

RHYTHMIC AND LYRIC INTERACTIONS IN KENDRICK LAMAR'S *DAMN*
AN ANALYSIS OF THE PULITZER WINNING ALBUM

by

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July, 2021

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ABSTRACT: This study focuses primarily on the interactions between the rhythmic and lyric elements in Lamar's album *DAMN*. Although *DAMN* has various social and cultural implications, this writing is primarily concerned with the technical features of the key tracks in the album. Any discussion of the cultural or social implications of this work is for the purpose of providing a better understanding of its musical features (as many of the musical decisions are informed by the work's lyrical content). One of the key musical elements that is discussed in this study includes rhythmic texture. Mitchell Ohriner, in his book *Flow: The Rhythmic Voice in Rap Music*, alludes to the concept of "texture" that results from the relationship between text and its delivery. Rhythmic texture is the measure of conflict between the background beat, text, and the rapper's delivery in rap music. This study examines how the shift of alignment between the rhythmic layers within Lamar's flow (or rapping style and rhythmic delivery) and the beat generates tension.

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A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Music

East Carolina University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Music

by

Shawn Johnson

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express a sincere thank you to all of the members of my committee which includes Professor John Hoppenthaler, Dr. Mark Richardson, Dr. Ed Jacobs, and Dr. Travis Alford. This project would not have been possible without the advice and oversight of all those who were involved. I would also like to extend a special thanks to Professor Richardson who directed this project and walked me through every step of the procedure. Furthermore, I want to draw attention to Professor John Hoppenthaler's work on this thesis as he offered an invaluable outside perspective; his knowledge of English literature and poetry proved to be indispensable for the development of this work. Lastly, I would like to express my gratitude towards my significant other as well as my family and friends who offered support throughout the entire creative process.

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Introduction

Kendrick Lamar's fourth studio album *DAMN* is widely regarded as one of the most influential rap albums in recent history. Analysts compare Lamar to innovative figures such as Kayne West, Jay Z, and Eminem. *DAMN* has even infiltrated the world of cultivated music as it was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for music in 2018. As reported by the *New York Times* article "Kendrick Lamar Wins Pulitzer in 'Big Moment for Hip-Hop,'" the jury that selected the prize winner that year was composed of five members and selected the work from a pool of over one hundred compositions. One of the talking points for the jury was the discussion of classical compositions that drew stylistic elements from rap. Since they were considering works that borrowed elements from rap music, the panel felt it appropriate to take actual works of rap music into consideration. According to David Hadju, one of the judges, this was a discussion "That led us to put on the table the fact that this sphere of work [rap] has value on its own terms and not just as a resource for use in a field that is more broadly recognized by the institutional establishment as serious or legitimate."¹ Finalists for the coveted prize include the works *Sounds from the Beach* by Ted Hearne and *Quartet* by Michael Gilbertson. Discussing *DAMN*, the composer Ted Hearne praises the work stating "The work that's on that album is every bit as sophisticated and experimental as any music."² The board that made the decision to award Lamar the Pulitzer ultimately described the album as "a virtuosic song collection unified by its vernacular authenticity and rhythmic dynamism that offers affecting vignettes capturing the complexity of modern African-American life."³

¹ Joe Coscarelli, "Kendrick Lamar Wins Pulitzer in 'Big Moment for Hip-Hop'" (*New York Times*, 2018).

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

DAMN represents an evolution in Lamar's craft as an artist and shares multiple characteristics with his previous studio album *To Pimp a Butterfly* (2015). Some of these shared features include similar themes discussing black culture, the influence of jazz and rhythm and blues, and the importance of large-scale structures. In both *To Pimp a Butterfly* and *DAMN*, Lamar's interest in large-scale structures is revealed. Within *DAMN*, Lamar utilizes formal elements to portray the contrasting themes of wickedness vs. weakness. Wickedness refers to his status as a rapper because of the need to establish his "street credibility," which contradicts the concept of weakness. He alludes to weakness as a vulnerability rather than a lack of strength. In this composition, Lamar grapples with the contradiction between his personae and his humanity. Additionally, he makes use of a retrogradable form where the album is designed to be played either forwards or in reverse order; this formal element is confirmed in the collector's edition of *DAMN* where the tracks are put in reverse order.

Throughout this study, I refer to Kendrick Lamar directly, but in order to acknowledge all of the artists involved in the production of the album I have provided a full list of credits for the album in the appendix. I believe that this is significant because although Lamar is certainly the driving force and the leading composer of the album, it is still important to recognize the efforts of all of the other composers and producers who were involved in the work's conception and development.

One final topic to address before moving into the body of this work includes Kendrick Lamar and other rappers' use of explicit content. The often-controversial content present in rap and hip-hop music presents a unique set of problems for theorists. Some authors may opt to completely avoid the discussion of the lyric content due to its explicit nature. Others may even question the authenticity of the artist or suggest that their use of explicit (or even sometimes

nonsensical) content is an element of satire. However, taking this approach can be misguided at times.

To gain a better understanding of why many rap artists such as Kendrick Lamar, Kanye West, T.I. (Clifford Joseph Harris, Jr.), etc., make use of explicit content one must consider the social content of rap and hip-hop and the role that this music plays in the expression of black culture. Anthony B. Pinn, in his article “Real Nigga Conditions: Kendrick Lamar, Grotesque Realism, and the Open Body” discusses the social aspect of rap music and outlines the concept of the “barbaric personae.” Within this text, he compares the rap artist to a blues musician (for example, the “trickster” or “barbaric personae”). In a way, the rap artist is portraying a particular character or personae that is often a reflection of their environment or the perceived expectations of the listener. He outlines how rappers such as Lamar create personas within their works that contradict the social purity that is often typical in society. Pinn demonstrates this concept writing:

Hip-hop is fundamentally a poetic demonstration of the grotesque (as Bakhtin names it) of life circumstances over against the illusions of containment, social cleanliness, and cultural fixity. The grotesque and open body is a complex and contradictory body—e.g., the structure of experience—as porous, or open to various arrangements of encounter. It is penetrated by the world and it penetrates the world—defying in the process any easy description and truncated coding of meaning. Put differently, this open body—the African American—is marked by structures of being that are layered, thick, complex and that defy restrictions.⁴

From this quote by Pinn, it is made evident that the rebellious or “grotesque” characters that rappers portray in their music play a significant role in the perception of their work by society.

This concept of the “grotesque” relates to the explicit content that is often present in rap.

Although rap is often criticized because of its content it should be noted that artists such as T.I.

⁴ Anthony B. Pinn, "Real Nigga Conditions: Kendrick Lamar, Grotesque Realism, and the Open Body," In, *Kendrick Lamar and the Making of Black Meaning*. (231-244: Routledge, 2020), 235.

argue for the necessity of revealing content in rap music. In response to the criticism of the genre over violent materials, T.I. has stated "People need to take into consideration that hip-hop traditionally has always been a reflection of the environment. So, if you want to change the content of the music, change the environment of the artist. And he won't have such negative things to say."⁵ Theorists should take artists at their word; rappers often use abrasive content to reflect the harsh realities that many African Americans face during their life. Kendrick Lamar, who grew up in Compton, California, is aware of these realities as he witnessed the city's gang culture firsthand during his childhood. Although rappers can make use of satire, it is important to attempt to take the artist at their words (when appropriate).

This study is not chiefly concerned with the meaning of the text used within *DAMN*, but it addresses the lyrics and their interactions with the musical delivery. Any discussion of the lyrics and their meaning within this work is primarily aimed at achieving a better understanding of the implications of their musical delivery by Lamar. This project seeks to better understand the principles of design involved in the interaction between the lyrics and Lamar's musical decisions throughout the work. Furthermore, this project is intended to provide a straightforward method of analysis for rap music. The greatest strength of the methodology that is presented within this work is its consideration of the layered connections that are present within rap music between the background beat, the text layer, and the performance layer.

⁵ *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah*, Season 21, episode 152, "Tip T.I. Harris," Directed by Chuck O'Neil, written by Zhubin Parang and Daniel Radosh, featuring Trevor Noah and T.I., Aired September 12, 2016, ViacomCBS Domestic Media Networks. <https://www.cc.com/video/yf2os5/the-daily-show-with-trevor-noah-exclusive-t-i-extended-interview>.

Chapter I: Methodology

One of the unfortunate challenges of composing a study of this type is the reality that there is a lack of resources concerning rap and hip-hop music. Despite rap's commercial success as a genre, there are very few theoretical writings that discuss the musical characteristics present in rap. Furthermore, finding resources that specifically discuss the musical elements at play in Kendrick Lamar's *DAMN* has posed a greater challenge. Many of the resources available at this moment are first and foremost concerned with the social discourse present in rap music. One substantial work that discusses the social aspects present in Lamar's *DAMN* includes *Kendrick Lamar and the Making of Black Meaning*. This source is a collection of articles that are concerned with the social discourse present in *To Pimp a Butterfly* and *DAMN*. Although the social aspect of rap music is significant, this study is primarily concerned with the musical features present in rap.

Four of the important authors whose principles have guided this study include Kyle Adams, Robert Komaniecki, Mitchell Ohriner, and Benjamin K. Wadsworth. Although their writings are not focused on Kendrick Lamar's album *DAMN*, their works have helped to establish a methodology for analyzing and discussing rap music. Kyle Adams is one of the earliest theorists to discuss the technical features present in rap and hip-hop music. Within his studies, he makes use of charts to outline the interactions between the lyrical and musical content found in rap music. One of the guiding principles of his analysis is the division of measures into sixteen equal parts. He argues that many rap and hip-hop artists compose their music in this way and cites the creative process of rappers such as A Tribe Called Quest and OutKast.

Robert Komaniecki's work is a helpful resource to this study as he provides a discussion of the stylistic features of "flow." In his dissertation "Analyzing the Parameters of Flow in Rap

Music,” Komaniecki analyzes various rap songs to explore the pitch and rhythmic elements that are implemented in an artist’s flow. Mitchell Ohriner is another author whose works have been important to the development of this study. Specifically, Ohriner’s book *Flow: The Rhythmic Voice in Rap Music* provides valuable insight into the technical features of an artist’s flow. He addresses the complications that theorists have in defining flow as some writers define it as purely musical while others argue that flow also incorporates stylistic elements. Ohriner clarifies the definition of flow in rap music by expanding upon the work of other theorists such as Kyle Adams. Ohriner responds to the problems of identifying flow, stating:

One could answer this question by observing the entirety of rap music, but I would like to constrain the search. There is an inherent contradiction in the ways emcees describe flow. Emcees flow over instrumental streams (usually called “the beat”) that, within verses, change very little. Samples and drum patterns repeat endlessly. To flow over the instrumental streams accurately and continuously implies matching this stasis. But emcees also clearly value originality and inventiveness. These two values—fidelity and invention—must be constantly rebalanced to maintain the integrity of the flow while avoiding boredom. The necessity for change gives rise to the concept of “flipping the flow,” where the flow—whatever that is—is altered midverse. In most cases, emcees flip the flow without comment, but occasionally they call attention in the lyrics themselves to the change in flow. In those cases, we can examine what changes musically when the flow flips, in order to determine which musical parameters constitute flow. Identifying these parameters, in turn, clarifies how we ought to represent rap music in transcriptions in order to enable comparisons between verses and artists. I will focus on four such parameters in this section: syllable duration, position of rhyme, the durations that separate rhymes, and the durations that separate accented syllables.⁶

Ohriner argues that an artist’s flow is more than simply their rhythmic delivery; the artist’s flow is also representative of stylistic manipulation of their text. Additionally, he argues that the use of stability and contrast against a beat within an artist’s work constitutes the primary element in defining flow. He comes to this conclusion by taking into account how rappers discuss the aspect of flow within the rap community. Furthermore, he factors in how theorists have attempted to

⁶ Mitchell Ohriner, *Flow: The Rhythmic Voice in Rap Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 16.

define it. This provides a refreshing take on the definition of flow in rap music as Ohriner, by opting for this approach, avoids alienating the term from the practical definition that artists already associate with the word while also giving consideration to the theoretical perspective on flow.

Finally, the work of Benjamin K. Wadsworth provides a valuable discussion of the components of form in Lamar's music. In his presentation "Rhyme, Metrical Tension, and Formal Function in the Flow of Kendrick Lamar," Wadsworth describes the significance of structures such as the verse and chorus within Lamar's music. Furthermore, he discusses the "verse-crisis" that will be addressed in greater detail later in this study.⁷ Although other authors have been referenced in this study, these four have been instrumental in the evolution of this work.

In addition to the resources discussed above, this study also features the use of popular resources such as news articles, reviews, interviews, etc. Due to the popular nature of *DAMN*, it is necessary to utilize these sources as they provide an analysis of the work's development and cultural relevance. One of the most significant resources implemented within this work includes *Genius*.⁸ *Genius* is a website where users curate song lyrics. This resource is valuable because it contains an accurate listing of all the lyrics in Kendrick's Lamar's *DAMN*. Furthermore, *Genius* also features commentary on the meaning of each of the songs in the album and their lyrics.

Another challenge involved in the development of this work is the foundation of an efficient methodology for analyzing and discussing rap music. Rap music only exists through

⁷ Benjamin K. Wadsworth, "Rhyme, Metrical Tension, and Formal Function in the Flow of Kendrick Lamar," Presentation (Music Theory Southeast Appalachian State University, Boone, NC, March 14, 2020).

⁸ "DAMN. by Kendrick Lamar," Genius, n.d. <https://genius.com/albums/Kendrick-lamar/Damn>.

recordings and is not available in published notation. Due to the lack of notation, I have transcribed all of the songs that are discussed in this work. It is important to bear in mind that these rhythmic transcriptions are open to interpretation as rappers often incorporate free, speech-like patterns into their rhythmic delivery. There are various methods that have been used by theorists to transcribe the rhythmic patterns in rap and hip-hop music. In order to make the notation as accessible as possible to other musicians, this study makes use of traditional notation.

Two authors that make use of divergent systems of notating rap music include Kyle Adams and Mitchell Ohriner. Kyle Adams, in his article "Aspects of the Music/Text Relationship in Rap," makes use of traditional notation combined with charts to show where rap artists place their words in time.⁹ The charts in the article are split into sixteen equal parts where each block in the chart represents a sixteenth-note in a measure in common time. Adams also makes use of charts to reveal the rhyme scheme within rap songs. These charts from his article "On the Metrical Techniques of Flow in Rap Music" utilize color coding to reveal the rhyme scheme present in the songs that Adams discusses.¹⁰

⁹ Kyle Adams, "Aspects of the Music/Text Relationship in Rap" (*Music Theory Online* 14, no. 2, 2008), Line 14.

¹⁰ Kyle Adams, "On the Metrical Techniques of Flow in Rap Music" (*Music Theory Online* 15, no. 5, 2009), Example 1d.

Ex. 1.1. Example 1d. “Wu-Gambinos” by Raekwon from the Article “On the Metrical Techniques of Flow in Rap Music” by Kyle Adams.

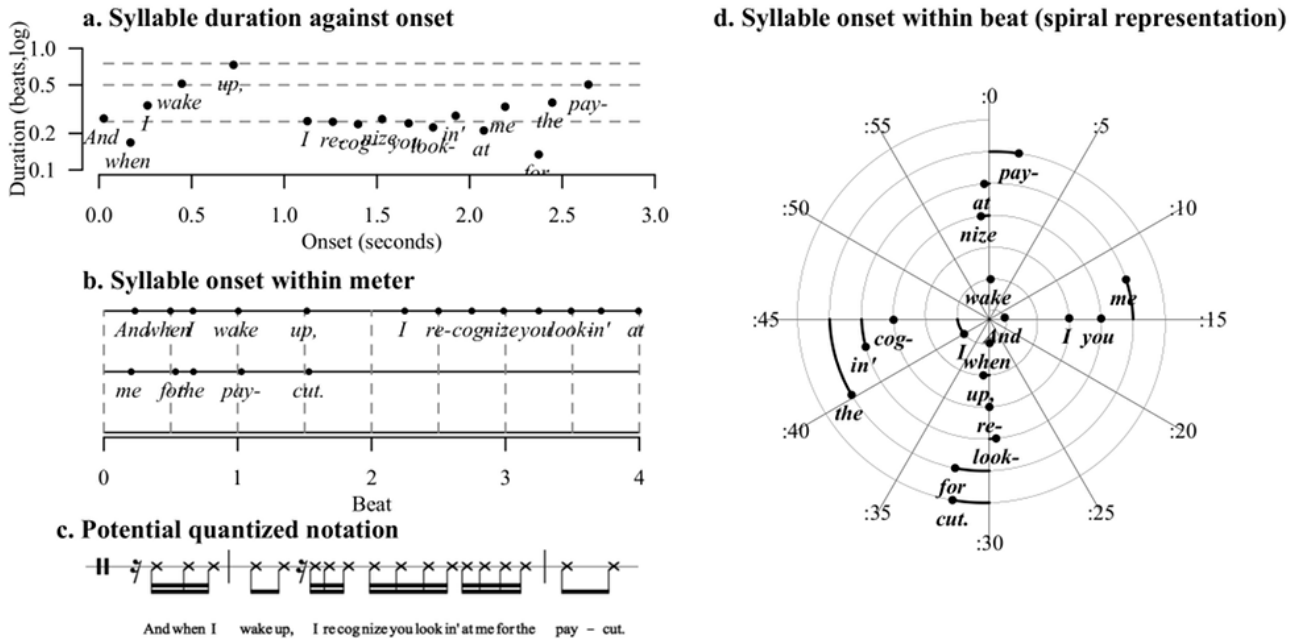
	1	x	y	z	2	x	y	z	3	x	y	z	4	x	y	z
1																
2	CROWN		is	SHIN-	in'	we're	BLUND-		din'	like	some		DIA-	monds	gold	'm re-
3	CLI-	nin'	in	the	SKY	on	a	cloud		with	sil-	ver	LIN-	ings	dou-	ble
4	BREAST-	ed			Bul-	let-	proof	VEST-	ed		well	pro-	TEC-	ted		
5	The	heart	the	rib-	CAGE		the	chest		and	so-	lar	PLE-	xus	cast-	in'
6	STONES				crack-	in'	two	hun-	dred-	and	six		BONES			and watch
7	yo'	ass		get	blown		to a	sea of	FIRE		and				STONE	
8		How	dare	you	'proach	it	with		DIM		poems			the	ov-	er fiend
9	like			no-	ah	bean		green		souls		with a		sol-	dier	mean
10		the	grand	ex-	qui-	site	im-	pe-		ri-	al	wiz-	ard	oh	is	it the R[j]-
11	za	rec-	tor	come	to	pay	your	ass	a	vi-	sit			Lo-	cal	bi-
12	chem-	i-	cal		un-	i-	ver-	sal	gi-	ant	the	black		ge-	ne-	ral Lick-
13	shots	to	Da-	vy		CROCK	ett		on	the	bi-	cen-	tenn-	i-	al	Hap-
14		mil-	len-	i-	um	two	thou-	sand	mic-	ro-	chips		two	shots		of pen-
15	i-	cil-	lin	burst	out		pure a-	dre-	na-	lin	son	it's	time	for	bou-	tin'
16	it's	a	mile-	age	you're		re-	sem-	blin	nig-	gaz	who	like	fol-	low-	in'
17	Trapped	in-	side	your	pro-	duct	like	a	ge-	nie	in-	side	the	bot-	tle	and...

Although both of these systems (charts, traditional notation) are useful for his articles, they are not without their weaknesses. While these charts are useful for rap music that makes use of sixteenth-note patterns, it would be difficult to notate different metrical divisions such as triplets in this system. Ben Duinker, in his article “Good Things Come in Threes: Triplet Flow in Recent Hip-Hop Music,” discusses how triplet flow is a style that has become more popular in rap music recently.¹¹ Triplet flow is utilized by Kendrick Lamar in *DAMN*, therefore making use of Adams’s equally divided charting notation falls short when analyzing different subdivisions of the beat. Ohriner’s article, “Lyric, Rhythm, and Non-Alignment in the Second Verse of Kendrick Lamar’s ‘Momma’” features the use of spiral notation (in addition to other notation systems such as standard rhythmic notation) to show the rhythmic alignment and non-alignment in Lamar’s music. This notation is useful for his study because it showcases the rhythmic patterns that

¹¹ Ben Duinker, "Good Things Come in Threes: Triplet Flow in Recent Hip-Hop Music" (Popular Music 38, no. 3, 2019), 423-424.

Lamar uses in his songs. Ohriner takes a detail-oriented approach to reveal Lamar’s exact entry points down to the second.¹²

Ex. 1.2. Example 1 from Ohriner, “Lyric, Rhythm, and Non-Alignment in the Second Verse of Kendrick Lamar’s ‘Momma’” showing the Syllable Placement in Lamar’s “Alright.”



Although this approach works for Ohriner’s writing, this study will not engage in this level of detail as it is not essential for this work. This study has been designed to be as accessible to musicians as possible, therefore, it features the use of standard notation. This work aims to avoid forcing its audience to read a new system of rhythmic notation that, for this study, would be unnecessary. Additionally, traditional rhythmic notation supplies the reader with the information for this study that is essential.

A Generative Theory of Tonal Music by Fred Lerdahl and Ray S. Jackendoff is also a significant resource for the discussion of rhythm. In the section of this book on rhythm, the writers create a distinction between meter and groupings. The authors discuss how meter is made

¹² Mitchell Ohriner, "Lyric, Rhythm, and Non-Alignment in the Second Verse of Kendrick Lamar’s ‘Momma’" (*Music Theory Online* 25, no. 1, 2019), Example 1.

up of beats that are structured hierarchically whereas grouping is made up of larger units that are arranged hierarchically.¹³ This difference is significant because groupings are divisions such as phrases and periods whereas meter is the separation of beats within measures. Meter is especially concerned with the placement of emphasis within metrical patterns. This text is useful for the analysis of rap music as its rhythmic concepts can be applied to the genre.

Poetic devices also play a significant role in the formation of interest within rap music. This study carefully examines text elements such as rhyme, enjambment, elision, anaphora, and epistrophe. These devices form relationships with the musical elements to captivate the listener. Throughout *DAMN*, Lamar reinforces his text through the musical execution of his lyrics. Furthermore, he manipulates the rhythmic and text interactions by creating musical lines that either support the natural rhythm of the text or divert from the natural prosody. Through his control of text elements, it becomes apparent that Lamar has purposefully designed his lyrics and his performance of the text to create a sonic world that supports the established narrative that is presented in *DAMN*.

One of the most important concepts that is addressed in this work includes rhythmic texture. This is a term that was inspired by the work of Mitchell Ohriner who discusses the concept of texture in his book *Flow: The Rhythmic Voice in Rap Music*. Although Ohriner does not specifically use the term “rhythmic texture,” one can see that he alludes to its devices. For example, Ohriner addresses the text and rhythmic relationships within rap music throughout his book writing that “Emcees do not have to align syllables to the beat, but we are to understand the discrepancies between syllables and beats as a roughness that gives texture to the flow of rap,

¹³ Fred Lerdahl and Ray Jackendoff, *A Generative Theory of Tonal Music* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1983), 25-26.

just as (poetic) rhythm gives texture to (poetic) meter.”¹⁴ From reading this excerpt in the text, the connections between layers or interactions between the rhythmic and lyric content in rap music became apparent. This realization was significant because these layered connections are one of the most important and unique considerations in the formal design of rap music. In rap music, there are three main layers at play: the first layer is the background beat (what Ohriener refers to as “instrumental streams”¹⁵) that the rapper is performing over, the second layer is the text that the artist performs, and the third layer (and likely the most important one) is the rapper’s delivery of the text.

¹⁴ Ohriener, *Flow: The Rhythmic Voice*, 15.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

Chapter II: Formal Considerations

The formal design featured in *DAMN* is one of its most compelling features. Lamar's concept of *DAMN* as a unified composition creates the album's continuously developing narrative. The thematic unification in *DAMN* and *To Pimp a Butterfly* displays an approach to formal design in rap that is unique to Lamar. His diligence to his craft is exemplified in his creative process which he discusses in detail in interviews. In his interview for Apple Music with Zane Lowe, he discusses his artistic process and the inspiration behind *DAMN*. In this interview, Lamar states:

Prior to me going and recording the record everything is probably eighty percent premeditated first, ya know, before I actually put the words to the referenced track or go in the studio and lay down vocals. Everything for me is about execution. 'Cause I can go on with a thousand ideas, but if I'm not executing it right it doesn't feel home to me. So, I like to put a lot of different things in, ya know, word plays and messages in my music 'cause I want it to live further than two weeks...¹⁶

From this quote by Lamar, it is clear that he is purposeful in how he structures the lyric content within his compositions and that he spends considerable time planning before producing a record.

Furthermore, Lamar responds to the open-ended questions that are posed within the work. One might consider how he avoids answering whether or not "BLOOD" functions as the beginning or the end of the album. When questioned by the interviewer on the dual function of "BLOOD" as either "the beginning of the end or the end of the beginning," Lamar protects the ambiguity of the song by stating "I can't tell you that. That's what I can't tell you. Come on now that's the whole thing."¹⁷ Based on this interview and Lamar's credentials as an artist, it is

¹⁶ Kendrick Lamar, "Damn' Interview," interviewed by Zane Lowe (Apple Music YouTube Channel, April 27, 2017).

¹⁷ Ibid.

apparent that he wants to leave concepts within the album open to interpretation. By making use of this artistic approach, he offers the listener the opportunity to form their own opinions concerning the questions that arise over the course of the record (i.e. wickedness vs. weakness).

The immersive narrative established in *DAMN* is supported by Lamar's formal decisions. This album, more so than Lamar's previous works, reveals his detail-oriented artistic process. The title of the work *DAMN* is inspired by the religious concept of damnation as well as the saying "damned if I do, damned if I don't." Lamar confirms this when questioned about the name of the album in an interview on the radio show *Big Boy's Neighborhood* where he states "It was so many different ways you could put it. In my head, it was like from concept 'damned if I do, damned if I don't.' The loudness of the record – it just screamed that in my face. When I think of 'DNA', when I think of 'HUMBLE', when I think about these records, they just felt like that."¹⁸ The origin of the title of the album is also reinforced within the bridge of the song "ELEMENT" where Lamar recites the lines "Damned if I do, if I don't / Goddamn us all if you won't / Damn, damn, damn, it's a goddamn shame / You ain't front in line, get out the goddamn way."

One of the key concerns displayed throughout the album is the thematic development of wickedness vs. weakness. This concept is introduced in the first (or last) song of the album entitled "BLOOD" where the text "Is it wickedness? / Is it weakness? / You decide / Are we gonna live or die?" is stated. This theme is paradoxical because the concepts of wickedness and weakness are in opposition to one another. Lamar introduces paradox throughout the album which can be seen as a development of the thematic idea presented at the beginning of "BLOOD." His use of paradox is revealed through the titles used for the tracks in the album and

¹⁸ Kendrick Lamar, "Kendrick Lamar on Damn., His Sister's Car & Being The G.O.A.T." interviewed by Big Boy, (BigBoyTV YouTube Channel, June, 2017).

their content. For example, the songs “PRIDE” and “HUMBLE” as well as the songs “LUST” and “LOVE” can be seen as being paradoxical in nature.

Lamar’s use of paradox plays a significant role in the form of the album, where songs with themes of wickedness vs. weakness are in alternation. Ex. 2.1 lists all of the songs and their association with either weakness or wickedness. The songs have been categorized according to both their text and musical content. For example, “XXX” is categorized as being in the wickedness category because of its suggestive title and lyrics.

Ex. 2.1. Diagram of Wickedness vs. Weakness within DAMN.

1. “BLOOD”	Weakness
2. “DNA”	Wickedness
3. “YAH”	Weakness
4. “ELEMENT”	Wickedness
5. “FEEL”	Weakness
6. “LOYALTY”	Weakness
7. “PRIDE”	Wickedness
8. “HUMBLE”	Weakness
9. “LUST”	Wickedness
10. “LOVE”	Weakness
11. “XXX”	Wickedness
12. “FEAR”	Weakness
13. “GOD”	Wickedness
14. “DUCKWORTH”	Weakness

Furthermore, the intense musical content in “XXX” also supports this categorization. Although many of the songs within the album fit this scheme, there are songs that are ambiguous in terms of their categorization. For example, in spite of its title and the relaxed feel of the song “GOD,”

it has been placed into the wickedness category. The reasoning behind this decision is due to the nature of the text materials within the song reflected in coarse lines such as “Don’t judge me! My mama caught me with a strap / Don’t judge me! I was young fuckin’ all the brats / Don’t judge me! Aimin’ at your head for a stack.” In this song, Lamar establishes a paradox between the title of the song, “GOD” (associated with holiness, righteousness, etc.), and its explicit text. It is important to note that the placement of these songs into one category or the other is certainly open to interpretation. The goal of this diagram is not to provide a definitive answer concerning Lamar’s strategy of organization, rather it is to explore one logical explanation for the order of tracks that also supports the narrative within the work.

The large-scale structure of the album features the use of retrograde. The tracks in *DAMN* are organized where the album can be experienced from the beginning to the end or in reverse order. This characteristic is confirmed by the collector’s edition of the album, where the songs are placed in reverse order. The retrogradable structure within the album relates to the contemplative nature of the work; in this work, Lamar makes use of an introspective narrative where the decisions of the characters in the album are questioned.

The consequences of the characters’ decisions are exemplified within the songs “BLOOD” and “DUCKWORTH.” These songs are on opposite ends of the album and both may function as either the beginning or the end of the work. “BLOOD” and “DUCKWORTH” both reference mortality. This can be seen in the final lines of “BLOOD” where Lamar recites the text “She replied, ‘Oh, yes, you have lost something / You’ve lost ... your life.’” Following the final line of text, a gunshot is heard within the track which may serve as a point of foreshadowing or as a conclusive moment. The use of a gunshot sound is also heard at the end of “DUCKWORTH,” where Lamar contemplates the potential harm that may have come to him or

his father if the KFC where his dad was employed was robbed. Lamar's scrutiny of the events within "DUCKWORTH" brings light to the damaging effects of violence. This scrutiny is demonstrated at the end of the song where he completes the narrative of the work:

Reverse the manifest and good karma, and I'll tell you why
You take two strangers and put 'em in random predicaments
Give 'em a soul, so they can make their own choices and live with it
Twenty years later, them same strangers, you make 'em meet again
Inside recording studios where they reapin' their benefits
Then you start remindin' them about that chicken incident
Whoever thought the greatest rapper would be from coincidence?
Because if Anthony killed Ducky, Top Dawg could be servin' life
While I grew up without a father and die in a gunfight¹⁹

The theme of contemplation throughout the album is supported by this text as Lamar references the concept of reversal²⁰ at the end of the song. References to the concept of reversal or undoing include the text "We gon' put it in reverse" heard at the beginning of "DUCKWORTH." Another example includes the use of the text "So, I was takin' a walk the other day" which is heard in both "BLOOD" and "DUCKWORTH." Lamar's placement of this line is compelling because in "BLOOD" he places this text at the beginning of the song, whereas in "DUCKWORTH," this line is heard at the end of the song. Lamar makes use of literal reversal as well as he introduces reversed audio multiple times within *DAMN*. For instance, in "DUCKWORTH," the reverse audio effect is heard at the end of the song where the audio from other tracks (such as "DNA") is heard in reverse.

¹⁹ "'DUCKWORTH.' by Kendrick Lamar," Genius, n.d. <https://genius.com/Kendrick-lamar-duckworth-lyrics>.

²⁰ References to reversal could possibly be related to Jacques Derrida's Theory of Deconstruction. Throughout *DAMN*, Lamar deconstructs various topics. Some of the topics that are deconstructed include blackness (the state of the black community), Lamar's personal history (i.e. the narrative of "DUCKWORTH"), and the role of the rapper in society.

Lamar's references to reversal are thematically related to the concept of wickedness vs. weakness because *DAMN* appears to function as an introspective examination of Lamar as an artist, his upbringing, and his community. Furthermore, he examines his own "street credibility" and reinforces his credentials as a "real" artist. Lamar appears to be very conscious of how he is perceived inside and outside of the black community. He even implements satire to illustrate the absurdity of establishing one's "street credentials." For instance, within the song "XXX" Lamar states the hypothetical character "Johnny," "don't wanna go to school no mo'," and that he "caught a body yesterday out hustlin.'" *Genius* points out how these lines resemble lyrics from Dr. Dre's 1999 track "Bang Bang" where Dre states "Johnny got a shotgun / And he ain't even strong enough to cock one / Fuck trying to job hunt."²¹ Lamar signed a record deal with Dr. Dre's label, Aftermath; therefore, the resemblance of these lines may not simply be coincidental as he had contact with Dr. Dre.²²

Thematic unity within *DAMN* is vital to the development of the work. Within this album, Lamar establishes thematic unity through his use of conceptualization and allusion. Throughout the album, Lamar makes use of conceptualization where, within individual tracks, he attempts to concisely encapsulate the meaning of the song's title. All of the songs within the album (and the title of the album itself) are one-word subjects that are capitalized and followed by a period.²³ This stylistic choice leaves room within each song for Lamar to create a sonic world that embodies the concept for which the song is named. His approach in this album creates an

²¹ "'Bang Bang' by Dr. Dre," *Genius*, n.d. <https://genius.com/Dr-dre-bang-bang-lyrics>.

²² Lauron Kehrer, "Lamar [Duckworth], Kendrick" (*Grove Music Online*, 30 Dec. 2019).

²³ The use of a period possibly symbolizes a stop at the end of each title. This would support Lamar's use of conceptualization within the album as each song is focused on a single topic or idea. The use of the period indicates singularity within each track because the period indicates an ending point (no other ideas will follow).

environment for contrast because he includes titles that are opposite of one another. On a larger level, the use of conceptualization is important because all of the tracks together are designed to capture the spirit of the entire work, *DAMN*.

Lamar's use of allusion throughout the album creates meaningful connections that penetrate nearly every song within the composition. Over the course of this work, Lamar references both texts from other songs within the album and from outside sources. Phrases that are used multiple times throughout the work include examples such as "ain't nobody prayin' for me" and "what happens on Earth stays on Earth" (that are taken from songs within *DAMN*).²⁴ The use of these phrases across multiple tracks in the album showcases his interest in creating a work that establishes meaningful associations across multiple different songs. Lamar makes various religious allusions within the album, and these phrases are reflective of that thematic content. Furthermore, he references other religious buzzwords such as "Israelite," "the Bible," and "God." In fact, the title of the track "YAH" behaves as a double entendre where it is used as both the slang for "yeah" and as a reference to the word "Yahweh" (the Hebrew word for God). Lamar comments on his religious position when asked exclaiming that "I always felt like God used me as a vessel period. Whether to show my flaws, whether to show my intellect, to show my pain, to show my hurt, to share my stories. To share his message. All across the board, that's me personally. That's always been a vessel. I could say the nastiest thing on record period, but I still feel like that's a vessel, you need to hear that. Because I can't sugarcoat the reality of what's goin' on out here."²⁵ By investigating Lamar's artistic strategies, such as conceptualization and

²⁴ The phrase "what happens on Earth stays on Earth" is possibly an allusion to the cliché slogan "what happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas." This saying could act as a metaphor between life and Las Vegas because the slogan for Vegas is representative of the free spiritedness that is often associated with the city.

²⁵ Kendrick Lamar, "Damn' Interview."

allusion, it is possible to gain a better perspective on how *DAMN* functions as a comprehensive work of art.

Lamar reinforces the broader narrative within the album through the manipulation of local structures. Rap music, like other popular genres, features the use of sections such as the verse, bridge, chorus, intro, outro, etc. Lamar alters the expected ordering of these sections to match the narrative. Furthermore, he introduces tension by occasionally removing the sections expected by the listener within the structure of songs. Multiple tracks throughout *DAMN* showcase varied placement of the musical segments discussed above.

Throughout the course of the album, he introduces varying levels of conflict by adding or removing sections such as a verse or chorus to a song. In addition to adding or removing these elements, he also changes the position of the sections to surprise the listener. This manipulation of the expected formal pacing within songs is demonstrated in the song “DNA.” This song is one of the key tracks within the album because it introduces significant thematic content that is further developed throughout the composition. Unlike many of the tracks in the album, this song does not contain a chorus. Instead, the song is made up of two long verses that are separated by a short bridge. With this formal design, Lamar creates conflict because the listener would expect to hear rap’s more typical verse-chorus structure.

Another technique illustrated in “DNA” includes the verse-crisis, a technique discussed by Benjamin Wadsworth in his theoretical presentation entitled “Rhyme, Metrical Tension, and Formal Function in the Flow of Kendrick Lamar.”²⁶ In this presentation, Wadsworth discusses the musical elements related to rap such as form and metrical considerations. He also analyzes the relationship between meter and rhyme placement. Wadsworth defines the verse-crisis and

²⁶ Wadsworth, “Rhyme, Metrical Tension, and Formal Function.”

discusses Lamar's use of the technique stating that a "verse-crisis suggests an intensification to a climax through shorter durations between rhymes, a chorus through memorable names, and either a verse or chorus depending on which beat-classes are rhymed. In Lamar's songs, this role signals impending disaster."²⁷ The use of verse-crisis by Lamar is signaled in the second verse of "DNA" where Lamar makes use of a rhythmic flow that is intensified through both his use of faster rhythms and his more fierce delivery when compared to the first verse. In contrast to the first verse, Lamar implements triplet figures (triplet figures are not heard in the first verse) which leads to the increased pacing of his text. Additionally, Lamar intensifies the tone of his voice where, by the end of the song, he begins to expressively shout his lyrics.

Another example of Lamar's use of the verse-crisis is demonstrated within the song "XXX," where Lamar introduces increased tension within the middle of the first verse. Beginning with the line "Yesterday, I got a call, like, from my dog, like 101" and up until the bridge, Lamar implements more intensity through both the timbre of his voice and the increased rhythmic delivery of his text. In this section, Lamar creates contrast against what was heard previously in the verse to support the harsh nature of the lyrics. The crude nature of the lyrics is reflected in the text presented because Lamar discusses harsh realities within the black community:

²⁷ Ibid.

I catch a nigga leavin' service if that's all I got
I chip a nigga, then throw the blower in his lap
Walk myself to the court like, "Bitch, I did that!"
Ain't no Black Power when your baby killed by a coward
I can't even keep the peace, don't you fuck with one of ours
It be murder in the street, it be bodies in the hour
Ghetto bird be on the street, paramedics on the dial
Let somebody touch my momma, touch my sister, touch my woman
Touch my daddy, touch my niece, touch my nephew, touch my brother
You should chip a nigga, then throw the blower in his lap
Matter fact, I'm 'bout to speak at this convention, call you back—²⁸

Lamar's use of the verse-crisis to express jarring text is significant because the text layer of "XXX" is supported by his musical and performative decisions. In "DNA" as well as "XXX", Lamar creates a sonic world that contains tension and strain that directly relates to the meaning of his lyrics. As pointed out by Wadsworth, the verse-crisis is a cue indicating that catastrophe is forthcoming.²⁹ In the examples discussed above, Lamar references problems that are related to being black in America and draws attention to these issues through the application of the verse-crisis which is reflected in his use of rebellious lyrics and his musical interpretation of the text.

Through the formal decisions made by Lamar, he generates a complete narrative that is revealed over the album's journey. He goes a step further in his formal design by implementing the use of a retrogradable structure. This use of retrograde relates to Lamar's contemplation of the consequences related to decision-making; it is demonstrated by the dual functionality of the songs "BLOOD" and "DUCKWORTH" as both beginning and ending points for the work. Additionally, the message of the importance of one's decision is supported by the opening lines of "BLOOD" where the narrator states "Is it wickedness? / Is it weakness? / You decide / Are we gonna live or die?" The choice between wickedness or weakness plays an important thematic and

²⁸ "'XXX.' by Kendrick Lamar." Genius, n.d.

²⁹ Wadsworth, "Rhyme, Metrical Tension, and Formal Function."

formal role within *DAMN* and is illustrated primarily through the use of paradox. The retrogradable structure in the album is indicative of the decisions that are discussed throughout the work as the narrative within the album can be experienced differently according to whether the listener hears it from beginning to end or in reverse. By implementing this structure, Lamar permits the listener to be a part of the creative process through their preference of the listening order (they are able to alter the course of the narrative through their selection).

Lamar's local decisions concerning the placement of elements such as the verse or chorus also reinforce the story that unfolds within the work. He manipulates these formal elements to sustain tension and create interesting vessels for his lyric performance. Through careful examination of the composition, it becomes evident that within *DAMN*, Lamar reflects on his struggles with his identity as an artist, a role model, and a celebrity. To make a final note about the narrative within the album, one can reference Lamar's description of his two most recent records where he states "The best way for me to put it, *To Pimp a Butterfly* would be the idea of, the thought of changing the world, ya know, and how we work and how we approach things. *DAMN* would be the idea of I can't change the world until I change myself."³⁰

³⁰ Kendrick Lamar, "'Damn' Interview."

Chapter III: Overview of Rhythmic Texture

As discussed previously³¹, rhythmic texture in rap music is composed of three layers: the background beat featured, the artist's choice of text, and the artist's delivery of their selected text. The first layer is the background beat which is the music over which the artist performs. The beats used within the first layer in popular rap styles are almost always in 4/4 meter and make use of simple and repetitive harmonic patterns. The typical background beat used in popular rap styles, though simple, provides the foundation against which rappers perform their more rhythmically complex lines.

The second layer involved in rhythmic texture is the text that the artist decides to set. This layer is significant because it sets up an important conflict within songs. Words in the English language have natural prosody when spoken or even sung. Songwriters and composers have to be aware of these patterns when setting text in their music and often make creative decisions that adhere to or break the natural prosody found within our spoken language. Additionally, sentence structure plays a key role in how artists may set their text. Similar to individual words, sentences contain parts of their whole that are prone to being naturally stressed based on the inherent rhythm within the text. Like stressed syllables in a single mono- or polysyllabic word, individual words in sentences generate a natural pattern of stressed and unstressed words that may vary depending on the intended meaning of the text.

A rap song's lyrics may or may not agree with a typical 4/4 background beat. Through the text selected for their songs, rappers create expectations regarding the natural flow and pronunciation of words. Their choice of text sets the listener up for the third layer of rhythmic texture which is the rapper's delivery of their selected text. This final layer includes both the

³¹ Rhythmic texture discussed on Pg. 13.

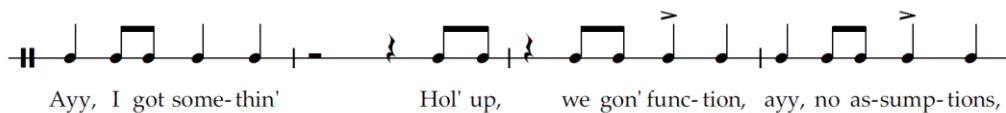
artist's rhythmic delivery of the text and their intonation. It should be noted that intonation includes both the inflection used by the artist and their choice of pronunciation; this study is primarily focused on rhythmic elements as there is not an in-depth investigation of pitch elements present in the artist's flow. The interplay between the text in rap music and an artist's delivery is a complex and compelling attribute of rap performance. Artists control this element through their decisions regarding rhythmic patterns and metrical concerns, as well as pronunciation and articulation.

The performative layer of rap music allows artists to generate conflict and resolution as they have the power to conform to or rebel against the listener's expectations of metrical placement and pronunciation. This is an important feature in rap music that is confirmed by the industry's use of the term "wordplay." Wordplay is the artist's manipulation of words to fit into their rhythmic delivery. Rappers often "mispronounce" words in order to make them fit into their rhyme or rhythmic scheme. For example, artists may condense multi-syllabic words into fewer syllables or change the stress placement or pronunciation of their text to fit their rhyme scheme. Wordplay also encompasses literary devices such as clever rhymes and double entendre.

The concept of rhythmic texture is a key element in popular rap music as the background beats used are often simple. The interest generated is achieved through an artist's manipulation of the elements of the three layers addressed above. This manipulation is demonstrated in *DAMN*'s exhibition of rhythmic and lyric interplay. The songs on *DAMN* feature both smooth and rough rhythmic textures. A rhythmic texture can be described as smooth when two or more of the elements are in alignment with one another; this smoothness can be related to consonance or rest. The song "LOVE" on the album features more rhythmic consonance than many of the other songs on the album. This rhythmic consonance aligns with the song's contemplation of the

commitment associated with being in love with someone. This is reflected in the first verse of the song where the rhythmic pattern (see Ex. 3.1) is repeated throughout the verse. This repeated rhythmic pattern features syncopation as it starts on beat two; however, this is still an example of a smoother texture as the three elements of rhythmic texture are in close alignment, and the rhythms used are consistent with the common time meter established by the background beat. The other two layers on top of the background beat in this example, the text, and its delivery, generate a smooth rhythmic texture as Lamar does not stray very far from the expected delivery of the text. For instance, the line “we gon’ function” features a rhythmic delivery that reflects the natural word stress in “function” where “func-“ is rhythmically accented through its placement on beat three compared to the placement of “-tion” on the weaker fourth beat of the measure. The rhythmic accent used by Lamar is representative of how one would naturally recite this line because he places emphasis on the first syllable of the word “function.”

Ex. 3.1. Example from the beginning of verse one from “LOVE.”



Another example of smooth rhythmic texture is heard later in the first verse of “LOVE.” In Ex. 3.2, the subject “life” of the repeated phrase “Only for life” lands on the strong beats of the meter. When reciting the phrase “Only for life,” the natural emphasis is on the word “life” as it is the most important word in the phrase and provides meaning where the previous words do not.

Ex. 3.2. Example from the Beginning of Verse One from "LOVE."

The image shows two lines of musical notation. The first line contains the lyrics: "Knock it out twice, I'm with it" followed by "On - ly for the night, I'm kidd - in'". The second line contains the lyrics: "On - ly for life, yeah, on - ly for life, yeah On - ly for life, let's get it". The notation consists of a treble clef, a key signature of one flat, and a 4/4 time signature. The melody is composed of eighth and quarter notes, with some notes beamed together. The lyrics are placed below the notes, with hyphens indicating syllables that span across two notes.

Ex. 3.2 demonstrates a smooth rhythmic texture because the text is delivered in a manner that fits the natural rhythm of the selected words. Additionally, it is performed in a way that aligns closely with the meter established by the background beat. Therefore, the three elements of rhythmic texture are in a state of consonance where there is little conflict between each layer. This study demonstrates that Lamar is also a master of generating intense conflict between these layers.

While the song "LOVE" features a more smooth rhythmic texture than the other songs in the album, it also has moments that demonstrate a more rough or coarse rhythmic texture as well; though, the examples that are discussed below make use of a smaller degree of rhythmic dissonance than other songs on the album, such as "DNA." Throughout the album, the balancing of rhythmic consonance vs. dissonance is utilized as a way of maintaining the listener's interest. Lamar balances rhythmic dissonance and consonance to generate conflict and resolution in his works. This concept is demonstrated in "LOVE" where Lamar makes use of a second verse that is more rhythmically dissonant and varied than the first verse.

Rhythmic dissonance is demonstrated in the second verse through Lamar's use of rhythmic displacement. In the opening line of the second verse, Lamar delivers the beginning of the line on the upbeat rather than on the downbeat. This creates conflict between the sentence structure used by Lamar and his rhythmic delivery because these two layers are out of alignment; instead of the sentence beginning on the established strong beat of the meter (beat one), Lamar

begins a beat earlier. The line that follows, “We ain’t got no time to waste” similarly starts on the weaker second beat of the measure.

Ex. 3.3. Example from the Beginning of Verse Two from “LOVE.”

The image shows two lines of musical notation on a single staff. The first line contains the lyrics: "I'm on the way We ain't got no time to waste Popp-in' your gum on the way Am I in the". The second line contains the lyrics: "way? I don't wan' pres-sure you none I want your bless-ing to-day Oh, by the". Above the notes, there are several triplet markings (a '3' over a bracketed group of three notes). The first line has triplets over the notes for "way", "We ain't", "got", "no", "time", "to", "waste", "Popp-in'", "your", "gum", "on", "the", "way", "Am", "I", and "in". The second line has triplets over the notes for "way?", "I", "don't", "wan'", "pres-sure", "you", "none", "I", "want", "your", "bless-ing", "to-day", and "Oh, by".

Notice that in this example from “LOVE,” there is elision where multiple lines begin or end within individual measures without rest, whereas, in the first verse, the movement from each line of text to the next occurred more slowly (about one line per measure.) In addition, Lamar begins to create groupings of three that are separated by groupings of two in these opening lines that conflict with the 4/4 meter of the background beat and create a sensation of multiple meters occurring simultaneously (see Ex. 3.4). These patterns of two- and three-quarter-notes occur in the recurring pattern: 2+3+3+2. This pattern, as shown in Ex. 3.4, is maintained during the entire verse until the last measure where there is a pickup that leads into the return of the chorus. The alternating groupings of three and two in the second verse establish a pattern that distorts the expected metrical emphasis (see the bracketed markings in the example below). Moreover, Lamar makes extensive use of triplets throughout this verse which provides contrast against the first verse which was almost exclusively made up of eighth- and sixteenth-note rhythms. Through the increased rhythmic dissonance displayed in the second verse of “LOVE,” one can see that Lamar increases the tension between the first and second verses because the second verse of the song features more conflict between the rhythmic layers than the first verse.

Ex. 3.4. Transcription of verse two from “LOVE” illustrating groupings of two and three.

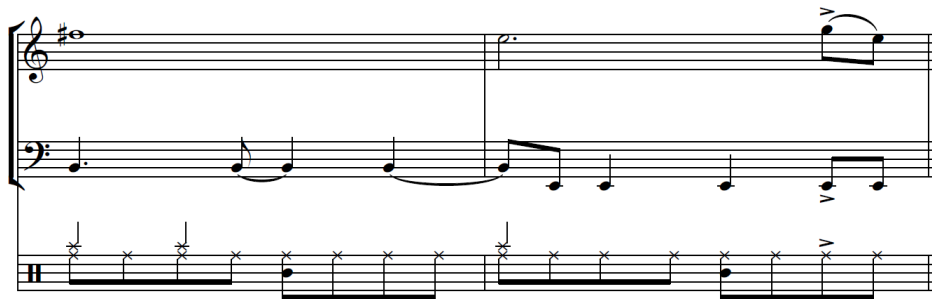
The image shows a transcription of the second verse of the song "LOVE" by Lamar. The music is written on a single staff with a treble clef and a common time signature. The lyrics are: "I'm on the way We ain't got no time to waste Popp-in' your gum on the way Am I in the way? I don't wan' pres-sure you none I want your bless-ing to-day Oh, by the way, op-en the door by the way Told you that I'm on the way I'm on the way, I know con-nec-tion is vague Pick up the phone for me, babe Damm-it, we jamm-in' Bad at-ti-tude from yo' nann-y Curves and your hips from yo' mamm-y Re-mem-ber Gar-de-na, I took the stu-di-o came-ra I know Top will be mad at me I had to do it, I want your bod y, your mus ic I bought the big one to prove it Look what you made Told you that I'm on the way I'm like an ex-it a-way, yep". Above the notes, there are brackets and numbers indicating rhythmic groupings: '2' for a pair of notes and '3' for a triplet. These groupings are placed over various parts of the melody, such as the first two notes of "I'm on the way" (grouped as a 2), the first three notes of "We ain't got no time to waste" (grouped as a 3), and so on. The notation includes stems, beams, and slurs to indicate the flow of the melody.

From the examples from “LOVE” discussed above, it is apparent that varying levels of conflict between the background beat, text, and the rhythmic delivery of the artist generate varying degrees of tension within songs. The manipulation of tension is an important element at play throughout the album. Lamar progressively establishes more conflict through the generation of dramatic tension. “DNA” features a crescendo of tension from the beginning of the song until the end. The generation of tension throughout this track can be explained through the application of the elements of rhythmic texture.

Beginning in the first verse of “DNA,” Lamar makes use of a rhythmic texture that presents a lesser degree of tension than that of the second verse. In the first verse, the background beat presented is a typical pattern that one would expect to hear in rap music where

the 4/4 time signature is made apparent. This support of the expected meter through the background beat in the opening is showcased through the use of typical drum patterns. These patterns include the use of a constant eighth-note hi-hat pattern and a snare pattern that is heard on beat three. The normalcy and regularity of the background beat featured in verse one differs from the more tense and rhythmically varied background beat featured in verse two.

Ex. 3.5. “DNA” verse 1 background beat. The bottom staff showcases the percussion used in “DNA” (cymbal stems-up x-head; hi-hat stems down x-head; snare filled notehead). The top staff shows a melodic figure present in the background beat and the middle staff showcases the repeating bassline.



The beat used in the second verse creates more tension because it does not highlight the expected 4/4 meter as clearly as the beat utilized in verse one does; in fact, the rhythmic patterns used in the background beat of verse two make it more difficult for the listener to perceive the meter due to the resulting polyrhythm between the beat and Lamar’s performance (see Ex. 3.13).

Without even delving into the lyrical content of the song or Lamar’s performance, one can see how the background beat alone can create a sensation of alignment or misalignment with the listener’s expectations. More often than not, listeners would expect to hear a clear and regular 4/4 pattern in popular rap music. In “DNA,” Lamar delivers on those expectations in the first verse by supporting the 4/4 meter and rebels against the assumptions of the listener in the second verse by distorting the sense of rhythmic regularity which was present throughout the first verse.

The generation of tension that occurs between the first and second verse of “DNA” is also revealed in Lamar’s text. In the first verse of the song, Lamar largely makes use of lines that

can be segmented into groups of four, i.e., quatrains. For example, the eight lines following the introductory line “I got, I got, I got, I got” are heard as two quatrains.

Ex. 3.6. “DNA” verse one text patterns (color used to show rhyming pairs).

[I got, I got, I got, I got—
[Loyalty, got royalty inside my DNA
Cocaine quarter piece, got war and peace inside my DNA
I got power, poison, pain and joy inside my DNA
I got hustle though, ambition flow inside my DNA
[I was born like this, since one like this, immaculate conception
I transform like this, perform like this, was Yeshua new weapon
I don't contemplate, I meditate, then off your fucking head
[This that put-the-kids-to-bed

The rationale behind this division is that the rhyme scheme and the content at the beginning of these lines divide them in half. The first four lines of this group can be seen as independent of the last four because they all end with the phrase “inside my DNA.” While the second four lines of this group can be seen as independent because they introduce new rhyming sounds that have not been heard before. These rhyming sounds come in pairs with “immaculate conception” and “Yeshua new weapon” ending the first two lines of the second quatrain and “head” and “bed” ending the third and fourth line of the second quatrain. By using these poetic strategies, Lamar creates regular quatrains throughout the first verse. These regular groupings create a sensation of regularity that is contradicted by the lack of regularity within the apparent poetic line groupings utilized in the second verse of “DNA.”

In the second verse of “DNA,” Lamar goes against the lyrical and poetic expectations that were established in the first verse. This irregularity is demonstrated in the opening lines of the verse where it is difficult to discern a recurring pattern of line groupings. Unlike the opening

verse of “DNA” which features the use of consistent four-line groupings throughout the verse, the second verse’s line groupings are largely irregular. The first eleven lines are paired unevenly into groupings of 3+2+6.

Ex. 3.7. “DNA” Verse Two Text Patterns (color coding used to show rhyming pairs).

DNA VERSE 2 (3+2+6)

Tell me **somethin'**
You mothafuckas can't tell me **nothin'**
I'd rather die than to listen to you
My DNA not for **imitation**
Your DNA an **abomination**
This how it is when you in the Matrix
Dodgin' bullets, reapin' what you **sow**
And stackin' up the footage, livin' on the **go**
And sleepin' in a villa
Sippin' from a Grammy, **walkin'** in the **buildin'**
Diamond in the **ceilin'**, marble on the floors

Additionally, the text selected beginning on the sixth line of the verse (“This how it is when you in the Matrix”) and onward creates a series of lines that are elided. The text used in these lines continues seamlessly line after line without rest; furthermore, the ideas between lines are less coherent and contain less continuity than the text from verse one. By making use of text elements that increase in tension such as irregularity, Lamar increases the tension between the first and second verse of “DNA.” As a result, the second verse contains more conflict. Lamar’s text introduces many important components such as thematic concepts, poetic elements, literary

devices, and rhyme. It is evident that the lyrics throughout *DAMN* create their own sonic world that exists apart from the musical elements presented throughout the album.³²

One of the significant elements that supports the development of tension between the first and second verse of “DNA” includes Lamar’s performance of the text. This layer of the music includes elements such as Lamar’s rhythmic choices, mannerisms, and pronunciation. In the first verse of “DNA,” Lamar utilizes rhythmic patterns that are more regular than those which are present in the second verse. The first verse of this song is largely based on a two-measure rhythmic pattern that is introduced and varied throughout the verse. Lamar implements this pattern at the beginning of the song following the introductory measure “I got, I got, I got, I got.” This pattern contains less rhythmic conflict against the established 4/4-time signature when compared to the second verse. The metrical agreement is apparent because both the background beat and Lamar’s rhythmic performance correspond to a two-measure pattern.

Ex. 3.8. “DNA” Verse one performance and background beat relationships.

The musical score consists of three staves. The top staff is the vocal line with lyrics: "I got, I got, I got, I got Loy-al-ty, got roy-al-ty In-side my D-N-A Co-caine quart-er piece, got war and peace In-". The middle staff is the piano accompaniment, and the bottom staff is a drum pattern. The drum pattern shows a consistent two-measure rhythmic pattern of eighth notes.

³² The reference to a “sonic world” within the text that is independent from its musical interpretation alludes to the lyric’s inherent poetic quality. Rap shares various characteristics with poetry; therefore, if one were to remove musical elements (such as the background beat) and recite Lamar’s text, it would still showcase interesting aural characteristics. Some of the elements that lend to this quality of Lamar’s text (and poetry in general) includes the use of literary devices such as rhyme, assonance, consonance, onomatopoeia, epistrophe, anaphora, etc.

5

side my D - N - A I got pow - er, poi - son, pain and joy In - side my D - N - A I got

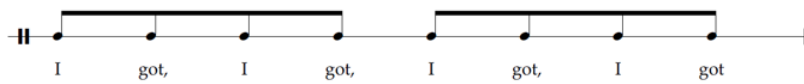
8

hust - le, though, am - bi - tion, flow In - side my D - N - A I was

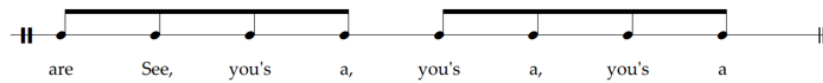
Additionally, each line of text – with the exception of the introductory single measure lines – is approximately two measures in length in their musical execution (compare Ex. 3.6 and 3.8). The pattern present in this two-measure loop is revealed by the repetition in the rhythmic and melodic structure of the bass. This two-measure ostinato background beat is only disrupted by the singular lines outside of the two-measure rhythmic pattern that Lamar establishes early in his performance of the first verse. These singular lines that break the two measure regularity and are typically only one measure in length include passages such as “I got, I got, I got, I got,” and “See you’s a, you’s a, you’s a—...” (see Ex. 3.9).

Ex. 3.9. "DNA" interrupting lines.

DNA OPENING INTRO MEASURE



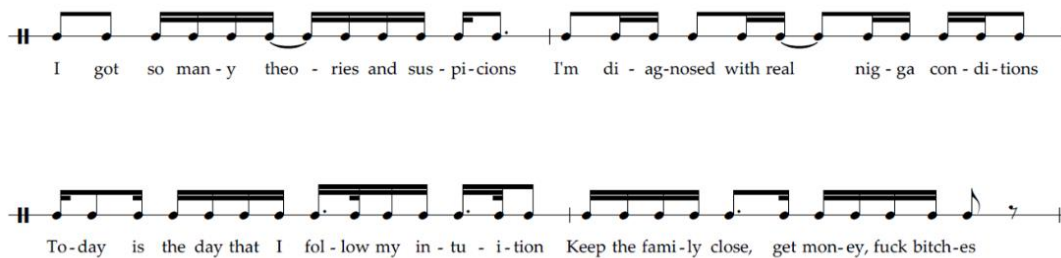
DNA INTERRUPTING MEASURE



These lines function to both introduce the text that is forthcoming and to interrupt the regularity present in the background beat. From the relationship that is reflected in the rhythmic length between the background beat and Lamar's performance, he establishes congruency between these layers that is not present in the second verse of the song.

Despite the congruency between these layers, there are other elements at play that maintain tension within the work. For one, Lamar makes use of the previously discussed single measure lines that interrupt the established rhythmic patterns within the song (i.e. "I got, I got, I got, I got"). He also creates tension between his performance decisions and the text that he has chosen to set. During this verse, Lamar begins many of the sentences used on beat four rather than on beat one. Examples where Lamar places the beginning of the line on the upbeat include the opening lines of "DNA" that are heard following the introductory measure. Compare these examples to the opening lines of "YAH," where Lamar aligns the beginning of each sentence with the downbeat of the measure (see Ex. 3.10).

Ex. 3.10. Example from the beginning of verse from "YAH."



These examples demonstrate the metrical decisions that Lamar makes throughout the album in his performance of the text. His placement of the beginning of sentences on the upbeat in “DNA” creates an interesting conflict between the text and the musical performance. By beginning on beat four throughout the first verse of the song, Lamar generates a sense of propulsion and unrest between lines because he avoids beginning each line on the downbeat. Despite the lesser degree of tension in the first verse of “DNA” when compared to the second verse, Lamar still introduces conflict to sustain the attention of the listener.

Compared to the first verse of “DNA”, Lamar introduces more tension in the performance layer. In the second verse of the song, Lamar makes use of rhythmic patterns that conflict with the expectations established by the background beat and the selected text. This conflict is showcased in the extended use of triplet flow throughout the verse. The use of triplet flow can be seen for the first time in “DNA” within the bridge that occurs between verse one and verse two. For example, in the lines “This is my heritage, all I’m inheritin’ / Money and power, the mecca of marriages” Lamar makes use of triplet rhythmic figures.

Ex. 3.11. Example from the end of the bridge in “DNA.”

This is my her - i - tage, all I'm in - her - i - tin Mon - ey and pow - er, the mec - ca of mar - riag es

Following this bridge, Lamar continues his use of rhythmic groupings of three in the opening lines of verse two.

Ex. 3.12. Example from verse two of "DNA."

Tell me some-thin' You mo-tha-fuck-as can't tell me noth-in' I'd rath-er die than to list-en to you

My D-N-A not for im-i-ta-tion Your D-N-A an a-bo-mi-na-tion This how it is when you in the Ma-trix Dodg'in

bull-ets, reap-in' what you sow And stak-in' up the foot-age, liv-in' on the go And sleep-in' in a

vill-a Sipp-in' from a Gram-m-y, walk-in' in the build-in' Dia-mond in the ceil-in', mar-ble on the

floors Beach in-side the wind-ow, peek-in' out the wind-ow Ba-by in the pool, god-fath-er

Goals on-ly Lord knows I've been go-in' hamm-er dodg-in' pap-a-razz-i, freak-in' through the

In fact, verse two is made up almost exclusively of triplet rhythmic figures, where contrast is generated when compared with verse one because Lamar did not make use of any triplet figures in the first verse. Additionally, verse two introduces intensified rhythmic conflict between Lamar's performance and the background beat by introducing polyrhythms. Lamar's use of triplet figures contradicts the rhythmic patterns featured in the background beat where figures such as eighth-notes and sixteenth-notes are heavily utilized. The use of polyrhythms by Lamar is demonstrated in the lines beginning with "Dodgin' bullets, reapin' what you sow / And stackin' up the footage livin' on the go." In Ex. 3.13, Lamar implements continuous triplet figures that occur at the same time as continuous sixteenth-note figures in the background beat.

The sixteenth-note pattern present in the background beat in this example comes in the form of a vocal sample that is manipulated and turned into a repeated group of sixteenth-notes.

Ex. 3.13. “DNA” verse two performance and background beat relationships (the bottom staff represents the repeated vocal sample that is used).

The image shows two systems of musical notation. Each system consists of a vocal line (top staff) and a background beat line (bottom staff). The vocal lines contain lyrics with syllables aligned under the notes. The background beat lines consist of repeated groups of sixteenth notes, some marked with a '3' above them, indicating triplets. The first system covers the lyrics: "This how it is when you in the Ma-trix Dodg'-in bull-ets, reap - in' what you sow And stak - in' up the". The second system covers: "foot-age, liv - in' on the go And sleep-in' in a vill - a Sipp - in' from a Gramm - y, walk-in' in the".

Lamar’s decision to feature polyrhythms in the second verse of the song generates more tension than the previous verse. Lamar also creates tension in his performance by making use of elision where rhythmic lines begin immediately one after the other. An example of elision is demonstrated in the lines “Diamond in the ceilin’, marble on the floors / Beach inside the window peekin’, out the window” (see Ex. 3.12). By introducing more rhythmic tension through performance decisions between verse one and verse two of “DNA,” Lamar creates the sensation of build and climax throughout the song where verse two serves as the dramatic climax of the piece.

Similar to “DNA,” other songs in the album contain verses that implement varying levels of tension. The song “LOVE” creates a similar effect between verse one and verse two where the second verse features more conflict than the first verse. The lesser degree of tension in the first verse of “LOVE” is demonstrated through Lamar’s text and musical decisions. When compared to the second verse, the first verse is sparse. Lamar makes effective use of space through the implementation of extensive rests during the opening verse (see Ex. 3.14).

Ex. 3.14. Example from verse one of "LOVE."

Ayy, I got some-thin' Hol' up, we gon' func-tion, ayy, no as-sump-tions, ayy Feel-in' like Tyson with it

Knock it out twice, I'm with it On-ly for the night, I'm kidd in' On-ly for life, yeah, on-ly for

life, yeah On-ly for life, let's get it Hit that should-er lean I know what com-in' ov-er me Back-stroke ov-er-sea

I know what you need Al - read - y on ten, all mone - y come

in All feel - ing go out, this feel - ing don't drought This party won't end

Also, the lines that are present in the first verse are largely based on variations of a singular rhythmic motive. This motive is introduced in the text “ayy / no Feelin’ like Tyson with it” and is varied throughout the verse (see Ex. 3.15 and measure 5 of Ex. 3.14).

Ex. 3.15. Rhythmic motive from "LOVE."

The first line shows a rhythmic pattern: a quarter note, followed by a dotted quarter note, followed by a quarter note, followed by a quarter note. The second line shows a variation: a quarter note, followed by a dotted quarter note, followed by a quarter note, followed by a quarter note, followed by a quarter note.

For example, the lines “Only for the night, I’m kiddin’ / Only for life, yeah, only for life, yeah / Only for life, let’s get it” can be seen as variations and/or a continuation of the rhythmic pattern established earlier in the verse (see Ex. 3.14). It could be argued that this rhythmic pattern is based in part on the rhythmic pattern used in the first line of the first verse “Ayy, I got somethin’” as it mirrors the rhythmic structure of the opening line (compare Ex. 3.14 and 3.15).

In the second verse of “LOVE,” Lamar establishes increased tension where more rhythmic conflict is introduced. One of the most significant considerations in the generation of tension throughout the album includes his performance decisions. Like “DNA,” Lamar makes use of triplets in the second verse of “LOVE.” The use of triplet flow by Lamar in this song is exemplified from the start of the second verse in the lines “I’m on the way / We ain’t got no time to waste” and onward (see Ex. 3.3). Lamar’s inclusion of triplet figures in the second verses of both “DNA” and “LOVE” generates contrast due to the exclusion of these rhythmic figures in the first verses of these songs. This decision contributes to the sense of contrast between the verses in both songs, where each song’s second verse features heightened tension levels as a result of hemiola. Lamar’s generation of tension is illustrated through the varying degrees of conflict implemented within the verses in his works. In these examples specifically, he has made the decision to increase the level of tension over time.

The discussion of rhythmic texture offers the theorist an array of options to explain the aural phenomenon within rap music. Despite popular rap music’s apparent lack of harmonic interest, it is clear that there are other elements that generate tension and release. The interwoven connections demonstrated through the analysis of rhythmic texture reveal the complexity of the musical relationships in rap music. The three layers addressed – the background beat, text decisions, and performance decisions – develop layered interactions where artists such as Kendrick Lamar can generate congruency and incongruency throughout their works. Furthermore, through the manipulation of the alignment between these elements, rappers have the ability to design their songs formally. For example, artists can generate build by gradually introducing increased misalignment between layers as a song progresses. This technique is demonstrated in the songs “DNA” and “LOVE” where the second verse in these songs features

more tension when compared to the first verse. As will be demonstrated shortly, the connection between the text and the musical choices of the artist is one of the most significant relationships that is developed in rap music.

Chapter IV: Rhythmic and Lyric Interactions

The relationship between the text and rhythm in rap music is one of the most important components of the genre. Artists can produce tension and release through the interactions between the lyrics and their delivery of that text. Artists have the ability to create connections between the text and their execution of the text that may establish congruency or incongruency. In order to gain a full understanding of rap music, it is necessary to have a complete understanding of how text, literary, and poetic devices relate to the musical decisions of the artist. By analyzing this aspect of rap music, it is possible to gain a better conception of the storytelling element that is often implemented in the genre. The text and musical interactions generated by Lamar in *DAMN* support the development of the narrative throughout the album.

Rap music shares many elements with poetry. The text is often designed where it can be organized similarly to poetry. This is not completely unique to rap music, as other genres of popular music often borrow elements from poetry such as the use of line groupings or stanzas and rhyme. However, rap is unique among other popular genres as it places more emphasis on rhyme scheme. Also, depending on the decisions of the artist, there is often less focus on melodic elements within the rapping voice. Not to be misunderstood, there can be (and oftentimes are) elements of melodic design where rappers make use of pitch to create brief melodic phrases within their recitation or within the background beat utilized.

Robert Komaniecki is one of the writers on rap music that acknowledges the significance of pitch that is often disregarded. In his dissertation "Analyzing the Parameters of Flow in Rap Music" he addresses this topic by pointing out how, despite the lack of "melody" in the

traditional sense, rappers often make expressive use of pitch.³³ Komaniecki comments on the nature of pitch elements in rap music and discusses the intention of the artist. He writes:

All phonations are pitched. Any speech, laughter, whoop, grunt, or clearing of a throat could be theoretically mapped in pitch space. That being said, not all phonations are pitched with the same level of intention—a soprano singing a heavily-ornamented *da capo* is more precisely pitched than an imprecise singer like Bob Dylan, who himself is more precisely pitched than the average rap verse by Lil' Kim. When analyzing the usage of pitch in rap flows, one must become familiar with a spectrum of pitch techniques employed by rappers, each yielding different results for the listener.³⁴

Komaniecki delineates the use of pitch in rap music from that which is present in the phonations that we hear in everyday life by arguing for the intentionality of the artist. Rappers can utilize pitch as an expressive tool where they shape or emphasize their musical gestures. Although this study on *DAMN* is not focused on pitch elements, it is significant to illustrate how it plays an important role in rap music; it could be argued that the artist's pitch decisions are a part of the performance layer of rhythmic texture. Ohriner also mentions the importance of pitch within his article, "Analysing the Pitch Content in the Rapping Voice." Here he discusses both the importance of pitch in rap music that is often neglected and the difficulties presented when attempting to analyze the use of pitch in the genre.³⁵ Similarly to how performers of spoken poetry utilize pitch and intonation in their performance of a given text, rappers may also implement the use of pitch to shape their music.

Poetic devices in Lamar's text include techniques such as enjambment, anaphora, epistrophe, and rhyme. Enjambment occurs when text from one line continues into the next line

³³ Robert Komaniecki, "Analyzing the Parameters of Flow in Rap Music," (Ph. D. Dissertation, Indiana University, 2019), 108.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 113.

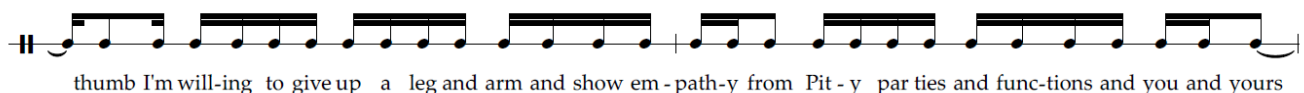
³⁵ Mitchell Ohriner, "Analysing the Pitch Content of the Rapping Voice" (*Journal of New Music Research* 48, no. 5, 2019), 413.

that follows without rest as a result of incomplete syntax or the lack of end punctuation.

Enjambment also has a musical connection where the artist can reinforce incomplete text ideas through their musical decisions. The technique of enjambment is implemented within many of the songs in the album, and an example of this technique is showcased in the song “PRIDE.”

Lamar makes use of enjambment in the lines “I’m willing to give up a leg and arm to show empathy from / Pity parties and functions of you and yours” where he ends the first line with the word “from” and the sentence continues into the next line. This relates to the musical context because Lamar implements elision where multiple sentences are heard within a single measure without rest. Lamar’s reinforcement of enjambment through his musical interpretation leads to increased conflict and forward momentum where both layers create a need for continuation or resolution. The text layer requires resolution because the first of the two lines ends with the word “from” (a preposition), and would result in an incomplete sentence without the line that follows. The musical layer requires continuation because the last word “from” is recited on the second eighth-note of beat one (a weaker metrical position).

Ex. 4.1. Example from verse one of “PRIDE.”



Anaphora and epistrophe are related in that they both utilize repeated phrases. Anaphora is the repeated use of text at the beginning of the line, while epistrophe is the repeated use of text at the end of the line.³⁶ The use of anaphora or epistrophe relates to the musical content within *DAMN* because the use of repeated text in this manner is usually related to specific rhythms that are paired with the text. In many instances, the repeated text is linked to a specific rhythmic

³⁶ Oxford English Dictionary, Oxford University Press, <https://www.oed.com/>.

figure. The use of anaphora is showcased in the second verse of the song “FEAR.” Within this verse, Lamar makes repeated use of the text “I’ll prolly die” at the start of multiple lines.

Ex. 4.2. Example from versetwo of “FEAR” illustrating the use of anaphora.

The image shows two lines of musical notation for the second verse of the song "FEAR". Each line consists of a staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The melody is written in eighth notes. The lyrics are: "I'll prolly die a-non-y-mous, I'll prolly die with prom-is-es I'll prolly die walk-in' back home from the cand-y house I'll prolly die be-cause these col-ors are stand-in' out I'll prolly die be-cause I ain't know De-marc-us was snitch-in' I'll". The phrase "I'll prolly die" is repeated at the beginning of each line.

Lamar reinforces the concept of “FEAR” by repeatedly mentioning death or mortality, which is an important thematic topic throughout the entirety of the album. The repeated line “I’ll prolly die” is possibly representative of the impending doom that many African Americans face from the racial problems prevalent in the U.S.

One of the captivating instances of epistrophe is demonstrated within the first verse of “DNA” by Lamar’s repeated use of the text “inside my DNA.”

Ex. 4.3. Example from verse one of “DNA” illustrating the use of epistrophe.

The image shows three lines of musical notation for the first verse of the song "DNA". Each line consists of a staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The melody is written in eighth notes. The lyrics are: "I got, I got, I got, I got Loy-al-ty, got roy-al-ty In-side my D-N-A Co-caine quart-er piece, got war and peace In-side my D-N-A I got pow-er, poi-son, pain and joy In-side my D-N-A I got hust-le, though, am-bi-tion, flow In-side my D-N-A I was". The phrase "In-side my D-N-A" is repeated at the end of each line.

Again, this text is used repeatedly to emphasize the topic being addressed. In context, Lamar reminds the listener of the strengths and weaknesses within his DNA and his heritage as a black man in the United States. He highlights both the good and bad qualities in the opening lines of the song stating, “I got, I got, I got, I got –/ Loyalty, got royalty inside my DNA.” This is immediately followed by the text “Cocaine quarter piece, got war and peace inside my DNA.”

This use of paradox where words with a positive connotation such as “loyalty” and “royalty” are in immediate opposition with words that have a negative connotation such as “cocaine quarter piece” and “war” reveals how Lamar is concerned with lifting up the black community as well as criticizing the abuse that results from both members within the community and from outsiders. The reference to members within the community is uniquely evident in the song “FEAR.” Here, the narrator alludes to a potentially abusive relationship between a child and their parent/caretaker that is revealed at the beginning of the song through the following lines (which coincidentally make use of anaphora), “I beat yo’ ass, keep talkin’ back / I beat yo’ ass, who bought you that? / You stole it, I beat yo’ ass if you say that game is broken...” (see Ex. 4.4).

Ex. 4.4. Example from verse one of “FEAR” illustrating the use of anaphora.

I beat yo' ass, keep talk - in' back I beat yo' ass, who bought you that? You
 stole it, I beat yo' ass if you say that game is brok-en I beat yo' ass if you jump on my couch I beat yo' ass if you

The songs “FEAR” and “DNA” both function as a commentary on the life experience of an African American individual in the United States who faces pressures from both natives and foreigners within their community.

Not only do anaphora and epistrophe create text emphasis, these techniques can also generate accentuation within their musical setting. Within a musical context, these devices are used to reinforce relationships across multiple lines. These patterns can be seen in the examples from the songs “FEAR” and “DNA” that were addressed above. In Ex. 4.2, Lamar generates musical relationships across multiple lines by recalling (or imitating) the initial rhythmic motive linked to the repeated text “I’ll prolly die.” A similar effect is achieved in “DNA,” where Lamar implements epistrophe at the opening of the song by continuously stating “Inside my DNA” at

the end of each line. Throughout this first verse there is a shared rhythmic motive that is paired with the repeated text (see Ex. 4.3). As a result of analyzing these passages, it is made clear that Lamar sought to reinforce the thematic unity within the tracks “FEAR” and “DNA” by applying the poetic devices of anaphora and epistrophe. Lamar’s choice to employ these poetic elements forms consequential relationships between the text and musical layers that support the themes presented in the songs through the manipulation of both his text and performative decisions.

In rap music, rhyme scheme plays an important role in the design of a work. Rhyme in popular rap music acts as a key rhythmic element within songs. Rhyme is used as a device that highlights important points in time. It can be used to connect ideas within a singular line or across multiple lines, or it can be used as a purely sonic device that functions independently from the actual meaning of the words.

Rhyme is often used to create emphasis on particular words at specific points in time. Artists are able to generate regularity or irregularity through their use of rhyme scheme and rhythmic placement of rhyming words. The rhyme schemes that are utilized in rap music generate rhythmic stresses where there are rhyming words. This phenomenon results from both the listener’s recollection of the previous rhyming words and from the regular (or irregular) patterns of rhymes that are created by the artist. Rhyme scheme can be seen as both an element of the text layer and the performance layer of rhythmic texture. It can be described as an element of the text layer because the artist actively designs their lyrics with a particular scheme in mind. It can also be analyzed as part of the performance layer because the artist may alter the pronunciation of their selected words in order to force a rhyming sound when there would not ordinarily be one. An example of this technique is illustrated in the song “DNA” where Lamar “mispronounces” Nirvana. Instead of pronouncing the second syllable “-van” in Nirvana as

“vaa” (nir- 'vā-nə) as one typically would, he pronounces it as “van” (nir- 'van-nə).³⁷ He makes use of this pronunciation to create near rhymes with the previous words in the verse such as “hammer,” “cameras,” and “sandals.” Lamar and other rappers often alter the way in which they pronounce words to force a particular text to fit their rhyme scheme.

The use and placement of rhyme in rap music can serve to create associations and meaningful connections. By analyzing an artist’s use of rhyme, it is evident that significant relationships are revealed in the literary function of words independent from their musical interpretation. In the song “FEEL,” Lamar forms relationships between the rhyming words that are used. For instance, in the second verse he recites the lines “The feelin’, the feelin’ of false freedom / I’ll force-feed ‘em the poison that fill ‘em up in the prison.” In these lines, Lamar introduces rhyming words that are thematically related. In context, the multi-syllabic rhymes “false freedom” and “force-feed ‘em” are connected in that they both relate to the concept of deception. The “false freedom” that Lamar addresses relates to the state of black America. While America is known as being the “land of the free,” Lamar challenges this description, citing in the lines that follow the struggles and racism that minorities have to face. In this example, Lamar implements rhyme not only to create a rhythmic and sonic pairing but also to generate a thematic relationship where the phrases “false freedom” and “force-feed ‘em” are connected.

The use of rhyme as a purely sonic device is also significant. Rappers can use rhyming words in a percussive manner where the sounds of the rhyming words play a more important role than the actual meaning of the text itself. Rappers who use rhyming words in this way within their flow include artists such as Busta Rhymes, Eminem, and Twista. These artists are known to feature fast, continuous rhymes within their songs; oftentimes, when the text is separated from its

³⁷ Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, Encyclopedia Britannica Inc., <https://www.merriam-webster.com/>.

musical context, it becomes apparent that the meaning of the text is not necessarily the focus of the passage. Rather, the artist is attempting to showcase their lyric virtuosity. This can be heard by listening to the 2011 song “Look at Me Now” where Busta Rhymes is a featured artist. In the third verse, he makes use of a fast flow within the lines “Every time I come, a nigga gotta set it / Then I gotta go, and then I gotta get it / Then I gotta blow, and then I gotta show that.”³⁸

Ex. 4.5. Example from verse three of “Look at Me Now” (color coding used to show rhyming pairs).

The image shows three lines of musical notation with lyrics underneath. The lyrics are: "Eve-ry time I come, a nigg-a gott-a set it Then I gott-a go, and Then I gott-a get it Then I gott-a blow, and then I gott-a show that An-y Litt-le thing a nigg-a think that he be do-in''Cause it does-n't matt-er,'cause I'm gonn a da-da-da-da Then I'm gonn a murd-er eve-ry-thing and an -y-thing A ba-da boom, a ba-da-bing, I gott-a do a lott-a things That make it". The words "set", "go", "get", and "blow" are highlighted in yellow. The words "show", "da-da-da-da", and "things" are highlighted in blue. The words "thing", "thing", "bing", and "things" are highlighted in pink. The musical notation consists of a series of eighth notes on a staff, with a double bar line at the end of each line.

These rhymes (i.e. “go” and “blow”) occur so quickly one after the other, that it is difficult to decipher their meaning within the music. Furthermore, the text layer in this example is somewhat incoherent because Busta Rhymes is more than likely interested in the rhythmic effect generated by the sound of the rhyming words rather than what the words themselves mean in context. Kendrick Lamar’s style differs from artists such as Busta Rhymes in that Lamar is more deliberate in his execution of the text. Unlike Busta Rhymes, who distorts his text through his fast pacing, Lamar mostly attempts to convey his meaning clearly.

In addition to rhyme, rappers can also implement consonance, assonance, and slant rhymes which serve a rhythmic and aural function that is similar to that of rhyme. Consonance,

³⁸ “Look at Me Now. by Chris Brown featuring Busta Rhymes and Lil Wayne,” Genius, n.d. <https://genius.com/Chris-brown-look-at-me-now-lyrics>.

assonance, and alliteration work in conjunction with rhyme to reinforce the sonic world that rappers design.³⁹ Slant rhymes or near rhymes differ from perfect rhymes in that perfect rhymes share the same vowel sounds while slant rhymes often share the same consonant sound but have different vowel sounds. For instance, “storm” and “swarm” are examples of slant rhymes while “tea” and “bee” are examples of perfect rhymes. Slant rhymes serve a dual purpose where they both enable variety within songs where artists may avoid rhyming pairs that are obvious (i.e. “she” and “he,” “red” and “bed,” etc.) and allow artists to create rhymes with words that do not rhyme perfectly with any other word in the English language. Lamar’s organization of rhyme plays an important role in forming the sonic world that is present in *DAMN*.

Even though rhyme may be used to create patterns or relationships between lines, rappers may also utilize rhyme to generate rhythmic accent. Throughout *DAMN*, Lamar produces rhythmic interest in ostensibly simple rhythmic lines by his unusual placement of rhyming words. “HUMBLE” contains an excellent example of this effect. Many of the rhythmic lines seem simple on their surface; however, upon listening it is made clear that Lamar introduces rhythmic tension that is not obvious in the way that these rhythmic lines appear on paper. The development of rhythmic tension throughout this song is in large part related to text elements such as the placement of rhyming words. To demonstrate this phenomenon, one can analyze the first verse where Lamar’s placement of rhyming words creates an interesting pattern of accents. In Ex. 4.6 from the opening of the song, the pattern of rhyming words or phrases is displayed where the rhyming sounds begin on beats two and the offbeat of beat four.

³⁹ Consonance is defined by the *Oxford Dictionary* as the “correspondence of sounds in words or syllables; recurrence of the same or like sounds, e.g. in a verse,” whereas assonance is defined as the “Resemblance or correspondence of sound between two words or syllables.”

Ex. 4.6. Example from verse one of “HUMBLE” (color coding used to show rhyming pairs).

The image shows four lines of musical notation for the first verse of the song "HUMBLE". Each line consists of a rhythmic staff with notes and rests, and a corresponding line of lyrics below it. Rhyming words are highlighted in yellow boxes. The lyrics are: "Ayy, I re-mem-ber syrup sand-which-es and crime al-low-anc-es fi-nesse a nig-ga with some count-er-feits, but now I'm count-in' this Parm-e-san where my ac-count-ant lives, in fact I'm down-in' this D'US-SÉ with my boo bae tastes like Kool-Aid for the an-al-lysts Girl, I can".

The rhythms displayed in Ex. 4.6, while simplistic on their own, have added interest when rhyming sounds are added to the text layer. Emphasis is placed on rhyming words in their connection with the rhyming sounds that were heard previously. Additionally, the use of rhyme in the example is captivating in that it generates syncopation because the rhyming sounds often begin on the off-beat (ex. “sandwiches” on beat two and “allowances” on the off-beat of beat four). Rappers, through their placement of rhyming words, may create unexpected accents while using rhythmic lines that do not appear to be heavily syncopated on their surface. This phenomenon in rap music showcases the layered connections that are present in the genre where text decisions interact with the artist’s rhythmic decisions to influence the musical perception by the listener and bring about tension.

Similar to the other elements involved in rhythmic texture, rhyme may be used to generate or support the tension and release that is heard in the music. Through the pacing and location of their rhyming words, artists may create regularity or irregularity. Additionally, artists may generate conflict in places where the rhyme scheme works against the established meter; just like their selection of the text, their placement of rhyming words can generate a sense of

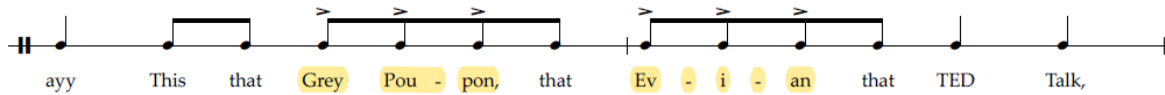
polyrhythm that works against the established meter of the background beat layer present within their songs.

The song “HUMBLE” exemplifies how rappers can manipulate the sense of propulsion through their placement of rhyming words; additionally, they may take advantage of literary devices such as consonance, assonance, or slant rhymes to create a similar effect. In this song, Lamar makes use of rhyme schemes that create both regularity and irregularity. For instance, at the beginning of the first verse of the song, Lamar establishes a regular pattern of rhyming words. In the first four lines of the verse, Lamar places the rhyming words in a similar metrical location across multiple measures. Ex. 4.6 showcases the placement of rhyming or near rhyming sounds by Lamar where the words “sandwiches” and “counterfeit” are placed on beat two of their respective measures while the words “allowances” and “I’m countin’ this” both begin on beat four and continue into the following measure. Although the words or phrases used in this example are not all perfect rhymes, Lamar uses near rhyme to create an effect that is comparable to rhyme. This passage showcases how artists can design rhyme schemes that generate regularity. These patterns are significant because they act as cues for the listener. Rappers establish regular patterns of rhyming words that generate expectations for the listener in the same manner that their use of recurring rhythmic motives does. When the artist complies with the established rhyme scheme, the listener’s expectations are confirmed; however, when the artist breaks that pattern, they create tension and subvert the expectations of their audience.

Examples of irregular placement of rhyming words can also be seen in “HUMBLE.” Lamar creates irregularity through his placement of the words “Poupon” and “Evian” at the end of the second verse. Unlike the previous example discussed, these near rhyming words are placed

on different beats; “Poupon” is stated beginning on beat three, whereas “Evian” is stated beginning on beat one of the following measure.

Ex. 4.7. Example from versetwo of “HUMBLE” (color coding used to show rhyming pairs).



This is an irregular pattern of rhyming words because they are not placed on corresponding beats. This passage highlights a brief example of an opportunistic rhyme scheme where the rhyming words are heard immediately one after the other. The manipulation of the rhyme scheme in rap music generates tension where the artist has the power to conform to established patterns or surprise the listener by disrupting the regularity of rhyming words.

Another important component of the rhythmic and lyric interactions in rap music includes the rhythmic placement of words. Sentences contain both content words and function words. A content word is defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary as “a word that primarily expresses lexical meaning” whereas a function word is defined as “a word (such as a preposition, auxiliary verb, or conjunction) that expresses primarily a grammatical relationship.”⁴⁰ In essence, content words provide meaning to sentences while function words play a grammatical role. Content words can include nouns, pronouns, and adjectives while function words can include articles and conjunctions. Rappers often place emphasis on certain words (usually content words) through their rhythmic decisions. Artists may generate emphasis through techniques such as metric or rhythmic placement, accent, repetition, and the development of rhythmic motives. The relationship that is created between rhythmic and lyric elements often supports the overarching message or lesson that the artist is trying to communicate to their audience. In the case of

⁴⁰ Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, Encyclopedia Britannica Inc.

Kendrick Lamar's works, he creates captivating rhythmic and lyric interactions throughout *DAMN*.

The rhythmic and lyric relationships that are formed in rap music play a significant role in the storytelling element within the genre. Lamar's selection and rhythmic placement of his text demonstrates his thoughtfulness as an artist because his decisions play an important role in either supporting or contradicting the established narrative within the album. The song "DUCKWORTH" from the album is possibly the best choice amongst songs that illustrate Lamar's ability to craft an engaging narrative within his tracks. This song is unique among the other tracks in the album and most popular rap songs as it does not contain a chorus or hook; this song is made up of a singular, continuous verse. The use of a singular, continuous verse resembles the storytelling methods utilized by other artists such as Slick Rick who, in the 1989 song "Children's Story,"⁴¹ creates an effect that is related to "DUCKWORTH" due to its more spontaneous nature; furthermore, like "DUCKWORTH," "Children's Story" does not contain a chorus or a hook in the traditional sense. As a result of this characteristic, Lamar's song resembles a monologue where he addresses his origins and the unique connection between his father, Kenny Duckworth, and Anthony "Top Dawg" Tiffith who is the CEO of Top Dawg Entertainment (the label for which Lamar is signed). On this track, Lamar tells the story of how Anthony Tiffith intended to rob the KFC where Lamar's father was employed. Lamar hints that his father's generosity towards Anthony was one reason that no harm came to him while he was working. This narrative is illustrated near the end of the song in the lines "They robbed the manager and shot a customer last year / He figured he'd get on these niggas' good sides / Free Chicken every time Anthony posted in line, two extra biscuits / Anthony liked him and then let

⁴¹ "Children's Story," YouTube. YouTube, n.d. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HjNTu8jdkA>

him slide, they didn't kill him." Ultimately this song functions as an allegory where Lamar challenges violence within the black community; if Anthony harmed his father, there could have been lifelong repercussions for both Lamar's family and Anthony.

Lamar supports the compelling narrative in "DUCKWORTH" through the rhythmic setting of his lyrics. This song makes use of a flow that resembles a stream of consciousness where Lamar elides sentences one after the other. He also makes use of this technique in the track "FEAR," where the song is delivered from the perspective of an outside narrator (see Ex. 4.8). Like "FEAR," "DUCKWORTH" features the perspective of a narrator, and Lamar implements a flow that closely resembles natural speech patterns.

Ex. 4.8. Example from verse one of "FEAR."

I beat yo' ass, keep talk - in' back I beat yo' ass, who bought you that? You
 stole it, I beat yo' ass if you say that game is brok-en I beat yo' ass if you jump on my couch I beat yo' ass if you
 walk in this house With tears in your eyes, runn - in from Poo Poo and Pren -
 tice Go back out - side, I beat yo' ass, li - I nig - ga That home - work

Ex. 4.9. Example from “DUCKWORTH.”

The image displays a musical score for the song "DUCKWORTH". It consists of seven lines of music, each with a corresponding line of lyrics. The lyrics are: "Life is one funn-y ma'-fuck-er A true com-e - di - an, you gott - a love him, you gott - a trust him I might be bugg-in', in - fo-mer-cials and no sleep In-tro vert ed by my thoughts; child-ren,list-en, it gets deep See, once u-pon a time in-side the Nick-er-son Gard-en pro-jects The ob-ject was to pro-cess and di-gest pov-er-ty's di - a - lect A-dap-ta-tion in-ev-it - a - ble: gun vio-lence, crackspot Fed-er-al pol - i - cies raid build-ings and drug pro fes-sion-als An-tho-ny was the old - est of sev-en Well-re-spect-ed, Calm and col-lect-ed Laugh-in' and jok - in' made life eas - i - er; hard times, ma-ma on crack A four-year-old tell-in' his nann-y he need-ed her His fami - ly his - tor - y: pimp - in' and bang - in' He was". The musical notation includes various rhythmic values such as eighth notes, sixteenth notes, and rests, with some notes marked with a '7' indicating a specific rhythmic placement.

The technique of utilizing spontaneous rhythmic lines is reflected in the opening lines of the songs where the text is set in a manner that is rhythmically independent of the expected or natural setting of the text. “DUCKWORTH” contains various examples where an unstressed syllable in a multisyllabic word is placed on a strong beat within the measure or a stressed syllable in a multisyllabic word or the beginning of a line is placed on a weak beat within the measure. This is demonstrated through Lamar’s setting of the lines “Adaptation inevitable: gun violence, crack spot / Federal policies raid buildings and drug professionals” (see Ex. 4.9). Within these lines, Lamar creates tension by rhythmically placing the text in an opportunistic way. For instance, when he sets the word “professionals” he places the second syllable “-fes” on the final sixteenth-note of beat three. This creates tension because the performance layer

executed by Lamar diverts from the expected natural setting of the established text layer; “-fes” in the word “professionals” is the stressed syllable, therefore, it would be more natural for this sound to fall on a stronger beat in most musical settings. By placing the stressed syllable on a weak metrical location, Lamar generates syncopation.

Lamar’s use of contradiction between the text and rhythmic layer is further exemplified in Ex. 4.9 through his decision to begin lines on offbeats. Lamar makes extended use of elision in the song “DUCKWORTH.” His use of elision can be seen in the setting of the line, “Introverted by my thoughts; children, listen, it gets deep” because, rather than beginning this new line of text on the downbeat of a new measure, he places it on beat four within the measure that precedes this line (see Ex. 4.9.) His use of elision in this song and in other songs within *DAMN* creates tension and rhythmic variety. By setting the text in an opportunistic manner and making use of techniques such as elision, Lamar reinforces the narrative of the text through his musical decisions. The text in this song is narrative intensive and more speechlike, henceforth, it is sensible for Lamar to institute rhythmic lines that are uninhibited by the inherent text patterns. By creating spontaneity between the rhythmic and text elements he generates tension that is related to the unpredictable character contained within the story that is recited in “DUCKWORTH.”

Lamar’s rhythmic manipulation of the text layer to support the narrative throughout the album is further illustrated through his handling of sentence structure and multisyllabic words. He makes use of varied settings of sentence structure where he both supports and breaks from the expected rhythmic placement of keywords. This technique is accomplished by his musical decisions concerning the location of function vs. content words. Since content words provide lexical meaning to sentences, they are typically the keywords that are prioritized within the

structure of a sentence whereas function words simply play a grammatical role. Lamar, however, creates interesting points of conflict where he places the content words within a sentence on the weak beat and/or he places the function words on a strong beat. This phenomenon within the album is typically the result of an elision where Lamar intertwines lines of text without any rhythmic breaks. This is demonstrated in the song “ELEMENT,” where Lamar creates interesting rhythmic and text relationships by manipulating the metric position of keywords within sentences (see Ex. 4.10). Within this song, Lamar creates syncopation where the content words within sentences are placed on weaker beats. In the opening of the song, this technique is demonstrated because he begins the first line of text on beat two rather than beat one. Additionally, he places one of the content words “I’m” (the subject) on beat two (a weaker beat) from the sentence “I’m willin’ to die for this shit.” Later in the same verse, in his setting of the text “I been stomped out in front of my mama,” he again places the subject “I” on an offbeat on the last sixteenth-note of the first beat of the measure.

Ex. 4.10. Example from verse one of “ELEMENT.”

I'm will-in' to die for this shit I done cried for this shit, might take a life for this shit Put the
 Bib-le down and go eye for an eye for this shit D-O-T my en-em-y, won't catch a vibe for this shit, ayy,
 I been stomped out in front of my ma-ma My dadd-y comm-i-ssar-y made it to com-mas Bitch, all my grand-mas dead So

These examples from “ELEMENT” demonstrate how Lamar introduces tension through his text setting because he creates a sense of syncopation by placing keywords from his text on weaker beats. These interactions between the text layer and the performance layer create engaging musical lines.

His control of multisyllabic words can be seen in how he alters the syllable content in words and through the way that he places the stressed or unstressed syllables in time. There are examples throughout *DAMN* where Lamar occasionally opts to deliver multisyllabic words in a manner that decreases the number of syllables in their typical pronunciation. Lamar features this technique in the line “his family history: pimpin’ and bangin’” (from “DUCKWORTH”) where he states the word “family” as a two-syllable word instead of a three-syllable word (see Ex. 4.9). This technique allows rappers, such as Lamar, to sculpt words to fit into their rhythmic scheme; in Ex. 4.9, Lamar removed a syllable from the word “family” in order to force the word to fit into his rhythmic design.

Lamar’s rhythmic placement of the stressed and unstressed syllables within the multisyllabic words may create tension or support the natural pronunciation of the text independent of its musical context. Since words have their own natural rhythm of stressed and unstressed sounds outside of a musical context, the sensation of propulsion can be varied by disrupting the natural rhythmic flow of the text or by placing it in an unexpected rhythmic location. The song “FEAR” (like “DUCKWORTH”) resembles a monologue where Lamar implements speechlike patterns including elision to permit the text to flow continuously with minimal breaks. Elision used in this way results in conflict between the text and performance layers; there are moments where stressed text syllables are spoken on a weak beat or unstressed text syllables are spoken on a strong beat. In “FEAR,” for instance, the lines “I beat yo’ ass if you walk in this house / With tears in your eyes, runnin’ from Poo Poo and Prentice” are recited continuously without rest. This musical decision by Lamar results in a text setting that is opportunistic, permitting a multisyllabic word such as “Prentice” to have its stressed syllable placed on a weak beat within the measure; in this example, “Pren-” is the stressed syllable that is

spoken on the last sixteenth-note of the measure which creates rhythmic emphasis on the offbeat (see Ex. 4.8).

Similar to “DUCKWORTH” and “FEAR,” the manipulation of stressed and unstressed syllables as well as elision is also demonstrated in the second verse of “DNA.” Within this verse of the song, Lamar creates a constant flow of text that generates tension where words are set musically in an unconventional manner. In his setting of the lines “Eat at Four Daughters, Brock wearin’ sandals / Yoga on a Monday, stretchin’ to Nirvana” he places stressed syllables such as “yo-” in the word “yoga” on the final triplet eighth-note of beat one which is a metrically weak location.

Ex. 4.11. Example from verse two of “DNA.”

came-ras Eat at Four Daught-ers, Brock wear - in' sand - als Yo - ga on a Mon-day, stretch-in' to Nir -

van-a Watch-in' all the snakes, curv-in' all the fakes Phone nev er on, I don't con-ver-sate I don't com-pro-mise, I just pen-e -

trate Sex, mone-y, murd-er - these are the breaks These are the times, lev-el numb-er nine Look up in the sky, ten is on the

way Sen-tence on the way kill-ings on the way moth-er-fuck-er, I got winn-ers on the way You ain't shit with-out a bod-y on your

Later in this verse, Lamar creates a similar effect within the lines “I don’t compromise, I just penetrate / Sex, money, murder – these are the breaks” where he places the stressed syllable “com-” of the word “compromise” on the second triplet eighth-note of the second beat (see Ex. 4.11). Lamar’s placement of stressed syllables on weaker metrical beats creates accentuation that may contribute to the sense of rhythmic syncopation. Through the connections heard within

DAMN between Lamar's text and performance layers, it is evident that text elements can generate emphasis which plays a role in the manipulation of tension in rap music. Lamar's performative and musical decisions are implemented throughout *DAMN* to support the narratives contained within his selected lyrics. In the case of "DNA," he institutes a rhythmic setting of the text that contradicts the natural prosody of the lyrics to bring about tension and support the intense tone of the second verse. In contrast, he makes use of a free setting of the text within "DUCKWORTH" and "FEAR" to reflect the speechlike character present in the narrative of these songs.

The relationship between the text and musical elements within rap music is one of the most compelling aspects of the genre. This characteristic is demonstrated throughout *DAMN* by the meaningful connections that are formed within the album between the text and Lamar's performance decisions. These connections are significant because he manipulates them in order to shape the narrative of both the album as a whole and the narrative contained within each individual track. As an artist, Lamar is very deliberate in the conception of his works; therefore, it comes as no surprise that he would be purposeful in the lyrics that he utilizes and the manner in which he sets them. The design of the text in rap music, in many ways, shares technical features with poetry where elements such as rhyme, slant rhyme, assonance, and consonance play an important role in the development of the artist's intended sonic world. Because rap music does not typically prioritize pitch in the same way that classical music often does, the genre can be misunderstood. To gain a fuller understanding of what makes rap engaging as a genre, it is important to realize the influence between layers on the musical perception of the listener. Artists, through their decisions, may create congruency or incongruency between different musical layers.

Conclusion

Kendrick Lamar's album *DAMN* has proven itself to be one of the most critically acclaimed rap albums in recent years. Lamar, through this work, has achieved success within the scene of contemporary music as he has become the first rapper to ever be awarded the Pulitzer for Music Composition. Lamar reveals himself to be a deliberate artist who spends time thoughtfully crafting his works. Within this album, Lamar takes advantage of every tool at his disposal. Some examples of these manipulated elements include formal considerations and rhythmic texture. The complexity demonstrated by both the large-scale and local structures within *DAMN* is unique when compared to works by other rappers. Within the composition, Lamar creates an immersive soundscape that draws the listener in.

Lamar creates meaningful connections through his handling of the components that are related to rhythmic texture. Over the course of the work, he creates points of alignment and misalignment between different layers. His control over the background beat, the text, and his interpretive decisions lead to the formation of tension and resolution within the album. The primary goal of this study is to analyze these connections in order to establish a digestible methodology for analyzing rap music. Despite the genre's surface-level simplicity, it is clear that under further scrutiny the complex rhythmic and text relationships that are typical of the genre are revealed. This large-scale analysis of *DAMN* could serve as a case study for the manner in which one could interpret the layered connections present within other compositions in the musical category. By studying *DAMN* one can see how rappers, such as Kendrick Lamar, are able to (like great composers), both satisfy or veer away from the expectations of the listener.

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Appendix A: Official Album Credits for DAMN

The following listing has been taken directly from *Genius*. *Genius* has curated the credits from the album by song and have also included a complete record of everyone involved in *DAMN* at the end of the post.

“BLOOD.”

- Composers: K. Duckworth, D. Tannenbaum, A. Tiffith
- Produced by Bēkon & Anthony “Top Dawg” Tiffith
- Additional vocals by Bēkon
- Mixed by Derek “MixedByAli” Ali
- Mixing assistants: Tyler Page & Cyrus “Nois” Taghipour

“DNA.”

- Composers: K. Duckworth, M. Williams II
- Produced by Mike WiLL Made-It
- Additional guitar by Matt Schaeffer
- Mixed by Derek “MixedByAli” Ali
- Mixing assistants: Tyler Page & Cyrus “Nois” Taghipour

“YAH.”

- Composers: K. Duckworth, M. Spears, D. Natche, A. Tiffith
- Produced by Sounwave, DJ Dahi & Anthony “Top Dawg” Tiffith
- Additional production by Bēkon
- Mixed by Derek “MixedByAli” Ali
- Mixing assistants: Tyler Page & Cyrus “Nois” Taghipour
- Kid Capri vocals recorded at Jungle City Studios

“ELEMENT.”

- Composers: K. Duckworth, M. Spears, J. Blake, R. Riera
- Produced by Sounwave, James Blake & Ricci Riera
- Additional production by Tae Beast & Bēkon
- Additional vocals by Kid Capri
- Mixed by Matt Schaeffer, James “The Black White Man” Hunt & Derek “MixedByAli” Ali
- Mixing assistants: Tyler Page & Cyrus “Nois” Taghipour
- Additional recording by Zeke Mishanec & Brendan Silas Perry
- Kid Capri vocals recorded at Jungle City Studios

“FEEL.”

- Composers: K. Duckworth, M. Spears
- Produced by Sounwave
- Bass by Thundercat
- Additional vocals by Chelsea Blythe
- Additional guitar by Matt Schaeffer
- Mixed by Sounwave, Matt Schaeffer & Derek “MixedByAli” Ali
- Mixing assistants: Tyler Page & Cyrus “Nois” Taghipour

“LOYALTY.” feat. Rihanna

- Composers: K. Duckworth, D. Natche, M. Spears, T. Martin, A. Tiffith
- Produced by DJ Dahi, Sounwave, Terrace Martin & Anthony “Top Dawg” Tiffith
- Additional vocals by DJ Dahi
- Mixed by Derek “MixedByAli” Ali
- Mixing assistants: Tyler Page & Cyrus “Nois” Taghipour
- Rihanna vocals recorded by Marcos Tovar at Windmark Studios
- Rihanna vocal production by Kuk Harrell

“PRIDE.”

- Composers: K. Duckworth, S. Lacy, A. Wise, A. Tiffith
- Produced by Steve Lacy & Anthony “Top Dawg” Tiffith
- Additional production by Bēkon
- Background vocals by Anna Wise & Steve Lacy
- Mixed by Tyler Page & Derek “MixedByAli” Ali
- Mixing assistants: Tyler Page & Cyrus “Nois” Taghipour

“HUMBLE.”

- Composers: K. Duckworth, M. Williams II
- Produced by Mike WiLL Made-It
- Additional guitar by Matt Schaeffer
- Mixed by Derek “MixedByAli” Ali
- Mixing assistants: Tyler Page & Cyrus “Nois” Taghipour

“LUST.”

- Composers: K. Duckworth, D. Natche, M. Spears, C. Hansen, A. Sowinski, M. Tavares, L. Whitty
- Produced by DJ Dahi, Sounwave & BADBADNOTGOOD
- Strings by Kamasi Washington & Sounwave
- Additional vocals by KAYTRANADA & Rat Boy
- Mixed by Derek “MixedByAli” Ali
- Mixing assistants: Tyler Page & Cyrus “Nois” Taghipour

- Recorded by Blake Harden at Windmark Studios
- Strings recorded at Henson Recording Studios

“LOVE.” feat. Zacari

- Composers: K. Duckworth, Z. Pacaldo, T. Walton, M. Spears, G. Kurstin, A. Tiffith
- Produced by Teddy Walton, Sounwave, Greg Kurstin & Anthony “Top Dawg” Tiffith
- Additional vocals by Kid Capri
- Mixed by Cyrus “Nois” Taghipour & Derek “MixedByAli” Ali
- Mixing assistants: Tyler Page & Cyrus “Nois” Taghipour
- Additional recording by Zeke Mishanec & Brendan Silas Perry
- Kid Capri vocals recorded at Jungle City Studios

“XXX.” feat. U2

- Composers: K. Duckworth, M. Williams II, D. Natche, M. Spears, A. Tiffith, P. Hewson, D. Evans, A. Clayton, L. Mullen
- Produced by Mike WiLL Made-It, DJ Dahi, Sounwave & Anthony “Top Dawg” Tiffith
- Additional production by Bēkon
- Additional keys by Kendrick Lamar
- Additional vocals by Bēkon & Kid Capri
- Mixed by Derek “MixedByAli” Ali
- Mixing assistants: Tyler Page & Cyrus “Nois” Taghipour
- Recorded at Jungle City Studios
- Additional recording by Zeke Mishanec & Brendan Silas Perry

“FEAR.”

- Composers: K. Duckworth, A. Maman
- Produced by The Alchemist
- Additional production by Bēkon
- Additional vocals by Charles Edward Sydney Isom Jr., Bēkon & Carl Duckworth
- Mixed by Tyler Page & Derek “MixedByAli” Ali
- Mixing assistants: Tyler Page & Cyrus “Nois” Taghipour

“GOD.”

- Composers: K. Duckworth, R. Riera, M. Spears, D. Natche, D. Tannenbaum, R. LaTour, A. Tiffith
- Produced by Ricci Riera, Sounwave, DJ Dahi, Bēkon, Cardo & Anthony “Top Dawg” Tiffith
- Additional vocals by Bēkon
- Additional drums by Mike Hector
- Mixed by Derek “MixedByAli” Ali
- Mixing assistants: Tyler Page & Cyrus “Nois” Taghipour

“DUCKWORTH.”

- Composers: K. Duckworth, P. Douhit
- Produced by 9th Wonder
- Additional production by Bēkon
- Additional vocals by Bēkon & Kid Capri
- Recorded by Blake Harden at Windmark Studios
- Mixed by 9th Wonder & Derek “MixedByAli” Ali
- Mixing assistants: Tyler Page & Cyrus “Nois” Taghipour
- Additional recording by Zeke Mishanec & Brendan Silas Perry
- Kid Capri vocals recorded at Jungle City Studios

Album Credits:

- Executive Producers: Anthony “Top Dawg” Tiffith & Dr. Dre
- Associate Producer: Dave “Miyatola” Free
- General Manager: Roberto “retOne” Reyes
- TDE Management: Dave Free, retOne, Moosa, Punch & 2Teez
- Mgmt. Assistants: Edgar Moreno, Derrick McCall & David Harrell
- TDE A&R: Kendrick Lamar, Sounwave & Brock Korsan
- Recorded by: Matt Schaeffer & James “The White Black Man” Hunt
- Mixed by: Derek “MixedByAli” Ali
- Mastered: Mike Bozzi at Bernie Grundman in Hollywood, CA
- Recorded at No Excuses, Santa Monica, CA
- Creative Direction: Kendrick Lamar, Dave “Miyatola” Free & Vladimir Sepetov
- Photography: Dave “Miyatola” Free & Roberto “retOne” Reyes
- Legal: Joshua P. Binder, Esq
- Business Accounting: Brandon “Big B” Tiffith & Saj Motley
- Styling: Dianne Garcia

Appendix B: Complete Lyrics for *DAMN* from *Genius*

The following transcription of the lyrics from *DAMN* come courtesy of *Genius*. This website has been a significant resource as it has provided a complete listing of the lyrics from the album as well as providing valuable commentary from both moderators and artists themselves (contributing artists such as Kendrick Lamar have their commentary listed on the website).

“DNA”

[Verse 1]

I got, I got, I got, I got—

Loyalty, got royalty inside my DNA

Cocaine quarter piece, got war and peace inside my DNA

I got power, poison, pain and joy inside my DNA

I got hustle though, ambition flow inside my DNA

I was born like this, since one like this, immaculate conception

I transform like this, perform like this, was Yeshua new weapon

I don't contemplate, I meditate, then off your fucking head

This that put-the-kids-to-bed

This that I got, I got, I got, I got—

Realness, I just kill shit 'cause it's in my DNA

I got millions, I got riches buildin' in my DNA

I got dark, I got evil, that rot inside my DNA

I got off, I got troublesome heart inside my DNA

I just win again, then win again like Wimbledon, I serve

Yeah, that's him again, the sound that engine in is like a bird

You see fireworks and Corvette tire skrrt the boulevard

I know how you work, I know just who you are

See, you's a, you's a, you's a—

Bitch, your hormones prolly switch inside your DNA
Problem is, all that sucker shit inside your DNA
Daddy prolly snitched, heritage inside your DNA
Backbone don't exist, born outside a jellyfish, I gauge
See, my pedigree most definitely don't tolerate the front
Shit I've been through prolly offend you, this is Paula's oldest son
I know murder, conviction
Burners, boosters, burglars, ballers, dead, redemption
Scholars, fathers dead with kids and
I wish I was fed forgiveness
Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, soldier's DNA (I'm a soldier's DNA)
Born inside the beast, my expertise checked out in second grade
When I was 9, on cell, motel, we didn't have nowhere to stay
At 29, I've done so well, hit cartwheel in my estate
And I'm gon' shine like I'm supposed to, antisocial extrovert
And excellent mean the extra work
And absentness what the fuck you heard
And pessimists never struck my nerve
And Nazareth gonna plead his case
The reason my power's here on earth
Salute the truth, when the prophet say

[Bridge: Kendrick Lamar & Geraldo Rivera]

I-I got loyalty, got royalty inside my DNA
This is why I say that hip hop has done more damage to young African Americans than racism in recent years
I got loyalty, got royalty inside my DNA
I live a better life, I'm rollin' several dice, fuck your life
I got loyalty, got royalty inside my DNA

I live a be-, fuck your life

5, 4, 3, 2, 1

This is my heritage, all I'm inheritin'

Money and power, the mecca of marriages

[Verse 2]

Tell me somethin'

You mothafuckas can't tell me nothin'

I'd rather die than to listen to you

My DNA not for imitation

Your DNA an abomination

This how it is when you in the Matrix

Dodgin' bullets, reapin' what you sow

And stackin' up the footage, livin' on the go

And sleepin' in a villa

Sippin' from a Grammy, walkin' in the buildin'

Diamond in the ceilin', marble on the floors

Beach inside the window, peekin' out the window

Baby in the pool, godfather goals

Only Lord knows I've been goin' hammer

Dodgin' paparazzi, freakin' through the cameras

Eat at Four Daughters, Brock wearin' sandals

Yoga on a Monday, stretchin' to Nirvana

Watchin' all the snakes, curvin' all the fakes

Phone never on, I don't conversate

I don't compromise, I just penetrate

Sex, money, murder—these are the breaks
These are the times, level number 9
Look up in the sky, 10 is on the way
Sentence on the way, killings on the way
Motherfucker, I got winners on the way
You ain't shit without a body on your belt
You ain't shit without a ticket on your plate
You ain't sick enough to pull it on yourself
You ain't rich enough to hit the lot and skate
Tell me when destruction gonna be my fate
Gonna be your fate, gonna be our faith
Peace to the world, let it rotate
Sex, money, murder—our DNA

“YAH”

[Intro: Kid Capri]

New shit, new Kung Fu Kenny

[Verse 1: Kendrick Lamar]

I got so many theories and suspicions
I'm diagnosed with real nigga conditions
Today is the day I follow my intuition
Keep the family close—get money, fuck bitches
I double parked the Aston in the red
My momma told me that I'ma work myself to death
My girl told me don't let these hoes get in my head
My world been ecstatic, I checked the signal that read—

[Chorus: Kendrick Lamar]

Buzzin', radars is buzzin'
Yah, yah, yah, yah
Yah, yah, yah, yah, yah, yah
Buzzin', radars is buzzin'
Yah, yah, yah, yah
Yah, yah, yah, yah, yah, yah

[Verse 2: Kendrick Lamar]

Interviews wanna know my thoughts and opinions
Fox News wanna use my name for percentage
My latest muse is my niece, she worth livin'
See me on the TV and scream: "That's Uncle Kendrick!"
Yeah, that's the business (Uno)

Somebody tell Geraldo this nigga got some ambition
I'm not a politician, I'm not 'bout a religion
I'm a Israelite, don't call me black no mo'
That word is only a color, it ain't facts no mo'
My cousin called, my cousin Carl Duckworth
Said know my worth
And Deuteronomy say that we all been cursed
I know He walks the Earth
But it's money to get, bitches to hit, yah
Zeroes to flip, temptation is, yah
First on my list, I can't resist, yah
Everyone together now, know that we forever—

[Chorus: Kendrick Lamar]

Buzzin', radars is buzzin'
Yah, yah, yah, yah
Yah, yah, yah, yah, yah, yah
Buzzin', radars is buzzin'
Yah, yah, yah, yah
Yah, yah, yah, yah, yah, yah

“ELEMENT”

[Intro: Kid Capri & Kendrick Lamar]

New Kung Fu Kenny

Ain't nobody prayin' for me

Y'all know, what happens on Earth stays on Earth

Here we go!

I don't give a fuck, I don't give a fuck

I don't give a, I don't give a, I don't give a fuck

[Verse 1]

I'm willin' to die for this shit

I done cried for this shit, might take a life for this shit

Put the Bible down and go eye for an eye for this shit

D-O-T my enemy, won't catch a vibe for this shit, ayy

I been stomped out in front of my mama

My daddy commissary made it to commas

Bitch, all my grandmas dead

So ain't nobody prayin' for me, I'm on your head, ayy

Thirty millions later, know the feds watchin'

Auntie on my Telegram like, "Be cautious!"

I be hangin' out at Tam's, I be on Stockton

I don't do it for the 'Gram, I do it for Compton

I'm willin' to die for this shit, nigga

I'll take your fuckin' life for this shit, nigga

We ain't goin' back to broke, family sellin' dope

That's why you maney-ass rap niggas better know

[Chorus]

If I gotta slap a pussy-ass nigga, I'ma make it look sexy

If I gotta go hard on a bitch, I'ma make it look sexy

I pull up, hop out, air out, made it look sexy

They won't take me out my element

Nah, take me out my element

[Verse 2]

I'm allergic to a bitch nigga, ayy

An imaginary rich nigga, ayy

Seven figures ho, that's slimmer than my bitch figure, ayy

Goin' digital and physical on all y'all, ayy

Bunch of criminals and money in my phone calls, ayy

We okay, we let the A1 fly

Relocate, jump on the same G5

Checkin' for me heavy 'cause I go, yeah, I go, yeah

They never been ready, yeah, I know, yeah, know, yeah

100K spread across the floor, 'cross the floor, yeah

None of y'all fuckin' with the flow, yeah, the flow, yeah

Years in the makin', and don't y'all mistake it

I got 'em by a landslide, we talkin' about races

You know this'll never be a tie, just look at they laces

You know careers take off, just gotta be patient

Mr. One through Five, that's the only logic

Fake my death, go to Cuba, that's the only option

[Chorus]

If I gotta slap a pussy-ass nigga, I'ma make it look sexy

If I gotta go hard on a bitch, I'ma make it look sexy

I pull up, hop out, air out, made it look sexy

They won't take me out my element

Nah, take me out my element

[Bridge]

Damned if I do, if I don't (Yuh)

Goddamn us all if you won't (Yuh)

Damn, damn, damn, it's a goddamn shame

You ain't front in line, get out the goddamn way

[Verse 3]

Niggas thought they wasn't gonna see me, huh?

Niggas thought that K-Dot real life

Was the same life they see on TV, huh?

Niggas wanna flex on me and be in L.A. for free, huh?

Next time they hit the 10 freeway, we need a receipt, huh?

'Cause most of y'all ain't real, most of y'all gon' squeal

Most of y'all just envy, but jealousy get you killed

Most of y'all throw rocks and try to hide your hand

Just say his name and I promise that you'll see Candyman

Because it's all in your eyes, most of y'all tell lies

Most of y'all don't fade, most of y'all been advised

Last LP I tried to lift the black artists

But it's a difference 'tween black artists and wack artists

[Chorus: Kendrick Lamar & Kid Capri]

If I gotta slap a pussy-ass nigga, I'ma make it look sexy

It's the one and only, the world's greatest, the Kid Capri

If I gotta go hard on a bitch, I'ma make it look sexy

I pull up, hop out, air out, made it look sexy

They won't take me out my element

Nah, take me out my element

“FEEL”

[Intro: Kendrick Lamar & Chelsea Blythe]

Ain't nobody prayin' for me

(Ain't nobody prayin' for me)

(Ain't nobody prayin' for me)

Ain't nobody prayin' for me

(Nobody prayin' for me)

Ain't nobody prayin' for me

(Ain't nobody prayin' for me)

(Nobody prayin' for me)

[Verse 1: Kendrick Lamar]

I feel like a chip on my shoulders

I feel like I'm losin' my focus

I feel like I'm losin' my patience

I feel like my thoughts in the basement

Feel like, I feel like you're miseducated

Feel like I don't wanna be bothered

I feel like you may be the problem

I feel like it ain't no tomorrow, fuck the world

The world is endin', I'm done pretendin'

And fuck you if you get offended

I feel like friends been overrated

I feel like the family been fakin'

I feel like the feelings are changin'

Feel like my thought of compromise is jaded

Feel like you wanna scrutinize how I made it

Feel like I ain't feelin' you all

Feel like removin' myself, no feelings involved
I feel for you, I've been in the field for you
It's real for you, right? Shit, I feel like—

[Chorus: Kendrick Lamar]

Ain't nobody prayin' for me
Ain't nobody prayin' for me
Ain't nobody prayin' for me
Ain't nobody prayin'

[Verse 2: Kendrick Lamar]

I feel niggas been out of pocket
I feel niggas tappin' they pockets
I feel like debatin' on who the greatest can stop it
I am legend, I feel like all of y'all is peasants
I feel like all of y'all is desperate
I feel like all it take is a second to feel like
Mike Jordan whenever holdin' a real mic
I ain't feelin' your presence
Feel like I'ma learn you a lesson
Feel like only me and the music though
I feel like your feelin' ain't mutual
I feel like the enemy you should know
Feel like the feelin' of no hope
The feelin' of bad dope
A quarter ounce manipulated from soap
The feelin', the feelin' of false freedom
I'll force-feed 'em the poison that fill 'em up in the prison

I feel like it's just me
Look, I feel like I can't breathe
Look, I feel like I can't sleep
Look, I feel heartless, often off this
Feelin' of fallin', of fallin' apart with
Darkest hours, lost it
Fillin' the void of bein' employed with ballin'
Streets is talkin', fill in the blanks with coffins
Fill up the banks with dollars
Fill up the graves with fathers
Fill up the babies with bullshit
Internet blogs and pulpit, fill 'em with gossip
I feel like this gotta be the feelin' where 'Pac was
The feelin' of an apocalypse happenin'
But nothin' is awkward, the feelin' won't prosper
The feelin' is toxic, I feel like I'm boxin' demons
Monsters, false prophets schemin'
Sponsors, industry promises
Niggas, bitches, honkies, crackers, Compton
Church, religion, token blacks in bondage
Lawsuit visits, subpoena served in concert
Fuck your feelings, I mean this for imposters
I can feel it, the phoenix sure to watch us
I can feel it, the dream is more than process
I can put a regime that forms a Loch Ness
I can feel it, the scream that haunts all logic
I feel like sayin' somethin', I feel like takin' somethin'
I feel like skatin' off, I feel like waitin' for 'em

Maybe it's too late for 'em

I feel like the whole world want me to pray for 'em

But who the fuck prayin' for me?

[Outro: Kendrick Lamar]

Ain't nobody prayin' for me

Who prayin' for me?

Ain't nobody prayin'

“LOYALTY”

[Intro: Mr. Talkbox]

[Pre-Chorus: DJ Dahi & Kendrick Lamar]

I said I'm geeked and I'm fired up (Fired, fire)
All I want tonight is just get high (High, high, high)
Girl, you look so good, it's to die for (Die for, fire)
Ooh, that pussy good, it's to die for (I'm on fire)

[Chorus 1: Kendrick Lamar & Rihanna]

It's a secret society
All we ask is trust (All we ask is trust)
All we got is us
Loyalty, loyalty, loyalty
Loyalty, loyalty, loyalty

[Verse 1: Kendrick Lamar]

Kung Fu Kenny now
My resume is real enough for two millennium
A better way to make a wave, stop defendin' them
I meditate and moderate all of my wins again
I'm hangin' on the fence again
I'm always on your mind
I put my lyric and my lifeline on the line
And ain't no limit when I might shine, might grind
You rollin' with it at the right time, right now
(Only for the dollar sign)

[Verse 2: Rihanna]

Bad girl RiRi now

Swerve, swerve, swerve, swerve, leave it now

On your pulse like it's EDM

Gas in the bitch like it's premium

Haul ass on a bitch all in the fast lane

Been a bad bitch way before any cash came

I'm established, hundred carats on my name

Run the atlas, I'm a natural, I'm alright

[Verse 3: Kendrick Lamar & Rihanna]

I'm a savage, I'm a asshole, I'm a king

Shimmy ya, shimmy ya, shimmy ya rah (Yeah)

You can tell your nigga he can meet me outside (Yeah)

You can babysit him when I leave him outside

Ain't no other love like the one I know

I done been down so long lost hope

I done came down so hard I slowed

Honestly forever, all a real nigga want

[Pre-Chorus: DJ Dahi & Kendrick Lamar]

I said I'm geeked and I'm fired up (Fired, fire)

All I want tonight is just to get high up (Yeah)

All I want is, all I want is

[Chorus 2: Kendrick Lamar & Rihanna]

Loyalty, loyalty, loyalty

Loyalty, loyalty, loyalty

10-4, no switchin' sides

Feel somethin' wrong

You actin' shifty, you don't vibe

With me no more, I need

Loyalty, loyalty, loyalty

Loyalty, loyalty, loyalty

[Verse 4: Kendrick Lamar]

Tell me who you loyal to

Is it money? Is it fame? Is it weed? Is it drink?

Is it comin' down with the loud pipes in the rain?

Big chillin', only for the power in your name

Tell me who you loyal to

Is it love for the streets when the lights get dark?

Is it unconditional when the 'Rari don't start?

Tell me when your loyalty is comin' from the heart

[Verse 5: Rihanna & Kendrick Lamar]

Tell me who you loyal to

Do it start with your woman or your man? (Mmm)

Do it end with your family and friends? (Mmm)

Are you loyal to yourself in advance?

I said, tell me who you loyal to

Is it anybody that you would lie for?

Anybody you would slide for?

Anybody you would die for?

That's what God for

[Pre-Chorus: DJ Dahi & Kendrick Lamar]

I said I'm geeked and I'm fired up (Fired, fire)

All I want tonight is just to get high up (Yeah)

All I want is, all I want is

[Chorus 2: Kendrick Lamar & Rihanna]

Loyalty, loyalty, loyalty

Loyalty, loyalty, loyalty

10-4, no switchin' sides

Feel somethin' wrong

You actin' shifty, you don't vibe

With me no more, I need

Loyalty, loyalty, loyalty

Loyalty, loyalty, loyalty

[Outro: Kendrick Lamar & Rihanna, Rihanna]

It's so hard to be humble

It's so hard to be

Lord knows I'm tryin'

Lord knows I'm dyin', baby

“PRIDE”

[Intro: Bēkon]

Love's gonna get you killed

But pride's gonna be the death of you and you and me

And you and you and you and me

And you and you and you and me

And you and you and you and me and—

[Chorus: Steve Lacy & Kendrick Lamar]

Me, I wasn't taught to share, but care

In another life, I surely was there

Me, I wasn't taught to share, but care

I care, I care

[Verse 1: Kendrick Lamar]

Hell-raising, wheel-chasing, new worldly possessions

Flesh-making, spirit-breaking, which one would you lessen?

The better part, the human heart, you love 'em or dissect 'em

Happiness or flashiness? How do you serve the question?

See, in a perfect world, I would be perfect, world

I don't trust people enough beyond they surface, world

I don't love people enough to put my faith in man

I put my faith in these lyrics, hoping I make a band

I understand I ain't perfect, I probably won't come around

This time I might put you down

Last time I ain't give a fuck, I still feel the same now

My feelings might go numb, you're dealing with cold thumb

I'm willing to give up a leg and arm to show empathy from

Pity parties and functions of you and yours
A perfect world, you probably live another 24
I can't fake humble just 'cause your ass is insecure
I can't fake humble just 'cause your ass is insecure

[Chorus: Steve Lacy & Kendrick Lamar]

Me, I wasn't taught to share, but care
In another life, I surely was there
Me, I wasn't taught to share, but care
I care, I care

[Post-Chorus: Kendrick Lamar & Anna Wise]

Maybe I wasn't there
Maybe I wasn't there
Maybe I wasn't there
Maybe I wasn't there

[Verse 2: Kendrick Lamar]

Now, in a perfect world, I probably won't be insensitive
Cold as December but never remember what winter did
I wouldn't blame you for mistakes I made or the bed I laid
Seems like I point the finger just to make a point nowadays
Smiles and cold stares, the temperature goes there
Indigenous disposition, feel like we belong here
I know the walls, they can listen, I wish they could talk back
The hurt becomes repetition, the love almost lost that
Sick venom in men and women overcome with pride
A perfect world is never perfect, only filled with lies

Promises are broken and more resentment come alive
Race barriers make inferior you and I
See, in a perfect world, I'll choose faith over riches
I'll choose work over bitches, I'll make schools out of prison
I'll take all the religions and put 'em all in one service
Just to tell 'em we ain't shit, but He's been perfect, world

[Chorus: Steve Lacy & Kendrick Lamar]

Me, I wasn't taught to share, but care
In another life, I surely was there
Me, I wasn't taught to share, but care
I care, I care

[Post-Chorus: Kendrick Lamar & Anna Wise]

Maybe I wasn't there
Maybe I wasn't there
Maybe I wasn't there
Maybe I wasn't there

“HUMBLE”

[Intro]

Nobody pray for me

It been that day for me

Way (Yeah, yeah)

[Verse 1]

Ayy, I remember syrup sandwiches and crime allowances

Finesse a nigga with some counterfeits, but now I'm countin' this

Parmesan where my accountant lives, in fact I'm downin' this

D'USSÉ with my boo bae tastes like Kool-Aid for the analysts

Girl, I can buy your ass the world with my paystub

Ooh, that pussy good, won't you sit it on my taste bloods?

I get way too petty once you let me do the extras

Pull up on your block, then break it down: we playin' Tetris

AM to the PM, PM to the AM, funk

Piss out your per diem, you just gotta hate 'em, funk

If I quit your BM, I still ride Mercedes, funk

If I quit this season, I still be the greatest, funk

My left stroke just went viral

Right stroke put lil' baby in a spiral

Soprano C, we like to keep it on a high note

It's levels to it, you and I know

[Chorus]

Bitch, be humble (Hol' up, bitch)

Sit down (Hol' up, lil', hol' up, lil' bitch)

Be humble (Hol' up, bitch)

Sit down (Hol' up, sit down, lil', sit down, lil' bitch)

Be humble (Hol' up, hol' up)

Bitch, sit down (Hol' up, hol' up, lil' bitch)

Be humble (Lil' bitch, hol' up, bitch)

Sit down (Hol' up, hol' up, hol' up, hol' up)

Be humble (Hol' up, hol' up)

Sit down (Hol' up, hol' up, lil', hol' up, lil' bitch)

Be humble (Hol' up, bitch)

Sit down (Hol' up, sit down, lil', sit down, lil' bitch)

Be humble (Hol' up, hol' up)

Bitch, sit down (Hol' up, hol' up, lil' bitch)

Be humble (Lil' bitch, hol' up, bitch)

Sit down (Hol' up, hol' up, hol' up, hol' up)

[Verse 2]

Who that nigga thinkin' that he frontin' on Man-Man? (Man-Man)

Get the fuck off my stage, I'm the Sandman (Sandman)

Get the fuck off my dick, that ain't right

I make a play fucking up your whole life

I'm so fuckin' sick and tired of the Photoshop

Show me somethin' natural like afro on Richard Pryor

Show me somethin' natural like ass with some stretch marks

Still will take you down right on your mama's couch in Polo socks

Ayy, this shit way too crazy, ayy, you do not amaze me, ayy

I blew cool from AC, ayy, Obama just paged me, ayy
I don't fabricate it, ayy, most of y'all be fakin', ayy
I stay modest 'bout it, ayy, she elaborate it, ayy
This that Grey Poupon, that Evian, that TED Talk, ayy
Watch my soul speak, you let the meds talk, ayy
If I kill a nigga, it won't be the alcohol, ayy
I'm the realest nigga after all

[Chorus]

Bitch, be humble (Hol' up, bitch)
Sit down (Hol' up, lil', hol' up, lil' bitch)
Be humble (Hol' up, bitch)
Sit down (Hol' up, sit down, lil', sit down, lil' bitch)
Be humble (Hol' up, hol' up)
Bitch, sit down (Hol' up, hol' up, lil' bitch)
Be humble (Lil' bitch, hol' up, bitch)
Sit down (Hol' up, hol' up, hol' up, hol' up)
Be humble (Hol' up, hol' up)
Sit down (Hol' up, hol' up, lil', hol' up, lil' bitch)
Be humble (Hol' up, bitch)
Sit down (Hol' up, sit down, lil', sit down, lil' bitch)
Be humble (Hol' up, hol' up)
Bitch, sit down (Hol' up, hol' up, lil' bitch)
Be humble (Lil' bitch, hol' up, bitch)
Sit down (Hol' up, hol' up, hol' up, hol' up)

“LUST”

[Chorus: Kendrick Lamar]

I need some water, something came over me
Way too hot to simmer down, might as well overheat
Too close to comfort, as blood a-rush my favorite vein
Heartbeat racing like a junkie's, I just need you to want me
Am I asking too much? Let me put the head in
Ooh, I don't want more than that; girl, I respect the cat
I promise, just a touch—let me put the head in
If it's okay; she said, "It's okay"

[Interlude: Kendrick Lamar & RATBOY]

Yeah, I need everybody's motherfuckin' hands up right now
I need everybody's motherfuckin'—
Door and his Nike Air Rattles
Rush the fire exit, no time for battles
Well I, I never expected
This that new shit
This that new, new shit

[Verse 1: Kendrick Lamar]

Wake up in the mornin', thinkin' 'bout money, kick your feet up
Watch you a comedy, take a shit, then roll some weed up
Go hit you a lick, go fuck on a bitch
Don't go to work today, cop you a fit
Or maybe some kicks and make you—

[Break: RAT BOY]

Door and his Nike Air Rattles

Rush the fire exit, no time for battles

Well I, I never expected

[Verse 1 (cont'd): Kendrick Lamar]

Wake up in the morning, thinking 'bout money, kick your feet up

Watch you a comedy—hol' up

Wake up in the mornin', thinkin' 'bout money, kick your feet up

Watch you a comedy, take a shit, then roll some weed up

Go hit you a lick, go fuck on a bitch, don't go to work today

Cop you a fit or maybe some kicks and make it work today

Hang with the homies, stunt on your baby mama

Sip some lean, go get a pistol, shoot out the window

Bet your favorite team, play you some Madden

Go to the club or your mama house

Whatever you doing, just make it count (I need some water)

Wake up in the morning, thinking 'bout money, kick your feet up

Hop in the shower, put on your makeup, lace your weave up

Touch on yourself, call up your nigga, tell him he ain't shit

Credit card scam, get you a Visa, make it pay your rent

Hop on the 'Gram, flex on the bitches that be hatin' on you

Pop you a pill, call up your bitches, have 'em waitin' on you

Go to the club, have you some fun, make that ass bounce

It's whatever, just make it count

[Chorus: Kendrick Lamar]

I need some water, something came over me
Way too hot to simmer down, might as well overheat
Too close to comfort, as blood a-rush my favorite vein
Heartbeat racing like a junkie's, I just need you to want me
Am I asking too much? Let me put the head in
Ooh, I don't want more than that; girl, I respect the cat
I promise, just a touch—let me put the head in
If it's okay; she said, "It's okay"

[Verse 2: Kendrick Lamar]

I wake in the morning, my head spinning from the last night
Both in a trance, feelings are dead—what a fast life
Manager called, the lobby call is 11:30
Did this before, promised myself I'd be a hour early
Room full of clothes, bag full of money: call it loose change
Fumbled my jewelry, 100K, I lost a new chain
Hop on the bird, hit the next city for another M
Take me a nap then do it again
We all woke up, tryna tune to the daily news
Looking for confirmation, hoping election wasn't true
All of us worried, all of us buried, and our feelings deep
None of us married to his proposal, make us feel cheap
Stale and sad, distraught and mad, tell the neighbor 'bout it—
Bet they agree, parade the streets with your voice proudly
Time passing, things change
Reverting back to our daily programs, stuck in our ways
Lust

[Bridge: Kendrick Lamar]

Lately, I feel like I been lusting over the fame

Lately, we lust on the same routine of shame

Lately (Lately) Lately, my lust been heightened (Lately)

Lately, it's all contradiction (Lately, I'm not here)

Lately, I lust over self (Lust turn into fear)

Lately, in James 4:4 says

"Friend of the world is enemy of the Lord"

Brace yourself: Lust is all yours

[Chorus: Kendrick Lamar]

I need some water, something came over me

Way too hot to simmer down might as well overheat

Too close to comfort, as blood a-rush my favorite vein

Heartbeat racing like a junkie's, I just need you to want me

Am I asking too much? Let me put the head in

Ooh, I don't want more than that; girl, I respect the cat

I promise, just a touch—let me put the head in

If it's okay; she said, "It's okay"

“LOVE”

[Intro: Kendrick Lamar]

Damn, love or lust

Damn, all of us

[Chorus: Zacari & Kendrick Lamar]

Give me a run for my money

There is nobody, no one to outrun me

(Another world premiere)

So give me a run for my money

Sippin' bubbly, feelin' lovely, livin' lovely

Just love me

I wanna be with you, ayy, I wanna be with

Just love me, just love me, just love

I wanna be with you, ayy, I wanna be with

Love me

I wanna be with you

Love me, just love me

[Refrain: Kendrick Lamar & Zacari]

If I didn't ride blade on curb, would you still love me?

If I made up my mind at work, would you still love me?

Keep it a hundred, I'd rather you trust me than to love me

Keep it a whole one hund', don't got you, I got nothin' (Uh, uh)

[Verse 1: Kendrick Lamar]

Ayy, I got somethin'

Hol' up, we gon' function, ayy, no assumptions, ayy

Feelin' like Tyson with it

Knock it out twice, I'm with it

Only for the night, I'm kiddin'

Only for life, yeah, only for life, yeah

Only for life, let's get it

Hit that shoulder lean

I know what comin' over me

Backstroke oversea

I know what you need

Already on ten, all money come in

All feeling go out, this feeling don't drought

This party won't end

[Refrain: Kendrick Lamar & Zacari]

If I didn't ride blade on curb, would you still love me?

If I minimized my net-worth, would you still love me?

Keep it a hundred, I'd rather you trust me than to love me

Keep it a whole one hund', don't got you, I got nothin' (Uh, uh)

[Chorus: Zacari & Kendrick Lamar]

Give me a run for my money

There is nobody, no one to outrun me

So give me a run for my money

Sippin' bubbly, feelin' lovely, livin' lovely

Just love me

I wanna be with you, ayy, I wanna be with
Just love me, just love me, just love
I wanna be with you, ayy, I wanna be with
Love me
I wanna be with you
Love me, just love me

[Verse 2: Kendrick Lamar & Zacari]

I'm on the way
We ain't got no time to waste
Poppin' your gum on the way (love me)
Am I in the way?
I don't wan' pressure you none
I want your blessing today (love me)
Oh, by the way, open the door by the way
Told you that I'm on the way (love me)
I'm on the way, I know connection is vague
Pick up the phone for me, babe
Dammit, we jammin'
Bad attitude from yo' nanny
Curves and your hips from yo' mammy
Remember Gardena, I took the studio camera
I know Top will be mad at me
I had to do it, I want your body, your music
I bought the big one to prove it
Look what you made
Told you that I'm on the way
I'm like a exit away, yep

[Refrain: Kendrick Lamar & Zacari]

If I didn't ride blade on curb, would you still love me?

If I minimized my net-worth, would you still love me?

Keep it a hundred, I'd rather you trust me than to love me

Keep it a whole one hund', don't got you, I got nothin' (Uh, uh)

[Chorus: Zacari & Kendrick Lamar]

Give me a run for my money

There is nobody, no one to outrun me

So give me a run for my money

Sippin' bubbly, feelin' lovely, livin' lovely

Just love me

I wanna be with you, ayy, I wanna be with

Just love me, just love me, just love me

I wanna be with you, ayy, I wanna be with

Love me

I wanna be with you

Love me, just love me

“XXX”

America

God bless you if it's good to ya

America, please take my hand

Can you help me underst—

New Kung Fu Kenny!

[Verse 1: Kendrick Lamar]

Throw a steak off the ark to a pool full of sharks

He'll take it

Leave him in the wilderness with a sworn nemesis

He'll make it (He'll make it)

Take the gratitude from him, I bet he'll show you somethin'

Woah (Woah)

I chip a nigga lil' bit of nothin'

I chip a nigga lil' bit of nothin'

I chip a nigga lil' bit of nothin'

I chip a nigga, then throw the blower in his lap

Walk myself to the court like, "Bitch, I did that!," X-rated

Johnny don't wanna go to school no mo', no mo'

Johnny said books ain't cool no mo' (No mo')

Johnny wanna be a rapper like his big cousin

Johnny caught a body yesterday out hustlin'

God bless America, you know we all love him

Yesterday, I got a call, like, from my dog, like 101

Said they killed his only son because of insufficient funds

He was sobbin', he was mobbin', way belligerent and drunk

Talkin' out his head, philosophin' on what the Lord had done

He said: "K-Dot, can you pray for me? It been a fucked up day for me
I know that you anointed, show me how to overcome."
He was lookin' for some closure, hopin' I could bring him closer
To the spiritual, my spirit do know better, but I told him
"I can't sugarcoat the answer for you, this is how I feel:
If somebody kill my son, that mean somebody gettin' killed."
Tell me what you do for love, loyalty, and passion of
All the memories collected, moments you could never touch
I wait in front a nigga's spot and watch him hit his block
I catch a nigga leavin' service if that's all I got
I chip a nigga, then throw the blower in his lap
Walk myself to the court like, "Bitch, I did that!"
Ain't no Black Power when your baby killed by a coward
I can't even keep the peace, don't you fuck with one of ours
It be murder in the street, it be bodies in the hour
Ghetto bird be on the street, paramedics on the dial
Let somebody touch my momma, touch my sister, touch my woman
Touch my daddy, touch my niece, touch my nephew, touch my brother
You should chip a nigga, then throw the blower in his lap
Matter fact, I'm 'bout to speak at this convention, call you back—

[Break: Kendrick Lamar]

Alright, kids, we're gonna talk about gun control
(Pray for me) Damn!

[Chorus: Bono]

It's not a place
This country is to me a sound

Of drum and bass

You close your eyes to look around

[Verse 2: Kendrick Lamar]

Hail Mary, Jesus and Joseph

The great American flag is wrapped in drag with explosives

Compulsive disorder, sons and daughters

Barricaded blocks and borders—look what you taught us

It's murder on my street, your street, back streets, Wall Street

Corporate offices, banks, employees, and bosses with

Homicidal thoughts; Donald Trump's in office

We lost Barack and promised to never doubt him again

But is America honest, or do we bask in sin?

Pass the gin, I mix it with American blood

Then bash him in, you Crippin' or you married to Blood?

I'll aks again—oops, accident

It's nasty when you set us up then roll the dice, then bet us up

You overnight the big rifles, then tell Fox to be scared of us

Gang members or terrorists, et cetera, et cetera

America's reflections of me, that's what a mirror does

[Chorus: Bono]

It's not a place

This country is to me a sound

Of drum and bass

You close your eyes to look ar—

“FEAR”

[Intro: Dale Warren]

Poverty's paradise

I don't think I could find a way to make it on this earth

(I've been hungry all my life)

[Voicemail: Carl Duckworth]

What's up, family?

Yeah, it's your cousin Carl, man, just givin' you a call, man

I know you been havin' a lot on yo' mind lately

And I know you feel like, you know

People ain't been prayin' for you

But you have to understand this, man, that we are a cursed people Deuteronomy 28:28 says, "The Lord shall smite thee with madness And blindness, and astonishment of heart"

See, family, that's why you feel like you feel

Like you got a chip on your shoulder

Until you follow His commandments, you gonna feel that way...

[Bridge 1: Charles Edward Sydney Isom Jr. & Kendrick Lamar]

Why God, why God do I gotta suffer?

Pain in my heart carry burdens full of struggle

Why God, why God do I gotta bleed?

Every stone thrown at you restin' at my feet

Why God, why God do I gotta suffer?

Earth is no more, won't you burn this muh'fucka?

I don't think I could find a way to make it on this earth

AkcuF'hum siht nrub uoy t'now ,erom on si htraE

Reffus attog I od doG yhw ,doG yhW

Teef ym ta 'nitser uoy ta nworht enots yrevE

Deelb attog I od doG yhw ,doG yhW
Elggurts fo lluf snedrub yrrac traeh ym ni niaP
Reffus attog I od doG yhw ,doG yhW
Teef ym ta 'nitser uoy ta nworht enots yrevE

[Verse 1: Kendrick Lamar]

I beat yo' ass, keep talkin' back
I beat yo' ass, who bought you that?
You stole it, I beat yo' ass if you say that game is broken
I beat yo' ass if you jump on my couch
I beat yo' ass if you walk in this house
With tears in your eyes, runnin' from Poo Poo and Prentice
Go back outside, I beat yo' ass, lil' nigga
That homework better be finished, I beat yo' ass
Your teachers better not be bitchin' 'bout you in class
That pizza better not be wasted, you eat it all
That TV better not be loud if you got it on
Them Jordans better not get dirty when I just bought 'em
Better not hear 'bout you humpin' on Keisha's daughter
Better not hear you got caught up
I beat yo' ass, you better not run to your father
I beat yo' ass, you know my patience runnin' thin
I got buku payments to make
County building's on my ass, tryna take my food stamps away
I beat yo' ass if you tell them social workers he live here
I beat yo' ass if I beat yo' ass twice and you still here
Seven years old, think you run this house by yourself?
Nigga, you gon' fear me if you don't fear no one else

[Chorus: Kendrick Lamar]

If I could smoke fear away, I'd roll that mothafucker up

And then I'd take two puffs

I'm high now (Huh), I'm high now (Huh)

I'm high now (Huh), I'm high now (Huh)

Life's a bitch, pull them panties to the side now

(Pull them panties to the side now)

I don't think I could find a way to make it on this earth

[Verse 2: Kendrick Lamar]

I'll prolly die anonymous, I'll prolly die with promises

I'll prolly die walkin' back home from the candy house

I'll prolly die because these colors are standin' out

I'll prolly die because I ain't know Demarcus was snitchin'

I'll prolly die at these house parties, fuckin' with bitches

I'll prolly die from witnesses leavin' me falsed accused

I'll prolly die from thinkin' that me and your hood was cool

Or maybe die from pressin' the line, actin' too extra

Or maybe die because these smokers are more than desperate

I'll prolly die from one of these bats and blue badges

Body-slammed on black and white paint, my bones snappin'

Or maybe die from panic or die from bein' too lax

Or die from waitin' on it, die 'cause I'm movin' too fast

I'll prolly die tryna buy weed at the apartments

I'll prolly die tryna defuse two homies arguin'

I'll prolly die 'cause that's what you do when you're 17

All worries in a hurry, I wish I controlled things

[Chorus: Kendrick Lamar]

If I could smoke fear away, I'd roll that mothafucker up

And then I'd take two puffs

(I've been hungry all my life)

I'm high now (Huh), I'm high now (Huh)

I'm high now (Huh), I'm high now (Huh)

Life's a bitch, pull them panties to the side now

(Pull them panties to the side now)

Now

[Verse 3: Kendrick Lamar]

When I was 27, I grew accustomed to more fear

Accumulated 10 times over throughout the years

My newfound life made all of me magnified

How many accolades do I need to block denial?

The shock value of my success put bolts in me

All this money, is God playin' a joke on me?

Is it for the moment, and will he see me as Job?

Take it from me and leave me worse than I was before?

At 27, my biggest fear was losin' it all

Scared to spend money, had me sleepin' from hall to hall

Scared to go back to Section 8 with my mama stressin'

30 shows a month and I still won't buy me no Lexus

What is an advisor? Somebody that's holdin' my checks

Just to fuck me over and put my finances in debt?

I read a case about Rihanna's accountant and wondered

How did the Bad Girl feel when she looked at them numbers?

The type of shit'll make me flip out and just kill somethin'

Drill somethin', get ill and fill ratchets with a lil' somethin'
I practiced runnin' from fear, guess I had some good luck
At 27 years old, my biggest fear was bein' judged
How they look at me reflect on myself, my family, my city
What they say 'bout me reveal if my reputation would miss me
What they see from me would trickle down generations in time
What they hear from me would make 'em highlight my simplest lines

[Verse 4: Kendrick Lamar]

I'm talkin' fear, fear of losin' creativity
I'm talkin' fear, fear of missin' out on you and me
I'm talkin' fear, fear of losin' loyalty from pride
'Cause my DNA won't let me involve in the light of God
I'm talkin' fear, fear that my humbleness is gone
I'm talkin' fear, fear that love ain't livin' here no more
I'm talkin' fear, fear that it's wickedness or weakness
Fear, whatever it is, both is distinctive
Fear, what happens on Earth stays on Earth
And I can't take these feelings with me, so hopefully, they disperse
Within fourteen tracks, carried out over wax
Searchin' for resolutions until somebody get back
Fear, what happens on Earth stays on Earth
And I can't take these feelings with me, so hopefully they disperse
Within fourteen tracks, carried out over wax
Wonderin' if I'm livin' through fear or livin' through rap
Damn

[Bridge 2: Bēkon]

God damn you, God damn me

God damn us, God damn we

God damn us all

[Outro: Carl Duckworth]

Verse 2 says, "You only have I known of all the families of the Earth, therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities"

So until we come back to these commandments

Until you come back to these commandments

We gonna feel this way, we gonna be under this curse

Because He said He's gonna punish us

The so-called Blacks, Hispanics, and Native American Indians

Are the true children of Israel

We are the Israelites, according to the Bible

The children of Israel

He's gonna punish us for our iniquities, for our disobedience

Because we chose to follow other gods

That man chastens his son, so the Lord, thy God, chasten thee

So, just like you chasten your own son, He's gonna chasten you

Because He loves you, so that's why we get chastised

That's why we're in the position that we're in

Until we come back to these laws, statutes, and commandments

And do what the Lord says, these curses is gonna be upon us

We gonna be at a lower state in this life that we live

Here, in today, in the United States of America

I love you, family, and I pray for you

God bless you

Shalom

“GOD”

[Chorus]

This what God feel like, huh, he-yeah
Laughin' to the bank like, "A-ha!", huh, he-yeah
Flex on swole like, "A-ha!", huh, he-yeah
You feel some type of way, then a-ha!
Huh, he-yeah (A-ha-ha, a-ha-ha)

[Verse 1]

Ever since a young man (Since a young man)
All I wanna be was a gunman (Was a gunman)
Shootin' up the charts, better run, man
Y'all gotta see that I won, man
Slick as El DeBarge with the finger waves, work it, JT
Handle bars like a fade, watch me work it, JT
I'm at large, runnin' plays like a circuit, JT
I'm sellin' verses, JT, watch me work it, JT
Look, look... hol' up!
Don't judge me! My mama caught me with a strap
Don't judge me! I was young, fuckin' all the brats
Don't judge me! Aimin' at your head for a stack
Don't judge! Don't judge me! Now my home got a Valley peak
Don't judge me! If I press your line you a freak
Don't judge me! Won't you tell a friend? Y'all gon' see—

[Chorus]

This what God feel like, huh, he-yeah
Laughin' to the bank like, "A-ha!", huh, he-yeah
Flex on swole like, "A-ha!", huh, he-yeah
You feel some type of way, then a-ha!
Huh, he-yeah (A-ha-ha, a-ha-ha)

[Verse 2]

Fuck is you talkin' to?
Ayy, do you know who you talkin' to?
Slide on you like fallen drapes
God toss full of carnivals
I kill 'em with kindness
Or I kill 'em with diamonds
Or I put up like fifteen hundred
Get yo' ass killed by the finest
Everything in life is a gamble
Nothin' in life I can't handle
Seen it all, done it all, felt pain more
For the cause, I done put blood on sword
Everything I do is to embrace y'all
Everything I write is a damn eight ball
Everything I touch is a damn gold mine
Everything I say is from an angel

[Bridge]

I don't rush shit, fuck shit, always your shit, my shit
Cannonballs to ignite shit, morning to the night shift
I'm on, I ain't sorry for it
Asked for a piece of mind, you charged me for it
I wanna see sometimes if you ignore it
I'm in the streets sometimes and can't afford it
I got a bad habit, levitatin', duckin' haters
Oh my! My heart is rich, my heart is famous

[Chorus]

This what God feel like
Huh, he-yeah (This what God feel like)
Laughin' to the bank like, "A-ha!"
(This what God feel like)
Huh, he-yeah (This what God feel like)
Flex on swole like, "A-ha!"
(This what God feel like)
Huh, he-yeah (This what God feel like)
You feel some type of way, then a-ha!
(This what God feel like)
Huh, he-yeah (This what God feel like)
This what God feel like

“DUCKWORTH”

[Intro: Bēkon & Kid Capri]

It was always me vs the world

Until I found it's me vs me

Why, why, why, why?

Why, why, why, why?

Just remember, what happens on Earth stays on Earth!

We gon' put it in reverse

[Bridge: Ted Taylor (Sampled)]

Darling, I told you many times

And I am telling you once again

Just to remind you, sweetheart

That my—

[Verse: Kendrick Lamar]

Oh, Lamar

Hail Mary and marijuana, times is hard

Pray with the hooligans, shadows all in the dark

Fellowship with demons and relatives, I'm a star

Life is one funny mothafucka

A true comedian, you gotta love him, you gotta trust him

I might be buggin', infomercials and no sleep

Introverted by my thoughts; children, listen, it gets deep

See, once upon a time inside the Nickerson Garden projects

The object was to process and digest poverty's dialect

Adaptation inevitable: gun violence, crack spot

Federal policies raid buildings and drug professionals

Anthony was the oldest of seven
Well-respected, calm and collected
Laughin' and jokin' made life easier; hard times, mama on crack
A four-year-old tellin' his nanny he needed her
His family history: pimpin' and bangin'
He was meant to be dangerous, clocked him a grip and start slangin'
Fifteen, scrapin' up his jeans with quarter pieces
Even got some head from a smoker last weekend
Dodged a policeman, workin' for his big homie
Small-time hustler, graduated to a brick on him
10,000 dollars out of a project housing, that's on the daily
Seen his first mil twenty years old, had a couple of babies
Had a couple of shooters, caught a murder case
Fingerprints on the gun they assumin', but witnesses couldn't prove it
That was back when he turned his back and they killed his cousin
He beat the case and went back to hustlin'
Bird-shufflin', Anthony rang
The first in the projects with the two-tone Mustang, that 5.0 thing They say 5-0 came, circlin'
parking lots and parking spots
And hoppin' out while harrassin' the corner blocks
Crooked cops told Anthony he should kick it
He brushed 'em off and walked back to the Kentucky Fried Chicken
See, at this chicken spot, there was a light-skinned nigga that talked a lot
With a curly top and a gap in his teeth, he worked the window
His name was Ducky, he came from the streets, The Robert Taylor Homes
Southside Projects, Chiraq, the Terror Dome
Drove to California with a woman on him and five-hundred dollars
They had a son, hopin' that he'd see college
Hustlin' on the side with a nine-to-five to freak it

Cadillac Seville, he'd ride his son around on weekends
Three-piece special with his name on the shirt pocket
'Cross the street from the projects, Anthony planned to rob it
Stuck up the place before, back in '84
That's when affiliation was really at gears of war
So many relatives tellin' us, sellin' us devilish works, killin' us, crime
Intelligent, felonious prevalent proposition with 9's
Ducky was well-aware
They robbed the manager and shot a customer last year
He figured he'd get on these niggas' good sides
Free chicken every time Anthony posted in line, two extra biscuits
Anthony liked him and then let him slide, they didn't kill him
In fact, it look like they're the last to survive, pay attention
That one decision changed both of they lives, one curse at a time
Reverse the manifest and good karma, and I'll tell you why
You take two strangers and put 'em in random predicaments
Give 'em a soul so they can make their own choices and live with it
Twenty years later, them same strangers, you make 'em meet again
Inside recording studios where they reapin' their benefits
Then you start remindin' them about that chicken incident
Whoever thought the greatest rapper would be from coincidence?
Because if Anthony killed Ducky, Top Dawg could be servin' life
While I grew up without a father and die in a gunfight
[Gunshot]

[Outro: Kendrick Lamar]

Thgifnug a ni eid dna rehtaf a tuohtiw pu werg I elihW
Efil 'nivres eb dluoc gwaD poT ,ykcuD dellik ynohtnA fi esuaceB
Ecnedicnioc morf eb dluow reppar tsetaerg eht thguoht reveohW?
Tnedicni nekcihc taht tuoba meht 'nidnimer trats uoy nehT
Stifeneb rieht 'nipaer yeht erehw soiduts gnidrocer edisnI
Niaga teem me' ekam uoy ,sregnarts emas meht ,retal sraey ytnewT
Ti htiw evil dna seciohc nwo rieht ekam nac yeht os luos a me' eviG
Stnemaciderp modnar ni me' tup dna sregnarts owt ekat uoY
Yhw uoy llet ll'I dna ,amrak doog dna tsefinam eht esreverR
Emit a ta esruc eno ,sevil yeht fo htob degnahc noisiced eno tahT
Noitnetta yaP—
Erac tuB
—Tpecnoc etalucammi ,siht ekil eno ecnis retrauq eniacoC
AND ym edisni ytlayor tog ,ytlayoL
—Tog I ,tog I ,tog I ,tog I
So, I was takin' a walk the other day...

