). While students were not explicitly learning through orature, the task proved to be a good step in beginning to think of literacy universally. More importantly, this method abides by the values that Street lists in his checklist of new approaches to literacy (420). By taking stock in this methodology and perspective, the discussion of orality and literacy can take new forms for students, teachers, and academics alike.

In the process of examining the orality of Hughes and Lamar, a more universal understanding of literacy and orality is introduced. Hughes reigns as a foundational proponent of the Harlem Renaissance, where among his primary attributes is his penchant for the musical within literature. His epic, *Montage of a Dream Deferred*, imbues fractured scenes of African American minutiae with the sonic capabilities of jazz, blues, and be-bop. The strict assertion of his oral culture does not lay silent but explodes with confidence and a bravado that alerts its immediacy and relevancy. While Hughes' work continues to be an important piece of American literary history, it can also be a fruitful ally when looking for the oral economies of literature. Where Lamar functions as an oral poet; Hughes introduces the oral to poetry. This organic progression, from containing oral devices in literature to using literature as a foundation for the oral, only further elucidates the antiquated binary that is touted between orality and literacy. That both artist's works have held such applauded social stature only promotes the ideas behind Street's "ideological" model of thinking. After all, "It is instructive to listen to others who come from communities we tend to think of as oral" (Mackey 261). It would be prudent then to listen to what Lamar and Hughes have to say and more importantly how they say it.

Prelude: Langston Hughes and the New Traditions of Black Expression

In his article, "A Review of African Oral Traditions and Literature," Harold Scheub articulates an important aspect of the African oral tradition as having to do with "a force that makes kin of all living things" (3). Scheub goes on to explain the power of the metaphor in tethering oral recitation through generations and how crucial historical relevance is of certain stories and tales. When reading the work of Langston Hughes, that "force" comes in the form of

jazz. Enlisting jazz casts a mellow blue tone on the atmosphere in the text that adds a dimensionality to the otherwise brief pieces, allowing the poems to speak in a more authentic and casual vernacular. The be-bop style intentionally blurs the lines of poetic standards, illustrating a conversational and didactic virtue that is less concerned with standards than it is the message and voice.

Even in the era of modernity, Hughes eschews the trajectory of the already tangential movement. Where Western modernists wished to ‘make it new,’ Hughes and other Harlemites sought to establish a new voice that works distinctly in the vernacular of African Americans; for that he uses jazz. It helps to understand Scheub’s description of the specific purpose of metaphor, as he writes:

“The core of the mythic process is to harness the emotions of the members of the audience, trapped as they are in images of past and present, thereby divining paradoxes and resolving conflicts, and to move that audience into a new perception of reality” (4).

For example, in Hughes’ *Harlem*, a poem titled “Juke Box Love Song” depicts two lovers transfixed with their infatuation for each other and the Harlem night. Using the city as an orchestral arrangement, music becomes the language of love in the poem as the speaker muses on using “Lenox Avenue busses, taxis, subways” to make a love song (Hughes 233). More than a lover’s poem, the metaphor insists that Harlem be seen as an instrument that can be played with at every stoop, corner, honk, or shout. In redefining the ‘ghetto’ narrative surrounding the neighborhood of Harlem, Hughes uses the metaphor of music to “move [the] audience into a new perception of reality” (Scheub 4).

In an article written nearly two decades ago but whose significance remains undiminished, Robert Hokanson calls for a concerted attention to be placed on the way Hughes used orature and jazz in *Montage of a Dream Deferred*. Hokanson recognizes the embalming

effect jazz has on the epic's structure and vernacular, but notes that its specific application was through be-bop. Hughes was using jazz indeed, but the arrangement of the words and their impact is felt through be-bop, which Hokanson chooses to see as comparable to "Euro-American modernists forms of collage and montage" (64). In spirit, be-bop can be understood as the "music of revolt...[that] reasserts the individuality of the jazz musicians as a creative artist, playing spontaneous and melodic music within the framework of jazz, but with new tools, sounds, and concepts" (Lopes 209). Be-bop is responsible for the fast paced structure and form of the epic but also carries with it the spirit of protest and individuality that Hughes is known for. Hokanson recognizes this, writing that "Like be-bop, the poem reworks 'standards' from the African- American musical and broader expressive traditions, pushing them farther than previous poetic practice had allowed" (66). Particularly noticeable in the shorter poems, Hughes takes advantage of the multi-faceted aesthetics that jazz imparts.

With be-bop, Hughes breaks down the barriers of a beginning and end in a poem, creating one long poem that entails conversations that appear separately. In "What? So Soon!" and "Sister," the conversation surrounds a man whose partner is "pregnant again!" (229). The man speaks of this to other unnamed characters whose response is titled by an isolated line, "Comment against a Lamp Post" (229). Hughes illustrates the diminished border between the two poems with "Sister" where the conversation continues but from a different perspective as several individuals gossip about the situation. Comments and rhetorical questions are answered by other characters in italics (or capitalization depending on the version), and finally the same title format of "Comment on the Stoop" operates to end the poem:

"DID IT EVER OCCUR TO YOU, BOY
THAT A WOMAN DOES THE BEST SHE CAN?"

Comment on the Stoop

So does a man."

(Hughes 211)

With this, Hughes developed his own voice within the Harlem Renaissance, one that captures the conversations scattered across Harlem yet contains the essence of the individual's worries, aspirations, and notions. The aesthetic nature of be-bop inspires spontaneity and as ushered into the poetic, elicits a poignant resolve with the quick cuts and sharp answers. At a time when these voices were repressed in America, Hughes' be-bop modernism became a viable language for protest. By eschewing the borders between each poem, the disparate pieces become a unified consciousness that collectively works to call for tradition as protest.

In creating such a modality in poetry, another method of storytelling is unearthed. Following Hughes' trajectory into the Black Arts Movement of the 60s, his penchant for rethinking standards, when met with civil rights movements from the late 20s to 60s, culminated in Hughes pushing other artists and writers to use traditions like jazz as a form of pride. Indeed, this method proved successful as Hughes' own work would go on to be referenced and used as the very tradition he sought to preserve. Setting a philosophical foundation for the Black Arts Movement was Hughes' *The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain* (1926), as he wrote:

“But, to my mind, it is the duty of the younger Negro artist, if he accepts any duties at all from outsiders, to change through the force of his art that old whispering “I want to be white,” hidden in the aspirations of his people, to “Why should I want to be white? I am a Negro—and beautiful”?

Not only did the essay establish black vernacular as a legitimate form of artistic expression; it envisioned the central concern for black art: to express with pride. Hughes' work went on to heavily influence the Black Arts Movement, with Amiri Baraka championing a similar mantra of destabilizing standards in place of a more authentic black expression.

I begin this extended piece of research primarily on the work of Kendrick Lamar with an admittedly brief discussion of Hughes to keep in mind his philosophies and practices when

dissecting contemporary work. Though Lamar -- whose work I discuss at length in the next chapter -- never explicitly references Hughes, the two have accomplished similarly infrequent landmarks for the African American voice in their respective mediums. Both push the boundaries of their mediums to better articulate their experiences. By doing so they enlist oral tactics and features to emphasize how Black vernacular traditions manifest in contemporary artistic expression. With Hughes, that stems from jazz, be-bop, and metaphor. With Lamar, the traditions of storytelling, historically pertinent metaphors, and black expression meld together African folk methods of orature and Harlem Renaissance pride. While both implicate "white-America" as being responsible for such a resistance, they find suppression of tradition as another vulnerability in their community. In dissecting the oral traditions at work in Lamar's album, one can discern a strong connection to the spirit of Hughes and other Harlemites despite being separated in space and time. Additionally, in finding the literary capacity with which Lamar curates his message, an answer to Ong's disparity between Orality and Literacy can be found.

Chapter I

The Hegemony of Literacy and the Oral Practice as Protest

Comedian Roy Wood Jr. has a bit on America's national anthem. In it he claims the song is antiquated and requires some amendments to better fit our evolving society. While the sentiment is much funnier with Wood's exaggerated dialogue, the message has never been

more pertinent. Wood wonders, “what’s more American than Bruno Mars?” (Comedy Central 0:24). While the pop sensation produces some catchy tunes, it was an artist from Compton, California whose song was actually enlisted as an impromptu national anthem by the Black Lives Matter movement. Lamar’s 2016 album, *To Pimp a Butterfly (TPAB)*, featured the song “Alright,” which was immediately enrolled by the civil rights movement to champion its message. Four years later, the album has resurfaced, climbing the Billboard top 100 and breaking its initial Spotify streaming record. Western thinking has valued Lamar’s artform as simply entertainment, and a capitalist model has diluted much of its products to fit this idea. But Lamar refuses this settlement and his work follows suit. Not only does *TPAB* push the aesthetic and political boundaries of mainstream rap, but it also remains a critical documentation of America’s treatment of people of colour. Indeed, in a review of the album, Al Horner insists that *TPAB* is, “undoubtedly an album forged in the fury and flames of Ferguson, Missouri.” While changing the national anthem might sound better as a joke, the real change needs to be in the value we place on orality and music when educating. As Lamar’s voice achieved a cultural co-sign, it is prudent to see the oral economy that facilitates its success and virtue. By doing so, the taxonomy of literacy is tackled and Street’s “ideological’ model can be further established. As Hughes once wrote, “you never know or understand a people until you understand the little things about them” (Chicago Defender 113).

Although it is important to find the oral features of Lamar’s work, his literary techniques should also be kept in view as they serve a valuable function in his hybrid form of communication. Essentially, it is the oral and literate characteristics that work together to produce an effective form of communication. This symbiotic relationship is what needs to be understood when reevaluating methods of educating. Focusing on one over the other is the antithesis of a culturally considerate model of pedagogy. Although it has been previously noted

that the products of a literate culture can indeed be modelled after an oral tradition, the next step must be to excavate the products. What can one do within this hybrid art form and how far can it go? With Lamar, a globally recognized artist, his reach seems to be unending. Yet while his music engages the masses it remains unique. Compared to his cohorts, Lamar's work is scant. He only has four studio albums, but each one has been dubbed a classic at one point or another. So what is it about his work that makes it so celebrated? In the case of *TPAB*, Jon Caramanica believes it is because "it's a howling work of black protest art," Caramanica continues, "It's a work about living under constant racialized surveillance and how that can lead to many types of internal monologues, some empowered, some self-loathing" (NYTimes). Certainly, the album's title itself is considered a play on Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, altered to illustrate the hoodwinked reality of African Americans; the play being freedom. Indeed, Hughes writes, "the subject matter of Negro poetry has remained more or less constant - the problems of freedom in a white-dominated society" (200 Years). Looking at *TPAB*, it seems this notion has not expired. Where Hughes aimed to give a voice to the oppressed, Lamar shouts with indignation. As people of colour are straddled in an environment that denies them equal treatment, what remains are their traditions.

To get an idea of how diligently Lamar curates messages within his art, the first dutiful assertion of orality/tradition comes from his 2016 Grammy Awards performance. Visually, Lamar uses the stage to illustrate the themes of each song. As he walks out, leading a shackled chain gang, Lamar uses the cold and boisterous wail of an imprisoned saxophonist to initiate the first ballad from his song "The Blacker the Berry." It would be a disservice to not recognize the political relevance of this performance as it occurs in the midst of the globalization of the Black Lives Matter movement and divisive 2016 Presidential Elections. The song's title alone is a racially charged reference to Wallace Thurman's novel by the same name. Lamar's

understanding of the phrase changes from Thurman's. Where Thurman used the phrase "the blacker the berry, the sweeter the juice" as a positive affirmation of black beauty, Lamar adapts this to better fit his contemporary narrative as he envisions it as the justifying mantra behind racial profiling by the police. Lamar vocalizes the pain in this narrative with, "you hate me don't ya, your plan is to terminate my culture" to which he answers by cutting out the lights at the end of his verse, leaving only colourfully painted bodies dancing on the stage. From this, Lamar stumbles stage left, embodying the transition of his ballads and performs a striking deliverance of "alright" surrounded with African tribal dancers, a bonfire, and a light gleaming from the background resembling the sun. The final transition is to a freestyle verse concerning the tragedy of Trayvon Martin's murder in 2012, a moment credited as being the catalyst for the Black Lives Matter movement. Under a single spotlight and quick camera cuts, Lamar powerfully lays out the pain of the injustices, reciting "On Feb. 26 I lost my life too." Lamar's lines come crashing down with every hit of the drum until it seemingly explodes and Lamar is left silent with only the image of Africa illuminating behind him with the title "Compton." Just as stunning as Lamar's performance looks, the messages of resistance, pride, and frustration are just as powerful. Thematically and aesthetically, the performance rings an urgent truth concerning America's treatment of African Americans. Not only does Lamar employ oral devices like spontaneity and communally concerned topics to make this message heard, but the striking imagery is also to be taken as seriously as the words he uses. Every faculty of the performance rings true to the factors of an oral tradition; everything except the physical act of writing the lines.

Therein lies the crux of the issue between Orality and Literacy. If an artist can effectively communicate and educate by employing both oral and literate devices, then why has such a fissure developed when thinking of the two? Lamar's performance was a moment of actuation

for commercial culture. Not only did the performance accrue critical and popular approval, but it asserted black consciousness and its relevance into the mainstream zeitgeist. Rolling Stone's writer, Greg Tate bolstered this notion by writing, "2015 will be remembered as the year radical Black politics and for-real Black music resurged in tandem to converge on the nation's pop mainstream" (Tate). Considering the performances from the previous year were AC/DC and Ariana Grande, the shift to a more politically and socially conscious audience could not be more appropriate for the year. It is with the technology of writing that Lamar can come to such prophetic lines, but the characteristic with which his writing is performed is entirely oral, especially the final freestyle verse. Certainly, it is the coalescence of these two methods of communication that aid in the powerful expressions that Lamar portrays. His performance is only the beginning of how far and deep Lamar goes into discovering the contemporary intricacies of the black experience and relationships with past ideologies. Deciphering the complexities of his album is a necessary act, for protest music is only truly understood once the message incites action.

Before getting into *TPAB*, it is worthwhile to take time to untangle some ideas regarding rap, orality, and hegemony. Firstly, hip hop is not rap, but rap is hip hop. Hip hop is a mentality born in the South Bronx in New York City in the 70s and rap is the articulation of that consciousness (Leach 10). Ong's "idealistic" model of orality and writing has the potential to align with the evolution of rap; from that of a completely oral tradition to one that integrates writing over time. The necessity and advantages of literacy are not lost in this community. However, the degree to which the rap community has acquired and implemented literacy to their vernacular is not the same as those that Ong speaks of. While writing plays a major role in the creation of the more complicated rhymes, the element of spontaneity is still a crucial element of rap that is derived from an oral tradition. From popular radio channels hosting freestyle

competitions to Black Entertainment Television's annual cypher, where the most promising new rappers are featured freestyling, the power of the spoken word and the spontaneous nature of rap comes from those oral traditions that championed such a virtue. Consequently, this propels Streets' 'autonomous model,' by taking into account the niche circumstances under which African Americans acquired literacy, something Ong's position leaves little to no room for.

Geneva Smitherman outlines this acquisition of literacy and its onward mutations for African Americans during and after slavery in her text "Talkin and Testifyin: The Language of Black America." Smitherman's study of black dialect and its origins considers the "push-pull syndrome in Black America, that is, pushing toward White American culture while simultaneously pulling away from it" (11). While this phenomenon might have felt its strongest effects during the Harlem Renaissance, its existence is still felt today through speech. As Smitherman writes, "contemporary Black English looks back to an African linguistic tradition which was modified on American soil" (15). This "push-pull" notion is linked to a concept posited by W.E.B. DuBois', that of the "double consciousness," a term often used to describe Lamar's themes in *TPAB* (Smitherman 16). Similar to the findings that Parry gathered with Homer's epics, the oral economy enforced on Lamar's work is too large to be ignored. Yet under Ong's model, the technology of writing is what allows Lamar to create such effective work; any trace of an oral tradition is theoretically eschewed with the induction of literacy (Ong 165). This stipulation might be a small one within Ong's larger work but it indicates the hegemony that takes place when thinking of this artform. Thiong'O sees this, writing "arts communicated orally and received aurally were seen as belonging on a lower rung in the linear development of literature." (78). Ong's findings would suggest that this community is on the way to literacy, that the evolving nature of humanity yearns for literacy and will almost always move in that fashion. Yet this overwhelmingly large portion of society is producing undeniably influential work using a

hybrid of the two. Ultimately, this holds another candle to Streets' ideas, but further than that it points to a larger systemic issue that Thiong'o calls "Aesthetic Feudalism" (70).

Thiong'O describes this phenomenon as "arising from placing cultures in a hierarchy, [and] is best seen in the relationship between oral and written languages, where the oral, even when viewed as being "more" authentic or closer to the natural, is treated as the bondsman to the writing master" (70). From this, a deeper understanding of the spoken word within the African American community arises, and how important the role of the rapper is in keeping traditions alive. It is no coincidence Lamar shouts "you hate me don't ya, you want to terminate my culture," followed a few lines after with "I want you to recognize that I'm a proud monkey," all of these things come together in harmony under the art of the spoken word (Blacker the Berry). Uncovering this process and its social implications are vital in understanding the importance of Lamar's work. *TPAB* works in every effort to thwart notions of orature being antiquated in the company of literacy. Lamar's album reclaims its roots and asserts its dominance through verses interspersed by jazz.

Ong claims an important feature of literacy is that it allows for outward speculation. That "unlike members of a primary oral culture, who are turned outward because they have had little occasion to turn inward, we are turned outward because we have turned inward" (165). Ong uses this as a foundation for why literacy promotes psychological advancement and primary orality does not. Ong continues, connecting that "secondary orality promotes spontaneity because through analytic reflection we have decided that spontaneity is a good thing" (165). Ong uses this "secondary orality" as his preferred term for orature or oral literature; these three terms refer to products of the spoken word used by a literate or illiterate agent. By Ong's definition, his notion of outward speculation sprouting solely from the technology of writing is problematic. Qualifying secondary orality because of its literary capacity does exactly what

Lamar is shouting about. Suggesting that the only reason secondary orality contains “outward” or external speculative properties is because of literacy does nothing but prefer another equation in place of a deeper understanding of the culture and situation. This is what Thiong’O writes about when positing “Aesthetic Feudalism.” Refusing to recognize the value of orality within a literate society carries issues larger than this conversation and its implications are grand. Especially in education, as its “deemphasis may result in an impoverished aural ability and the stunting of creativity” (Campbell 38). It would stand then that Ong’s assessment of interiorization within oral cultures is flawed. While the technologizing of the word undeniably contributes to advances in inward speculation, it would be preposterous to claim that oral cultures have no capacity for self-reflection. Getting to the source of such a claim requires understanding the fundamentally opposed perspective on words that the two communities harbor.

Smitherman helps to clear this up by focusing on the philosophy behind the way words are used within the African American community. She introduces the concept of Nommo, “the magic power of the word...believed necessary to actualize life and give man mastery over things” (Smitherman 78). The important thing to note with Nommo is that it perceives words as tools, something that man can use outside of himself to perceive and dictate reality. This is different from the Western perception of words, where words are an ideal object to which we must conform. Ong postulates these boundaries, like standard grammar rules, are what distinguish writing from speech. This agrees with the notion that writing and speech operate at two different levels of thinking and perceiving of one’s self. Indeed, “writing or script differs as such from speech in that it does not inevitably well up out of the unconscious” (Ong 81). That’s why a concept such as Nommo produces such a stark effect on the way people articulate themselves and the world around them. From fathers giving their newborn children names so

that they no longer remain “a mere thing” to “verbal battles preceding or accompanying warfare,” the word holds a special place in the African oral tradition; especially within music (Smitherman 78). Even poetry, where Western processes allowed poetry to evolve into a literary pursuit, poetry in the African tradition kept its musicality. Smitherman writes:

“Poetry is written to be recited, even in a sense “sung,” in such a way that its creator becomes a kind of performing bard before the group...it combines orality, music, verbal performance, and brevity - and when performed before a black audience it evokes the “collective ritual” (180).

Hughes’ “Montage of a Dream Deferred” exemplifies this musical and collective propensity by using be-bop and jazz as themes of protest to those looking to discredit his traditions and values as an African American. It is the process of literacy that has subdued much of these traditional practices, and the invention of the printing press universalized the new Western standards of literacy. Smitherman believes this to be the crux of the issue, writing:

“The crucial difference in American culture lies in the contrasting modes in which Black and White Americans have shaped [their] language - a written mode for whites, having come from a European, print-oriented culture; a spoken mode for blacks, having come from an African, orally-oriented background” (77).

Consequently, the mentality behind this situation is seeded deeply within American culture, from inflammatory narratives surrounding black communities to silencing the voices of African Americans.

This eschewing of traditional lexicon for the sake of keeping the status quo is not an uncommon practice in communities of colour. Even today, people of colour often employ the strategy of ‘code-switching,’ where a person of colour changes the inflection and content of their speech to better adhere to a more ‘appropriate’ situation. This might simply seem like decorum, as one does in a courtroom for example, but decorum relies on respect. ‘Code-switching’ comes from the absence of respect. People of colour use this when they feel their natural speech will be devalued, often in a predominantly white space. Acclaimed director Spike Lee featured this

as one of the plot points of his latest film, *Blackkkkiansman*. Based on a true story, Ron Stallworth, an African American police officer changes the way he speaks to successfully infiltrate a KKK group. All this points to the distinct way the African American community uses language; realizing this perspective might ameliorate the confusion that Ong's model bears. Emery Petchauer echoes the sentiment in the article, "Framing and Reviewing Hip-Hop Educational Research," writing that "the creative practices of hip-hop and the messages constructed in the music are woven into the processes of identity formation by which youth and young adults conceive of themselves, others, and the world around them" (947).

These creative practices have a strong history within the language of African American communities. A popular aural game that runs adjacent to the evolution of rap is "the dozens." In his book, *The Dozens: A History of Rap's Mama*, Elijah Wald outlines the extensive and largely unrecognized history of the cultural code that has gained such popularity it's been made into television shows that have lasted collectively for nearly 30 years. The popular shows, *Wild N' Out* and *Yo Mama*, have remained a prominent fixture in the hip hop community as a colloquially black form of comedy. The process of engaging in the dozens requires an understanding of its complex codes and motifs that over time have come to become simple jokes that even children can participate in. Melville J. Herskovits offers a definition of the dozens that credits African American troops from World War II for having proliferated it amongst the community. The game itself is often violent and vulgar, the goal being to have the better insult; insults that often concern the opposer's mother (12). Herskovits explains while including valuable context stating:

"[the dozens is] a medium of release through abuse, which affords much opportunity for improvisation, and for which there is no retaliation permitted except a response in whittier and more telling form, this song-type is in the direct tradition of many other kinds of 'songs of allusion' found among African and New World Negroes" (12).

The medium speaks to the degree of disparity that Black and White American's lexicon has held throughout time. Where rap comes from the oral tradition of song and hymn, the dozens exemplifies another way words are used as tools for empowerment. This is specifically a black experience, one that Hughes and other Harlem writers considered another form of independence and pride. In an essay for the *Chicago Tribune*, Hughes describes the medium as, "the fabulous game few whites seem to comprehend, even on the simplest level," Hughes continues, "if white folks were not so clannish and stand-offish and did not segregate themselves from us, they would understand us better" (113). Both "the dozens" and rap are products of a longstanding oral tradition, one that might not hold the same totemic value as it once did prior to literacy but one that's values continue to influence the way people communicate. For African American artists and writers, asserting these traditions is not just an act of homage or community, it is a deliberate form of protest.

Chapter II

Part 1: Conceit and Deceit

"The caterpillar is a prisoner to the streets that conceived it"

The title "Wesley's Theory" references the famous African American actor Wesley Snipes, who spent three years in a federal penitentiary for tax fraud. In a failed appeal to the

court, Snipes used a tax protestor theory, essentially claiming he was a non-resident of the US meaning his domestic income would be non-taxable, when in reality he had been born in the US. But the issue here is not about Snipes' offence, it comes from knowing that a disproportionate amount of African Americans have been incarcerated for similar accusations than their white counterparts, according to Pew Research (Gramlich 2019). Lamar uses this in the songs latter half once the perspective of the narrative changes to that of Uncle Sam, writing "I'll Wesley Snipe your ass before thirty-five" (Wesley's Theory 3:40). The idea being that a successful black man or woman in America will always have a target on their backs in the eyes of the law -- Michael Jackson and Lauryn Hill both paid a similar price. Though they might have committed the same crime, it could be argued that it was their skin colour that ultimately incarcerated them. These artists can be considered the caterpillars that are "pimped" or exploited by the system and their cocoon can be seen as the system that holds them from evolution -- freedom.

Lamar warns listeners of this trap by enumerating the process of being pimped, he begins this by presenting the vulnerability of an ego. In the first chorus, Lamar personifies the lust that a young artist might have for fame and fortune as a girlfriend. However, that relationship changes quickly, as Lamar writes, "at first, I did love you / but now I just wanna fuck" (Wesley's Theory 1:10-1:14). From love to lust, Lamar emulates this younger, more naive version of himself as he brags about what he would do with the money he would get. From buying a "brand new Caddy on vogues" to handing out guns "straight from the CIA," Lamar's venture into the world of opulence paints these items like a piece of candy in front of a toddler (Wesley's Theory 1:45-1:55). The chorus becomes a caricature of successful artists, ones who get swept up with the flash of fame and cannot see that their talent is being manipulated. Fame and fortune personified as a girlfriend becomes nothing more to the artist than an object -- a

piggy bank. The ideals of capitalism run strong within the music industry, to a rising star, the intricate web of corporate greed becomes unmanageable. At the end of the chorus Lamar says, “uneducated but I got a million-dollar check like that” (Wesley’s Theory 2:50). In a 2015 MTV Interview with Rob Markman, Lamar explains this line deeper by saying, “nobody prepared us for this [success]...they teach us everything else in these curricular activities, it’s just redundant” (Markman 5:00-5:20). Lamar is not simply criticizing education, he is illustrating the novice level mentality a lot of rappers have when entering into the music industry. Understanding that as someone being “uneducated” puts the rapper in a position of vulnerability as they are unsure of how to manage such splendour; something record labels take advantage of. Though he may have achieved the American Dream, Lamar catalogues the manipulation that comes with it and sees the complexity of the situation.

What follows is a change of perspective within the song. Initiated by a refrain performed by artists Thundercat and George Clinton, the words “we should never gave niggas money / go back home” are repeated (Wesley’s Theory 2:11-2:15). This line sets up the trajectory of the song, where before Lamar was illustrating the greedy and lustful nature of fame and fortune for a young black man, he now shows the dark side of all the success. Famed producer, Dr Dre leaves a prophetic voicemail that interludes the song and preludes the shift in narrative. Succinctly, Dre says “anybody can get it / the hard part is keepin’ it” (Wesley’s Theory 3:14-3:16). It is important to note the power that comes with ownership in the African American community. Where it was once illegal for an African American man to own property, the idea of losing your house to the government over taxes is repugnant. But Lamar, knowing the temptations of fortune, changes his pitch and tone in the second verse to deliver a sales pitch from the perspective of Uncle Sam.

Not only does the bidding start with offering a “house or a car,” Uncle Sam includes “forty acres and a mule, a piano, a guitar” (Wesley’s Theory 3:18-3:20). Clearly mocking the rescinded proposal for reparations after the Civil War, Lamar adds instruments to the sentiment. What might seem like a small inclusion becomes tethered to the leitmotif of deceit, this time tying in the music industry. Lamar seems to be suggesting that Uncle Sam is not just an antiquated ideal, something that used to seduce African Americans with false propositions like land, but something that is still happening today, only this time it is under the guise of fame and fortune through music. It is in this section of the song that Lamar has Uncle Sam say “I’ll Wesley Snipe your ass before thirty-five” (Wesley’s Theory 4:06). After establishing the complex relationship that he has with the music industry and struggles with fame and fortune, Lamar leaves the track with a harrowing outro that contextualizes the next song. A saxophone wails as a harmony sings repeatedly “tax man comin’, tax man comin’,” with ‘tax man’ becoming another way of Lamar seeing the industry, the chant ushers in the spoken-word and jazz heavy track “for free?” From conceit to deceit, Lamar’s first song stamps the themes that the album grows upon and illustrates the first steps in the evolution of the caterpillar.

Lamar’s second track shows a character that is unwilling to bend his ways to please Uncle Sam. “For Free?” begins with Darlene Tibbs berating Lamar’s character. Her grievances find root in how easily Lamar can be seduced by the temptation of Uncle Sam, wondering “I don’t know why you trying to go big, you aint shit” (For Free? 0:18-0:20) Tibbs’ rant continues, belittling Lamar’s lack of wealth and potential. Criticizing him for not buying her “no outfit for the Fourth” reveals the true character (For Free? 0:30-0:33). Unveiling that this is not an errant critique but a calculated attack by Uncle Sam to nudge Lamar into accepting the life offered to him in “Wesley’s Theory.” Tibb’s character becomes an extension of the cocoon that Lamar illustrates, one where at every turn there is reason to fall into the trappings of the system that

ultimately abuses its power. However, Lamar does not back down. What follows is a quick-fire rap that resembles the slam-style of Amiri Baraka, a poet and playwright that helped popularize the art form of slam-poetry with the Black Arts Movement that started in the 1960s.

Lamar capitalizes on this form of poetry by using it in this particular song that stands against temptation. Throughout the song, Lamar uses the phrase “this dick ain’t free,” as a point of reference or mantra that helps him keep this mentality of opposition. The mantra is a spin on the phrase “pussy cost money, but dick is free” popularized by comedian Chris Rock. Looking at Tibbs’ section, the phrase is relatively self-explanatory. Lamar alters it to refuse the price put on his life, writing “livin’ in captivity raised my cap salary / celery, tellin’ me green is all I need / evidently all I seen was spam and raw sardines” (For Free? 1:00-1:04). Lamar is not worried about his meals here, he is questioning the proposition laid out by Uncle Sam. The first stanza can be interpreted in multiple ways, all with the same idea. One being that it refers to slavery, as Lamar realizes his potential is being pimped he recognizes the injustice throughout his and his people’s history and wants more, thus increasing the cap salary. Second, he could be referring to the idea of a rapper being in prison bodes for a more authentic artist in the eyes of the industry, therefore he would be more valuable. Both versions play on Lamar’s growing self-respect as he realizes that the “celery” that was propositioned to him is nothing, as he can only see “spam and raw sardines.” This realization comes with a rage that is felt through the songs increasing tempo and volume. Lamar captures this during the last few seconds of the track saying “Oh America, you bad bitch, I picked cotton and made you rich / now my dick ain’t free” (For Free? 2:02-2:07) Not only does this line bolster the notion that Lamar lists slavery as a means for a higher “cap salary,” but it also confirms the idea that the song is meant to be entering into a collective black expression of consciousness. One that is not solely Lamar’s to bear, but a feeling that is entrenched into the psyche and emotions of African Americans. In the

sphere of protest art, this song serves as illustrating the veritable straw that broke the camel's back. Essentially, Lamar places this as his second track as a way of showing the evolution of such a consciousness. Right after being offered a sentence by Uncle Sam, the character is thwarted to reality as his value as a human is brought forth. This speaks to the poem of the butterfly and caterpillar, where Lamar says "while consuming its environment, the caterpillar begins to notice ways to survive" (Mortal Man 11:20-11:25).

The ending line of the poem and the message of "For free?" holds a crucial point of awareness within the message. Without such a moment of alertness, the caterpillar could easily fall into the comfortable situation within the confines of the cocoon, but through a harsh awakening it is realizing that the world of the butterfly comes only as a direct result of the cocoon. By reaching such an idea, the caterpillar realizes its potential and, as Lamar raises his "cap salary," the caterpillar can see itself as worthy. Lamar follows through with this position and uses the last line of the song to initiate this transformation, with Tibbs' singing "I'ma get my Uncle Sam to fuck you up / You ain't no king" (For Free? 2:07-2:11). The personification of Uncle Sam taunts Lamar, aggravating him to the point where he has no choice but to revolt. A revolt that functions on the principle of self-pride, consequently evaluating the position of the butterfly in relation to the other caterpillars who aren't able to see their way out, all in less than four minutes on the next track "King Kunta."

Further prophesying the poem, Lamar continues identifying points of weakness within the world, or cocoon, that he is forced to inhabit. In "King Kunta," Lamar takes a fictionalized perspective of the character Kunta Kinte, from Alex Haley's 18th-century narrative *Roots: the Saga of an American Family*. By stepping into such a historically pertinent narrative, Lamar demonstrates the facilities that work with the oral procedures of a narrative. Similar to the way Homer would have built his narratives by working off of pre-established dialogues, Lamar works

with the emotions and perspectives of Kunta Kinte as a point of emphasis by juxtaposing it with fame and fortune. It is no coincidence that the famed novel holds a grudge against the Westernization of history, with Haley writing “his story of our people can help to alleviate the legacies of the fact that preponderantly the histories have been written by the winners” (587). Not only does this emphasize the hegemony that comes with the printing press and proliferation of literacy, but coupled with Lamar’s musical sampling, the two work in tandem to resurrect the oral traditions and sounds of their people. Indeed, Lamar’s impetus for sampling the tracks he does comes from a sense of duty to pay homage to “a guy that never got to see his full potential” (NME 1:30-1:45). Ultimately, the track plays as another iteration of visualizing one’s potential as a black man in America. As Lamar plays Kunta Kinte’s character, he imbues strength where it might not be. In the instance of Kinte’s foot being cut off in the novel, Lamar takes time to suggest that while his foot is gone there is no way to remove him of the strength it takes to keep moving forward. This becomes a metaphor that Lamar relies on throughout the song, asking “where you when I was walkin?” (King Kunta 0:20).

The question is aimed toward other rappers that Lamar implicates with the first line of the song, stating “I got a bone to pick. I don’t want you monkey-mouth motherfuckers sittin’ in my throne again” (King Kunta 0:05-0:08). Playing the narrative as a formerly enslaved man who is now a “king,” Lamar sees the other rappers as those caterpillars that have not yet been awakened to the institution that placates them. Lamar’s tone takes on the aggression and frustration he feels when seeing a black man who has fallen victim to the American Dream but continues to adhere to its standards by eschewing his traditions. Lamar bolsters this notion with the inclusion of “yams” as he raps “the yam is the power that be” (King Kunta 0:45). The rapper is not concerned with the starchy vegetable itself but what it represents. As a reference to Ralph

Ellison's *Invisible Man*, the yams represent a complicated relationship with the past. Louis D. Rubin Jr. puts it properly in "Of Literature and Yams" when he writes:

"What the yam means, I think, is obvious, and the protagonist finds himself in New York City because the community in which the yam was a staple of its diet had decreed that if he wished to remain at home he must accept a degraded and disadvantaged social and political status and a servile relationship to the dominant regional culture" (13).

In this regard, the yams become a fragment of the life Kunta Kinte was forced to leave. It seems Lamar attaches the ideas of tradition and home to the yams at first but confuses it by imbuing secondary definitions with the line "the yam brought it out of Richard Pryor / Manipulated Bill Clinton with desires" (King Kunta 1:33-1:40). Where Pryor's yams could be drugs, Clinton's seem to mean sex and lust. Ultimately, Lamar paints the yams as capable of enticing anyone from the former President of the United States to celebrities. This takes on a definition more akin to the symbolism of yams represented in Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart*, in which yams represent wealth and masculinity. Pinning down exactly what the yams means is of little importance, understanding all of it is. Lamar is concerned with authenticity in this regard, his awareness of the universal uses of yams is another point in which his orality is seeking to communicate with everyone. His concern with this is cast onto other rappers as he says, "I can dig rappin', but a rapper with a ghostwriter? What the fuck happened?" (King Kunta 0:48-0:50).

In this instance, Lamar is calling out rappers who do not write their own lyrics. Furthermore, Kunta Kinte, as "King Kunta," agreeing with rapping but not ghostwriters does more than question the authenticity of one rapper. With the idea of yams being a symbol of home and tradition, "King Kunta" admonishing rappers that cannot make their own lines becomes a jab at those caterpillars that are in their cocoon and in effect further from their roots. While these ghostwriter rappers are perfectly capable of writing their own lyrics, their literacy fails them and they need another to pen their lines, suggesting that had they kept hold of their

roots they would not need a writer as the lines would come naturally. Lamar elicits this idea in the same verse, saying “and if i gotta brown-nose for some gold / then I’d rather be a bum than a motherfuckin’ baller” (King Kunta 2:49-2:54). The antidote for such a problem, as is evidenced by one iteration of yams, is to reclaim one’s traditions and customs. The song echoes this with its final outro as a chorus chants “we want the funk” (King Kunta 3:47). In this instance, the chants at the end of the song are a yearn for tradition, for reclaiming the yams and achieving true freedom, even if it means losing a foot.

Chapter II

Part 2: Anxiety and Double Consciousness

“Already surrounded by this mad city, the caterpillar goes to work on the cocoon which institutionalizes him. He can no longer see past his own thoughts, he’s trapped”

Remember, Lamar is not interested in creating work that is univocal. Indeed, “institutionalized” features a nasally and higher-pitched Lamar as he changes characters by manipulating his voice to empathize with those who he decried in “King Kunta.” What follows is a peek inside the mind of those who have been part of the institution. In this case, Lamar is able to speak from experience, his success in the music industry has shown him the life of a member of the community that has reached stardom but cannot change the environment or himself alone. Further elaborating on the harshness of such a mindset, Lamar cannot seem to calibrate himself to a world so alien from his home, saying “I’m trapped inside the ghetto and I ain’t proud to admit it, I could still kill me a ni**a, so what?” (Institutionalized 0:15-0:19). Not only is he admitting to being “trapped inside the ghetto” but he realizes such an awakening is not enough, that his mind is still that of someone who is institutionalized. While he might not be readily armed, the point is to illustrate how deeply entrenched one’s way of thinking can be when already institutionalized. Coming out of such a conditioned mentality is tougher than he imagined. Lamar dives deeper into this consciousness by wondering what he’d do if he were the President, saying he’d “pay my mama’s rent / free my homies and them / Bulletproof my chevy doors / lay in the White House and get high” (Institutionalized 0:30-0:38). Had he left this line at that one could surmise these activities are more alike a neerdowell than the President. But Lamar obfuscates it by ending the line with “master, take the chains off me,” imbuing the absurd

Presidential proclamations as a product of the environment (Institutionalized 0:38). These lines effectively act as a treatise for those who are left in the cocoon.

Snoop Dogg is featured on the track eliciting similar advice, rapping “Talented but still under the neighborhood ruse / you can take your boy out the hood / but you can’t take the hood out the homie” (Institutionalized 2:38-2:42). “Ruse” can easily be taken for “rule” in this line, echoing the idea that the environment has made Lamar act as such. But neither artist lets this be the sole reason for such a mentality, as Lamar says “I should’ve listened when my grandma said to me / shit don’t change until you get up and wash yo’ ass, boy” (Institutionalized 3:33-3:39). Subtextually, Lamar’s grandmother is telling him to cleanse himself, spiritually and mentally; without this there is no real hope for progress. The idea being contested is stagnation, that until one cleanses themselves, similar in spirit to a baptism, of the ideas that entangle them into submission, they will not find freedom. By employing Snoop Dogg and his Grandmother, Lamar’s work continues to support the oral tradition in that the process of this evolution requires listening to others. More than simply tapping into the communal message of the song, both are playing off of historically established idioms and cliches. Where Lamar’s Grandmother’s is a reference to a famous stand-up bit from comedian Redd Foxx, Snoop Dogg’s outro begins with “once upon a time, in a city so divine” playing off of the traditional intro for fairytales. In a song that outlines the problems with falling under the spell of the cocoon (institutionalized; either physically or mentally), the only lines that are repeated are from his grandmother and Snoop Dogg. Coincidentally, those are the lines that Lamar suggests could have helped him from getting into his situation in the first place. While choruses are usually repeated in songs, it would be irresponsible to not recognize the value that this instance has. Not only does this resemble the conversational and montage tactics of Hughes’ *Harlem*, extracting prophetic idioms within the minutiae, but it also allows the character of young Lamar to interact with the world around

him. Certainly, if *TPAB* is an album celebrating and examining the black experience, it would be reductive to not recognize that this experience is a shared one.

Cataloguing the caterpillar, Lamar finds himself stuck inside the cocoon in “these walls.” Metaphorically, the walls represent the thoughts that the caterpillar “can no longer see past.” Similar to “institutionalized” in its message, Lamar illustrates an allegorical tale of a man set on revenge. Lamar plays a man who sleeps with a woman whose partner is in jail for murdering Lamar’s best friend. The allegory plays out to a juxtaposing tune that is relatively up-beat and funky, while the lyrics slowly turn to hatred Lamar’s voice is manipulated to emphasize the drama. Throughout the song the walls are mutated to adhere to certain concepts, from sex to incarceration, Lamar is suggesting that these walls are meant to be understood as things that hold power over someone. From his own walls of lust to the woman’s walls “telling me they full of pain, resentment / need someone to live in them just to relieve tension,” the track holds that the caterpillar’s journey is not a unique experience (These Walls 1:40-1:44). While the allegory builds on the remorse Lamar feels for abusing his power of fame to enact revenge, the walls become a cocoon of his own making. The message ultimately services the caution to fame Lamar elicits through the poem that he slowly builds at the end of each song, adding, “I remember you was conflicted / misusing your influence / sometimes I did the same / abusing my power, full of resentment / resentment that turned into a deep depression / found myself screaming in a hotel room” (These Walls 4:50-5:01).

In the poem, the caterpillar looks to the butterfly with envy and jealousy. These final lines introduce us to what that butterfly has to deal with. Once the caterpillar has learned about its own injustices it looks to the freedom of the butterfly with scorn, but has no real idea of what it must be like to be the butterfly. Lamar, having achieved riches, is the butterfly, but having such power holds a heavy weight on the mind and soul of someone who is thrust into such a position

with no real experience with it. This notion is teased in “Wesley’s Theory,” when Lamar is concerned with the treatment of those who have been criminally prosecuted for their success. In “u” Lamar castigates his actions, claiming a pursuit of riches is one fraught with sacrifices that don’t necessarily have to be made.

The track works as a climax for the narrative of young Lamar, fitting in right before his most popular song “Alright” that promotes positivity and potential. Lamar mentions in an interview with MTV that he would have never put out the album had this song not been included as it was a way for him to share his experiences and perspective of fame (Markman 2:00-2:15). For the caterpillars looking at him as this soaring butterfly, “u” becomes a sobering answer for those wondering if fame is as glamorous as it appears. Survivor’s guilt is a common theme that Lamar speaks about as having an influence on songs like this one and “institutionalized.” In “u,” Lamar says, “a friend never leave compton for profit,” which he later proves to be a substantial bit of advice as he wrestles with his guilt for not being home when his friend passes, saying “you even FaceTimed instead of a hospital visit / that’s unforgiven” (u 3:40 / 3:50). What Lamar is trying to do here is unveil the idealistic dreams and luxuries that the American Dream offers. With “i” being a song that promotes self-respect and pride, “u” can be characterized as Lamar’s anxiety that will eventually lead him to the self-awareness necessary for “i.” This is not a dissimilar phenomenon than that of double consciousness. Where Dubois posited that a double consciousness is a result of an internal struggle with being both “African” and “American” and having to decide which of the two to represent, Lamar’s allegory of the caterpillar submits a similar prompt; to acknowledge the system and work under it or denounce it and grow. Both notions recognize that the hegemony of Western practices and protocols has influenced a great number of its least supported group, which in turn creates an anxiety within them that Lamar details in “u.” Throughout the song Lamar is finding it harder and harder to love himself, he

likenes the imagery to an alcoholic, even gulping mid-line, illustrating the anguish that his success has cost him. The end of the track finds Lamar at his lowest, saying “if I told your secrets the world’ll know money can’t stop a suicidal weakness” (4:15-4:29). Being completely aware of the narrative, Lamar follows up with “Alright,” reassuring the listener that those feelings of doubt and depression are not permanent.

Pulitzer Prize winning author Alice Walker, after finding out that Lamar had quoted her novel *The Color Purple* for the intro of “Alright,” said that she was glad people of colour were talking cross-generationally about their lifelong struggles. Certainly, creating a dialogue is no easy task and doing so through a form of ‘ghetto’ entertainment seems even less likely to be taken seriously. By intentionally starting his song with lines from such an esteemed novel Lamar is doing more than turning a phrase to find a catchy bar. He asserts his validity by collecting evidence from reality. Meaning, his narrative is further legitimized by blending multiple voices, his words are fed by and for the collective consciousness as he says “alls my life I has to fight...but if god got us, then we gon’ be alright” (0:20). Where his other tracks list the life of a single character’s journey through the system, “Alright” becomes a pooled expression of pride. Further, the line “wouldn’t you know / we been hurt, been down before / nigga, when our pride was low / lookin at the world like, “Where do we go?” ushers in the contemporary issues of identity and pride he and his fellows face (Alright 1:53-2:00). Within the poem Lamar finds solace, prophesying that the caterpillar, once it has been institutionalized and becomes overwhelmed with anxiety “certain ideas take root. Such as goin’ home and bringing back new concepts to this Maad City” (Mortal Man 11:14-11:20). Lamar did physically go to Africa prior to starting the album, so it is clear the impetus of the line comes from some relevant experience on Lamar’s part. Especially noting the political climate of late 2015 in the U.S., Lamar’s return to such a dismayed country catalyzed such an allegory. Though Lamar is the one who made the

physical trip, his transformation is intended to be a guide to self-respect. In an interview with Medium.com, Lamar says:

“I saw all the things that I wasn’t taught. Probably one of the hardest things to do is put [together] a concept on how beautiful a place can be, and tell a person this while they’re still in the ghettos of Compton. I wanted to put that experience in the music” (Hale)

It is a powerful thing to create art that resonates, but to do so with a historically unrecognized tradition forms another layer of poetry all-together. Similar to Hughes’, Lamar does not use Africa in the same way other African American artists use it. Certain black nationalist artists and authors would promote a migration to Africa as being the only way to be truly free and black. But Lamar and Hughes choose to stand ground in America, effectively demanding to be accepted and treated equally yet holding Africa as a symbol of pride. While Lamar works with the ideas of a double consciousness in the first half of his album, the latter half rebukes the need for such an existence and hopes others can see the beauty in themselves as they are. A sentiment that is teased out through satirizing the superficiality of hip hop culture in his next song “For Sale?”

“For Sale?” becomes a cautionary tale of success. Where “For Free?” displayed a yet-to-be successful Lamar denying the temptations of greed from Uncle Sam, “For Sale?” finds him post-success, fraught with guilt and vulnerable to whatever can numb his pain. From alcohol and drugs to women, Lamar finds himself at the mercy of “Lucy” short for Lucifer. The entire song is recited to Lamar by Lucy, depicted by Lamar changing his voice to illustrate another character. But there is more to this than simply playing a character. The album becomes a play of sorts with Lucy being the only one on stage at the time. Though Lamar has enough awareness to deny Uncle Sam’s offer, he is finding it harder to deny Lucy. His moral character is put to test by falling into this depression. Lamar imparts in “Mortal Man,” during his conversation with Tupac, that this is a common occurrence for black men at a certain age. That “once you

turn 30 it's like they take the heart and soul out of a man. Out of a black man in this country and you don't wanna fight no more" (Mortal Man 6:30-6:45). Placing this interlude right after "Alright" is more than just a simple tracklist choice, it becomes a reminder that there will still be temptation no matter what one's mentality is. By having Lucy speak to the character of Lamar, an almost cinematic effect of breaking the fourth wall occurs as Lamar is not able to comment in the space of the song. What the listener can remember from "Alright" and "u" is an emotionally and mentally disturbed Lamar, choosing between loyalty or wealth, freedom or fame. These choices are universal, as expressed with yams and Kunta Kinte in "King Kunta." Lamar's journey is meant to be of service to those in the same trap. As the interlude comes to an end, Lamar builds on the poem he has been ending the previous songs with, finally giving a solution for his depression and destruction saying "the evils of Lucy was all around me / so I went runnin' for answers / Until I came home" (For Sale? 4:30-4:38).

Chapter II

Part 3: Unlearning and Teaching

"While trapped inside these walls certain ideas take root. Such as 'goin home and bringing back new concepts to this M.a.a.d City. The result: wings begin to emerge, breaking the cycle of feeling stagnant. Finally free, the butterfly sheds light on situations that the caterpillar never considered, ending the internal struggle."

"Momma" follows Lamar escaping the traps of Lucy and visiting his home of South Africa. While Lamar never explicitly states whether home is meant to be South Africa or Compton, the ideas of pride and tradition are still outstanding. Ambiguity, in the context of a song, becomes a useful tool when reaching the masses. This is how Lamar skates between black nationalism and African American patriotism. His ultimate message is to shed light on the

beauty of Africa, and be able to share that beauty with the people who are not aware of it. By doing so, one has a sense of duty and call to create a beautiful place wherever one is. This is distinctly an oral feature, to create art that serves a purpose larger than self-expression. Indeed, Ong credits primary oral cultures as exhibiting “heavy patterning and communal fixed formulas” (67). The patterns Lamar adheres to comes from the typical narrative arch of the rise and fall of an individual character as an allegory for society. “Momma,” being the point in Lamar’s narrative where the caterpillar goes home to teach of his new concepts, holds a similar pattern to Plato’s *Allegory of the Cave*. One can discern the shadows on the prisoner’s walls can act similarly in their duplicity as the cocoon. The resemblance continues as Plato’s freed prisoner is meant to be the conduit for reality to the others, but can only tell them rather than show just like the caterpillar that is awoken to the reality of his institutionalization. Lamar takes more than just the allegory from Socrates, in “Momma” he says “I know what I know and I know it well to not ever forget / Until I realized I didn’t know shit / the day I came home” (2:50-3:00). This whole verse is Lamar pontificating on what he knows, from “lawyers, advertisement, their sponsors” to “history / the universe works mentally,” but ends with the Socratic philosophy of “I know that I know nothing” (Momma 2:14 / 3:00).

While alluding Socrates is the least traditionally relevant reference thus far, it does contain an important judgment on knowledge and thought that pushed Lamar to his final evolution in “Momma.” When describing his trip to Africa, Lamar mentions meeting a “little boy that resembled [his] features,” to which the boy tells Lamar, “Kendrick, you do know my language / you just forgot because of what public schools had painted” (3:05-3:10). The boy speaks the South African language of Zulu, yet insists Lamar knows his language despite never learning of it in America. The line is meant to be a representation of Western schooling and its whitewashing. Lamar imparts this anecdote to further illustrate the power of an institution. The

boy tells Lamar that if pursuing his destiny means leaving his home of Compton, then it is up to him to “be an advocate, tell your homies especially / to come back home” (Momma 3:25-3:30). As an artist, Lamar’s responsibility becomes more than expressing himself, but expressing the truths of the world he has witnessed and sharing the beauty of Africa to the people unable to break from their cocoon. The song’s dynamic slowly changes after this line, evoking a sort of transformation within the narrative. An interlude ushers in this new emotional and mental clarity, singing “this is a world premiere.” This relates to the Socrates reference in that Lamar begins to accept the mental incarceration that has held him back, and after travelling to Africa he realizes superficiality of his own problems and how those work to pimp him; only by realizing he knows nothing can he begin to understand the power of knowledge. Lamar ends the song by switching up the tempo and tone to signify a renewed sense of duty. Where before he was working for success, Lamar realizes that such a thing is detrimental. After struggling with depression, power and greed, he has come to realize his destiny is to help the people, saying “I can be your advocate / I can preach for you if you tell me what the matter is” (Momma 4:30-4:38). Having found his destiny, it comes to fruition in the form of the album.

This idea of legitimizing a piece of art or novel through the public’s reception to it is closely tied to protest art. Indeed, the references to black and African American art and novels work in the same spirit. In order for both to be realized, they must be recognized. Rachel S. Vandagriff mentions the “role of the listener” in her piece “Talking about a Revolution,” when understanding protest art. Vandagriff says:

“A protest song does not work unless it works on a listener enough or such that the listener makes an act of protest. By nuancing our understanding and descriptions of protest music, we can become clearer about where our roles lie” (16).

In *TPAB*, Lamar is protesting the mentality and institutions that cripple people of colour by stripping them of their traditions. In his next track “Hood Politics,” Lamar speaks on this by likening political parties to the infamous gangs the Bloods and the Crips. Holding politics culpable for the image of a “thug,” Lamar says “they give us guns and drugs, call us thugs / make it they promise to fuck with you / no condom, they fuck with you, Obama say, “what it do?” (Hood Politics 2:40-2:50). More than a critique of politics, Lamar is trying to clear the name of Compton. Warped by “what public schools had painted,” attempting to beautify Compton requires understanding that the problem is a systemic one. *TPAB* attempts to revive the pride that Hughes’ and other Harlem Renaissance poets attempted to imbue by holding the system culpable for their discriminatory image.

In excavating the issues of systemic racism, Lamar goes further by implicating his own mentality of others. In “How Much a Dollar Cost,” Lamar describes an instance in South Africa where he met a man who begs him for 10 rand (less than 1 U.S. Dollar) at a gas station. Lamar denies the beggar, “told him, beat it / contributin’ money just for his pipe - i couldn’t see it” (0:45-0:50). The song goes on to detail Lamar’s lack of empathy as the man is disappointed with Lamar’s judgement until he finally asks “Have you ever opened up Exodus 14? A humble man is all that we ever need / Tell me; how much a dollar cost?” (2:10-2:20). The line reflects the nature of greed, as the beggar turns out to be God the parable of the Sheep and the Goat is called to action. Where God banishes the man who denied him nourishment, Lamar is denied his place in heaven as he denies God in the image of the beggar. The dollar is nothing to Lamar but means everything to the beggar. With this, we can contextualize the parable as being used as another cautionary tale that the listener must embrace; to be a good person one must contain the capacity for empathy for all. Moreover, this parable can be looked at as a reflection of the political entities that Lamar critiques in “Hood Politics” as having the same problem. That

because of the images that Compton and South Africa have been cast with, that translates to Lamar being wary of someone looking for money; his reflex is negative. Similarly, the negative reflex that paints Compton or Africa as harshly as Lamar did, the beggar comes from the same avarice.

To illustrate a palette of colours, Lamar uses the discernable colours that arise when juxtaposing Republican v. Democrat, Blood v. Crips, Black v. White, but makes sure to focus on the shades. Lamar sheds light on the issue of colourism within the African American community in "Complexion (A Zulu Love)." Where fair is preferred to darker skin, Lamar and erudite American rapper Rapsody, create a song that celebrates all shades of colour. Succinctly and powerfully, Rapsody's last line on the track encompasses the breadth of the issue as she says "we all on the same team, blues and pirus, no colors ain't a thing" (4:00:4:05). Without explicitly mentioning gang violence, Rapsody implicates the notorious rivalry of the bloods and crips for basing their hatred off of something as frivolous as colour. The sentiment stretches from colourism to politics and gang violence, all following an imaginary protocol that separates them. With hate stemming from every corner of society, Lamar, as the narrative follows him going back to Compton, begins to see the cracks in the pavement as he says "I don't see Compton, I see something much worse / the land of the landmines, the hell that's on earth" (Complexion 4:19-4:24).

Lamar's answer to this assessment comes in the form of "the blacker the berry," which has been covered previously, but a line that might not have made sense earlier becomes clear when following the narrative. Lamar says "I'm the biggest hypocrite of 2015," and goes on to rebuke white on black violence but ends by saying "So why did I weep when Trayvon Martin was in the street / when gang-banging make me kill a nigga blacker than me? Hypocrite!" (Blacker the Berry 4:23-4:31). The key to understanding this comes when Lamar separates his

identity by saying “I’m African-American, I’m African,” which can be taken as an allusion to the double consciousness W.E.B. Dubois posits. What sounds like a prideful statement becomes a prescription of condition. Lamar’s identity is split and his moral compass is being tampered with when on one hand he can see the beauty of Africa and hopes Compton can be the same, but upon returning he can only see the effects of people being pitted against each other to survive. So when he sees a young black man splayed on the street, he is torn; one part of him weeps while the other is forced to violence for survival. Though he calls himself the hypocrite, Lamar is indirectly commenting on the communities that cannot see past their allegiance for change but decree violence toward their people. Certainly a divisive circumstance, but one that Lamar refuses to yield to.

Lamar continues with his critique of the Compton he has returned to with “You Ain’t Gotta Lie (Mamma Said).” The song follows the theme that “the loudest one in the room, that’s a complex” (3:00-3:02). A complex that Lamar finds in mainstream hip hop where rappers let their image dictate their character. The song, in the conversation of the narrative, contains the types of virtues that the caterpillar envies of the butterfly, but as Lamar says, “you ain’t gotta lie to kick it.” The line is a reference to “Lie to Kick it” by Tupac, both songs contain the same zeal for authenticity. Both Lamar and Tupac comment on the industry’s penchant for capitalizing on image and naive rappers who fall into the trap of becoming a walking billboard for their record label. Lamar says “sell a dream in the auction, tell me just who your boss is,” interrogating the rapper that does not see how his image is being used like slaves at auctions. Ultimately, the song reiterates the idea of being true to oneself and not allowing outside sources to dictate what parts of Black culture are acceptable because of how they sell. The song ends with sounds of a band moving and a crowd gathering as the track segues to “i.” From critiquing the superficiality

of hip hop to transitioning to a non-studio recorded version of the song, “i” shows the listener exactly what hip hop is supposed to be; completing the evolution of the butterfly.

The song begins with Lamar essentially retelling the journey from the album’s first song to this one. The tune is jovial, as Lamar continues rapping about the problems he used to have and the issues that circulate his neighbourhood. But he feels saved and hopeful because he has learned to love himself and that that was all it really took. Yet, the crowd gets rowdy and Lamar is forced to pause the music. As the crowd keeps bustling, Lamar says “not on my time / we could save that shit for the streets / this is for the kids” (i 3:30-3:35). He gets the crowd to quiet down after asking “how many we done lost bro?” (i 3:56-4:00). The crowd begins to lean in his favour and Lamar says he will continue with some acapella.

His verse covers the word “Negus.” Lamar questions the phrase “fuck nigga,” telling the crowd he was told it was “no better than a white man with slave boats” (i 4:32-4:35). Lamar speaks on the power of the phrase and how it controls his people. Lamar dedicates the verse to Oprah, who in an interview with rapper Jay-Z stood by her stance of not liking hip hop because she does not approve of the use of the n-word. Lamar continues, explaining the word Negus “straight from Ethiopia.” The word is defined as “royalty; king royalty” and the description is “black emperor, king, ruler,” but Lamar continues, telling the audience that “the history books overlook the word and hide it / America tried to make it to a house divided / the homies don’t recognize we been using it wrong” (i 5:12-5:20). In referencing President Abraham Lincoln’s The House Divided Speech where he says “a house divided against itself cannot stand,” Lamar redirects the sentiment toward the n-word. Lamar ends by saying “Take it from Oprah Winfrey, tell her she right on time / Kendrick Lamar, by far, realest Negus alive” (i 5:30-5:37). The song, in the context of the narrative, sounds and feels like a breath of fresh air, for both Lamar and the listener. After outlining the problems and injustices that surround Compton, Lamar has come full

circle, only this time he has a purpose - to show Compton how to love itself, that the answer can be this simple. The effect of the song being played in front of an audience garners a stronger emotional evocation than if it were a generic studio song. More than preach, Lamar is a living embodiment of the potential everyone has inside of them. The only way to truly understand something is to be able to teach it, and Lamar is doing that by the end of the album. He ends the message of the album with "Mortal Man," which features a fictional interview with Tupac in which they discuss racism, black experience, institutionalization, and tradition.

This track arguably features the only version of true Lamar throughout the album. Where he used characters to emphasize a point previously, "Mortal Man" has Lamar questioning his message and image in the public's eye. Lamar wishes to be great like Nelson Mandela, the Former President of South Africa, saying "the ghost of Mandela, hope my flows stay propellin'" (Mortal Man 1:08-1:11). Instead of wishing for riches like he critiques in other songs, he hopes his words reach people the same way Mandela's did to effect change. He is consumed with this hope, even asking "if shit hit the fan, is you still a fan?" wondering if his words will be occasional rather than evergreen and substantial enough to impact someone (Mortal Man 1:30). But as Mandela served 27 years to fight for his truth, Lamar wonders if he can live up to that expectation. The message is postured rhetorically, Lamar is really wondering if the album he just made will live up to its message - that people will learn about the injustices of the world and do something to fix it.

As the song ends, the poem that Lamar has slowly been building appears in its full form. The poem covers the album's central themes and moments, from "abusing my power" to "the evils of Lucy was all around me" and coming home. In this full version, Lamar describes what he learned from leaving and coming back home to be a single word - "respect" (Mortal Man 9:00). Lamar explains,

“Just because you wore a different gang color than mine’s / doesn’t mean I can’t respect you as a black man / Forgetting all the pain and hurt we caused each other on these streets / if i respect you, we unify and stop the enemy from killing us” (Mortal Man 8:40-8:58).

After finishing, the poem is revealed to be part of a conversation that Lamar was having with Tupac, with Lamar asking him how he feels about the poem. Throughout the conversation Tupac and Lamar speak about the black experience and the injustices that have been happening to them. Tupac mentions Nat Turner’s Slave Rebellion, saying America has no idea what it is doing to black people and one day it will be just as bad. Lamar listens and says “the only hope that we kinda have left is music and vibrations,” that for him to be on stage and speak into a mic is a powerful thing (Mortal Man 9:43). Finally, Lamar recites the prophetic tale of the caterpillar. It is notable that Lamar prefaces this by saying “It’s actually something a good friend had wrote / describing my world,” if only to further champion the message of listening the story falls into the category of a tale, one that gets passed down through generations. After reciting the story, Lamar calls out to Tupac but he is no longer there. The last words Tupac said to Lamar on the track were “we ain’t even really rappin’ / we just lettin our dead homies tell stories for us.” With this, the sobering reality of hip hop is laid bare. Tupac survives through music, Lamar and the audience must realize this truth with his absence before the album finishes. More than anything, Lamar reciting the story is a respite to the reality that it enforces just before cutting out. Recounting the journey from caterpillar to butterfly begs the audience to think deeper about the album and its message. As usual, Lamar capitalizes on the oral tradition of cyclical narratives by ending the album with calling out to Tupac who cannot answer. But once the album replays, the listener is given Gardener’s song again, fulfilling Tupac’s final words - “we just lettin our dead homies tell stories for us” (Mortal Man 10:23).

Conclusion

This thesis has examined the oral and literate characteristics at work in both Lamar and Hughes to get a better sense of the symbiosis that orality and literacy can carry. I turn here in conclusion to this inspection in order to supplement these findings as they translate to real-world pedagogy. Although Lamar might be less concerned with the academic world of orality and literacy than he is with the real-world implications of it, *TPAB* remains a crucial text in evaluating the potential for a more culturally sensitive and expansive category of poetry and literature. An exceptional example of this is Patricia Campbell's outline of the positive nature of educating with music, Campbell cites the ancient Chinese phrase "yu jiao yu yue," meaning "music in education should be emphasized, [implying] that music learning might serve also as a moral education" (32). In fact, *TPAB* and Lamar's previous albums have all successfully been integrated into various curricula nationwide. An exceptional example is Brian Mooney's English class at High Tech High School in New Jersey. Mooney's class was already in the middle of reading Toni Morrison's *Bluest Eyes* when *TPAB* dropped. Mooney instantly recognized the potential of teaching the album alongside the text saying, "I was listening and I was like, wow, there are just so many themes that are the same" (NPR).

Mooney's class went on to write essays on the similarities concerning institutionalization and internalized racism that Morrison's characters felt alongside Lamar's album. For high school students to discuss such intense topics, the takeaway was a newfound notion of hope and progress. Where the students saw little hope in the novel, after listening and comparing Lamar's album to the text, they began to see the purpose of speaking about the issues. One student wrote, "the novel represents hope because it is somebody taking notice and writing about all this oppression and racism. It brings attention to these serious problems and when people are

aware, action follows" (Mooney). Mooney reached the students by inviting the world they escaped to outside of school into the classroom. One sentiment that Mooney leaves with educators criticizing the practice is that "while it's problematic to cast Kendrick as a saviour for hip hop and black America, it's equally as dangerous to dismiss him."

Though some would see the impetus for adopting such a curriculum to be a reaction to 2016's political climate, the album has resurfaced in pop culture and breathed new life into the idea of expanding educational practices to build a more culturally expansive curriculum. Mooney's class went over much of the same explication that was done above, by doing so the veritable chest of knowledge is opened. Without real-world context, much of the issues of racial violence and injustice written about in novels can sometimes be abstract to students. By teaching Lamar's album, students are able to see the tangible and contemporary realities of racism in America.

Just as significantly, they are introduced to the expanding world of poetry and are given an accessible foundation to understand the intricate literary devices that Lamar uses throughout the album. The beauty of the album is that it subtly educates. By following the narrative and decoding the connections students and listeners are invited to find out the ideas being played with and critiqued all on their own. A critique of the album in the zeitgeist is that it has little replay value. Meaning that its content is often dense, dramatic, and too intense to play while driving to work or a concert. Consequently, this critique only corroborates the album's literary capacity. Its content is tough, it can be difficult to listen to the injustices as they are laid out. But that is precisely the reason that the album has reached such a totemic stature. Uncovering such truths takes concerted effort, and in the vein of protest art, it asks its listener to engage with it outside of the space of music.

To answer the initial question: what means of communication does music offer and should it be taught? Lamar and Hughes become a paramount pair. Indispensable in the play between orality and literacy, their work contains the same passionate genius that modernists of the early 20th century held. While Modernist writers have held an illustrious position in academia for their unfettered devotion to the pursuit of new and authentic voices in literature, black and African American writers have only recently been inducted to the periphery of this world. As the zeitgeist evolves, so does pedagogy. With teachers like Mooney and Lamen Kebe, the practice of literary studies can begin to adapt to the environment. With African American studies already posturing such an evolution, it would be prudent to include Lamar as a literary contemporary.

In dissecting his album and finding the oral and literate properties at work, the lockbox of canonical literature is opened. Where once music and language worked together in producing work that withstood generations and centuries, it would seem viable that a modern iteration should hold a similar totemic stature. Indeed, with Lamar's *TPAB*, the oral economies at work allow it to evade expiration; Hughes' *Montage of a Dream Deferred* exemplifies this virtue. As Lamar eschews boundaries of a typical rapper, his artistry becomes cartography. The blueprints of his narratives work in the same way Hughes' be-bop reigns in the collective consciousness. In producing work that typifies a responsibility to tradition, Lamar carries a longstanding spirit of African American art that is crucial in educating with an "autonomous" model. With that, Ong's assessment of literacy and orality can be amended and the breadth of literature and literacy expanded.

Works Cited

- Campbell, Patricia Shehan. "Orality, Literacy and Music's Creative Potential: A Comparative Approach." *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, no. 101, 1989, pp. 30–40. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/40318372. Accessed 27 June 2020.
- Caramanica, Jon. "Kendrick Lamar, Emboldened, but Burdened, by Success." <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/18/arts/music/kendrick-lamar-emboldened-but-burdened-by-success.html>.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/18/arts/music/kendrick-lamar-emboldened-but-burdened-by-success.html>.
- Danius, Sara. "The Nobel Prize in Literature 2016." *NobelPrize.org*, www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2016/prize-announcement/.
- DuBois, W. E. B. "The Souls of Black Folk (Original Classic Edition)." *Original*, G&D Media, 2019.
- Foley, John Miles. "Reading' Homer through Oral Tradition." *College Literature*, vol. 34, no. 2, 2007, pp. 1–28. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/25115419.
- Gramlich, John. "The Gap between the Number of Blacks and Whites in Prison Is Shrinking." *Pew Research Center*, 30 Apr. 2019, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/04/30/shrinking-gap-between-number-of-blacks-and-whites-in-prison.
- Greg Tate: "To Pimp a Butterfly Album Review." *Rolling Stone Magazine* on 19 March 2015. Online available via <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/albumreviews/kendrick-lamar-to-pimp-a-butterfly-20150319> (accessed on 3 March 2016).
- Hokanson, Robert O'brien. "Jazzing It Up: The Be-bop Modernism of Langston Hughes." *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 31, no. 4 (1998): 61-82. Accessed August 28, 2020. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44029735>.
- Hale, Andreas. "The Oral History of Kendrick Lamar's 'To Pimp a Butterfly.'" *Medium*, 20 June 2018, medium.com/cuepoint/the-oral-history-of-kendrick-lamar-s-to-pimp-a-butterfly-622f725c3fde.
- Haley, Alex. "Roots: The Saga of an American Family." *Media tie-In*, Da Capo Press, 2016.
- Heath, Shirley Brice. "Protean Shapes in Literacy Events." *Perspectives on Literacy*, Southern Illinois University Press, 1988, pp. 348–370.

Horner, Al. "To Pimp A Butterfly' – Kendrick Lamar's Fiery 'Soundtrack To A New Civil Rights Movement' Unravelled." *NME*, 13 Apr. 2015, www.nme.com/features/to-pimp-a-butterfly-kendrick-lamars-fiery-soundtrack-to-a-new-civil-rights-movement-unravelled-756645.

Hughes, Langston, and Arnold Rampersad. "The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes" (Vintage Classics). *Annotated, Vintage*, 1995.

Hughes, Langston, and Christopher Santis. Langston Hughes and the **Chicago Defender**: *Essays on Race, Politics, and Culture, 1942-62*. University of Illinois Press, 1995.

Hughes, Langston. "200 Years of American Negro Poetry." *Transition*, no. 75/76 (1997): 90-96. Accessed August 28, 2020. doi:10.2307/2935394.

Lartey, Jamiles. "Obama on Black Lives Matter: they are 'much better organizers than I was.'" *The Guardian*. 19 June 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/feb/18/black-lives-matter-meet-president-obama-white-house-justice-system>. Accessed 6/18/2020.

Leach, Andrew. "'One Day It'll All Make Sense": *Hip-Hop and Rap Resources for Music Librarians*." *Notes* 65, no. 1 (2008): 9-37. Accessed August 26, 2020. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30163606>.

Lopes, Paul. "The Rise of a Jazz Art World." 1st ed., *Cambridge University Press*, 2002.

Mackey, Nathaniel. *"Discrepant Engagement: Dissonance, Cross-Culturality, and Experimental Writing."* Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Markman, Rob. "YouTube." Kendrick Lamar Breaks Down Tracks From "To Pimp A Butterfly" (Pt. 1) | MTV News, uploaded by MTV, 13 Mar. 2015, www.youtube.com/watch?v=AUEI_ep9iDs&feature=youtu.be.

Malhotra, Alejandra, "'My only weapon is force': Rap as 'Post-Literate Orality'" (2009). ECLS Student Scholarship. http://scholar.oxy.edu/ecls_student/14

McDowell, Paula. "ONG AND THE CONCEPT OF ORALITY." *Religion & Literature*, vol. 44, no. 2, 2012, pp. 169–178. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/24397676.

Mooney, Brian. "Why I Dropped Everything And Started Teaching Kendrick Lamar's New Album." Brian Mooney, 28 Apr. 2015, bemoons.wordpress.com/2015/03/27/why-i-dropped-everything-and-started-teaching-kendrick-lamars-new-album.

- Nielsen, Aldon Lynn. "*Black Chant: Languages of African-American Postmodernism.*" Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- NME. "Kendrick Lamar On How He Wrote 'King Kunta.'" YouTube, uploaded by NME. 5 June 2015, www.youtube.com/watch?v=vm_Xb9c6_Q.
- Ong, Walter J., and John Hartley. "*Orality and Literacy: the Technologizing of the Word.*" Routledge, 2012.
- Petchauer, Emery. "Framing and Reviewing Hip-Hop Educational Research." *Review of Educational Research*, vol. 79, no. 2, 2009, pp. 946–78. Crossref, doi:10.3102/0034654308330967.
- Rubin, Louis D. "Of Literature and Yams." *The Southern Literary Journal* 20, no. 2 (1988): 12-15. Accessed August 28, 2020. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20077925>.
- Scheub, Harold. "A Review of African Oral Traditions and Literature." *African Studies Review* 28, no. 2/3 (1985): 1-72. Accessed August 28, 2020. doi:10.2307/524603.
- Smitherman, Geneva. *Talkin and Testifyin: The Language of Black America* (Waynebook). Wayne State University Press, 1986.
- Street, Brian V. "At Last: Recent Applications of New Literacy Studies in Educational Contexts." *Research in the Teaching of English*, vol. 39, no. 4, 2005, pp. 417–423. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/40171646.
- Thiongo Ngũgĩ wa. *Globalectics: "Theory and the Politics of Knowing."* Columbia University Press, 2014.
- Thurman, Wallace. "The Blacker the Berry." *Martino Fine Books*, 2015
- Vandagriff, Rachel S. "Talking about a Revolution: Protest Music and Popular Culture, from Selma, Alabama, to Ferguson, Missouri." *Song and Popular Culture* 60/61 (2015): 333-50. Accessed August 28, 2020. doi:10.2307/26538872.
- Wald, Elijah. "Talking 'Bout Your Mama: The Dozens, Snaps, and the Deep Roots of Rap." 1st ed., Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Weinstein, Susan. "A Love for the Thing: The Pleasures of Rap as a Literate Practice." *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, vol. 50, no. 4, 2006, pp. 270–281. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/40013745.

Wood, Roy Jr. "The Real Reason People Aren't Standing for the National Anthem - Roy Wood Jr." *YouTube, Comedy Central Stand-up*, Jan 23, 2019.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xCvsqAdEPic>