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MAGISTRSKO DELO

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Master Thesis: Intertextuality of Literature in Billy Woods's Lyrics  
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Disclaimer:

All Billy Woods's lyrics are used with the artist's permission granted via email.

## **Abstract**

The thesis analyses how literature has been integrated into rap lyrics. It looks at how allusion and intertextuality are the main stylistic techniques to integrate literature into rap lyrics. The thesis is divided into two parts: the theoretical and empirical. The theoretical part explains the concept of genre, allusion, text and intertextuality. The second part of the theoretical part analyses post-colonialism and its four main concepts: imperialism, colonialism, post-colonialism and neo-colonialism. It contextualizes how the development of rap music as a genre evolved from the African-American experience in the United States and is directly connected to race relations, the Civil Rights Movement and slavery in the United States. The early development of rap music is explained in the historical context and the most common speech figures in rap are elaborated upon. The empirical part makes a historical overview of the integration of literature into rap music and analyses Billy Woods's lyrics. The lyrics are analysed from three perspectives. The first two being how intertextuality is used to portray race relations, post-colonialism and to give the text an additional layer of interpretation. The third aspect addresses how the writing of Daniil Kharms and Flannery O'Connor has been adapted into a rap form by Billy Woods. The last part of the thesis deals with how specific writers have influenced individual rappers. The appendix includes a conversation conducted with Billy Woods for this thesis.

**Key words:** Billy Woods, allusion, intertextuality, rap, hip-hop, post-colonialism, race relations, Daniil Kharms, Flannery O'Connor

## **Povzetek:**

Magistrsko delo preučuje, na kakšen način je literatura vpeljana v rap besedila, kako sta intertekstualnost in aluzija glavni stilistični tehniki integracije literature v rap besedila. Magistrsko delo je razdeljeno na teoretični in empirični del. Prvi del teoretičnega dela razloži sledeče koncepte: žanr, aluzija, tekst in intertekstualnost. V drugem delu teoretičnega je predstavljen postkolonializem v povezavi s štirimi glavnimi koncepti: imperializem, kolonializem, postkolonializem in neokolonializem. Rap kot žanr je postavljen v kontekst povezave z afro-ameriško izkušnjo v Združenih državah Amerike in je neposredno povezan z odnosi med rasami, gibanjem za državljanske pravice in suženjstvom. Zgodnji razvoj rapa je postavljen v zgodovinski kontekst, predstavljene so najpogostejše retorične figure. Empirični del magistrskega dela prinaša zgodovinski pregled integracije literature v rap in analizo besedil Billya Woodsa. Besedila so preučena s treh vidikov. Prva dva se nanašata na intertekstualnost, uporabljeno za prikaz odnosov med rasami, in postkolonializem v besedilih Billya Woodsa. Tretji vidik se nanaša na prilagoditev sloga pisanja Danilla Kharmsa in Flannery O'Connor, prilagojenega rapu v besedilih Billya Woodsa. Zadnji del magistrskega dela se nanaša na vpliv pisateljev na določene raperje. Dodatek magistrskega dela vsebuje pogovor z Billyem Woodsom, izveden za dotično magistrsko delo.

**Ključne besede:** Billy Woods, aluzija, intertekstualnost, rap, hip hop, postkolonializem, razmerja med rasami, Daniil Kharms, Flannery O'Connor

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# 1. Introduction

On the surface, it may seem that rap lyrics and literature do not have much in common; however, once inspected in more detail, it can be found that literature and rap are intertwined. This is not surprising, because in rap lyrics are the key part of the song. How literature is integrated into rap lyrics depends on the individual rapper; nonetheless, intertextuality and allusion are among the most common literary techniques used. The thesis will analyse Billy Woods's lyrics from three aspects: how literature is used to portray race relations; how intertextuality is used to integrate post-colonialism into lyrics; how the writing of Daniil Kharmis and Flannery O'Connor are stylistically adopted and appropriated into rap. The appendix includes a conversation conducted with Billy Woods through email.

There will be a few restrictions regarding the analysis. To illustrate how literature has influenced rap lyrics, the rap records which were selected are considered influential on the genre or had a direct influence on Billy Woods. These records are Public Enemy – *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back*, Beastie Boys – *Paul's Boutique*, Nas – *Illmatic*, GZA – *Liquid Swords*, Company Flow – *Funcrusher Plus*, MF Doom – *Operation Doomsday*, Cannibal Ox – *The Cold Vein*, Aesop Rock – *Labor Days*, MF Doom – *Born Like This*, Dr. Yen Lo – *Days With Dr. Yen Lo*. The seven songs by Billy Woods which are analysed are those that could be considered archetypal Billy Woods songs, and have all the common stylistic characteristics that can be found in the rapper's discography. The songs analysed are "Tinsel Town," "Lucre," "Cuito Cuanavale," "Black Ark," "Zulu Tolstoy," "Dreams Come True," "Scales," and "Borrowed Time."

The aim of the thesis is to show how literature has been integrated into rap—how literature influenced rap throughout time and that the case of Billy Woods is not an isolated incident—that he is the stylistics progression and update of the pre-existing forms.

Hypotheses:

- Literature influences rap lyrics; however, how it is integrated into rap changes—depending on the time period in which rap is created.
- Intertextuality and allusions are the most common literary techniques to integrate literature into rap lyrics.
- Biblical allusions are the most common literary allusions.
- The quantity of literature allusions that are used in the lyrics depends on the individual rapper.

- Literature is adapted into rap lyrics as an individual stylistic choice by different rappers in the juxtaposition to the traditional pop culture allusions and similes.
- Direct influence of literature or a specific author on a rapper depends on the individual and is usually an exception and not the norm.

The thesis is divided into two parts: theoretical and empirical. In the theoretical part, the theoretical framework and the key concepts will be explained. The empirical part will provide a historical overview of literature in rap and the analysis of Billy Woods's lyrics.



## 2. Theoretical Part

Before we can analyse the rap lyrics, it is important to explain the theoretical framework of the thesis. There are two main concepts that will be applied for the analysis of the lyrics: intertextuality and post-colonialism. However, to be able to understand what intertextuality is, we must first explain the concepts of genre, allusion and textuality.

### 2.1. Genre

The origins of the word genre can be found in Greek *genus*: it means “kind” (Rosmarin, p. 25). The debate about the similarity of literature has been an ongoing theme in human history. Aristotle was already aware of the importance of the metaphorical expressions, because the user can see similarity in difference and be able to define general characteristics in a large amount of details (Rosemarin, p.23). Contemporary definitions of genre are following. Rosemarin defines genre as:

pragmatic rather than natural, as defined rather than found, and as used rather than described, then there are precisely as many genres as we need, genres whose conceptual shape is precisely determined by that need. They are designed to serve the explanatory purpose of critical thought, not the other way around. (Rosmarin, p.25).

On the other hand, Norman Fairclough sees genre as a question of how the text is formed in relation to other instances within a work, when social life is produced, when people interact. It is dependent on the genre what kind of text is produced. He refers to Bakhtin, who saw genre is a necessity, because it combines the relative fixity of the specific genre and acceptance to new forms (Fairclough, p.174). Genre has thereby been defined. The next literary device that needs to be defined is allusion, because it is connected to intertextuality.

### 2.2. Allusion

Allusion and intertextuality are used as references; however, there is a difference in their usage. The basic definition of allusion given by Abrams's *A Glossary of Literary Terms* is:

a passing reference, without explicit identification, to a literary or historical person, place, or event, or to another literary work or passage. Since allusions are not

explicitly identified, they imply a fund of knowledge that is shared by an author and the audience for whom the author writes. Most literary allusions are intended to be recognized by the generally educated readers of the author's time, but some are aimed at a special coterie. The current term intertextuality includes literary echoes and allusions as one of the many ways in which any text is interlinked with other texts (Abrams, p.9-10).

It must be noted that allusions or references do not stop on the literary level. They can also refer to other textual and non-textual mediums such as genres, films, social behaviour or previous knowledge (Bax, p. 19); however, in this thesis the emphasis will be on literary allusions. The non-literary allusion will be mentioned, but will not be focal point of the analysis. The next concepts that need to be defined before we can move to intertextuality are text and textuality.

### 2.3. Text

Beaugrande argues that a text is a communicative occurrence, which must meet the seven standards of textuality to be treated as a communicative text. In case one of those standards has not been met, the text is non-communicative. For that reason, non-communicative texts are not considered texts (Beaugrande, p. 3). The seven standards of textuality are cohesion, coherence, intentionality, acceptability, informativity, situationality and intertextuality, which are defined as follows:

- 1) Cohesion deals in what manner the parts of the surface text (the words we can hear or see) are connected in an arrangement (Beaugrande, p.3).
- 2) Coherence deals in what manner parts of the textual world (the composition of concepts and relations that control the surface text) are together approachable and appropriate (Beaugrande, p.4). It is not a bare characteristic of texts, but a result of cognitive processes among text consumers. A text does not have a meaning by itself. It is an interplay between the text-presenter's knowledge and people's stored knowledge of the world (Beaugrande, p.6). It must be noted that cohesion and coherence are text focused approaches and others are user focused approaches (Beaugrande, p.7).
- 3) Intentionality deals with the attitude of the author that the array of instances should form a cohesive and coherent text that is crucial in accomplishing the intention of the author (Beaugrande, p.7).

- 4) Acceptability deals with the attitude of the text recipient. The instances in the text should form a cohesive and coherent text that is relevant to the recipient (Beaugrande, p.7).
- 5) Informativity deals with instances of displayed text, which can be expected against unexpected or known against unknown. All texts are informative to a degree, regardless how foreseeable the form or the subject is, there exists the possibility of the occurrence of additional information. It is more problematic if the text has a low level of informativity, because it may be dismissed by the reader (Beaugrande, p. 9).
- 6) Situationality deals with aspects which make a text suitable under specific circumstances (Beaugrande, p.9).
- 7) Intertextuality deals with the elements of texts that require pre-existing knowledge of the recipient of an already existing text (Beaugrande, p.10).

Now that genre, allusion, text and textuality have been defined. The last concept that needs to be defined is intertextuality.

## 2.4. Intertextuality

Intertextuality is a polarizing concept; it can be seen a literary device, which is used to pay homage to pre-existing works or intertextuality can be plagiarism. In rap music, intertextually is a common occurrence and can be observed on two levels: the textual and the musical. Rap is a music genre that is sample-based. Sampling is the musical form of intertextuality. With sampling, the musician takes pre-existing recordings and rearranges them into a new sound. Sampling is one of the key features in creating the music behind rap (Schloss, p.34-35); however, the focus of the thesis will not be on sampling, because extensive studies about musical borrowing have already been made such as *Rhymin' and Stealin'* by Justin Williams, but on the intertextuality in the lyrics. Julia Kristeva is one of the early critics who concerned herself with intertextuality. In her essay “Word, Dialog and Novel” she quotes Bakhtin on intertextuality:

any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another. The notion of intertextuality replaces that of intersubjectivity, and poetic language is read as at least double (Moi, p.37).

She expands on this definition by adding:

The word as a minimal textual unit thus turns out to occupy the status of mediator, linking structural models to cultural (historical) environment, as well as that of regulator, controlling mutations from diachrony to synchrony, i.e., to literary structure. The word is spatialized: through the very notion of status, it functions in three dimensions (subject addressee-context) as a set of dialogical, semic elements or as a set of ambivalent elements. Consequently, the task of literary semiotics is to discover other formalisms corresponding to different modalities of word joining (sequences) within the dialogical space of texts (Moi, p.37).

In conclusion, she says that to be able to characterize the function of specific words across various literary genres or texts, we need a translinguistic practice. She sees the literary genres as flawed semiological systems indicating underneath the surface of language; however, not at any time without it. Furthermore, exploring connotations between bigger narrative units like sentences, dialogs questions and answers, but not on the basis of linguistic models, but by the standards of semantic extension (Moi, p.37).

Nonetheless, Kristeva was not the only one who problematized intertextuality. As mentioned, one of Beaugrande's definitions of intertextuality is one of the seven standards of textuality; however, the concept is expanded. He argues that classifying the production and reception of the individual text relies on the individual person's pre-existing knowledge of other texts. The method for the employment of the pre-existing knowledge can be named mediation. Mediation means: the broader the extent of time and of processing actions between the usage of present texts and usage of past encountered texts, the bigger the mediation. Expanded mediation can be depicted by the advancement and employment of text types. Specific texts are required to have characteristics for various functions. Mediation is significantly smaller in case people cite, refer to widely known texts. It is exceptionally small in case of feedback, rebuttal, reporting, recapping and assessment of text, as these are common in conversation (Beaugrande, p.182).

In his analysis of intertextuality, Beaugrande covers two key issues. First, the classification of text types. Early linguistics categorized typologies according to sound and forms of language. Afterwards, the typology shifted towards sentences. An alternative approach is the creation of cross-cultural typologies for languages with comparable constructions. What those typologies have in common is that they are applied to virtual systems, meaning abstract possibilities of the language (Beaugrande, p.182). If we deal with

text typology, actual systems had already been decided on and picked. The problem of this domain is that concrete text examples do not correspond to the ideal type of text (Beaugrande, p.183). Several conventional text types could be determined according to their function, such as descriptive, narrative and argumentative text. Descriptive text would apply to objects, situations and abstract connections for attributes, states, instances and specifications. Narrative text would apply to action, events and abstract connections for cause, reason, purpose, enablement and time proximity. Argumentative text would apply to beliefs, ideas and abstract relations for reason, significance, volition, value and opposition (Beaugrande, p.184). A different group would be literary and poetic text in opposition to scientific and didactic text (Beaugrande, p.185-186). Second, text allusion that refers to a well-known text. It is possible for the author to refer to any existing text; however, it is more convenient to use more notable texts, because they can be easily attained by the public (Beaugrande, p.186). Intertextuality with the smallest amount of mediation occurs in conversation. The reason being that conversation emerges from intentionality and situationality. None of these determinants can provide a full explanation; nevertheless, the text had to be suitable for the other text in the same conversation, not only to participants' intentional and situational context. The topics need to be picked, advanced and switched. It is possible that texts are used to monitor other texts (Beaugrande, p.188). If a specific situation is monitored, the unforeseeable events appear outside of discussion. In the case of monitoring intertextuality, those situations are part of the actions of the discussion in development. The text recipient can hold the author accountable and has the ability to demand to know the motive behind the unforeseeable; therefore, there is a possibility of clarification of the dispute (Beaugrande, p. 193). Beaugrande concludes:

The central task for science of text is rather to find the regularities according to which conventional functions are either re-affirmed or adapted in actual usage. The whole notion of textuality may depend upon exploring the influence of intertextuality as a procedural control upon communicative activities at large (Beaugrande, p.206).

A different take on intertextuality is given by Norman Fairclough in his *Critical Discourse Analysis the Critical Study of Language*. First, he defines discourse as a classification used by social analysts and linguists, but uses it as a linguist. Therefore, discourse is mainly applied to written and spoken language; however, it can be applied to other mediums, such as photography and non-spoken communication (Fairclough, p.92). He

also puts emphasis on discursive acts within the conditions of discourse orders, named interdiscourse by French discourse analysts. The argument behind this classification is the intricacy of the connection between discursive events and conventions, because discursive events incorporate more traditional forms of discourse. On the other hand, texts are more diverse in content and structure (Fairclough, p.3).

Interdiscursivity focuses on diversity of texts that is created by combining different genres and discourses. It is designed and akin to intertextuality and it is like it, as its emphasis is on the historical aspect of remodelling pre-existing conventions and texts. Consequently, it can be applied to social practices to analyse the various stages of social organizations. It can also challenge power or ideology. Superficially, it may offer inexhaustible possibilities; however, it does not in case of strong homogeneity—the possibilities are limited (Fairclough, p.95). Fairclough also expands on the definitions of text and intertextuality, so they can be applied to social theory. Text is defined as an application of creating social practice that combines diverse elements into a local relationship, including time and space, area, natural resources, individual experience and language. He limits himself to four big classes: physical, sociological, cultural and psychological elements and text that contains spoken and written language. The articulation of those classes is possible when components are brought together. It is possible to reach a stabilisation; however, there is a chance of disarticulation. If the components and practice are combined, they alter. All those components combined build practice. These components are exchanging arguments with each other, each assigns the others without reduction. If the text is defined in this manner, it means endeavour, control, information, etc.; however, still altogether different. All those classes add to the characteristic generative power in making of social life (Fairclough, p.173). Fairclough concludes:

...production of social life and social practices is partly production of texts. The creativity of texturing as a mode of social production consists in generating new meanings through generating new combinations of elements of semiotic systems (including new “wordings”). Any difference of meaning, though the nature of that difference is a matter of social negotiation and renegotiation as wordings are repeated and shifted (Fairclough, p. 174).

The next important concept for Fairclough are features of social practices that are arranged into networks. Networks are relatively stable and fluid. Combined they express diverse types of social relations, dissimilar description and likeness comparable to different

linking practices. These practices in specific fields of social life which are consistent from the inside and detached from others such as education. Still, those fields can be modified, because of the internal and external fight for power. Considering that social practices connect with a field, the textual moment is analysed with regard to how different genres, discourse, styles are expressed in specific relationships. They can be called orders of discourse and how those are expressed in the moment of text. In this instance, intertextuality can be used as a means of expressing the changing articulation of genres, conversations, style of texts (Fairclough, p.175). It must be noted that intertextuality exists beyond text and social customs as seen in rap. Herewith, intertextuality has been defined.

## 2.5. Post-Colonialism

The second concept of the thesis is post-colonialism. Post-colonialism can refer to three concepts. First, to the period after the Second World War. Second, to the transition period in countries after being subjugated by colonizers. Third, to post-colonial studies as an academic discipline. The four main conceptions which will be described are imperialism, colonialism, post-colonialism and neo-colonialism.

One of the first to problematize post-colonialism was Edward Said in his book *Orientalism*, in which he refers to orientalism as a description of an academic field and assigns it to everyone who researches the Orient. The more contemporary term is oriental studies, because orientalism has historically negative connotations. It must be noted that it is also a style of thought that focuses on the differences between the East and the West (Said, *Orientalism* p.2). Historically, orientalism is an institution that concerns itself with the Orient. It educates, explains and reigns over it. Orientalism is controlling, altering and ruling the Orient. It was crucial in the construction of the cultural identity of Europe (Said, *Orientalism* p.3). It was the cultural undertaking of France and Britain, before the First World War and of America after the Second World War (Said, *Orientalism* p.3-4). He later expanded his ideas in the book *Culture and Imperialism*, in which he provides extensive definitions of imperialism, colonialism and post-colonialism.

Imperialism is defined by Said as:

thinking about settling on, controlling land that you do not possess, that is distant, that is lived on and owned by others. For all kinds of reasons, it attracts some people and often involves untold misery for others (Said, *Culture and Imperialism* p.7).

He expands the general definition. For Said, imperialism is an exercise of theory and practice of beliefs of a strong centre governing far away regions. The outcome of imperialism is called colonialism, and colonies are used as settlements in those regions (Said, *Culture and Imperialism* p.9). The two-main type of colonies are those for settlement and those for economic exploitation. In the relationships between the colonisers and the subjected indigenous people, the latter were in seen as inferior (Said, *Culture and Imperialism* p.9-10). Furthermore, this did not stop after the old colonial system was abolished. Post-colonialism was possible, because the former colonies continued to trade with their former colonisers and the perseverance of indoctrinated beliefs enabled the continuation of their rule (Said, *Culture and Imperialism* p.25). Edward Said's concepts were later built on and expanded by other post-colonialists, such as Bill Ashcroft and Robert C. Young.

In his book *The Empire Writes Back*, Bill Ashcroft argues that the term "post-colonial" needs to be redefined, because it can be too general. It can be understood as all the culture influenced by imperialism, from the time it started to the present. According to him, the problem is that not all societies are affected in the same manner, while others have not yet reached the period of post-colonialism (Ashcroft, p. 194). He therefore proposes the terminology "post-independence" or "neo-colonialism," because post-colonialism ignores the fact that colonies had been liberated (Ashcroft p. 195). On the other hand, Robert C. Young revises the concepts of imperialism, colonialism, post-colonialism and neo-colonialism historically and theoretically (Young, p.15).

His initial argument is that it is important to differentiate between colonialism and imperialism, since those terms are not equivalent. What they do have in common is the conquest of one group by another (Young, p.15). Commonly, empires are focused on the enlargement of an area, as was in the case of Chinese Empire or the Roman Empire. Those models were later reused in the 19<sup>th</sup> century imperialism (Young, p.15-16). Traditional imperialism changed in the 16<sup>th</sup> century with the technological advancements of ship transport. Ships were crucial in the expansion of empires. The Spanish Empire had two ways of operating: it spread Christian religion to the population and withdrew natural resources from the colonies. On the other hand, colonies in North America were used as settlements. Empire does not necessarily indicate imperialism. Empire can be administrated from the centre for ideological and monetary aims. Furthermore, an empire can develop for the settlement of people or monetary aims of an enterprise (Young, p.16). Imperialism is perpetuated by ideology from the centre. Colonialism, on the other hand, is perpetuated by



business, focuses on periphery and it is challenging to control (Young, p.16-17). Imperialism requires to be analysed as a concept and colonialism as a practice (Young, p.17). Historically, imperialism was conducted in several forms (the Roman, Ottoman and Spanish), while colonialism existed in two large forms: the French and the British (Young, p.17). It must be noted that colonies were considered a requirement for the economic development of an empire (Young, p. 22).

Young differentiates between “empire,” “imperial” and “imperialism”; for him, those terms have a different meaning. The Spanish Empire was the first modern empire. It had conquered a large part of America; however, it was a pre-capitalistic empire and was based on the Ottoman and Roman model (Young, p.25). The colonies were governed by the military, and were the main resource for extracting wealth and taxation (Young, p.25-26). In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the British Empire meant Britain and all its colonies (Young, p.26).

“Imperial” meant a preeminent authority; in comparison, “imperialism” has several meanings. It can mean a political system used for occupation; later, it acquired a more general meaning—it referred to economic subjection (Young, p.26). The main feature of imperialism is the exertion of authority by occupation or commercial control driven by institutions and ideologies from the centre to the outskirts (Young, p.27). The most influential types of imperialism were the French and British. The French imperial model was one which was used as a model for later empires. The French used the so-called *mission civilisatrice* method. It was the idea of bringing French culture to the occupied territories, to increase the indoctrination; the occupied population had access to French institutions if it adopted the French culture (Young, p.30). On the other hand, the British Empire was administered more loosely. It was larger than the French Empire; however, because the colonies had a degree of self-management, it was challenging to have it under control. (Young, p. 31-35).

After the Second World War, the old imperial system was not sustainable anymore, the reasons being opposition from the colonised population and the growing influence of the United States (Young, p.44). It was replaced with neo-colonialism, i.e. with the continuity of the commercial dependence of states on their former colonisers, as they enter the global market (Young, p.45). This condition can be defined as post-colonial and describes the position of the newly formed states and how they are able to function in the global economy, which is dictated by global superpowers (Young, p.57).

## 2.6. Race Relations in the United States

To be able to understand how post-colonialist theory is relevant to an analysis of rap, race relations throughout the history of the United States need to be explained. The mere existence of rap in the USA is strongly connected to the pre-existing socio-economical position of African-American communities in the country. Initially, the United States started as a British colony. An early example of institutionalized race relations can be observed in the state of Carolina, which was founded in 1670. It is important to note that John Locke wrote *Fundamental Constitution* in Carolina and that in 1670 slavery was not yet outlawed in Britain. Part of his constitution dealt directly with how slavery should be managed (Vickers, p.49). He argued that black people were the most suited for slaves were, because unlike the native population, they did not know the territory and they would therefore find it more difficult to escape and organize a counter offensive (Vickers, p.50). In the colonies that Britain had in North America, people were categorized into three groups: slaves (the black population), attendants (the impoverished whites) and free citizens (the majority of wealthy whites) (Vickers, p. 50). The native population managed to free themselves from slavery; they did it by waging war against the colonisers. However, as a result, they became marginalized inside of the colony (Vickers, p.50). The British Empire abolished slave trade in 1833. Because of this change, the settlements developed new race regimes (Vickers, p.51).

A “race regime” can be defined as a state perpetuated system in which the privileged are subjugating a marginalized group (Vickers, p.52). There are different manners in which the system is maintained, such as:

- Formal arrangement maintained by legislation, law enforcement and administration (Vickers, p.53).
- Informal arrangement maintained by customs and segregation (Vickers, p.53).
- Ideological doctrines, e.g., Darwinism (Vickers, p.53).
- Relations between the privileged whites and the underprivileged non-whites (Vickers, p.54).

The United States’ slavery was a race system. Prior to 1776 it was possible to punish a slave if he or she did not work fast enough (Vickers, p. 65). Slaves did not have rights in the United States and were considered property (Vickers, .64). The Independence War had an immense impact on institutionalized slavery, because it was fought for the abolishment of the old British system (Vickers, p. 65). From the war came innovative ideas such as political democracy, free labour and upward mobility, which were used later to undermine slavery

(Vickers, p.66). Major changes occurred in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; slave trade was a major issue in the federal republic (Vickers, p.66). It was the Civil War between the South and the North or more precisely Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation proclamation in 1863 that ended formal slavery in the United States (Vickers, p.67). However, the problem was that the system around slavery remained after the war in various forms (Vickers, p.68). Probably the most well know were the Jim Crow laws.

With the Jim Crow laws were state reinforced the segregation of the black and the white population in the United States. It was reinforced to such a degree that even the ancestors of black people that were seven-eighths white could be affected (Vickers, p.76). The rules, which were enforced by those laws were the separation of schools, accommodation, transport and all other civil facilities (Vickers, p.76). The implementation of Jim Crow was after the after the post-war reconstruction period. In the reconstruction period, the north controlled the south and African-Americans gained more rights. With Jim Crow, the southern states tried to prevent emancipated blacks to gain political control on the local level and consequently to prevent political influence on the state level (Vickers, p. 78). Segregation was practiced in following ways:

- Schools, accommodation, transport, leisure activities and hiring were segregated on the local and state level (Vickers, p.78).
- African-Americans were prevented from voting and running for office (Vickers, p.78).
- African-Americans could not participate in boards, public education and business (Vickers, p. 78).
- African-Americans had no civil rights (Vickers, p.78).
- Jim Crow was legitimized by state propaganda (Vickers, p.78).

In the North, African-Americans were used to keep the working wages low for other immigrants and in the South violence and lynching was used to perpetuate the system (Vickers, p. 78-79). It was not until the 1950s that the Jim Crow laws were overturned (Vickers, p. 79). The next change was the civil rights struggle in the 1960s. Black Nationalism and the Civil Rights Movement represented the main mobilisation forces that pushed for the equality of African-Americans (Vickers, p. 177-178). It should be noted that the approaches to achieving equality were not uniform. The more famous examples would be Rosa Parks's refusal to sit in the back of the bus (Vickers, p. 185). Martin Luther King Jr. believed in non-violent confrontation (Vickers, p.186). Later, the movement became more radical with Malcolm X and the Black Panther Party (Vickers, p.188). All those contributed that the Civil

Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Act of 1965 were passed, which allowed African Americans to vote (Vickers, p. 200).

## 2.7. Early Development of Hip Hop Music

The aforementioned conditions lead us to the hip-hop culture and music which was created by the first post-civil rights generation in the South Bronx in the 1970s. Several studies have been made which analyse the connection between the creation of hip-hop and the previous existing forms of expression in African-American communities. This thesis will focus on the development of a genre that was created in the early 1970s in the South Bronx. It is connected to the economic development in the previous decades in New York City. One of the key events that created the conditions was the construction of the Cross Road Expressway. It is the road that connects Manhattan and New Jersey. Its construction was controversial because it displaced many residents from the South Bronx. The way they were displaced has also been criticised. By the 1960s, middle class residents had moved to the suburbs and low-income residents were relocated into so called “towers in the park.” When minorities started moving to traditionally white neighbourhood, gang violence escalated between the old residents and new arrivals (Chang, p.10-12). The result of the construction was that 600,000 manufacturing jobs and 40% of the private sector was gone, the income dropped to half of the New York City average and youth unemployment was between 60 and 80%. Apartments were run by slumlords, who stopped providing water and electricity to increase profit and some ultimately even burned down the apartments to get insurance money (Chang, p.13). Poverty, violence and arson lead to cutting of public funds. It was claimed that minorities were unable to adapt and they are burning down their own property (Chang, p.14).

It has to be noted that the accounts of the development of hip-hop music are mostly from second hand sources, because the primary sources are almost non-existent. Therefore, a precise portrayal of the early development of hip-hop music and culture is impossible. This also leads to a degree of mythologization and romanisation of the genre's past, but the following events and people are considered to be crucial in the developing of the genre as such (Williams, “Rhymin and Stealin” p.20-27). In the early 1970s, one of the first hip-hop DJs was DJ Kool Herc. He was a Jamaican immigrant who moved to New York as a teenager in the late 1960s (Chang, p.72). The back to school parties that he hosted there in early 1970 were important for the development of hip-hop music. Such parties were held in rec rooms, because if they had been held in the basement, they would more likely have been interrupted.

From this point on, he started to give more parties and developed a technique called “Marry-Go-Round.” To use this technique, he needed two identical records. First, he played the initial part of one record and immediately afterwards he started to play the initial part of the second record, to extend the music. Those initial parts of the records were called breaks. People who would dance to those breaks were called break boys or b-boys by Kool Herc (Chang, p.77-81)

DJ Kool Herc was not the only prominent figure in early hip-hop music; the other was Afrika Bambaataa. He was a former gang leader of the gang Black Spades and transformed the gang into the Zulu Nation. The Zulu Nation is the first hip-hop organization. Afrika Bambaataa established the ideological framework of the hip-hop subculture. He established that hip-hop consists of breakdancing, deejaying, rapping and graffiti writing. Furthermore, he was responsible for promoting hip-hop music all over the world (Chang, p.90). As it can be seen in the early days of hip-hop, rap was not in the forefront. It would not be until 1979 that rap would start becoming the more visible part of hip-hop music. In 1979, the first commercially successful rap single was recorded; it was entitled “Rapper's Delight.” This record unleashed the first wave of mainstream rap in the USA and pushed rappers into the centre of hip-hop (Chang, p.130-133). However, it would take until the mid-1980s for rap albums to break into the mainstream with groups such as Run DMC and Beastie Boys (Chang, p. 245).

## 2.8. Structure and Figures of Speech in Rap

Rap lyrics are not written randomly; they are usually confined to the specific structure of rap as a genre. The basic song structure in rap is two to three verses and a refrain between the verses. It is possible that the song has more or fewer than three verses. The standard length of the verse is 16 lines (Edwards “How to Rap,” p. 193-195). In rap jargon, a line is called a “bar.” It must be noted that there are two definitions what a bar can be: a stanza or a line of a song. It depends on the individual rapper which of the two is used in a song (Edwards “How to Rap,” p.68).

The lyrics are just one part of the song, because when the song is performed, the delivery is also important. From the perspective of vocal delivery, rap, is not sung but rather spoken rhythmically. In rap jargon, the rhythmical delivery of the lyrics is called flow. The definition of flow is the overlapping of the songs rhythms and rhymes over the music (Edwards “How to Rap,” p. 63).

The last part of the structure in rap lyrics is the rhyme. With the rhythm, it gives musicality to the lyrics. Colloquially, rapping is also called rhyming. The rhyme is the rudimentary speech figure in rap; however, the way it has been used has changed over time. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, rap used simple perfect rhymes at the end of the line, which connected two lines together. This could be observed on songs like “The Message” by Grandmaster Flash & The Furious Five (Edwards “How to Rap,” p. 83). In the mid-1980s there came a change with Eric B. & Rakim’s record *Paid in Full*. The record is one of the prominent examples where a rapper (Rakim) started rhyming words inside the line. The next shift came in the early 1990s with records such as *Organized Konfusion* by Organized Konfusion. On the record, we can observe the usage of internal and polysyllable rhymes, assonance and consonance. Lastly, it was the record *Illmatic* by Nas which popularized complex usage of rhymes on the mainstream level.

The most common speech figures in rap are sound figures, similes and allusions (Edwards “How to Rap”, p.44). Similes and allusions were the speech figures which were used to integrate literature into rap lyrics in the 1980s; later, intertextuality is used. A historical overview of literature and the analysis of Billy Woods’s lyrics will be done in the empirical part of the thesis, which will take a closer look at how literature has historically been integrated into rap music.

### 3. Empirical Part

#### 3.1. Historical Overview of Literature in Rap

Through the development of rap as a genre, literature had an influence on it; however, in which manner it was utilised, depended on the time in which the rap was created. This part will analyse how literature has been integrated into rap. It will show how allusion and intertextuality were used in rap in the past.

##### 3.1.1. 1980s – General Concepts, Allusions and Intertextuality

In the 1980s, literature was integrated by applying general concepts to rap as it can be seen on Public Enemy records. Allusion and intertextuality occurred, but it was not until the Beastie Boys released *Paul’s Boutique* that the frequency of usage increased. Therefore, the records that are used as an example for the explanation of the literary influence on rap in the

1980s are Public Enemy – *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back* and Beastie Boys – *Paul's Boutique*.

### **Public Enemy – *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back* (1988)**

It was not until the late 1980s that the first “mature” rap records emerged; one of them was *It Takes a Nations of Millions to Hold Us Back* by Public Enemy. It is considered the rap record that radicalized rap by combining advanced forms of sampling and radical lyrics (Bradley, p. 248). Furthermore, it started what would later become political rap. The theoretical and ideological concepts on the record are taken from Malcolm X and Minister Farrakhan (Chang, p.269-272). The frontman of Public Enemy, Chuck D, stated that it was a conscious decision to integrate black nationalism into his lyrics, because he had an encounter with a young black person who asked him who Malcolm X was. The person even mispronounced Malcolm X's name calling him Malcolm the Tenth. After this encounter he was positive that he needed to educate young people, so that they do not forget black history (Chuck D). It should be noted that aside from the occasional allusions to Malcolm X and other prominent black activists, there are no other literary allusions on the record; however, the general concepts of black nationalism and didactics of emancipation of African-Americans are embedded in most of the songs on the record.

### **Beastie Boys - *Paul's Boutique* (1989)**

Literary allusions have been used in rap music prior to the Beastie Boys; however, with their record *Paul's Boutique*, the frequency of usage of literary allusions was new (Bradly, p. 130). There are three ways in which allusions are used on the record: as a diversification to the pop-culture allusions, as an extension of the content of the song, and lastly, intertextual references to literature can be observed. Allusions that diversify the pop-culture references are found in the song “Shadrach.” The title is already an allusion to the biblical story about Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. In the story, the three men are thrown into a fiery furnace by King Nebuchadnezzar, because they did not worship how he wanted and stayed loyal to their god. The men survived with help of God and were freed and promoted (*King James Bible*, p. 3086-3089). In the song, the Beastie Boys compare themselves to the biblical figures. This is not the only literary allusion in the song; there is an allusion integrated into a simile of J.D. Salinger, “because I've got more stories than J.D.'s got

Salinger.” In the song “Egg Man,” there is an allusion to the nursery rhyme *Humpty Dumpty*. In the song, there are three verses and each describes an accident with an egg. In the second verse, an allusion to Humpty Dumpty is made; he falls from the wall and breaks his leg. Intertextuality with regard to Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road* is integrated into the song “The Three Minute Role.” The song has a similar concept as the book: both are about a road trip and indulging in drugs; in the third verse of the song, intertextuality is present, “While I’m reading *On The Road* by my man, Jack Kerouac.” The same technique is applied in the song, “Looking Down the Barrel of a Gun.” The song is about violent criminal behaviour and contains an allusion to the book *A Clockwork Orange* by Anthony Burgess. The second intertextual reference to *A Clockwork Orange* is in the song “A Year and a Day.” The fictional language *Nadsat* is referred to. In the song “What Comes Around,” there is an allusion to Rapunzel. The album contains more literary allusions; however, they are used in the same manner as the above examples. With *Paul’s Boutique*, the Beastie Boys opened the possibilities for using allusions and intertextuality; they were later expanded by other rappers.

### 3.1.2. 1990s - Continuation of Literary Allusions and Intertextuality

The 1990s was the decade that expanded the stylistically possibilities of rap; most of the rap techniques that are used today originate from it. Therefore, it is not surprising that allusions and intertextuality become more diverse. The analysed records are some of the most influential records of the 1990s: Nas’s *Illmatic*, GZA’s *Liquid Swords*, Company Flow’s *Funcrusher Plus* and MF Doom’s *Operation Doomsday*.

#### **Nas – *Illmatic* (1994)**

*Illmatic* is one of the most influential rap records that came out of the 1990s. It was praised for its poetic sophistication and it is regarded as highly influential (Bradley, p.459). It is important on the stylistical and technical level for rap. One of its most visible features being the introduction of the epistolary form into rap in the song “One Love” (Dyson, chapter 7). Therefore, it is not surprising that it includes an allusion. An allusion to black leaders such as Malcolm X can be found in the song “Halftime”—in a similar manner that was previously done by Public Enemy. The most notable literary allusion was in the song “The World Is Yours,” in which there is an allusion to the novel *Phantom of the Opera* by Gaston Leroux. As is true for the previously mentioned records, it also includes a biblical allusion.



### **GZA – *Liquid Swords* (1995)**

The record *Liquid Swords* is considered one of the archetypal Wu-Tang Clan records. The Wu-Tang Clan are the most influential rap group that came out of the 1990s. They were the first rap group with nine individual rappers, each of whom had his own style of rapping. Stylistically, they combined eastern mysticism with stories of crime in their communities (Bradley, p. 533). On the record *Liquid Swords*, intertextuality can be observed in the song, “Cold World.” The first two lines are a reference to the English poem *The Night Before Christmas* by Clement Clark Moore.

Cold World	The Night Before Christmas
“It was the night before New Year's, and all through the fucking projects /Not a handgun was silent, not even a Tec	“Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the house /Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse

GZA adapted the stanza of the poem and put into to a new setting. There are other examples of literary and biblical allusions; however, they are used in the same manner as records that were released before *Liquid Swords*.

Lastly, on the song “Labels” intertextuality is utilised in the manner that the names of prominent record labels were integrated into the song lyrics. The song is a critique of the recording industry of the mid-90s. It criticizes the record labels; which names are included in the song lyrics. It has to be noted that this stylistic technique has been reused in the years 2013 and 2017. In 2013, by the rapper Ka on the record *The Night's Gambit* on the song “Off the Record.” In the song, Ka describes his experiences growing up in Brownsville, incorporates the names of important rap records into his lyrics. In 2017, Billy Woods on the record *Known Unknowns* on the song “Superpredator,” raps about violence in rap music. In the lyrics he uses references of titles of famous rap songs from the past that were known for their violent content. Furthermore, he incorporates references to literary theory such as Chekov’s gun.

### **Company Flow – *Funcrusher Plus* (1997)**

On the record *Funcrusher Plus*, the number of literary allusions increases. They referred to classical writers and works such as Laura Ingalls in the song “8 Steps to

Perfections,” Darwinism in the song “Legend,” Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* in the song “Definitive,” Doctor Jekyll from the novel *The Strange Case of Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* by Robert Louis Stevenson in the song “Vital Nerve,” *Watership Down* by Richard Adams in the song “Tragedy of War (In Three Parts)” and *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury in the song “Infokill.” A reference to the novel *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding is present in the song “The Fire in Which You Burn.” This increase in the number of allusions can be explained by the time in which the record was made. In the late 1990s, the rap industry was divided into two parts: the mainstream and underground. The mainstream rap had all the resources and exposure. This led to a reactionary response by the underground scene that as a result wanted to be as avant-garde as possible, in order to differentiate itself from the mainstream (Oware, p.64-65).

### **MF Doom – *Operation Doomsday* (1999), *Born Like This* (2009)**

A substantial change occurred in the late 1990s with MF Doom, who broke the preceding norms in writing rap music. Rap as a genre put a lot of emphasis on authenticity and so called “realness.” It was important that rappers were rapping about topics that they experienced or were exposed to (White, p.97-98). This concept was turned on its head by Daniel Dumile. He decided to fictionalize the narratives on the records. Most of them were written from the perspective of Doctor Doom, Viktor Vaughn or King Geedorah. The first two are based on the Marvel comic villains and the last on the arch enemy of Godzilla, King Ghidorah—a three-headed space dragon (MF Doom, ““DOOM.” Interview by Jeff Mao”). Stylistically, he does not narrate from the first-person perspective, but from the third to emphasise the character driven narrative and to distance himself from the story. With the introduction of fictional characters, he parodies one of the core concepts of rap. Dumile uses allusion and intertextuality to add additional layers of interpretation to his writing; however, it should be noted that there are examples of rappers using fictional narratives in their songs prior the late 1990s. One of the most well-known songs is “Murder Was the Case” by Snoop Dogg, but it was MF Doom who did it consistently. Additionally, in his songs he usually does not use the traditional rap structure. Most notable features being that he tends to avoid writing refrains and writes his songs as one verse. Examples of such writing can be found on his records *Madvillany* and *Vaudeville Villain*. The title of the record *Operation Doomsday* is an allusion to the Second World War. Britain’s mission of liberating Norway from German occupation was given the codename Doomsday (Paradata Editor). It is also an allusion to the

novel *Doomsday Conspiracy* by Sidney Sheldon. The skits of the record sample dialogs that reconstruct the dialog from the book. In the song “Doomsday” off this record he alludes to the said author. In the song “Go With the Flow” is the paraphrase of the phrase that Sherlock Holmes uses in the *Adventure of the Crooked Man*, in which Watson and Holmes converse. Holmes says “I have the advantage of knowing your habits, my dear Watson, (Doyle, p.156)” and “Elementary” (Doyle, p.157).” Those utterances are paraphrased into “It is elementary my dear Watson.” Lastly, there is an allusion to Helen Keller in the song “Operation Greenbacks” and to Doctor Seuss on “Gas Draws.” There is also an array of biblical allusions on the record, but they are used in the same manner as on the records previously referred to. The last contribution of MF Doom to literature was on the record *Born Like This* in 2009. The song “Cellz” samples Charles Bukowski reading his poem “Dinosauria We” from the documentary *Born into This*. The verses in the song continue using the same cadence in the following stanzas.

### 3.1.3. 2000s – Diversification of Allusions and Intertextuality

#### **Aesop Rock - *Labor Days* (2001)**

Aesop Rock is known for his dense lyrics and abstract imagery. In 2014, a study on the size of vocabulary of rappers was published, and according to it, Aesop Rock uses the most unique words of all rappers in his songs (Daniels). Therefore, it is not surprising that on his record *Labor Days* he uses different allusions to literature. In the song; “Coma” there is an allusion to Rip van Winkle; “Save Your Self” contains an allusion to “Holden Caulfield” from the novel *Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger and Jabberwocky from the novel *Through the Looking-Glass* by Lewis Carroll; in “One Brick” there are allusions to Captain Ahab from the novel *Moby Dick* by Herman Melville and the novel *Fahrenheit 451*; the song “The Yes and the Y'all” alludes to Jabberwocky, Baron Munchausen from *The Surprising Adventures of Baron Munchausen* by Rudolf Erich Raspe, Frankenstein from the novel *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley, the children’s story *The James and Giant Peach* by Roald Dahl and the allusion to Jabberwocky is repeated; on “9-5ers Anthem” Big Brother from *1984* by George Orwell is alluded to, and the song “Shovel” alludes to Dante Alighieri. As in previous cases, there are biblical allusions on the record. The allusions are used similarly to previously referred to rappers, only the frequency is increased, which is a stylistic choice by Aesop Rock.

### **Cannibal Ox – *The Cold Vein* (2001)**

The record *The Cold Vein* by Cannibal Ox is an influential record from the early 2000s. Cannibal Ox is a rap group consisting of rappers Vordul Mega and Vast Aire. The record was released to critical acclaim and it combined street rap with abstract concepts. The record is full of biblical allusions. There is reference to *1984* by George Orwell in the song “Ridiculoid.” It is not a coincidence that *The Cold Vein* and *Labor Days* use similar allusions; they were released on the same record label, Def Jux, in the same year.

#### 3.1.4. 2010s – Expansion of Allusions and Adaption of Books into Rap Records

**Billy Woods – *History Will Absolve Me* (2012), *Dour Candy* (2013), *Today, I Wrote Nothing* (2015)**

**Armand Hammer – *Race Music* (2013)**

**Dr Yen Lo - *Days With Dr. Yen Lo* (2015)**

In the early 2010s, rap records continued to incorporate literature into songs. On the records *History Will Absolve Me*, *Dour Candy* and *Race Music*, Billy Woods extensively incorporates literature into his writing; however, it is done in a manner comparable to previously referred to songs. What does change is the frequency and the type of literature that is integrated into his songs. In the song “The Man Who Would Be King,” the course of the song is a verse from the poem *The White Man’s Burden* by Rudyard Kipling. This is just one of many literary allusions in the song (Kolarič). An in-depth analysis of Billy Woods’ integration of literature into his writing will be presented later.

A shift in appropriation of literature can be observed in 2015 on the records *Today, I Wrote Nothing* by Billy Woods and *Days With Dr. Yen Lo* by Dr. Yen Lo. *Today, I Wrote Nothing* is a stylistic adaption of a collection of writing by Daniil Kharmis, which will be analysed later. On the record *Day With Dr. Yen Lo*, a different approach to adaption of literature has been taken. The record is a loose homage to the novel *The Manchurian Candidate*. To incorporate elements of the book into the record, it samples the 1964 film adaption of the book in the songs. The song titles are titled as specific days, which is an allusion to the chapters of the novel, which sometimes start with specific dates referring to events in the protagonist life’s. The events are not narrated chronologically and the song titles reflect that.

As seen in the overview, literature and rap are quite interrelated with each other. The most common technique are the biblical allusions. The usage of literary allusions depends on the individual rapper; however, the literary allusions repeat themselves with artists sometimes even on the same records. The above records are by no means the only examples of literature in rap, but they are some of the most influential. There are other records which use literary allusions and follow the same pattern. The next segment will analyse Billy Woods's lyrics and how literature has influenced his rapping.

## 3.2. Analysis of Billy Woods's Lyrics

### Billy Woods

Billy Woods is a New York rapper who was born in Washington D.C. He spent his early childhood in Zimbabwe, because his parents fought for the independence of Zimbabwe. In the late 1980s, he returned to the United States and as a teenager was introduced to rap through the film *Do the Right Thing* directed by Spike Lee. After college in D.C. he moved to New York City. His rap career started in the early 2000s with the support of Vordul Mega of Cannibal Ox (Woods, "Interview w/ Billy Woods (Uncommon Radio Podcast #50)"). One of his main contributions to rap music is the introduction of post-colonialism into rap. In the 2000s, he was part of the group Super Chron Flight Brothers. In 2012, he released *History Will Absolve Me*, which revitalised his career. Since 2013 he has been part of the rap group Armand Hammer, which released the record *Race Music*. His lyrics will be analysed from three aspects: race relations, post-colonialism and the influence of Daniil Kharms. For race relations, the songs "Lucre" and "Tinseltown" will be analysed. For post-colonialism, the songs "Cuito Cuanavale" and "Black Ark" will be analysed. The influence of the writings by Daniil Kharms and Flannery O'Connor will be addressed by analysing the songs "Zulu Tolstoy," "Dreams Come True," "Scales" and "Borrowed Time."

## 3.3. Race Relations

One of the two central topics in Billy Woods lyrics is race relations. The analysis will focus on how intertextual references to literature are integrated into the lyrics to portray race relations and crime in African-American communities. Before we can turn to "Tinseltown" and "Lucre," which appeared on the record *Dour Candy*, some facts about race relations and the justice system need to be explained. In the United States, there is a historical relationship

between crime, race relations and the criminal justice system. It has been established that African-American males are the predominant group of incarcerated people in United States' prisons (Tonry, p.1). This can be traced to the controversial "Southern Strategy." It was a political strategy was designed by the Republicans in the southern states of the United States of America. Their strategy was to appeal to white voters by aiming towards their prejudices against African-Americans. This was done by emphasising crimes committed by African-Americans, especially violence and drug related crimes. This was done to weaken the support Democratic candidates. Its origins were in 1940s, as a reaction to the civil rights reforms by Roosevelt and Truman, but the 1960s had a broader impact, when Republicans wanted to rebuild the party with southern voters. The method was to emphasise the differences between black and white people and to exploit those in order to gain political power in the South. It lead to an increase of drug related incarcerations in the 1970s and 1980s (Tonry, p.2-4).

Political campaigns were not the sole factor that contributed to racial biases. A greater challenge is to explain the perseverance of a social, economic and political system that encourages differences between the African American minority and the white majority. There was a long-held belief that African-American were less intelligent than whites and therefore unsuitable for certain jobs. Those prejudices lead to discriminations in housing, education and hiring. The traditional race relations were maintained with institutions such as slavery before the Civil War and afterwards Jim Crow. Contemporary drug polices now fulfil this function (Tonry, p.5). The imprisonment of African-Americans is still one of the significant issues in African-American communities and the negative consequences that it has on them. The reasons for the higher rates of imprisonment of African-Americans are the following: harder sentences for black people; discrimination; the type of crimes for which African-Americans are prosecuted. For crimes such as aggravated assault, rape, robbery and homicide, African-Americans are prosecuted more frequently than whites. Prior to the 1960s, African-Americans and whites were imprisoned proportionally; however, the imprisonment of African-Americans increased in the 1980s because of the drug policies. Under those, both small and large scale drug dealers received harsh sentences. Two laws that affected drug related crimes. The 100 to 1 law governed cocaine sentencing. The law meant that selling crack cocaine was equal to selling powdered cocaine. (Crack is a low level version of cocaine that was sold mostly by African-Americans on the street.) That meant that selling 5 grams of crack was considered equal to selling 0.5 kilogram of powder cocaine, which resulted in an increase of incarceration in African-American communities. (Tonry, p.1). The ratio was reduced in 2010 to 18 to 1. Second, the three strikes law in California. It meant that after the third felony the offender

could be sentenced from 25 years to life in prison regardless of the offense (Tonry, p. 26-28). The problem is that the limited opportunities for African-Americans give drug trafficking the illusion of a lucrative business. Furthermore, the supplier and not the consumer is persecuted, the moral and not the health problem is focused on, and street-level drug traffickers, who are predominantly African-American, are arrested. All of the above contributed to an increase of incarcerated African-Americans (Tonry, p. 53-54).

### 3.3.1. Tinseltown

Billy Woods illustrates various aspects of illicit activities related to race relations on his song “Tinseltown.” The title of the song is ironic, because *Tinseltown* is another name for Hollywood. At first, illicit activities may seem lucrative and a means to achieve wealth and power. It is difficult to be a successful criminal and it usually ends with the death of the actor. In a similar manner, Hollywood promises aspiring actors fame and fortune, but it is extremely difficult to be successful in Hollywood’s film industry; the chance of becoming wealthy and well-known is miniscule and most actors fail (Warner, p.173).

The song starts out with a stanza about a young boy being ridiculed by his peers because he is afraid of pursuing illicit activities. The stanza goes: “scared money don’t make money / but now they doing bids right?” The word used to describe the boy is *money*, a slang term for a young man; nevertheless, the person needs to overcome fear to pursue illicit activities. In this stanza, it is not clear if the person did that because it ends with a rhetorical question about “doing a bid.” In the next stanza, this ambiguity is continued with allusions to Marvin Harrison and Tony Dungy. The allusion is ambiguous because only the last names are used. In the stanza, Harrison gives a gun to Dungy. The slang *iron* is used for gun. Marvin Harrison is a highly successful football player and Tony Dungy was his coach (Bowen, “Dungy”). The preceding line of the stanza questions conventional wisdom. Despite Marvin Harrison’s illustrious career as a football player for the Indianapolis Colts (Bowen, “Harrison”), he was allegedly involved in a gunfight. This shows that there is no clear path to who becomes a criminal and it depends on the circumstances. With the omission of the first names Harrison and Dungy become everyday people in the inner-city that are about to commit a crime. In the following stanzas, the allusion to Marvin Harrison is continued with the reference “quiet ones be the shooters.” Harrison was modest in his private life; thus, it was surprising when the allegation of a gunfight emerged (Fagone). It continues the

unpredictability of criminal behaviour —it uses the cliché of silent people being potential killers.

The song continuities with the two men being disappointed with their present situation; they therefore decide to rob a white person. They justify their decision by stating that life is not like the film *Hoosiers*, directed by David Anspaugh. This is a film about a fictional local high school basketball team from Indianapolis that under the guidance of a retired navy officer wins the state championship. In the case of criminals (unlike in the movie) being guided by a white person does not guarantee success. The *Hoosiers* references continue in the following stanzas that describe crimes. The reference is to an army recruiter, which is an allusion to the coach in the film. The verse continues with a series of crime images emphasising the black-market involving monetary exchange and fraud. As the officer is exploring illicit activities, he will encounter criminals. This is portrayed with the imagery of the military and Afghans. It is possible to interpret it as the United States' interference in the Middle East. Over the years, the United States financed various militant groups in order to expand their geo-political position. One example was the financing of the Mujahedeen in the Russian war with Afghanistan. That made the rise of Osama bin Laden possible and severely backfired in the early 2000s (Dimitrakis, p.183). The type of fraud that is mentioned in the song is internet phishing. The emphasis is on short-term success and monetary gain. The allusion and imagery used are to the high-end steak restaurant Peter Luger (Cosmos) and the double entendre of *gouda*. Gouda can be understood as type of cheese and slang term for money. This is supported with the statements in the following stanzas that explicitly state that the main concern is the near future and the stanza ends with what seems a rhetorical question, "Optimistic?" However, it is sarcastically answered by the poetic persona who is scratching lottery tickets in the morning.

The first verse ends with the poetic persona preparing to continue with crime. The metaphor of "middle passage" is used. The middle passage was the transatlantic voyage that slaves were forced to take from Africa to America. It was known for its inhumane conditions in which slaves were transported. Many of them did not survive the voyage, because of the weather, disease and insufficient accommodation (Rediker, p.20). For the poetic persona, the middle passage is the steps which he must take before committing a crime. He even comments on the state of his competition. The imagery stays within the context of seafaring; with diseases that historically affected sailors, scurvy and rickets caused by lack of vitamins and nutrition. The verse is concluded with a self-reflection of the poetic persona. He concludes that in the long run, he is irrelevant. The literary allusion used is to African-



American writer Ralph Ellison. It implicitly references his most well-known work *The Invisible Man*, a novel that describes the issues that African Americans faced in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The protagonist of the novel is metaphorically invisible to the society in which he lives. In the same manner, the criminal must be able to commit the crime. He ends the verse with three polysyllabic words that rhyme.

The chorus of the song uses the same slang term as the opening stanza: *money*. It is used in the same manner: it means a young man. In both cases, the poetic person is confronted by a woman who does not have faith in his position or his acquaintances. It does not matter if it means easy money or an easy situation that he is about to put himself into. This is also an reference to the Public Enemy song, “Can’t Trust It” from *Apocalypse 91...The Enemy Strikes Back*. It is a song about questioning official narratives.

The second verse continues the narrative of illicit activities. The first two stanzas describe a drug dealer whose home gets raided by the police; he denies any connections to any criminal activity. Literary allusions to Grimms’ *Fairy Tales* are used to depict crime in African-American communities. An allusion to Hansel and Gretel portrays exploited parentless children. Hansel represents boys who are exploited for drug trafficking and Gretel represents girls who are exploited in adult entertainment. The exploiters are also portrayed with a literary allusion. The visible danger of the inner-city is portrayed by the wicked witch and can be avoided. ”With the means of an allusion to Geppetto from *The Adventures of Pinocchio* it is stated that covert dangers are more dangerous because they are difficult to detect. However, the next stanza comments on crime as being un lucrative and that there is a high possibility of being prosecuted by police. Nevertheless, the next stanza contradicts the comments by adding that if a person is driven by greed, crime might be profitable; this is supported with an allusion to Gordon Gecko from the film *Wall Street*. Gordon Gecko was a fictional Wall Street banker who manipulated stocks to profit at the expense of others.

The last three stanzas expand the narrative of success in an informal economy. The person needs to move constantly; the simile and literary allusion “more flight than Biggles” is used. Biggles was a fictional British First World War fighter pilot appearing in the collection of short stories entitled *The Camels are Coming*.<sup>1</sup> The word flight is used to emphasise fast movement. The last allusions are to stand-up comedians Don Rickles and Rodney Dangerfield. Don Rickles is used to portray the exaggerated glamour of illicit activities, he was known for stereotypes in his humour (Cunningham). In the end, illicit activities do not

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<sup>1</sup> Biggles flew a plane called the Sopwith Camel.

bring the person wider social acceptance or respect; in the same manner, Rodney Dangerfield was self-deprecating and known for the phrase “I don’t get no respect” (Nirala) The verse ends with the poetic persona continuing to pursue crime. This can be read as follows: both the allure of the profitability of show business and crime is so strong that the negative consequences do not prevent individuals from pursuing both.

### 3.3.2. Lucre

In the song “Lucre,” race relations and violence between the African-American community and the broader American society are put into a global context connecting it to post-colonialism. The song starts with the chorus; in the first stanza there is a reference to Cormac McCarthy’s passage from the novel *The Crossing*. It is not verbatim intertextuality; it is slightly paraphrased. The rest of the chorus questions the conventional narratives of honest people working hard, but not being rewarded.

The first four stanzas of the first verse portray the nervousness of the poetic persona who prepares to commit an armed crime, but is running out of time. He asks a rhetorical question about expecting change with the first African-American president. A reference to James Baldwin’s collection of essays *Fire Next Time* is used to portray the social commentary in the stanza, “Warned em/*Fire Next Time* but they fucking slept.” In one of his essays entitled “Down at the Cross,” Baldwin comments on the social issues that African-Americans faced in 1960s. He questions the hypocrisy of religious leaders and African-Americans idolizing the Soviet Union. He argues that African-Americans must be able to see beyond those, because they do not provide a solution to complex issues in American society. Only when they will be able to see beyond the colour, the key problems can be addressed.

In the song, the poetic persona knows that all the issues had already been addressed and a black president will not change the structural problems in society. Those same structural problems helped the rise of violent gangs. The following stanza portrays a weeping mother whose son died from gang violence. The origin of gangs can be traced to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century; their formation was the result of the disfranchisement of minorities from mainstream society. The original gangs were formed to provide a safety net for people who did not have access to other forms of protection. Racially based antagonism between whites and minorities lead to the formation of street gangs. In the 1940s, many African-Americans migrated from rural areas to California in search of employment. They could get employment in Californian factories and were able to gain a degree of monetary prosperity; however, social equality was

beyond their reach. Housing segregation was one of the problems minorities faced in Los Angeles. After the Second World War, the demand for work force diminished and the unemployment of African-Americans grew. In the 1950s, racial violence grew and African-Americans started to form groups to protect themselves. From those initial gangs, Bloods and Crips developed and over time, they were increasingly involved in criminal activities (Covey, p.18-19). The question is whether the choice between the Bloods and the Crips is the only solution. The previous line is the answer: it is not. Gangs give African-Americans a false sense of security, which most likely ends in death or a prison sentence. The last six lines of the first verse connect street crime and geo-politics. They draw a parallel between the underground meetings between street criminals and groups trying to overthrow governments that both end in homicide.

The second verse focuses on different aftermaths of post-colonialism. The poetic persona is a fictional post-colonial leader. The first stanza portrays an assassination which helps him to come to power. The body of the assassinated person is not removed until night falls to display the power of the new leader. The allusion to the assassination of Anwar Sadat is used to portray the analogy. Anwar Sadat was the president of Egypt from 1971 to 1981. He played a key role in the Israeli-Arab war. His important contribution was the peace stalemate between Israel in Egypt, for which he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Increasing internal unrest lead to his assassination by members of his own army that were Islamic extremists in 1981 (Lippman, p. xxi-xxiv, p.246). The assassination was ironic because Sadat supported and encouraged religion in society. He even freed religious groups such as the Moslem Brotherhood from prison; they had been jailed by his predecessor Nasser (Lippman, p. 216-222). This allusion implies that the poetic persona was involved with the assassinated leader. The rest of the verse describes the aftermath of the assassination. From a monetary standpoint, the leader is successful; his lifestyle is compared to that of the former Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi and his Revolutionary Nuns. The Revolutionary Nuns were an all-female guard established by Gaddafi in the 1980s; they later became his bodyguards (Pargeter, p. 265). The song ends with the leader trading natural resources with western powers—an allusion to the diamond mining company De Beers. It is one of the most well-known diamond mining companies in South Africa; it has been active since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was founded by Cecil Rhodes in the period known as dry digging. De Beers would grow to monopolize diamond mining in the world; this remains true until this very day (Cleveland, chapter 4, n.p.). This can be interpreted that in post-colonialism, despite dictators or former colonizers, countries are being overthrown by subversive insiders. In time, they enter global

politics, and are not much better than their former masters. Because of the nature of the global economy, they are forced to trade with their former colonisers.

Blurring lines between street crime and corporate crime is one of the key features in Billy Woods's lyrics when he describes post-colonialism. Post-colonialism is the second most common topic in Billy Woods's lyrics. This is connected to his personal upbringing and interests. The songs "Black Ark" and "Cuito Cuanavale" are used to analyse post-colonialism in Billy Woods lyrics.

### 3.4. Post-Colonialism

#### 3.4.1. Black Ark

The song "Black Ark" appeared on the record *Race Music* by Armand Hammer. Armand Hammer is a rap group consisting of Billy Woods and Elucid. The title *Race Music* is an allusion to the classification of African-American music in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Only the second verse of the song will be analysed, because it was written by Billy Woods. It takes the poem "Charge of the Light Brigade" by Lord Alfred Tennyson and transforms it. The original poem describes the battle of Balaclava from the Siege of Sevastopol in the Crimean War. The song uses references to transform the setting of the poem from the battle of Balaclava to South African mining. The Crimean War was a conflict between the Ottoman Empire and the Russian Empire. One of the reasons for the conflict was the declining power of the Ottoman Empire and the other European Empires wanted to establish influence and power in the territory (Badem, p.46, p.65). The Ottoman Empire was an important trading partner of the British Empire (Badem, p. 59). Britain and France joined the conflict in 1854 after they refused the Russian ultimatum to withdraw their ships from the Black Sea (Badem, p.177). One of the battles was the Charge of the Light Brigade, in which the British army lost their light brigade to the Russians because of mistakes made by their officers. The battle was not important from a strategic perspective; however, the aftermath of it and the losses on the Ottoman side led to a demoralization of the troops. The Ottoman Empire was not able to provide sufficient provisions for their soldiers who were dying from starvation and disease (Badem, p. 275-276). The Crimean War is the first layer of colonialism in the song. It refers to the historical conflict between Europe's imperial powers. The song takes the concept of suffering and death, recontextualizes it and puts into a new setting. The setting is the suffering

and death of South African miners by adding the second layer of colonialism and post-colonialism.

The historical Africa is associated with mining for minerals. There was an array of minerals that were mined; however, it was gold that led the global interest in mining in Africa. In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century gold was the main mineral that the Europeans traded in Africa, but because of financial limitations and diseases they were unable to explore the continent in its entirety. It was with the technological advancement in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that Europeans were able to explore the southern part of Africa. Political tensions between the Boers and the British led the Boer Farmers to migrate south, which led to conflicts with the Griqua. Both were competing for the same resources that slowly diminished and a new source of revenue had to be found. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century diamonds were discovered and wet and dry mining followed. The first wave of immigrants (who were small-time diggers) was followed by investors who bought land that could potentially contain diamonds; one of those investors was Cecil Rhodes. The most important four mines, Kimberly, De Beers, Dutoitspan and Bultfontein, were all located in South Africa. The possibility of work attracted many immigrants who would be temporally employed in the mines. The mines employed unskilled white and black labour force; however, there were severe racial tensions between groups (Cleveland, chapter 3, n.p.). The conditions in which the Africans worked were hazardous. They faced work related injuries, diseases or death. From the corporate establishment of the enterprises they faced racism and indifference. Later, even prison labour was used. The work force was divided along racial lines with white people occupying managerial posts and black people being unskilled labourers in the mines. Insufficient accommodation led to the outbreak of diseases like pneumonia. Over the years, there was resistance from the workers, but it was suppressed by the owners.; nevertheless, the working conditions improved with time (Cleveland, chapter 4, n.p.).

The title of the song is the first allusion; it refers to Noah's Ark, which saved him from the Flood. It is also used ironically; the concept of the song is about the working conditions of South African miners and the owners' indifference to them. It refers to the historical function of mines in South Africa. Mines provide a job opportunity for the natives of South Africa; however, the work is dangerous and can result in death. Unlike Noah's Ark, the mines do not provide salvation. The term "ark" could be interpreted as a homonym of the word arc. This interpretation changes the meaning of the title. Black arc represents the plight of the colonial and post-colonial population with their colonial masters. With investments, they presented a pretence of salvation; yet, in the long run, brought no salvation to the native population.

The verse starts with reference to the second stanza of the first verse of the poem, “Into the valley of Death / Rode the six hundred.” The poem refers to the charging soldiers in the Battle of Balaclava; the song transforms it and refers to miners going into the mine. The battery smoke from the poem is replaced by the elevator tunnels transporting workers. The working conditions are described; “fire in the earth” referring to the possibility of explosions in the mines. To describe the size of the mine, a reference to the opening stanza of the poem is used, but slightly paraphrased. *Half a league* is converted into the metric system and becomes four kilometres. An allusion to the Biblical Exodus is used for the plight of miners. In the context of the song, Exodus can be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, the Exodus as the physical movement of the miners. In the same manner, Moses had to move the Israelis from Egypt (*King James Bible*, p.224). Secondly, it can refer to the larger migration of African workers to South African mines. The conditions in the mines are described as a dance with death that ends with one of the miners getting tuberculosis and his children being orphaned. The hopelessness of the work conditions is illustrated with a reference to the second stanza of the poem, “Theirs not to reason why / Theirs but to do and die.” In the same manner, the British soldiers were facing death in the battle. The miners most likely will die, because of the mine or the work-related diseases. The authority over the miners is described with the allusion to the writer Jules Verne. He wrote the novel *A Journey to the Centre of the Earth*. To emphasis the want of colonisers to unearth the minerals in Africa. For the portrayal of the desire for diamonds an allusion to Sméagol from *Lord of the Rings* and *Hobbit* and his phrase “precious” is used. In the novel, he was obsessed with the Sauron’s ring and called it his “precious”. He possessed it for a time, but the ring was stolen by Bilbo Baggins. In the same manner, investors were trying to get all the diamonds that they could from South Africa. The verse ends with the indifference of the authorities towards the dying miners.

Black Ark is not the only song by Billy Woods that describes post-colonialism in Africa. The song “Cuito Cuanavale” portrays the liberation of Africa from its colonisers and the consequences of post-colonialism. It focuses on the liberation of Angola and Zimbabwe.

### 3.4.2. Cuito Cuanavale

The first reference to post-colonialism in the song, “Cuito Cuanavale” is the title. It alludes to the Battle of Cuito Cuanavale from the Angolan Civil War. The Angolan War was a series of conflicts that started in the early 1960s with the war for independence and developed

into a civil war in 1975 and lasted until 2002 (*The Angolan Civil War (1975-2002): A Brief History*).

Angola was a colony of Portugal from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Portugal's interest in Angola was connected to the political climate in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was afraid to lose its colonies in Africa to other European imperial powers. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, laws regarding the possession of colonies changed with the Berlin conference in 1884-1885. The new laws required the colonisers to completely conquer the potential colony; the divine right to the colony was not sufficient anymore. While prior to the conference, Portugal primarily traded with its African colonies, between 1885-1900 Portugal used force to establish an administration in Angola. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Portugal abolished its monarchy and the new government focused on reorganizing the management of colonies. Under reforms, the colonies would be taxed, harvested, there was mandatory labour for the natives and a separation of the European and native African populations (Guimaraes, p.3-5). Nevertheless, the new government was not able to implement changes because of internal turmoil. It was later overthrown in 1926. The new finance minister Antonio de Oliveira Salazar was appointed to fix the economy. He gained complete control over the state budget and that affected the colonies—his policies focused on balancing the budget and managing the deficit. Bureaucracy and the monopoly of economy was used to maintain the system's force (Guimaraes, p.5-6). His goal was to return the society to a time before the industrial revolution. With help of the Church, he advocated a patronizing ideology of God and nation to keep the population obedient to the new economic system. Under his policies, the colonies needed to serve the centre and were an important part of the ideological indoctrination of the population to legitimize the regime. Having colonies meant that the regime could evoke the historical greatness of Portugal (Guimaras, p.9-10).

The new regime's colonial period is divided into two periods. The first lasted from 1920 to 1950. In this period, the administration of the colonies was restructured to be under the administration of Lisbon. The position of governor in the colony was symbolic, he had no political influence on the management. Salazar was the main authority in the colonies. The goal was to merge Portugal with its colonies. During the Second World War Portugal profited from trading with both the Axis and the Allies. The increase of the prices of goods helped Portugal, which had access to the natural resources from its colonies. On the other hand, the decolonization process started after the war and there was international pressure for Portugal to abandon its colonies (Guimaras, p.11-12). The 1960s saw a change in the management of the colonies—it shifted to foreign capitals, there where development deals for colonies and

manufacturing of colony-specific goods. This last period of colonisation ended with the Angolan war for independence that escalated into a civil war (Guimaras, p.12-14).

In the war for independence, three main groups emerged: MPLA (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola), FNLA (National Front of Liberation of Angola) and UNITA (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola); only the abbreviations of the organizations will be used from here on. MPLA strove to gain independence for the Angolan people regardless of ethnicity, social class, sex or beliefs. FNLA strived to liberate Angola on the national, regional and social level. UNITA's goal was to form an Angolan national identity across ethnic groups. On the surface, it seems that they had similar goals; however, there were political and ideological differences between them. These movements originated from three groups of people. First, from the Mbundu region, where the Bakongo people lived, when their King Pedro VIII was dethroned by the government of Portugal. Second, Ovimbundu, which lived on the mountainous areas in the south of Luanda. Third, in the North-Eastern part of Angola the Lunda-Chowke. MPLA was rooted in the historical fight of colonialism of Mbundu groups. FNLA was the contemporary manifestation of the Congo kingdom. UNITA represented the interests of the Ovimbundu and the Lunda-Chokwe. There were several reasons for the civil war among them the ethnic, racial, educational and political divisions (Guimiaras, p.33-34). The civil war expanded when the global superpowers wanted to gain a strategic influence in Angola. The civil war began in the mid-1970s—in the middle of the Cold War. The United States and the Soviet Union wanted to gain influence in African States fighting for independence. MLPA was supported by the Soviet Union and Cuba (Guimiaras, p.102-104). FNLA and UNITA, on the other hand, were supported by China, Congo, the United States and later South Africa (Guimiaras, p.108-109).

One of the later battles in the Angolan civil war was the Battle of Cuito Cuanavale from 1986-1987. It was one of the crucial battles on the Angolan and South African border. South Africa wanted to repress the resurgences in Namibia. South Africa was supported by UNITA; therefore, it came into conflict with FAPLA (Popular Armed Forces of the Liberation of Angola) a military offshoot of MLPA (Guimiaras, p.104). FAPLA's goal was to defeat UNITA with the support of Cuba. Two important battles were the South African victory at the Lomba River and FAPLA's prevention of the capture of Cuito. When it was impossible for both parties to make progress, Cuban forces broke the deadlock. The battle is controversial because both sides claim victory. Angola claims that it won with the support of Cuban forces. On the other hand, South Africans claim their aim was reached with preventing the destruction of UNITA and the war ended in a standstill (Bains, n.p.).



The refrain of the song, “you want it one way/ but it is another” is a reference to the television series *The Wire*. It quotes the drug dealer Marlo Stanfield in the fourth episode of the fourth season. Marlo is stealing lollipops from a store and is confronted by a security guard. He calls him out for stealing; however, Marlo ignores him at first. The confrontation continues and Marlo ends it with the following statement: “You want it to be one way / But it's the other way.” The statement can be interpreted in the context of the song as a comment on colonial and post-colonial experience. Colonisers had expectation of material gain from the colonies, but it ended with resistance and liberation movements. In post-colonialism, the liberated states expected democracy; yet, the newly formed states were absorbed into the global economy and the leaders established authoritarian regimes. In the end, nobody fulfilled their wants.

The opening stanza begins with a reference to the novel *Through the Looking Glass*. It continues with a historical allusion to Robert Mugabe watching Bob Marley’s performance of the song “Zimbabwe.” The allusion refers to the liberation of Zimbabwe. In 1980, when Zimbabwe gained its independence. Bob Marley was invited to play at the independence concert, after the flag of Zimbabwe was raised (Hans). One of the songs performed was “Zimbabwe” from the record *Survival*. The song was dedicated to the newly independent state (bobmarley.com). In the novel, Alice observes through the looking glass the Queen and a world different from her own. In same manner Robert Mugabe was watching a new Zimbabwe being built after the war. To be able to understand the song, the historical liberation of Zimbabwe needs to be explained.

Zimbabwe (formerly known as Rhodesia) was colonized by Britain from 1890 to 1980. Until 1923, Rhodesia was governed by the South African Company. Afterwards, it was ruled by white settlers until 1965; in that year Ian Smith with his party Rhodesian Front Party declared independence from Britain. Britain did not consent to Rhodesian independence and wanted to change the white minority rule. Africans were opposed to the British ruling; however, any resistance was suppressed. In 1979, Robert Mugabe and Joshua Nkomo's Patriotic Front settled an agreement with the Rhodesian government, and Zimbabwe became independent and with new African leadership in 1980 (Murdoch, p. 3-4).

The aim of the colonisers in Rhodesia and later in Zimbabwe was to seize land and its natural resources; however, for the early colonisers, the aim was not clear; did they want predominately the land or was the religious conversion of Africans of equal importance? The colonisation of Rhodesia was part of a larger plan of resettling the English unemployed to British colonies. The first decades of colonisation were not successful; nevertheless, the

colonisers changed their aims and focused on “civilising” the Africans, which secured financial aid of Cecil Rhodes (Murdoch, p.8-10). It was Rhodes who gave land to the missionaries to spread religion. His authority over the land came from the negotiations of his partners with King Lobengula. The King agreed to a mining concession and Rhodes used it for the colonisation of Rhodesia (Murdoch, p.14-15).

Early on, the colonisation of Rhodesia was met with resistance. One of the bigger resistances was Chimurenga by the Ndebele and Shona from 1886 to 1887. There were several reasons for resistance; people were forced off their land, subjected to forced labour, had to endure brutal treatment by native police, high taxation seized most of their livestock and disease and locusts destroyed their crops and livestock (Murdoch, p.22-23). The Chimurenga reached its high point with the death of Captain Cass, who was a captain of the Salvation Army and a missionary. He was killed by the Shona (Murdoch, p.22-23). The Chimurenga ended with the executions of African religious leaders and the displacement of people (Murdoch, p.29). The death of Captain Cass was later mythologized by the white Rhodesians and the colonizers considered him a martyr (Murdoch, p.33-34). In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the plan was to resettle unemployed citizens from British cities to Rhodesia (Murdoch, p.46).

Between the 1930s and 1969, the Salvation Army relied on the Rhodesian government to fund the Christianisation of Africans. Spreading religion was not the only function of the Salvation Army—education of Africans was the other; however, education and religion were not separated. The involvement of the government also meant that funds were unevenly distributed among the African population. Rhodesia had a white minority rule; the white population got more funds for social services and Africans did not have the same access to education and healthcare (Murdoch, p. 92-94). With time, the army could not afford teachers from their own ranks and teachers provided by the state replaced them and gained influence over them (Murdoch, p.102). The social services predominately focused on white homeless people (Murdoch, p.110). In the 1960s, the colonies in Africa started to change. After the Second World War, negative attitudes towards colonialism grew and liberation movements in Africa began, as in other African colonies. In the Rhodesian fight for independence there was an ideological clash between communism and the West.

The liberation of Zimbabwe escalated as Ian Smith declared the independence of Rhodesia from Britain and wanted to establish a white minority government. The Salvation Army, despite being predominantly black, joined Ian Smith. There were several reasons for this decision: the Army was dependent on government funding; conservative international

leaders feared the influence of communism that supported the rebellion; most of the army leaders in Rhodesia were white; the international Army was funded by the conservative American leadership (Murdoch, p.112-114). One of the leaders of the Patriotic Front, Joshua Nkomo, had a history of organizing strikes and the rebellion originated from those (Murdoch, p.112). The Patriotic Front was Marxist and was supported by Eastern Europe, Asia and South America. It consisted of two factions: ZANU (Zimbabwe African National Union) and ZAPU (Zimbabwe African Peoples' Union). The aim was to liberate Zimbabwe, fight racism and establish a majority African rule (Murdoch, p.143). The fight between the white Rhodesian minority rulers and the Patriotic Front ended with black majority rule and Rhodesia becoming independent Zimbabwe (Murdoch, p.111).

The second stanza continues with a reference to *Through the Looking Glass*, with Mugabe having an out of body experience in the same manner as Alice was dreaming of the Wonderland. He is remembering his own experience in the liberation war. The war casualties are portrayed with an allusion to Pompeii, referring to the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 CE. The city was covered in volcanic debris and ashes, which preserved the infrastructure and the corpses of the people who were unable to escape (Jashemski). Furthermore, it refers to Billy Woods's song, "Pompeii" from the record *History Will Absolve Me*, in which he parallels two stories that do not end as the protagonist wishes they would. The first verse describes a soldier who committed atrocities during the war and was tried for war crimes later in his life. The second verse describes a man who becomes a drug dealer and dies because of it.

Mugabe's reflection continues in the third stanza with a reference to Fidel Castro's speech *History Will Absolve Me*. Cuba was one of the countries that supported Zimbabwean independence. The speech was written by Castro in prison after the failed rebellion against the Batista regime in 1953. When he was on trial, he defended himself and delivered the speech in which he confessed the attempt at rebellion. Nevertheless, he condemned the Batista regime, proposed an alternative for how the Cuban society should be run and concluded the speech with the statement that judges might condemn his actions, but in the end, history would absolve him (Chomsky, p.36-37). The first line of the stanza ends with Mugabe doubting himself. This self-reflection is the foreshadowing of the future and a comment on the consequences of post-colonialism. History did not absolve Castro nor will it absolve Mugabe, because both abandoned their principles and became authoritarian rulers of their states. This is further explained with the second line of the stanza, "botched robbery." The phrase can be interpreted as a metaphor for the incompetent governments of Mugabe and Castro. Both

started out as liberators of oppressed people; yet, after the establishment of a new government in their respective states, they also abused their power to repress the population. On the other hand, “botched robbery” can be a metaphor for the colonialization of Africa that ended with the liberation movements in the colonies.

This is supported by the next stanza. The stanza starts with an allusion to the killing of 2Pac, who was shot in 1996 (Constable). The escalated violence and feud between East and West coast rap was blamed for his death (Wartofsky). The allusion to 2Pac’s death represents the victims of colonialism. They were victims of a system that was sustained by exploiting them. Similarly, 2Pac’s success contributed to the popularisation of rap as a genre, but his career led to his death. In the second line, the liberation of Zimbabwe is referred to again by means of a reference to the book *True Believer* by Eric Hoffer, which explains how mass movements are formed and how they work. The reference to the Patriotic Front, which started out as a movement and was a major force in the liberation of Zimbabwe (Murdoch, p.33-34). The next allusion is to Ian Smith condemning Africans, who are referred to as “niggers” and his rule over Zimbabwe.

The following six stanzas portray post-colonialism and its consequences. The rivalry of the global superpowers and the influence over Africa is referred to as African chess, the two sides being the United States and the anti-communist West, and the other side being the Soviet Union and other communist countries. For the allusion to the Angolan War there is a reference to Raekwon’s record *Only Built 4 My Cuban Linx....* It refers to Cuban support of MPLA in the Angolan Civil War and refers to the communist self-interest. The title of the record was censored before it was released. The original title of the record was *Only Built 4 My Cuban Linx Niggas* (Pinkard).

The poetic persona is aware of the ulterior motives described in the previous stanza, because the first line in the next stanza is “neat trick.” The second line alludes to the after effects of post-colonialism in Africa. After independence, the newly formed countries entered the global economy and the former allies started investing in Africa. This pattern can be observed in the global trade between African countries and China. Initially, China supported the liberation of colonies, as with Angola, and today, China is one of the investors in the same countries that it helped to liberate. One of the factors according to which China chooses its investments is that the government is stable. The inner workings of the country are not important and the country must have natural resources (Chen, p.6-8). These investments were criticised by the former Nigerian central bank governor Lamido Sanusi, who explained that China invests in mining, builds the infrastructure, but it uses its own labour force and

equipment, without teaching new skills to the local population. Sanusi concludes that China takes the resources and imports manufactured goods back to Africa, therefore evoking old colonial practices (Chen, p.2). The line ends, “your blood still gets spilt.” Despite new investments, violence continues to be a problem in the country, because as long as the government is not threatened investors ignore the internal struggles of the population.

Post-colonialism is further referred to in the next stanza. The position of Africa is explained as a, “game sewed like an AIDS quilt.” The difficulties of post-colonial Africa are explained with the simile of an AIDS quilt. A quilt is a type of blanket with multiple layers, like the systemic problems in African countries in the post-colonial period. The problems are multi-layered, connected to the past with colonialism and the present, with internal-violence and non-functioning institutions, which are in some cases maintained or perpetuated by neo-colonialism. The neo-colonial extraction of natural resources is depicted with an intertextual reference to the film *There Will Be Blood*. The title is paraphrased to, “there will be oil”—adding a reference to the novel *Oil*, on which the movie was loosely based. The film depicts the rise of Daniel Plainview, portrayed by Daniel Day Lewis, a business man who invested in natural resources and became rich when investing in oil in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in the west of the United States. His business approaches were questionable. The scene from the film which is alluded to in the stanza is when Daniel explains to a priest who came to Daniel to sell him land how he deceived him as a child to persuade his father to sell their land. From this land he then extracted all of the oil and now it is worthless. Neo-colonialism extracts resources from countries until there is nothing to extract anymore; the consequences in Africa are wars for resources.

A reference to the novel *Les Misérables* by Victor Hugo is used to describe the colonial struggles of African society. In the novel, the protagonist Jean Valjean was incarcerated for 10 years because he stole a loaf of bread. African colonies were managed in such a manner that as much of their resources as possible could be extracted. If individuals broke the colonially imposed roles, they were severely punished.

In the last few stanzas, Billy Woods places himself directly in the song and states that he is a representative of his generation in the lineage of post-colonial experience. He alludes to this with the rapper Earl Sweatshirt, who is the son of the South African writer Keorapetse Kgosisile (Ehrlich) with the late Zimbabwean writer Dambudzo Marechera. Billy Woods falls generationally between Earl Sweatshirt and Dambudzo Marechera—he is older than Earl and younger than Dambudzo. (Woods, “Track for Track: Billy Woods on ‘Dour Candy’”).

The last reference in the song is to Joseph Conrad's novel *Secret Sharer*, which is connected to allusions to the ISI and Haqqani Network. The ISI and Haqqani network are part of the war of Afghanistan. In the 1970s, the King of Afghanistan was overthrown in a coup conducted by Afghan officers that were trained in the Soviet Union under the leadership of Daoud. In Afghanistan, there were conflicts between Islamist groups and the Communists. First, Daoud suppressed the protests of the Islamists and later he banned Communist Parties. The increased financial investment of Soviet Union in Afghanistan was alarming to Iran and Pakistan. Pakistan decided to invest in Afghanistan to diminish the influence of Soviet Union. This was brought to the attention of the United States; it wanted Afghanistan to address the question of the Pashtunistan and Baluchistan tribes. The United States wanted to increase aid to those tribes. The Baluch region was in Pakistan; therefore, this provoked a reaction from Pakistan. With the help of its own Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISI) Iran the with support of the CIA provided arms to the Mujahedeen (Dimitrakis, p.3-7). From those Mujahedeen, the Haqqani Network emerged; it was used to fight the Soviet Union in the 1980s and contributed to the emergence of al-Qaeda (Haqqani Network). The covert relationship between the United States' sponsored Islamists is compared to the novel *Secret Sharer*, in which the captain of the ship takes on board a man that killed his crew member. The captain decides to hide him on the ship and later helps him to escape without the crew being aware of it. To support their agenda, states are willing to make decisions that, if made public, would not be supported by the population. In the same manner, post-colonialism is implemented outside of the West. Global superpowers invest in groups that bring the most profit regardless of the consequences, even if it means collaborating with extremists and consequently furthering their agenda. The last three lines of the song emphasise this by calling the acts *deplorable*; nevertheless, all parties involved are satisfied. The last line of the song is, "we all love to see the white man shook." The extremists get to further their agenda by using the finances gained by the West to attack it. On the other hand, the West exploits those attacks to increase control over the population in their own society. This is also a reference to the Mobb Deep song "Shook Ones" from the album *The Infamous*. The song ends with a repetition of the chorus.

There are many more examples of post-colonialism in Billy Woods's writing, the above examples and the song "The Man Who Would be King" being the most notable ones; however, he is not the only rapper to have tackled post-colonialism. He was one of the first to do it, but on the record *Madvillainy*, MF Doom did it in the song "Strange Ways." The American rapper Immortal Technique did it on almost all his records, even on his first record,

*Revolutionary vol.1*, is a spoken word interlude (“The Poverty Of Philosophy”) on which he describes the United States and South American culture. He is Billy Woods one of contemporaries. British rappers did it in 2011 and 2013. In 2011 was it Lowkey with his album *Sound Track To the Struggle* and in 2013 rapper Akala did it on the record *Thieves Banquet* (Williams “Rapping Postcoloniality”).

### 3.5. Adaptation of Writing of Daniil Kharms and Flannery O’Connor

Daniil Kharms was the *nom de plume* of Daniil Ivanovich Iuvachev, a Russian writer. He was the son of an important intellectual from St. Petersburg. Kharms was not a successful writer during his lifetime; however, he was known in Leningrad for avant-garde and children’s writing. From 1925 on, he participated in leftist poetry readings, and joined the All-Russian Union of Poets. During this time, he would publish the only two poems for adults written during his lifetime. For a short period, he was a member of OBEIRU, a movement of modern experimental art, which was dissolved under Stalinism (Cornwell, p.158-159).

Kharms transitioned to writing children’s literature. He was able to publish several books; nevertheless, his employment of literary devices that he learned about in OBEIRU led to his arrest and exile. Kharms survived the Stalinist purges in the 1930s. During the Second World War, he was imprisoned again and in 1942 died incarcerated. Most of his adult work was published posthumously during the Gorbachev era (Cornwell, p.159-160). He wrote absurd short prose and dramatic fragments. His non-fiction writing ranged from philosophy to mathematics. His other writing includes diaries, notebooks and poetry. The genre of Kharms’ writing is not clear (Cornwell, p.160-161).

Flannery O’Connor was a writer from the southern United States; her writing is still highly influential. Her first novel was published in 1952. She was a highly prolific and critically acclaimed author during her lifetime. She came in second place in the O. Henry Awards in 1954 and in 1957, 1963 and 1965 she won the O. Henry Award. Her writing is known for being grotesque, humorous and violent; however, O’Connor was a deeply religious southerner, who questioned the role of God in her writing. She died in 1964, but her work continues to be published posthumously (Whitt, p.1-3).

On the record *Today I Wrote Nothing*, Billy Woods stylistically adapts short stories of Daniil Kharms and Flannery O’Connor into rap form. He takes a collection of stories by Daniil Kharms by the same title and structurally adapts them into rap. The collection of the

stories is divided into four parts. The first part is called “Events.” The second is called “The Old Woman” which is a short play and the longest piece of writing in the collection. The third is “The Blue Note Book” and the fourth is other writing. On the record, Billy Woods discards the standard form of structure of rap: the album consists of 24 songs. All songs are in absurd vignettes mirroring the writing style of Kharms. The standard rap structure of 16 lines long songs and refrain are abandoned. Some aspects of Kharms’ writing that are adopted are the meta-narrative song writing, ironisation of others’ and one’s own misery, self-deprecating humour and short fragmented narrations. From Flannery O’Connor, he takes the grotesque, humour, hopelessness, death and the tragic endings from her short stories such as “Good Man is Hard to Find” and “Good Country People.”

Billy Woods explicitly stated that Danill Kharms and Flannery O’Connor were his influences while he was writing *Today, I Wrote Nothing*.

In an interview conducted in 2015 for the website *tinymixtapes*, he reflected on meeting a person late one night at a bar, who was reading Kharms book. The person was inebriated and he showed Billy Woods the book. At the time Billy Woods was suffering from writer’s block and after seeing the book an idea came to his mind:

I just found it really interesting what [Kharms] was doing. I thought A) that’s an awesome title and it relates to how I feel now; and B) maybe I should just go and write some shit and not worry about structure, because I was looking at these stories, and one story is “Today, I Wrote Nothing.” It’s just: “Today, I wrote nothing.” That’s the story. So I [told myself], “Don’t worry about structure, just go, be creative, write and let it come out.” Then I went home that night and wrote the first verse of “Big Nothing,” which was a one-verse song until almost the end of this [project], and I wrote an early version of “Warmachines” maybe the next day (Woods 2015).

In 2017, he did an interview for the *Passion of the Weiss* website in which he describes how Flannery O’Connor had influenced the writing process of *Today, I Wrote Nothing*:

I would also say Flannery O’Connor and “A Good Man is Hard to Find,” or the other one where the guy steals the woman’s leg (“Good Country People”). My mother put me on to Flannery O’Connor and gave me an anthology of her stories at some point. I really dug that. She was close to my mind when I was working on *Today, I Wrote Nothing* (Woods, 2017).



The four songs from the record which will be analysed are “Zulu Tolstoy”, “Dream Comes True,” “Scales” and “Borrowed Time.”

### 3.5.1. Zulu Tolstoy

The title of the song is an allusion to a famous statement made by the American author Saul Bellow, who asked how African literature will develop in the post-colonial period and who will be the Tolstoy of Zulus (Menand). The song is one of the few proper executions of meta-rap. It must be noted that this was not the first appearance of meta-rap. Rap has a long tradition of writing about rap and bragging about one’s ability as a rapper (Edwards, p.26; Bradley, p.364); nevertheless, the way “Zulu Tolstoy” is written is different from the rap written in the past. The closest example from the past can be found on MF Doom’s *Operation Doomsday* on the songs “?” and “Operation Greenbacks.” It describes a poetic persona writing about a rapper that is writing about a young rapper trying to escape from the inner-city. The song ridicules clichés of rap writing. The first rapper that is writing the song is not successful because he is in a conflict with the producer. The young rapper is more successful; however, because he is on parole, he cannot leave the state and therefore his career is staling. Nevertheless, he is still in contact with Drake, who is a famous rapper. The poetic persona can be interpreted as the least successful rapper of all the three rappers in the songs and his writing projects his own wishes of success.

The metafictional aspects of the song are those which mirror Khram's the most. In his writing, he was known for his usage of allusions to classical Russian writers and prominent figures, such as Pushkin, Gogol and Michelangelo, who he puts into absurd situations from which they cannot escape. Furthermore, one of the prominent features of Khram's writing is that the characters wind-up in an absurd situation that is repeated several times from different perspectives and ends with a misfortune or death of the affected character, as seen in the stories *The Plummeting Old Women* or *An Unsuccessful Show*.

### 3.5.2. Dreams Come True

“Dreams Come True,” is a parody of a love rap song. It is one stanza long and depicts an unsuccessful phone call by the poetic persona, who calls his ex-girlfriend that rejects him. Billy Woods:

Caught feelings off an old picture. Hit her up like 'I still miss ya!'/

Two words: 'Nigga, please' Fair enough...

This evokes an absurd Kharmsanian situation. The song is entitled "Dreams Come True"; however, the irony is that it does not happen in the song. First, the song has the same structure as the Kharms vignettes collected in the Blue Notebook section of the collection, in which there are several stories that are only a few lines long. Daniil Kharms: "Today I wrote nothing. That's not important (Scotto, p.482)." Secondly, the content is also related to Kharms' writing. He often writes about the tragi-comic occurrences in personal relationships and Woods reflects this aspect in "Dreams Come True."

### 3.5.3. Borrowed Time

In the song, the poetic persona visits his own funeral and reminisces with the attendants about the life of the deceased person, in same manner that Kharms in his writing put the poetic persona in situations which would have been impossible. The absurdity is in the setting. Billy Woods chose the setting of the song to be his own wake, at which he catches up with his old acquaintance, who offers him a cigarette. The absurdity in the dialog is that Woods declines the cigarettes because he had stopped smoking.

The song mirrors Kharms' stories "How I Was Born" and "The Incubator Period." In "How I Was Born," he describes how he observed his own birth and the complications that occurred at the birth. The description of the birth is absurd. It starts with the statement that Kharms was born prematurely, which angered his father; therefore, the midwife had to push him back into his mother, but she missed the right hole. The mother was given English salt, so she could empty her bowels. The story ends with Kharms being put into an incubator. "The Incubator Period" is a continuation of the previous story. It is the reflection of the four months that Kharms spent in the incubator.

### 3.5.4. Scales

The song "Scales" combines the structure of Kharms with the content of Flannery O'Connor. It can be seen as a recontextualization of O'Connor story "A Good Man Is Hard to Find." In the story of Bailey and his family take a summer vacation. During the trip the grandmother tells stories about her childhood to the children. When she remembers that she

made a mistake in her narration, she kicks her feet scaring the cat. This leads to the Bailey losing control over the car causing an accident. As they are waiting for help the grandmother hears a vehicle driving down the road and stops it. Three men come out of it and one is recognized by the grandmother. This leads to the whole family being shot by the men.

In the song “Scales” there are four short verses. Three of them describing murders and one adultery. In the first verse, an aftermath of a murder is described by the poetic persona. In a few lines it is describes how the police came to the murder scene and people gathered around them. In the end the poetic persona reflects how, despite the presence of the police investigation, there is still a possibility of confrontation with them. Therefore, it is advised to have a gun.

The second verse, reveals that the poetic persona was the killer. He betrayed the person he murdered a reference to the murder of Julius Caesar is used of the act. The poetic persona justifies it that there was no other choice and described in the song:

“Two types of people in the word/ kid, those with loaded guns and those who dig.”

The verse concludes with the poetic persona visiting the grave of the person he murdered.

In the third verse the story continues with the poetic persona is still betraying his friends. His next betrayal is indulging in adultery with his friend’s wife. The justification of this deed is said in one line which is a reference to O’Connor’s short story, “A Good Man Is Hard to Find.” In the story the family is killed by the man, about which the grandmother made the remark “A Good Man Is Hard to Find,” while having a discussion with an owner of a diner. In the song the poetic persona is aware that he is not a good man.

The song concludes with the poetic persona drinking home, lying about his actions and observing his children listening to violent rap. Later he is called by his boss and asks about Wallace. This is a reference to the 12<sup>th</sup> episode from the first season of show *The Wire*. The exact dialog between DeAngelo and Stringer is sampled in the song. Stringer (the boss) gives an order to kill Wallace, because he is seen as a person who could give information to the police about a previous murder in that was committed by Stringers drug cartel. DeAngelo, under whom Wallace sold drugs is interested why did Wallace disappear. From those last stanzas and the dialog, we can read that the poetic persona was betraying his fellow drug dealers, because of vengeance. This is also the parallel to the short story in which the murder kills the family, because the grandmother recognizes him. In the song a drug dealer kills his fellow drug dealers, which he assumes are those involved in the disappearance of Wallace.

Those four songs are not the only example of adaptation of Daniil Kharm's writing on Billy Woods record *Today, I Wrote Nothing*. Nevertheless, the songs are textbook examples that demonstrate successful stylistic adaptation of literature into rap.

### 3.6. Rappers as Writers

In rap, words play a major part; therefore, it is important to ask the question whether rappers see themselves as writers. However, the answer is not clear: some do, while others do not. The question is usually posed to rappers who are known for their writing skills. Notable examples being MF Doom, Aesop Rock, El-P, Ka and Billy Woods. Early on in his career, Aesop Rock was asked whether he was an avid reader or if he sees himself as a writer and his answer was always no to both of questions. He told the interviewer that he does not like to read fiction and prefers natural science magazines, the only thing he does is to look up words that he does not know the meaning of. Aesop Rock always emphasised that he is a rapper; the only thing he ever wrote are raps and he likes to rap (Aesop Rock).

On the other hand, MF Doom gave two different answers. In an interview conducted in 1999, his rapping was compared to Charles Bukowski and he told the interviewer that he did not know who Bukowski was (MF Doom, "MF DOOM Interview." Interview by LSD"). Ten years later, he was interviewed for *Rolling Stone Magazine*; he told the magazine that he was influenced by Bukowski and could relate to him (MF Doom, "Reclusive Rapper Doom Talks New LP 'Born Like This.'"). In 2011, he gave a lecture for the Red Bull Music Academy and explained his writing process in detail. He told the audience that he approaches rap writing as if he were writing a screen play or a novel, in which different characters appear. The reasons for this being that it is personally boring for him to write from one perspective and that he can convey a story easier. Therefore, there are several personas that appear on his records, giving him the ability to able write from different perspectives that might disagree with each other. The more personas there are, the more comfortable he is. With this method of writing, he is able to avoid being pigeonholed. It is usual in rap that the rapper is personally associated with the narrated story. He is writing outside of the established rap norms and he can distance himself from the songs (MF Doom, "DOOM." Interview by Jeff Mao").

Unlike Aesop Rock, El-P explicitly stated that he considers himself a kind of a writer and that he was influenced by writers. Among the writers that influenced him were George Orwell and Philip K. Dick (Hart). Those influences can be heard in his songs—he alludes to their writing.

Ka, the rapper from the group Dr. Yen Lo, said in an interview that it was rap that influenced him to read and be a better writer. He sees himself as a writer, books influence his writing and serve as some of the basic concepts on his records. He also expects other people to read and to aspire to be intelligent (Ka, "I'm Inspired By Pain"; Ka, "Ka: How New York MC Makes Understated Rap Minimalism.").

In the case of Billy Woods, there is no more apparent example of a rapper being influenced by literature. He stated in several interviews that he was directly influenced by the English canon. Books played a significant role in his upbringing, his mother has a PhD in English literature and is a university professor (Woods, "Interview w/ Billy Woods (Uncommon Radio Podcast #50); " Woods, "'Time Goes By: Interview With Billy Woods; " Woods, "Question in the Form of An Answer: An Interview With Billy Woods). In a conversation conducted for this thesis, he explicitly stated that literature had a major impact on him, when asked about the influence (See Appendix page 63). Some of the writers and their work that had an influence on him are: James Baldwin, Flannery O'Connor, Cormac McCarthy, Chinua Achebe, Dambudzo Marechera, early Stephen King, Joseph Conrad, Charles Dickens, Doris Lessing, Tony Morrison, Neil Gaiman, Richard Price, Ralph Ellison's *The Invisible Man* and David Foster Wallace's non-fiction work (Woods, "Episode 44: Billy Woods."). In an interview conducted for the website Passion of the Weiss, Woods goes into detail how writers influenced him. One of the biggest influences on his writing is James Baldwin:

Well I would definitely put James Baldwin because I started reading him at a young age. I would put him in this category of transformative artists where after you encounter their work, you move forward, however slightly, attuned to the world in a new type of way. After you've ingested that person's work, everything after that point has clearly delineated. So one of those people for me is James Baldwin. I read a lot when I was a little kid and I already read Richard Wright's *Native Son* and Ralph Ellison. I remember reading *Go Tell it on the Mountain*, which I thought was really good. But it was when I read *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone*, after that I was like, 'Okay, this is something different than what I've seen.' The way this person uses character and language, there were layers there that weren't present in other things that I had seen (Woods, "Somewhere There's a Cafe in Paris That's Missing Me").

He states that Cormac McCarthy was his last influence:

As far as writers, I would say Cormac McCarthy, who I read much later in life. He was probably the last author who had me reorient. I really liked his work, but it was *Blood Meridian* that really changed things (Woods, “Somewhere There’s a Cafe in Paris That’s Missing Me”)

His perspective and perception on post-colonial writing has been changed by Dambudzo Marechera:

There’s this little known Zimbabwean author named Dambudzo Marechera. I knew him through my family, but I’m not related to him at all. He was a very eccentric and incendiary sort of writer, and he died very young. I met him once as a child. Anyway, when I first read his book, it was at this time where the sort of writing I had read by African writers centered around the idea of certain postcolonial tropes. They’re valuable and interesting, but that was where everything was centered. It was always some look at the clash between Western society, colonialism, and African-ness, and the aftermath of that, which was done in ways I was already familiar with. So to encounter this author whose work just brushed all of that to the side and was so brazenly raw and dark, and sexual. It gave no consideration to the things that were the part of the central crux of what you were used to reading; it was really stunning (Woods, “Somewhere There’s a Cafe in Paris That’s Missing Me”).

Lastly, he acknowledges an indirect influence of William Faulkner, because he influenced Cormac McCarthy and James Baldwin; nevertheless, Billy Woods acknowledges that literature is not the sole influence on his writing, but his overall life experiences growing up in several different parts of the world also immensely shaped his worldview and approaches to writing (see appendix page 63-64).

In 2009 and 2013 Paul Edwards published his book series *How to Rap* and *How to Rap 2* in which he interviewed several rappers on their writing process. The two aspect that came to the forefront was the building their vocabulary and writing. Many said that it is important to read and to write to be a better rapper (Edwards “How to Rap”, p.50-56, p.133-135). On the other hand, we can see from Aesop Rock there is no direct coloration between

having a broad knowledge of literature and being a great rapper. In the end, it should not be a prerequisite in making great rap music.

## 4. Conclusion

Six hypotheses were set in the beginning. The hypothesis that literature influences rap lyrics but that how it is integrated into rap changes depends on the time period in which rap is created has been disproven. In 1989 with Beastie Boys' record *Paul's Boutique* allusions and intertextual references to specific literary works were introduced. Afterwards, rap records utilised literary allusions and intertextuality in the same manner, the frequency of intertextuality in individual rappers has increased; other than that, no significant changes to the approach were observed.

The hypothesis that intertextuality and allusions are the most common literary techniques to integrate literature into rap lyrics has been confirmed. If literature is integrated into rap, it is by means of allusions or intertextuality.

The hypothesis that biblical allusions are the most common literary allusions has been confirmed. From the 1980s onward, biblical allusions are present in rap and represent the most frequently used allusions in rap lyrics. The *Bible* is the most referenced book, regardless of the period or ideological orientation of rap. There are probably several reasons for this occurrence. First, the *Bible* is the origin of a large amount of western meta-narrative. Second, in the United States religion plays a large part in people's lives. Third, rap originates from African-American communities, in which religion traditionally plays a significant role in organizing everyday life. Nonetheless, there are still aspects of intertextuality of religious text in rap lyrics that need to be analysed such as what are the most common biblical allusions? Are the *Bible* and the *Quran* the two mayor religious works alluded in rap, or do other schisms and their writings such as the Five Percent Nation play a larger role in rap lyrics? Lastly, how does the individual ideology of a rapper influence his usage of allusions of religious text?

The hypothesis that the quantity of allusions to literature that are used in the lyrics depends on the individual rapper has been proven. Generally speaking, the use of literary references depends on the context of the song; however, Billy Woods is the exception that constantly utilises literary allusions and intertextuality.

The hypothesis that literature is adapted into rap lyrics as an individual stylistic choice by different rappers in the juxtaposition to the traditional pop culture allusions and similes has

been proven. From the 1980s allusions to literature have been used in this way; however, when and why they are used depends on the song and the context, as Billy Woods argues that it would be gimmicky if allusions were used just for the sake of allusions (See appendix page, 60-61). It should be noted that rappers even use the same literary allusions, but in a different context. In the 1980s the Beastie Boys used allusions to the novels *The Catcher in the Rye* on their album *Pauls Boutique*. In 2001 on the album *Labor Days* Aesop Rock alluded to the same novel. George Orwell's novel *1984* is a quite common literary allusion, some of the records that it appears on are *Funcrusher Plus*, *The Cold Vein*, *Labor Days*, *Fantastic Damage*, *History Will Absolve Me*, *Dour Candy*, *Ultraviolet*, *Known Unknowns* and there are likely more examples in rap alluding to it. Those examples are by no means the only examples of repetition of literary allusions in rap. One of the possible reasons for the allusion to literature that occur is classic English literature that should be known to most English-speaking persons.

The hypothesis that the direct influence of literature or a specific author on a rapper depends on the individual and is usually an exception and not the norm has been partially proven. There are rappers that are influenced by literature, Billy Woods being one of them; however, to prove how much literature influences rap, an analysis with a broad spectrum of rappers from different time periods needs to be done. It must be noted that rap as a genre is highly referential; therefore, it would be more appropriate to analyse how different mediums such as films and television series influence rap writing.

The analysis of Billy Woods's lyrics has shown that intertextuality and allusions are systematically used to convey complex concepts that would be harder to convey with traditional rap writing. Intertextuality is used to give the song an additional layer of interpretation. From the selected examples, we can see that the chosen literature is not picked randomly, but it depends on the content of the song. Songs that deal with race relations and issues of African-American communities use literature that deals with the same issues. In the songs, "Tinseltown" Ralph Ellison is alluded to and on "Lucre" James Baldwin. The same process is repeated in the songs confronting post-colonialism, "Black Ark" alludes to *Charge of the Light Brigade* and "Cuito Cuanavale" alludes to Dambudzo Marechera. This stylistic feature is one of the key elements of his writing and it is still present on his most current record *Known Unknowns*. Lastly, when Billy Woods adopts Daniil Kharmis and Flannery O'Connor, he acknowledges it openly as a conscious stylistic choice that grew out of the circumstances surrounding the creative process of making the specific record.



To conclude, in the conversation for this thesis Billy Woods denied that using literary allusions or intertextuality is his main aim in writing his rap. If it fits into the broader context of the song, he uses those literary devices and if not, he does not force them. He stated that for him, the listeners' overall enjoyment of the song is more important than that they get every single literary reference, but if they do, they can get something more out of the songs. It must be noted that rap is a quite referential genre. To get a complete overview of how other media (films, television series, comic books, anime and manga) influence rap writing, a broad study would have to be conducted on rappers from different time periods to get a broader picture how intertextuality is used in rap lyrics.

## 5. Bibliography

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## 6. Appendix

### 6.1. Conversation with Billy Woods

Abbreviations: JK (Jožef Kolarič), BW (Billy Woods), HWMA (History Will Absolve Me), TWIN (Today, I Wrote Nothing)

**JK: You are the first rapper I was aware of that consistently integrates literature into his writing; however, the interesting part was that you did not use it like rappers from previous eras to diversify their pop culture similes or allusions. The closest comparison to your rap writing from the past that integrated literature into rap would be on the records *Funcrusher Plus*, *Operation Doomsday*, *The Cold Vein* and *Labor Days*. Your writing seems like a continuation and modernisation of stylistic choices on those records. Did you consciously decide to upgrade the pre-existing forms?**

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

**JK: I read that you spend your childhood in Zimbabwe, could you tell me how growing up in Africa influenced your writing?**

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

**From a textual perspective, you are one of the most potent rappers I ever heard. In interviews in the past you said that James Baldwin, east coast rap and western canon literature had a huge influence on you. Could you elaborate; did those influences shaped your rap writing? In which manner does literature influence your writing and how does rap? Is there any difference to you or it depends on the song you are writing?**

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

**JK: In the song, “BBC,” you allude to *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad. As far as I know this was one of the first songs of yours that used intertextuality to emphasise post-colonialism. In 2004 this was novelty in rap content and since then it is a recurring theme in your songs. From 2003 to 2010, post-colonialism was in your songs; however, it was not one of the central topics. After *History Will Absolve Me* it is a staple in your songs. Was it challenging to explore a new topic in rap that has not been done before? What were the initial difficulties that you faced? How did your writing change over the years?**

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

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

**JK: You mentioned that *Camouflage* was affected by 9-11, and that your approach made it difficult to find an audience. I find it extremely brave that you made songs like "Poli-Sci" or later "First Blood," but wouldn't such songs alienate the audience even more? Are those topics deliberately chosen as a provocation, why write from an extremist perspective, considering the time they were released?**

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

**JK: On your record *The Chalice* on the song "Capture the Flag" you shout out Edward Said and on the song "Invasion" you rap, "Edward said took its thesis and made darts." Did his writing have any personal influence on you or your writing?**

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

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

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

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

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

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



**JK: In 2009 MF DOOM sampled Bukowski's Dinosauria We in his song "Cellz," and in the same year you released "The Man Who Would Be King." In the song the course is a verse of the poem "White Man's Burden" by Rudyard Kipling. Is this coincidence or did you improve and expand the concept initiated by MF DOOM?**

BW: Coincidence. Growing up with two parents who were born into British colonialism outright, and growing up in a newly liberated British colony (we moved to Zimbabwe when I was 5) meant that I was intimately familiar with that poem from a young age.

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

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

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

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

**JK: How do you define "bar"? Does one bar to you mean one line or one stanza (two lines as in poetry)? I came across both versions in rap songs and rappers also used both versions when describing the structure of their songs.**

BW: This is a terrible question for me to answer. I don't have a background in music theory and honestly, I am not terribly good at counting bars. I probably use both version interchangeably, but it's more out of ignorance than anything else.

**JK: While listening to your music, I noticed that you change the narrator's voice frequently ("The Man Who Would Be King" – white coloniser, "No Roses" – woman, etc.). Does this make it easier to write a rap song, as you do not have to narrate all the stories from your personal perspective?**

BW: Easier? I don't know, but it certainly makes things more interesting for me.

**JK: Your raps are mostly fictional; however, there are stanzas in your songs that clearly refer to personal events ("Frog and Toad are Friends," "Duppy," "Freedman' Bureau," "Central Park," etc.). Do you intentionally avoid writing about your life or do you only add it in stanzas when it makes sense in the context of the whole song?**

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

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

BW: Two different things. I write in my day job, and I still consider writing for rap, writing, but it is its own thing with its own logic and rules. It's like being a person who writes novels and poems, to some extent, they have their own internal logic and I approach them differently and for different reasons.

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

BW: On the first part of this question, I am not sure how to quantify that, but certainly it has on some level because literature is part of our wider culture. So yes it has influenced rap, but so has TV and movies, rap necessarily draws on the wider culture because it is such a referential art form.

Can't speak for other people but I do.