

**Merging Modalities:**

Sonic Intertext and Diaspora Spacetime on Earl Sweatshirt's *Some Rap Songs*

by

Joseph Riesterer

A thesis presented for the B. A. degree

with Honors in

**The Department of English**

University of Michigan

Winter 2020



## Acknowledgements

Ben Mangrum, for always helping me think these things through; for thinking, reading, listening, and laughing with me. For not throwing this document and all its semicolons in the recycle. Susan Parrish, for mentoring me, and motivating me to finish this document. Joey Horan, for pushing my brain through and beyond this fifty-page thought. Adela Pinch for pairing me with Ben. Kayla Johnson-Levy, for allowing me to ramble incoherently through day and night, for fixing my thoughts following their inevitable derailments, for forming ideas with me of identity, social structures, pronouns for trees, music, listenership, agency and status. Mike Watkins for the porch and mind more eloquent than my own. Tierra Shannon for helping me see that any of this matters.

Stop supporting the systemic incentivization of ego death.

Peace.

## Abstract

Keorapetse and Thebe Kgositsile are remarkable examples of artistic expression transcending time and place. Through the very diasporic lenses which Earl invokes on the album, this thesis will show ways in which Earl Sweatshirt, the musical persona curated by Thebe, reimagines diasporic expression—and hip hop—through the functional contexts of today’s world.

While Keorapetse’s poetry is political and personal, local and global; Thebe’s music is hip-hop and poetry, experimental and personal. Keorapetse’s work serves as a window into trans-national streams of art and influence, world literature and post-colonial literature, Thebe’s music illuminates the constant search for identity within an ever-progressing world timeline, and the always-developing art of music. This thesis will analyze the formal nature of both artist’s work to better understand their respective places in the literature of our world and the globally political art, using the biological narrative as a foundation

Sample-based hip hop and its global audience rely on the digitization of music, Earl’s local artistic redefinition is parallel to the global technological one. As these samples were what first attracted me as a listener, I find it to be the most productive direction of inquiry. I will approach such strata through the course of this project with fundamental questions: what work are these invocations doing? How do these invocations function in creating an auditory space? A literary space? With which voices is Earl predominantly interacting? What is the nature of these interactions? Is it deliberate? And, above all, what does Earl accomplish by both invoking and interacting with these ideas?

To explore such temporal and spatial conundrums presented by *Some Rap Songs*, and the temporality of poems alike, this project will lean heavily on the work of Yogita Goyal. Building from her critique of diasporic temporality, diaspora time, this thesis will point to examples in both the Kgositsile’s work.

The project is navigated through three major sections: the first pertaining to the formal aspects of *Some Rap Songs*, many of which will be shown to be similar to those of Keorapetse’s poetry; the second analyzing specific invocations occurring on *Some Rap Songs*; the third exemplifying how the album is both a departure from what is traditionally considered hip hop and a fulfillment of what Baldwin asserts an artist must do in the invoked speech. This is followed by a conclusion. The thesis is structured this way to provide a coherent progression through the assertions it contains. An understanding of the formal and rhetorical strategies which Earl employs on *Some Rap Songs* is fundamental to exploring how these tactics give shape to the album.

## CONTENTS

Introduction	5
ii	7
A Formal Analysis of Hip Hop Through Poetry	14
i.ii Ruptured Temporality Inside and Out of <i>Some Rap Songs</i>	20
i.iii Persistent Simultaneities In <i>Some Rap Songs</i>	29
Invoking Imprecise Words	34
Earl Practicing Baldwin in <i>Some Rap Songs</i>	37
Earl's Reimagination of Genre: Conclusions	47
Bibliography	51

## Introduction

*Show you right, it took some passages to get grown*<sup>1</sup>

This thesis is concerned with a single recording artist: Thebe Neruda Kgositsile. However, the lens of analysis will dart between artists, using Thebe's work as a starting point. In general then, this thesis is concerned with three main players: Thebe Kgositsile, his father Keorapetse, and author James Baldwin. While this project commences at Thebe's album *Some Rap Songs*, the analysis of this album, structured to match the album's collage of influence, will be diverse. To keep the artist's and their work separate, this project begins at the most basic level, that of names..

Thebe Kgositsile, born in 1994, records music deceptively. The credits of his record releases are of two aliases: Earl Sweatshirt and RandomBlackDude. Within hip hop, the act of creating under a name other than that given at birth is more common than the alternative. Hip hop is a medium equally concerned with aesthetics as it is ideology, and the curation of a distinct character behind one's music is important to many artists. Earl is no different. Given then that *Some Rap Songs* was released under this stage name of Earl Sweatshirt, the following project and its analysis will assume that the speaker, unless otherwise stated, is this fictional Earl. Although much of the album's content may be read as personal matter, this analysis refrains from biographical conjecture. Though, this ambiguous speaker is voiced by someone who *does* exist, somewhere.

While the voice is Thebe Kgositsile's, I assign the stories to Earl. Thebe's biological father, Keorapetse Kgositsile, will play a role in this investigation of *Some Rap Songs*, as he makes frequent

---

<sup>1</sup>Earl Sweatshirt, prod. RandomBlackDude, "Eclipse." From "Some Rap Songs by Earl Sweatshirt", iTunes Store, Released November 30, 2018.

sonic appearances. From 1962 until 1975, Keorapetse “Bra Willie” Kgositsile moved to America’s East Coast in exile from his home country of South Africa. Despite much of his poetry having been written in the United States, he would go on to become South Africa’s poet laureate in 2006. He remained in South Africa until his death in 2018. I’ll refer to Bra Willie as Keorapetse throughout this document for clarity.

While work has been done to highlight Keorapetse’s adaptive rhetorical devices<sup>2</sup>, the discussion of those being used by his son is remarkably scarce. TsiTsi Jaji’s essay, “Sound Effects,” surveys the form of Keorapetse’s poetry and its political, historical, and stylistic merits. Highlighted are his multiple authorial identities, a reader’s perception of time, and the musicality of his poetry. Formal aspects are shown to expand Keorapetse’s audience to America from South Africa, namely through speakers’ ambiguity. In blending the spheres of hip hop and poetry, Earl’s work is rooted in rhetorical strategies that make space for previous thinkers within the album’s own moment. In general, Earl’s temporal blending manifests continually in allusions to other works and the outright sound-sampling of them. This multimodal integration of diasporic expression allows for Earl’s interaction with it. Earl’s synthesis of rhetorical and auditory devices is engendered by the album’s form in its integration of samples.

The third and final artist central to this project is James Baldwin. His voice is the first to appear on Earl’s album, and this project aims to underscore how, in order to understand Earl’s interactions with Baldwin’s work, it’s essential to understand the invoked speech, “The Artist’s Struggle for Integrity.” Through the very diasporic lenses which Earl invokes on the album, this thesis will show ways in which Earl reimagines diasporic expression—and hip hop—within the functional contexts of

---

<sup>2</sup>Tsitsi Jaji, "Sound Effects: Synaesthesia as Purposeful Distortion in Keorapetse Kgositsile's Poetry," *Comparative Literature Studies* 46, no. 2 (2009): 287-310. doi:10.1353/cls.0.0077.

today's world. This will be accomplished through three major sections: the first pertaining to the formal aspects of *Some Rap Songs*, many of which will be shown to be similar to those of Keorapetse's poetry; the second analyzing specific invocations occurring on *Some Rap Songs*; the third exemplifying how the album is both a departure from what is traditionally considered hip hop and a fulfillment of what Baldwin asserts an artist must do in the invoked speech.

I've often thought of *Some Rap Songs* as being as much of a collage as an album of music. It's rife with literal, auditory, invocations of intertexts; one hears countless voices in listening, many of which aren't that of the artist or alias, but those the artist chose to assemble. Few hip hop albums feature such frequently interspersed excerpts of writers, poets, and thinkers conversing with one another, which is an idiosyncrasy in and of itself. On *Some Rap Songs*, Earl redefines the act of sampling by interacting with his selected samples.

### **Introduction.II** - Essential Background for the Analysis of Some Rap Songs

Even beginning at the most basic practice of labeling, the amorphous nature of hip hop is forced to center stage. One might liken the tracing of hip hop's influences to the infinite possible measurements of a single fractal. It turns out there's a metric by which this measurement is calculated: fractal dimension.<sup>3</sup> By changing the length of one's measurement device, one changes the measurement they arrive at. Mapping the jagged coastline of California, itself a fractal, with a yardstick would in theory yield a shorter measurement than the same measurement done at centimeter-long intervals. One can quickly lose themselves, to speak of my own experience, in attempts at locating the

---

<sup>3</sup> "Introduction" *Fractal Geometry: Mathematical Foundations and Applications*, by K. J. Falconer, John Wiley Et Sons, 2014, pp. xvii-xxiv.

ultimate origins of hip hop. The degree of inquiry will inherently reflect the inquisitor's degree of research; yardstick or centimeter, one approaches something closer to a limit than a static endpoint in hip hop.

In noting that, "Rap and hip hop are not synonymous,"<sup>4</sup> Adam Bradley approaches this limit. Though the specificities of this dilemma are inessential for this discussion, it deserves a brief nod if only to serve as an entrypoint. Bradley explains that while rap lends itself to a more commercialized music, hip hop captures the "sounds of the underground," more concerned with the politics and social dynamics it engages. In short, then, hip hop is a broader label of the cultural sphere within which rap music exists. While Bradley is right to complicate by highlighting the gap between terms, I hesitate in adopting such a strict dichotomy. Like the music they describe, these two terms are fluid; tied equally to one's place in time and space as they are to the music's sound or purpose. Bradley makes a linear distinction, separating the music on grounds of two contexts: sound and artist intentionality. I suggest that the concrete labelling of a genre that is still rapidly transforming is a nearly impossible task, simply a limit to be approached.

Earl has floated between these labels throughout his career. Being introduced to listeners in 2010 at age sixteen with the single "Earl," this confidently immature, unapologetic, and provocative rap song is the starting point for Thebe's chosen persona, Earl. Parallel the lyrics' surface-immaturity at play runs a content of garish lyricism, nothing short of aural poetics. Under the surface of this raucous content is a maze of tongue-twisting end and internal rhymes that put Earl's rhetorical gifts on display:

Yo, I'm a hot and bothered astronaut

Crashing while jacking off

To buffering vids of Asher Roth eating apple sauce

---

<sup>4</sup> Adam Bradley et al. *The Anthology of Rap*, New Haven, CT, Yale Publishing, 2010, pp xxix.

Sent to Earth to poke Catholics in the ass with saws  
 And knock blunt ashes into their caskets, and laugh it off  
 Twisted, sicker than mad cattle, in fact I'm off  
 Six different liquors, with a Prince wig plastered on<sup>5</sup>

The song's vocals are pitted over a distorted instrumental of booming bass hits and snares. What little melody sits under Earl's words is drowned out by the backing percussive forces. At once, the song borders auditory chaos and rhetorical mastery. In trying to read the above lines aloud, one encounters the sonic density that sixteen-year-old Earl experimented with. Internal rhymes are scattered throughout the verse's start, especially on the vowel sounds: "hot // bothered // astronaut," "crashing // jacking," "Asher Roth // applesauce," "knock blunt ashes into their caskets, and laugh it off." These sounds effortlessly fall out of one's mouth when read aloud, despite their meanings' straying from social convention.

The chaos that Earl touches here begins with the song's abrasive sonics: a listener hears blaring drums in the song's first moments. Over this sonic chaos, Earl lays a verse of words as chaotic, volatile as the sounds beneath them. Earl's tone oscillates: speaking in absurdity at points, "I'm [an] astronaut crashing while jacking off," while at other moments he oscillates toward dark reflection, pointing to exploitative members of the Catholic hierarchy and calling himself "twisted," painting the image of an alcohol-dependent artist who has lost control of his mind. Adding to the absurdity of this verse is his clear lyrical talent, the contrast of comparing Earl's clearly crafted aural delivery with the seemingly dismissable rhetorical content. That he orchestrated this maze of words at only sixteen years, Earl's progression of form to present-day poetics shows a clear evolution that begins with "Earl."

---

<sup>5</sup> Earl Sweatshirt, "Earl," Track Self-Released, 2010, Digital Medium.

The final piece to Earl's exaggerated introduction to rap circles are the accompanying visuals: a collage of skateboarding, countless drugs in a blender, images of Earl and his friends drinking said concoction, climaxing with scenes of the teenagers bleeding, convulsing, and ultimately dying. It goes without saying that the entire piece is dark fantasy, a fictive narrative of overconsumption, the lyrics and visuals alike. The entire piece may be seen as a side-shot to the emphasis on drug consumption in commercial rap: most clear today, but precursors were visible at the time of "Earl"'s release. A brief survey of Billboard's top twenty songs at the time of writing (8 Nov., 2019) yields numerous references to pills, MDMA, codeine, and weed. Earl was calling attention to this trend by meticulously satirizing it nine years ago. Alternatively, this song may be read as Earl's foray into "horror-core." By the same token, Earl inhabits to a degree of satire an anarchistic, teenage voice. The song, while superficially disturbing to many, is mere amusement to the artist. The ensuing decade has shown Earl's listeners a distinct transition. Gone are the blown-out and bass-heavy instrumentals, gone with them the absurdist lyricism that one can't help but laugh at. In their replacement has come meticulously refined instrumentals and lyrics; listening to Earl's most recent work alongside his first single is a juxtaposition.

I argue the two essential creators of hip hop, the lyricist and the producer, of a given song work in synthesis to produce a work that's part instrumentation, part poetics. Uniquely, Earl fills both halves of this dichotomy: *Some Rap Songs* was almost entirely produced by Thebe—both the lyrics and the music.

Schloss concisely infers in *Making Beats: The Art of Sample-Based Hip-Hop*, that, "the producer embodies hip hop history through ... scratching, looping, digging for rare records,

philosophizing. [They] choose to become part of the collective history every time [they] make a beat.”<sup>6</sup> This is Earl’s position in one view, that of an artist placing themselves in history. However, in the following chapter, I will articulate the ways in which Earl not only enters history in *Some Rap Songs*, but continually invokes it. In doing so, Earl cedes a linear conception of time for a distinctly simultaneous experience, not unlike that which is more concretely evident in the poems of his father, Keorapetse. Earl, by embodying the role of lyricist and producer, gains creative power and temporal synesthesia, two defining aspects of his work.

To discuss the temporality of songs and poems alike, this project will lean heavily on the work of Yogita Goyal. In her introduction to a special issue of *The Journal of Research in African Literature*, Yogita Goyal explains the following problem facing diasporic literature:

The quandary about how to read history may be rethought by turning not just back in time, but across in space—to diasporic and global engagements with slavery and to the different histories of race and empire that African writers bring to the conversation. At stake in the discussion is the basic question of how we see the relation between past and present, particularly between historical violence and contemporary forms of inequality.<sup>7</sup>

Goyal adds that “the ongoing work of diaspora studies, then, has to be a continuing rethinking of time and space, alongside a reassessment of nationalism and Pan-Africanism and the excavation of histories long suppressed,” ultimately asking, “how may we think of diaspora not only as a description of people and worlds generated by displacement, but as a concept, method, and reading practice?” Compelled

---

<sup>6</sup> Joseph Schloss, 2014, *Making Beats: the Art of Sample-Based Hip-Ho*, Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, p. 197.

<sup>7</sup> Yogita Goyal, “Africa and the Black Atlantic,” *Research in African Literatures* 45, no. 3 (2014): v-xxv.  
<https://www.muse.jhu.edu/article/555708>. pp. IX.

by Goyal's inquiry, this project is centered on using the diasporic actors Earl invokes on *Some Rap Songs* as the lenses for the album's analysis.

Most central to this project is Goyal's distinction of diaspora time—"[time] that is characterized by rupture, but also by various kinds of imagined or projected simultaneities"<sup>8</sup>—from a linearly progressive concept of nation time. In this project, diaspora time will denote a separate spatial temporality from that of nation time. diaspora time, then, is a nonlinear temporal experience, wherein the present is both moving from the past and persistently tied to it by history's omnipresence.

Diaspora time may be thought of as a synesthetic experience of time: where past and present make up the now, not only looking backward, or forward, as in nation time, but in all directions at once. This simultaneity is of historical causes, and the very rupture which Goyal references. Because histories of racialized power structures still reverberate in today's world, diaspora time is ruptured, nonlinear.

These traits will be fully explored in the following chapter on form.

Some final introduction to this project's keywords is necessary. By simultaneity, I refer to a ruptured sense of time: in labeling a moment as simultaneous, I referencing that both the past and present are invoked at once. When I label certain sonic qualities as bipolar, I am referencing the sonic tendencies to vascillate unpredictably between extremes. Typically, this oscillation is an emotional one, evoking conflicting feelings in a listener. This ability to toy with a listener's emotion brings me to my third keyword: artistic agency. I refer here to the artist's inherent power in the listener's experience of listening. If an artist evokes specific feelings from a listener, or intentionally deceives a listener's emotion by way of ruptured emotional progression, they are a more active agent in a listener's experience than if the artist simply fulfills a listener's expectations at each moment. These are the

---

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, X.

concepts that are key to this thesis. To begin this inquiry, I turn to the album's unique formal qualities. It was what first gained my listenership, and over the course of two years, still proves to lend itself to interrogation.

In transition, I urge the reader to keep the question that persists on my own mind in writing on theirs, while reading: what is the form of this album accomplishing, and how?

## *I - A Formal Analysis of Hip Hop Through Poetry*

*This then is the rhythm / and the blues of it / Home is where the music is.<sup>9</sup>*

In a poem titled “For Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers,”<sup>10</sup> Keorapetse’s speaker uses the poetic medium to capture the experience of listening to jazz in a New York nightclub:

How you sound is  
 who you are  
 where your ear  
 leans moaning and bopping  
 from the amen corner  
 of chicken and dumpling  
 memories of places

This stanza muddles the traditionally separate roles of making versus listening to music. In blurring the line between musician and audience, Keorapetse’s speaker asserts that the effect of Blakey’s drum performances is tied equally to Blakey’s motions as it is the audience’s response. By way of repeated alliteration, the speaker further pushes these boundaries, recreating percussive hits in written lines:

backing back to root

---

<sup>9</sup> “For Hugh Masekela.” *This Way I Salute You: Selected Poems*, by Keorapetse Kgositsile, Kwela, 2007, pp. 7–10.

<sup>10</sup> Keorapetse Kgositsile, “For Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers,” From *To Breathe into Another Voice: a South African Anthology of Jazz Poetry*, by Myesha Jenkins, Real African Publishers, 2017, pp. 33–35.

roosting at the meeting place  
 the time that has always been here  
 even here where wood  
 mates with skin on wax  
 to make memory to place us  
 even in this hideous place  
 p-p-pounding p-p-pounding  
 the s-s-sounds of who  
 we are even in this place  
 of strange and brutal design.<sup>11</sup>

To the speaker, a moment's sounds contain the identities of those who share that moment. Music is an identifier, locating a collective humanity even in the strangest places. Further, the act of recording this shared performance ('on wax'), binds every listener in the audience.

Earl's album, itself a place of "strange and brutal design," binds its own group in the act of recording. Each invoked piece: the sounds of Baldwin, the sounds of suffering, Keorapetse's voice, and those of others; each is localized via Earl's recording.

Echoing Goyal's prescription to use diaspora as "a reading practice," Earl crafts diaspora space, within which he interacts with the past, on each track from *Some Rap Songs* by way of sampling. This diaspora space is a massive web of influence and intertextuality attainable only by way of the album's form. Only in sample-based hip hop can one juxtapose excerpts of poetry, lectures, acceptance speeches, the home of music and the sounds of a generation past. The album's intertextual

---

<sup>11</sup>Keorapetse Kgositsile, "For Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers," *To Breathe into Another Voice: a South African Anthology of Jazz Poetry*, by Myesha Jenkins, Real African Publishers, 2017, pp. 33–35.

characteristics are what bring it life, the outside voices reminding listeners that this album is bigger than “Earl,” and more complex than, as the title misleads, some rap songs. This tendency works across both forms, unrestricted to sonic spaces.

Though this tactic isn’t restricted to sample-based hip hop, its effects are only fully conceived in the recorded medium. Keorapetse used a strategy much like that of Earl’s sampled invocations some fifty years prior. By titling certain poems in reference to specific musicians, and going so far as to recreate the sounds of their performance on paper, Keorapetse invokes the referenced artist’s work and ideas. While textually, this practice functions more as a simultaneous nod to those referenced, it’s on *Some Rap Songs* that this linkage is rendered sonically explicit by listening.

Schloss suggests that “[sampling] allows individuals to demonstrate intellectual power while simultaneously obscuring the nature and extent of their agency.”<sup>12</sup> While this assertion is correct, it’s lacking the final piece: that sampling also allows the artist to craft an auditory space of the diasporic influence in which their art is rooted.

Only in sample-based hip hop is Schloss’s limited thesis proven. All of it is made possible by the formal allowances of hip hop, which are markedly free form. Artists may sample any sounds they choose: ranging from other songs, other voices, a single drum hit, as far as car horns and even tornado sirens. Samples may serve to settle a listener or to disorient them entirely. Samples may be orchestrally arranged or jarringly mismatched. This amorphous allowance—to sample the auditory voice of *anyone* before you—allows an artist to interact directly with any member of their diasporic influence.

However, few artists have utilized the medium in such a way until *Some Rap Songs*.

---

<sup>12</sup>“Making Beats: the Art of Sample-Based Hip-Hop.” *Making Beats: The Art of Sample-Based Hip-Hop*, by Joseph Glenn. Schloss, Wesleyan University Press, 2014, p. 138.

*Some Rap Songs*' form not only allows for this direct interaction across vast gaps of time and space; it sets and maintains the mood throughout the album. To highlight this quality, which I find to be unique to Earl's album, I turn to the project's final six minutes. The four-track run of "Veins," "Playing Possum," "Peanut," and "Riot!" is a series of juxtapositions, as the transitions between each track catch the listener off-guard. The album finishes on bipolar swings, beginning at the primary sonic level: "Veins" comes to a close with a disembodied panning repetition of "peace," until the instrumental halts and Earl reflects, "Sittin' on a star thinkin' how I'm not a star just, can't call it dogs." Earlier, this same sequence appears in the song preceded by "It's been a minute since I heard applause." The words cut again as "Playing Possum" begins, itself with a cut vocal excerpt of Keorapetse Kgositsile reading his poem "Anguish Longer Than Sorrow." Before any more than a syllable of his voice, a sample of Thebe's biological mother, Cheryl Harris, cuts off while the instrumental unravels into a patternless collage of off-beat and muted drum kicks underneath a few piano keys, reversed, and a slowed-down choral excerpt.

This is a space with no rhythm: the two readers interchange in segments, each reading a separate speed, the instrumental often skipping or reversing in random intervals. After the two have finished reading, an applause louder than the voices begins and the instrumental dies. This is the applause Earl stated that he hadn't heard. From here, "Peanut" commences with a noise resembling a video game's indication that the player has died or been injured, followed by overbearing audio feedback or static and an empty soundscape that begins with a desolate tone of sedated piano keys and minimal bass. These volatile aesthetic swings in the formal composition of the album's sound, jolting from despair to relief, serve to emphasize the depths of Earl's portrayed suffering. By juxtaposing emotional peaks with their valleyed counterparts, Earl amplifies the intensity of both feelings.

Formally, Earl emphasizes portrayed emotional suffering while he works within Baldwin's framework, to be explored in the following chapter.

These sounds are the products of Earl's approach to diasporic expression, one that's concerned equally with aesthetics and thematics. In listening, one feels the shifts in mood as Earl's songs vacillate. While the sonic palette is novel, the emotive fluctuations at root are the continuation of long-preceding textual practice.

As bass is typically what grounds this project's beats, the instrumental space on "Peanut" sounds barren. This desolation is only amplified by the added emptiness of feedback static. For lack of better words, this song sounds like what the album's cover looks like: out of focus and eerie. The track concludes with the album's final words which are difficult to transcribe, with Earl's lyrics at a quieter volume than the ambient feedback. Accordingly, I propose two possible readings: "Father's face, but I'm not (afraid/a phrase) // my Uncle Hugh." The ambiguity of this line is frustratingly critical: Earl either states that he is not afraid of a paternal resemblance, or nods to the differences between his and his father's art. This line is charged by Earl acknowledging his facial resemblance to his father, a statement that might explain why the album's cover features a blurry, unrecognizable image of Earl's own face. Potentially, Earl states that he is not afraid that the two look alike, which implies a desired paternal split, but in replaying this syllable countless times, I lean towards the reading of "a phrase." In listening, there is a distinct 's' sound as Earl's voice fades out, especially in the isolated vocal track. Contextually, too, I find "phrase" to make more sense, with the closing line referencing South African jazz artist Hugh Masekela. Both musicians, Earl and Hugh, express themselves through a medium adjacent to Keorapetse's poetic sphere, which would explain why neither of them are "phrase[s]" to Earl.

Still the transition is disorienting to hear. Earl's words are followed by a distorted scream rendered demonic by how slowed it is, which cuts to the beginning of "Riot!" immediately, an overjoyed guitar swing. "Riot!" is a reworking of the aforementioned "Uncle Hugh"'s song of the same title. The song sampled is a soulful jazz track that is brought to life by a light guitar, swinging piano chords, and trumpets that scream in harmony. It's purely instrumental, a lyricless closing of the album. The sampling of Hugh Masekela is both historically and familially productive. Masekela and Keorapetse were friends, both coming to America in exile from South Africa. Keorapetse writes the following in his poem to Masekela, cited in this section's heading:

Mirror of my stupidity  
 And wisdom  
 ...  
 We are all dispensable  
 like words or songs  
 ...  
 This then is the rhythm  
 And the blues of it  
 Home is where the music is<sup>13</sup>

Earl captures these referenced rhythm and blues, those of home, and repurposes them as his own mirror, thus bringing his home to music and vice versa. In doing so, *Some Rap Songs* creates a home space exactly where Keorapetse expects to find it: where the music is. Thematically, this poem by Keorapetse, "For Hugh Masekela," aligns with the closing of *Some Rap Songs* in its aesthetic swings.

---

<sup>13</sup> Keorapetse Kgositsile, "For Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers." *To Breathe into Another Voice: a South African Anthology of Jazz Poetry*, by Myesha Jenkins, Real African Publishers, 2017, pp. 33–35.

Bra Willie cites music, or the music of Masekela as a mirror of both his stupidity and wisdom: his highs and lows. As I have shown, Earl manipulates the culmination of emotion on *Some Rap Songs* into jarring swings between euphoric highs (as with “Riot!” and the theme of peace in “Veins”), and rock-bottoms (as with the distorted “Peanut” and Earl’s self-removal on “Playin’ Possum”).

With this sequence Earl swings from moments of artistic “wisdom” in orchestrating a nonexistent parental conversation, in “Playin’ Possum,” to “stupidity,” with the depressed and jumbled content of “Peanut.” Similarly, Keorapetse can’t keep from hints of existentialism even in a poem dedicated to the work of his close friend, pointing to the infinite mass of human life that makes an individual feel isolated, negligible. Despite this brief moment of solemnity, the poem finishes in a hopeful declaration: that “home” is a space constantly within the reach of one’s ears.

### ***III*** - Ruptured Temporality Inside and Out of Some Rap Songs

The final piece of ruptured but simultaneous time in *Some Rap Songs* is found in the songs’ tempos. While I have described the mood of the instrumentals as bipolar, volatile, and unpredictable, a measure more objective than my own ear would allow those who aren’t able to listen as they read to understand this analysis. Songs’ tempos are tracked in beats per minute (bpm). While this measure in no way copies a song’s mood, it is a simple metric to record a song’s speed and infer tone. As more somber rap songs are typically slower, and more energetic ones happier, one can assume that this metric reflects generally the song’s tone. Using data from an internet database of song tempos, GetSongBPM, I’ve found the average tempo of the album to be 102.5 bpm. Using this metric, one can plot the bpm of each song against the album’s average bpm to see how many deviations across the

average bpm occur in the album. For example, the opening track is at 140 bpm, the second at 47 bpm. This is a fluctuation across the mean tempo, which I record as one mood shift. This serves as a measure of departures from the album's average tempo. On *Some Rap Songs*, there are 10 fluctuations across the average tempo throughout the 15 tracks. This can be simplified to a ratio of  $\frac{2}{3}$ , telling us that on average, two of every three songs on the album fluctuates across the mean tempo.

Without context, this data may seem meaningless. *Some Rap Songs* peaked on the Billboard list in the week of December 15, 2018, at number 17. To give meaning to the metric, I've plotted the same comparison for the rap albums within the top 20 of this list for the same week. For these seven albums<sup>14</sup>, the average fluctuation across bpm was 7.5, for an average 18.7 songs per album. This ratio can be simplified to 0.4, telling us that an average of two out of every five songs in this selection fluctuates across the average tempo.

This measure reflects the bipolar nature of *Some Rap Songs*, contextualized with similarly-selling rap albums. While the 40 percent of the songs from the average top-20 rap album in December of 2018 swung across average tempo, a jarring 66.7 percent of songs on *Some Rap Songs* swing across average tempo. Both statistically and experientially, Earl's album is markedly more volatile than the albums of his contemporaries.

This bipolarity of formal composition and tone hasn't appeared in *Some Rap Songs* by way of chance. Earl employs it within the space of this album in following the methods of one of its invoked speakers, Keorapetse Kgositsile. Kindred swings in speaker's tone are not difficult to locate within his poetry. I will focus on a selection of Keorapetse's poems: "Towards a Walk in the Sun," "Anguish Longer Than Sorrow," and "Random Notes to My Son." This is done to contain the scope of my

---

<sup>14</sup> Drake - *Scorpion*, Travis Scott - *Astroworld*, Metro Boomin' - *Not All Heroes Wear Capes*, Meek Mill - *Championships*, Lil Wayne - *Tha Carter V*, Trippie Redd - *A Love Letter to You III*, and Post Malone - *BB&B*.

project, with my focus localized on Earl Sweatshirt and hip hop. There is much fuller discussion of Bra Willie’s poetry in circulation, and I point interested readers toward the works of Phalafala, Margo Crawford, and Tsitsi Jaji to open the window into this scholarship.

One of Keorapetse’s most famous poems, titled “Towards a Walk in the Sun,” begins with an italicized prologue stanza (capitalized in some editions), followed by an interjecting series of stanzas, finishing with a return to a capitalized epilogue stanza. The italicized sections speak in stoic, prophetic language:

*This wind you hear is the birth of memory  
when the moment hatches in time’s womb  
there will be no art talk. the only poem  
you will hear will be the spearpoint pivoted  
in the punctured marrow of the villain;*

The stanzas threaded between are contrastingly interrogative, furiously charged with energy:

You who swallowed your balls for a piece  
of gold beautiful from afar but far from  
beautiful [...]

I quote these stanzas to emphasize the bipolarity present in this poem. The tension with which the reader is constantly confronted is central to the poem’s construction. Similarly, the reader is uneasy while piecing together Keorapetse’s labyrinthine syntax. Inconsistencies lend ultimate control to the speaker while the reader scrambles to make sense of it all. This characteristic presents itself in *Some Rap Songs*, with the sonic bipolarity—the listener is constantly unsure of what is to follow—and it is essential to understanding the work wherein Earl’s music is grounded. Earl follows the formal lead set

by Keorapetse some fifty years before, and a seemingly disorienting and chaotic surface proves, when analyzed, to be methodically set-up.

That this poem inspired a new wave of rhythmic expression in New York group The Last Poets underscores how the poet is involved with simultaneities beyond stanzas. The Last Poets, some of America's first rappers over beats, borrowed their namesake from Keorapetse. In fact, they take their name from lines analyzed above: "the moment [where] there will be no art talk. the only poem you will hear will be the spearpoint..." one needn't look further than the Kgositsile. Keorapetse's poem, "Towards a Walk in the Sun," serves a much more important impact on Black American expression, an explanation of which I borrow from UP Phalafala:

This dramatic monologue rendered with a heroic African voice declares the end of poetry and calls for revolutionary action. A troupe of four Afro-American performers responded to that call, 'therefore we are The Last Poets of the world', conscripting to Kgositsile's war of spears. And that is how they coined their name and that of their debut eponymous chart-topping album (1970). The Last Poets' response to Kgositsile's call to arms can be used to study how the tertiary archive then becomes a resource base in the diaspora. The Last Poets did not only coin their name from Kgositsile's poem, but also strategically transformed the imagery and language of that poem in the songs of their album. The anger and incendiary language characteristic of their poetry is shaped by Kgositsile's battle-cry. Kgositsile and his work at that juncture in black America provided a resource that could help them forge a distinctly African identity which they craved. He opened up new avenues to bring Southern African histories to bear on black America.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> Uhuru Portia Phalafala (2017) Setswana RootsRoute in Keorapetse Kgositsile's Poetry, *English Studies in Africa*, 60:1, 60-78, DOI: 10.1080/00138398.2017.1332799

Keorapetse's poem was fundamental in the creation of what one may call America's earliest hip hop group. The Last Poets' debut album is somewhere between jazz, poetry, hip hop, and soul. Like Keorapetse's poetry, the album is emotionally charged, only by screams in place of capital letters and percussive backing alongside alliteration. If using the essential characteristics of hip hop laid out by Adam Bradley and Joe Schloss, a beat and an MC, The Last Poets is the first hip hop album in America. Not only are they inspired by Keorapetse in namesake, but too, as Phalafala explains, in form. As the theory of Diaspora Time suggests, hip hop - itself a diasporic tradition - is rooted in the past and present simultaneously. When The Last Poets were recording revolutionary music and turning ears across the country, they worked on ground cleared in part by Keorapetse Kgositsile. Keorapetse's mark on the group is not hard to see: future-oriented songs like "When The Revolution Come" make up the album's tracklist.

Ground was cleared for more artists than those that made up The Last Poets. If one assumes Earl to have the same familial lineage as Thebe, then Earl and Bra Willie have each spoken to the other through their art. In *Some Rap Songs*, Earl uses excerpts of Keorapetse's poetry to permit posthumous speech. One can find similar methods in the work of his father: "Random Notes to my Son" is a poem from Keorapetse's 1971 collection, addressed in the first line to Thebe. I suggest one of the many possible readings.

Beware, my son, words  
 that carry the loudnesses  
 of blind desire also carry  
 the slime of illusion

It is a poem concerned with many things, though above all, its focus is set on linguistics from the beginning: that words carry weight—of suffering and of power. The poem is bipolar in its oscillation between charged assertions of colonization’s long-lasting impact on the world and open questions addressed to Thebe. This bipolarity is typical of Bra Willie’s poetry and of postcolonial literature as a whole<sup>16</sup>, textually illustrating Keorapetse’s speaker’s tension between his past and Thebe’s future.

The temporality of this poem is simultaneous; a blending of the past and future:

what days will you inherit?

what shadows inhabit your silences?

Formally, a linguistic focus is present, with the fluctuation of “inherit” followed by “inhabit,” intertwined with a collapsed sense of time. Between lines, the speaker shifts from the future form “will you,” to the present form of “inhabit.” Formally, time and language are in flux, while thematically, Keorapetse’s speaker frantically questions the uncertain future into which his son has been born. To explain this tension in another sense: Keorapetse’s linguistic talent is a distinct sense of power—much like Thebe’s assumed power in sampling—allowing him to playfully posit similar words, but this power is underscored by a larger sense of global helplessness. Simultaneously, he is vulnerable and untouchable through his words. This tension between the poem’s rhetorical surface and the collective meaning which can be assigned to it as a literary work, is present in *Some Rap Songs*, and will be analyzed further in the project.

Words’ power is emphasized, making evident their illusory ability to distract one from an apparent truth. One could read this as a warning to the poem’s addressee, but more broadly as a

---

<sup>16</sup>Robert JC Young, “World Literature and Postcolonialism,” *The Routledge Companion to World Literature*, edited by Theo D’Haen, Abingdon: Routledge, 2011, pp. 213–222. pp. 218.

warning to anyone reading—to be mindful of the words they speak, and those they follow. It is this “slime of illusion” that is so dangerous, which,

dripping like pus from the slave's battered back

e.g. they speak of black power whose eyes

will not threaten the quick whitening of their own intent.

This line is polyvocal: firstly, to evoke imagery of slavery and apartheid, and secondly, to signal the contained illusion of this imagery. This simile can be read as a meta-simile in that it shows how illusions are beaten into a person by a society, shaping (‘whitening’) the subject subconsciously. Keorapetse’s speaker fears a pacification of blackness conditioned by white desire. The abhorrance of slavery is no illusion; it is a reality. Thus, it is the illusion which drips from the back of whoever the poem is addressed to and the speaker who begs the listener to be conscious of this cultural conditioning.

I have aspired to expression, all these years,

elegant past the most eloquent word.

Again, Keorapetse’s speaker brings closely related words together with “elegant” and “eloquent,” yet he remains distanced. One would be correct in saying that the speaker not only aspired to expression, but excelled: globally-distributed poetry in multiple languages, participation in world-shaping movements within different countries, the creation of South Africa’s poet laureate. But all of this is ignored, and all that is written is of aspiration, a future-oriented word that stands to position Keorapetse as somehow dissatisfied, unfulfilled.

Why? As if the speaker is to answer themselves, the poem continues:

But here now

our tongue dries into maggots as we continue our slimy  
 death and grin. Except today it is fashionable to scream  
 of pride and beauty as though it were not known that  
 'slaves and dead people have no beauty'

A fear of consumerism, aesthetics, and the future is portrayed, one shaped by a perceived historical illiteracy. This is the culmination of the tension between an open future and the marred history evident since the poem's beginning. It is then acknowledged by the speaker: "Confusion / in me and around me / confusion." Like the reader, the speaker is confused.

The next line, "This pain is not from the past," emphasizes the present-moment pain, a fear that is tied equally to the past as it is the future, a simultaneous pain. When read through Goyal's framework of diaspora time, one sees a clear embodiment of the theory here. Turning to the final stanza:

And what shapes  
 in assent and ascent  
 must people the eye of newborn  
 determined desire know  
 no frightened tear ever rolls on  
 to the elegance of fire. I have  
 fallen with all the names I am  
 but the newborn eye, old as  
 childbirth, must touch the day  
 that, speaking my language, will

say, today we move, we move ?

One sees the climax of Keorapetse's closely paired words, which is again evident with "assent/ascent," and in the repeated last words, "we move." Paradoxically, though, this call to action, itself is a frequent trope in Keorapetse's poetry<sup>17</sup> is negated by the poem's final question mark. It leaves the poem's thesis uncertain, seemingly to be determined. The poem's syntax is equally ambiguous: "what shapes in assent and ascent must people" implies that people, the last clause of the phrase, must act to shape, "in assent and ascent" the newborn's eye. It is the newborn's eye, which is so readily molded by influence, that the speaker says people must shape. The speaker offers a defense for subjectively developed perception. However, the poem's final line, ending in uncertainty, seems to be a false finish line; the real end goal is a newborn shaped intelligently, not led astray by slimy illusion or desire. That is to say, while the poem's surface conveys uncertainty, buried in its syntactical maze is a prophetic prescription for the future.

In all, the reader is lost in strings of clauses held together by commas, lulled into the speaker's own sense of confusion by illusory words. This is a refined poem: densely layered, polyvocal, and a poignant warning. Overall, one reads an unwillingness to allow the invoked memory of slavery to slip away, a maze of syntax, and the speaker's reflection on their personal and collective history. To a listener of *Some Rap Songs*, this may sound like a particularly familiar framework.

---

<sup>17</sup>Tsitsi Jaji, "Sound Effects: Synaesthesia as Purposeful Distortion in Keorapetse Kgositsile's Poetry," *Comparative Literature Studies* 46, no. 2 (2009): 287-310. doi:10.1353/cls.0.0077.

### I.III - Persistent Simultaneities In Some Rap Songs

*Some Rap Songs* embodies Goyal's idea of diaspora time by way of following Keorapetse's method of simultaneous time. Recall the previously discussed syntax of Keorapetse's poems, most notably the way in which it serves to disorient the reader in "Random Notes to my Son." Returning to *Some Rap Songs* with Keorapetse's poetry as reference, one sees formal similarities.

After compiling the run times of all hip hop albums on the Billboard top 200 chart in 2018, the year of *Some Rap Songs*' release, I found the average album length to be 58 minutes and 27 seconds. This gives a simple baseline for comparing the 24-minute and 39-second *Some Rap Songs* within genre. Earl's album is about 2.5 times shorter than 2018's average hip hop album. This is the first temporal abnormality unique to *Some Rap Songs*.

This theme of brevity can be seen throughout the album: in Earl's refined approach to production, in the songs' lack of refrains, and in the bipolar swings of track mood from song to song. What the album lacks in runtime is compensated by way of its very compaction. As each song wastes no time on introduction, they are shaved down to deliberate stubs. Listening through the album with a keen ear causes one to continually reverse and repeat tracks as Earl's songs pass so quickly, yet with such syntactical density, that a listener's awareness struggles to keep pace. Given that this album held a spot on the Billboard list, surrounded by albums longer than it, one can infer that the brevity of the album is in no way a reflection of its quality.

However, it isn't the length of Keorapetse's poems that proves generative in reading through a diasporic lens. More fundamental is his subversion of a linear temporal progression. *Some Rap Songs* manifests this very temporal manipulation multimodally. Primarily, this occurs through the sampling

of authors of the mid-twentieth century. Recalling Goyal's theorization of diaspora time as "time characterized by rupture, but also by various kinds of imagined or projected simultaneities,"<sup>18</sup> I will show how sampling fits this model, and how Earl's sampling method exemplifies it.

Beginning at the most basic level of the sample, the connections are obvious. Schloss highlights how the repurposing of excerpts into the backbone of a new song "allow[s] a producer substantial space for creative control and manipulation while maintaining most of the characteristics of the original recording."<sup>19</sup> Simultaneously, the producer, in this case Earl, earns their own creative control while the content of another artist's work is present in a new form. This sampling pathway to creative control is parallel to Keorapetse's scrambled syntax in "Towards a Walk in the Sun" and "Random Notes to my Son": in both cases, control is with the artist, rewarding savvy readers or listeners. Time is also nonlinear in this theoretical space. On the opening track, Earl interacts with a fifty-year-old Baldwin speech. To the listener, though, the voices of Baldwin and Earl are separated by mere seconds.

When sampling, time is both fractured and simultaneous: the temporal jump of some fifty years is the fracture, while Earl's ability to act with this past speech ties the practice into a simultaneity. Schloss is correct in saying that the sampling artist maintains their own creative control, despite using the sounds of a sampled artist. They are more than a creative agent, though, as Earl acts as a temporal link between Baldwin's speech and present-day music. By reusing sounds and spoken ideas from the past to create music-of-the-now, Earl characterizes the album with the same "rupture" and "projected simultaneities" that form Goyal's theory of diaspora time. Earl's approach, when boiled down, may be seen as using the past to make future-oriented hip hop.

---

<sup>18</sup>Yogita Goyal, "Africa and the Black Atlantic," *Research in African Literatures* 45, no. 3 (2014): v-xxv. <https://www.muse.jhu.edu/article/555708>.

<sup>19</sup>Joseph G. Schloss and Jeff Chang, *Making Beats: The Art of Sample-Based Hip-Hop*, Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2014. [muse.jhu.edu/book/35663](https://www.muse.jhu.edu/book/35663). pp. 138.

As mentioned earlier, Earl manipulates time multimodally, of which all modal methods contribute to the listener's experience of diaspora time. Rhetorically, too, the songs on this album may be characterized by rupture. Returning to the eight-line repetition of "Red Water," the second song on *Some Rap Songs*:

Yeah, I know I'm a king  
 Stock on my shoulder, I was sinkin'  
 I ain't know that I could leave  
 Papa called me chief  
 Gotta keep it brief  
 Locked and load, I can see you lyin' through your teeth  
 Fingers on my soul, this [is] a 23  
 Blood in the water, I was walkin' in my sleep  
 Blood on my father, I forgot another dream  
 I was playin' with the magic, hide blessings in my sleeve

While the thematic content of this song has been analyzed, the formal presentation is equally generative. The speaker commences the song with a proclamation of kingship. Yet, this statement is contradicted—ruptured—by the lines to follow: the kingly speaker is sinking, seemingly trapped. The speaker's feeling of helplessness is called into question by way of paternal affirmation. This is a memory, which is made clear by the use of past-tense "made." The following line, "gotta keep it brief," can be read as an acknowledgement of the lines' cyclical structure; a cycle of integration met with disintegration. It's the only line without a first-person pronoun to tie it to the speaker. By way of syntax, this line's tone is more ambiguous than those surrounding it.

The next line departs by employing first- and second-person pronouns, referencing the observation of a liar. There are multiple possibilities here: the only other subject of this song is the speaker's father, so it may well be the speaker's father who is lying; it may be the speaker is referring to himself in the second-person, in a form of dissociated self-reflection; it may also be an unnamed subject who is lying. Contextually, I lean toward the first two possibilities. Finally, the repeated scene is ruptured yet again by gory dream-state images that seem to connect the speaker's father and the water in which our speaker sinks. The point is that the lyrics of "Red Water" are characterized by rupture and disavowal of linear time: the speaker jumps between dreams, self-reflection, and memories.

Turning to another track, "Ontheway!," one can see the same rejection of linear time. Beneath the lyrics croons a euphoric guitar sample, starkly uncharacteristic for the album's somber tone. The guitar holds an otherwise jolty instrumental together, as beneath it segments of a vocal cry are audible, sliced into momentary yells. The instrumental is simultaneously grounded and dissociating from itself. The instrumental's misalignment with the album's overall tone is acknowledged in the speaker's first line: "My mood really swinging, I peruse like a native would do." Here, the speaker provides some rationale to the album's volatile nature—which I've referred to previously as bipolar. This is why. Like the speaker, the album's mood swings unpredictably. The song continues:

Don't know what I'mma say

'Cause I don't label the bags, I stay in 'em

One may interpret this last line as a reference to the idea of "personal baggage." If one is mindlessly wandering through their emotional baggage, they will have no idea of what they are about to say. This, then, is another simultaneity, one of emotion and memory. It is as if the speaker is exploring all their baggage at once, 'staying' within it, which yields a ruptured ability to speak. Phrases, words, images,

and memories pour out guided by emotional importance rather than logical arrangement. This lack of mental agency further explains the speaker's tendency to float between multiple settings, as seen in "Red Water."

I revisit the past

Port wine and pages of pads

Momma say don't play with them scabs

It's safe to say I see the reason I'm bleeding out

This, in combination with the line before it (analyzed above), is more context on our speaker's process. Again, though, the sense of time is splintered when listened to: what may be assumed to be a memory of writing down memories is interrupted by a moment of maternal advice and the speaker's internalization of this advice.

Also here is an acknowledgment of nonlinear time: in revisiting the past, our speaker navigates a simultaneous temporal experience. It is this experience of nonlinear time, the very manifestation of diaspora time, that is causing our speaker's recurring blood loss. That these unavoidable memories are ever-present—simultaneous—takes a toll on the speaker, and is portrayed as bleeding out.

Above all else, this section has shown how *Some Rap Songs*' form of sample-based hip hop allows Earl to imbue his album with living diasporic influence. More importantly, though, I've shown how Earl uses similar strategies as Keorapetse Kgotsile, to conceptualize diaspora time—and space—as a fully sonic experience. Throughout the album, simultaneity, invocation, and surface-meaning tension present themselves to the listener, a collage that stands as Earl's reimagination of diasporic expression.

## II - Invoking Imprecise Words

*It is hard to begin to understand that the drift in American life towards chaos is masked by all these smiling faces and all these do-good efforts.*<sup>20</sup>

Analysis in the previous section explored formal aesthetics on *Some Rap Songs* insofar as those which were gathered from the invoked Keorapetse Kgositsile. While the aesthetic tactics Earl applies on *Some Rap Songs* were previously read as expansions of invoked artists' methods, much of the album's content can be shown to extend the ideas of yet another invoked artist when analyzed through the appropriate lens: James Baldwin. The album's lyrics carry ethical appeals. By rooting lyrics in Baldwin's existential questions, Earl, the album's speaker, appeals to listeners' own emotion. That this display of suffering might humanize the album's speaker—"insofar as I can tell you what it is to suffer, perhaps I can help you to suffer less."<sup>21</sup>

With this, I turn to Baldwin's 1962 lecture, "The Artist's Struggle for Integrity," from which Earl samples Baldwin's phrase, "imprecise words," as the first words on *Some Rap Songs*. The sampled passage is so essential to the lecture's overall thesis that it originally comes in the opening words of Baldwin's lecture:

I really don't like words like "artist" or "integrity" or "courage" or "nobility." I have a kind of distrust of all those words because I don't really know what they mean, any more than I really know what such words as "democracy" or "peace" or "peace-loving"

---

<sup>20</sup>James Baldwin, "The Artist's Struggle for Integrity," *The Cross of Redemption: Uncollected Writings*, edited by Randall Kenan, by James Baldwin, Pantheon Books, 2011, pp. 50–59.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 53

or “warlike” or “integration” mean. And yet one is compelled to recognize that all these imprecise words are attempts made by us all to get to something which is real and which lives behind the words.<sup>22</sup>

Baldwin begins the lecture in the universal. As the essay narrows into an exploration of language’s subjectivity and interpretation, it hinges upon the idea of “imprecise words.” It is out of Baldwin’s articulated dislike for such words that the essay unfolds. While the essay continues to question an artist’s social purpose, all stems from words’ unavoidable interpretability and their tie to something real. It’s as though the “real” thing, those ideas and experiences which give shape to the speaker’s words, is uninterpretable and universal. *Some Rap Songs*, when read through Baldwin’s lens, is a testament to the subjectivity that it’s involved in as art. It’s through this subjectivity that those emotional appeals referenced above reach listeners.

In framing the experience of suffering as valuable by way of its identifiable and universal qualities,<sup>23</sup> Baldwin finds the value of art and its creators. Baldwin posits that one’s experienced suffering is symbolic to any who have themselves suffered: “Not only did everybody suffer, everybody’s doing it. And all the time. It’s a fantastic and terrifying liberation.”<sup>24</sup> The liberation, to Baldwin, is the universality of suffering. Suffering is both recognizable and humanizing by way of its subjective experience. To Baldwin, the subjective becomes the universal through suffering. It is through this framework that Baldwin justifies the artist’s purpose in life:

---

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 50.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 53.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 53.

You must find some way of using this to connect you with everyone else alive. ... understand that your pain is trivial except insofar as you can use it to connect with other people's pain.<sup>25</sup>

The social involvement of Baldwin's theorizing is explicit. The speech having been given amidst the American civil rights movement, the societal foci were clear: "There is nothing you can do for me. There is nothing you can do for Negroes. It must be done for you."<sup>26</sup> Baldwin means that an artist can't begin to positively impact their society without first understanding that the very act is done for one's self. It's not charity to improve society, it's intentioned. To Baldwin, the solution to societal suffering along racial lines must be the solution-seeker's personal goal. Through one's own suffering, one finds a universal humanity. And to exist societally amidst this universal humanity—and end racial oppression in America—an artist must use their own suffering, for themselves. Because everyone has suffered, and because Baldwin asserts that only an artist can connect their experienced suffering to the broader suffering of a society, the artist connects their suffering to that of the larger picture. As the essay closes, Baldwin sums this up: "to save an entire country ... the price is to understand oneself."<sup>27</sup>

The context in which Baldwin's assertions were made is essential: an artist who, jaded by the polarized society in America, leaves the country at the age of twenty-four<sup>28</sup>. In returning to America with an international perspective, Baldwin grapples with what his purpose as an artist in America may be. In "The Artist's Struggle for Integrity," Baldwin struggles to articulate exactly the purpose of his own art and that of any American artist.

---

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 53.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 58.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 58.

<sup>28</sup> James Baldwin, "Notes of a Native Son," James Baldwin: Collected Essays, edited by Toni Morrison, by James Baldwin, The Library of America, Dist. by Penguin Books, 1998, pp. 5–11.

### *III* - Earl Practicing Baldwin in Some Rap Songs

Although Earl doesn't directly sample Baldwin's entire speech, Baldwin's thesis stems from an observation of rhetorical imprecision. One can only read such a comprehensive two-word reference as deliberate. Accordingly, *Some Rap Songs* follows Baldwin's edict of an artist's purpose deliberately. Such referenced themes as fear and death persist throughout the album, locally and universally, formally and lyrically. Earl imbues the album that follows with Baldwin's explorative tone, all of which is accomplished in under a second. This is the power of the album's numerous intertextualities. In transposing audio of Baldwin into an album of sounds, Earl's modal transformation is multifarious. In applying these two words, invoked is an essay's worth of ideas. Earl, by signalling to Baldwin's lecture, succinctly appeals to these ideas while simultaneously keying the listener of what is to follow. Earl brings new life into Baldwin's recorded words. Further, by sampling spoken excerpts, Earl begins to assemble a circle of living, breathing influences on record. Though Baldwin has died, his words live on in recording and remain generative as shown by Earl's application of them. In such a space, the temporal dimension is simultaneous. One hears Baldwin as one hears Earl.

These volatile aesthetic swings in the formal composition of the album's sound, jolting from despair to relief, serve to emphasize the depths of Earl's portrayed suffering. By juxtaposing emotional peaks with their valleyed counterparts, Earl amplifies the intensity of both sentiments. This suffering is emphasized by Earl as he works within Baldwin's framework, to be explored in this chapter and finished in the conclusion.

This first song keys the listener into what is to follow, using Baldwin's guide of suffering, fear, and pain. As shown in the first chapter, Earl's aesthetic and emotional swings in the album's formal composition emphasize the depths of Earl's portrayed suffering. By juxtaposing emotional peaks with their valleyed counterparts, Earl amplifies the intensity of both sentiments. This suffering is emphasized by Earl as he works within Baldwin's framework. Following Earl's invocation of Baldwin, the album's music begins with a distorted loop of the word dream. The looped voice is sonically shallow; it's eerie, cold, and prolonged. By way of the sample's distortion, the loop itself is slow. In this repetitive drone, the voice sounds utterly trapped. Each longing repetition of "dreams" is paired with a sedated finger-bass and periodic drum-hits, both gentle, saving the majority of the song's music for this vocal incantation, and in a way, lulling the listener. The actual voice segment is borrowed from a 1970 soul track by Nashville group, The Endeavors, of the same title, "Shattered Dreams." The chorus on Earl's version of the song includes the following lines:

Back off, stand-offish and anemic  
 Blast off, buckshot into my ceilin'  
 Why ain't nobody tell me I was bleedin'?  
 Please, nobody pinch me out this dream

The heavy-handed suicidal imagery of a shotgun shell through one's head is an immediate key into Earl's portrayed suffering. This suffering is only amplified by the tone of Earl's self-portrait: anemic and distant. The speaker portrays a deprived mental state that matches the sonic tone of the instrumental. The speaker looks to the community around him for support, seemingly alone or undefended. No one mentioned to Earl that he was suffering, which suggests that this is a suffering only Earl himself can see. It is this internal struggle, one with the self, which Earl puts on display

through *Some Rap Songs*. This internal struggle echoes Baldwin's conception of an artist's purpose. On the album's first song, Earl is already capturing the personal suffering. Not only does Earl invoke Baldwin's voice, but from the outset the album manifests Baldwin's ideas of what art should be. In doing so, Earl brings ideas tied to the past to look forward in time with his own work, an act that resembles Goyal's theorization of nonlinear time.

This thematic parallel with Baldwin's ideas only continues as the album progresses. The dream Earl hopes to not be removed from is revisited in the album's second song, "Red Water." Formally, the song begins a lazy guitar riff and quickly devolves into a disorienting loop of off-beat rhythm. A distorted voice croons unrecognizable words at varying pitches while muted drum hits hold what little beat the song has. This collage of sounds loops for the entire song, anchored to the sedated drums and surreal vocal sample. Once the verse begins, itself a repetition, Earl's voice appears flatly, almost as if he is speaking at the end of a barren tunnel. The eight lines repeat:

Yeah, I know I'm a king  
 Stock on my shoulder, I was sinkin'  
 I ain't know that I could leave  
 Papa called me chief  
 Gotta keep it brief  
 Locked and load, I can see you lyin' through your teeth  
 Fingers on my soul, this is 23  
 Blood in the water, I was walkin' in my sleep  
 Blood on my father, I forgot another dream  
 I was playin' with the magic, hide blessings in my sleeve

The recording is distinctly lo-fi, with some words being chopped altogether, as with the missing end sound of “walkin’,” and the singer’s vocal sample cut in a jarring manner. By way of the song’s repetition, Earl’s mournful sentiment feels inescapable. The lyrics match this sentiment. Earl internalizes that he is “a king” by way of his father’s affirmation. Simultaneously, though, this manifests as a burden, with the stock on his shoulder being an anchor’s stock, the load-bearing piece, causing him to sink. His father’s presence is markedly brief, and acts in this passage as both a justifier, in being a king, and as an inhibitor, the stock on his shoulder. The listener is at once confronted with the past and present of Earl’s parental lineage: a fleeting past of reassurance, marred by the weight of current circumstances.

Whether speaking about his father’s death, or the physical distance between the two, the lines convey unreachability. Like Earl’s feelings, the lyrics themselves are splintered and seem to interact with each line differently. For example, the stock of an anchor would cause one to sink, but one could also press the stock of a gun to their shoulder, which ties to “locked and load,” and “this is 23,” with a Glock 23 being a common semi-automatic handgun that one could both lock and load. The language is charged with violent allusion, much like Keorapetse’s use of spearpoint images.

Earl’s speaker describes himself as sinking and unaware, and by the end of this repetition, is somewhere between dream and reality, walking in his sleep. The song in its entirety is a repetition of these eight bars, which function as an incantation and lull the listener into the very trance that Earl finds himself in. There is blood on the water in which he sinks, the “Red Water” after which the song takes its title; there is also blood on his father, who is cited as the reason for his sinking. Ultimately, Earl stands as the creator of this strange scene, omniscient and reflective. His perspective here is

retrospective, allowed for by his own experienced suffering. Temporality is decidedly nonlinear as the listener floats between memory, dream, and history.

The referenced dream is associated paternally, pointing to the weight of the speaker following his father. In “Red Water” the speaker’s father is simultaneously the weight of his existence and the dreams after which he chases. It is this juxtaposition that is so Baldwin-esque, pitting this inescapable feeling of sinking with Earl’s asserted self-identity as a king. “Red Water” captures perfectly Baldwin’s idea of an artist’s purpose by portraying the feelings of fear and love in a tight eight-bar loop. Baldwin states near the end of “The Artist’s Struggle for Integrity,” that, “If I can survive it, I can always go back there.”<sup>29</sup> By this, Baldwin means once he has worked through, or survived, a specific manifestation of suffering, he can return to it, to “prepare myself in this way for the next inevitable and possibly fatal disaster.” Earl, to prepare himself for any uncertain future, must survive this suffering and stay afloat for the album and its artist to progress.

Returning to the framework of diaspora time, one can look more concretely into Earl’s temporal presentation. The portrayed relationship itself is ruptured: the speaker’s father has splintered time, for which he is covered in blood. This leaves Earl’s speaker with the simultaneous dream and burden of literary expression. Earl presents this experience as suffering, as influenced by Baldwin. Through ambiguity, he speaks vaguely about the actual source of this suffering, often referring to it as sinking, drowning, and dreaming. His metaphors become more explicit as the album progresses. In a track titled “OnTheWay,” Earl finally articulates the source of his suffering, which has been portrayed as bleeding:

I revisit the past

---

<sup>29</sup>James Baldwin, 2011, *The Cross of Redemption: Uncollected Writings*, Edited by Randall Kenan. New York, NY: Vintage International. p. 57.

Port wine and pages of pads

Momma say don't play with them scabs

It's safe to say I see the reason I'm bleeding out

By this point in the album, Earl has come full circle, pointing to his past as the reason for his bleeding. His mother's nagging to not pick at scabbed wounds is a metaphor for the suffering analyzed above: Earl's fiddling with scabbed memories has, in this dream-space, led to his bleeding out. It's not only the experience of familial volatility, but Earl's apparent habit of picking at things, revisiting the past to write about it (on "pages of pads"). The scabs are not the issue, but the inquisitive habit to wonder what might lie beneath them. This conclusion still follows Baldwin's essay, embodying the idea that "you can only have it by letting it go."<sup>30</sup> And too, it echoes the diaspora time framework: just as historical traumas rupture diaspora time into a nonlinear experience, Earl's traumatic memories—whatever they might be of—present themselves indefinitely, and their inexorability the cause of his bloody demise.

This analysis shows how Earl's invocation of Baldwin's lecture is bimodal. Initially, the invocation serves to create a space of interaction between the two works, Baldwin's speech and Earl's album respectively. Given that Baldwin's speech shows to hold guiding principles of the album's pathos, Earl's sampling uses the speech to create diaspora space—space wherein Earl interacts with a diasporic artist's work in which his own album is grounded. Secondly, this invocation serves as an outline for *how* exactly Earl crafts the lyrical and instrumental pieces of *Some Rap Songs*. In this intertextual place, it becomes clear that on *Some Rap Songs*, Earl not only follows Baldwin's prescription of what an artist's purpose is, he fully embodies it.

---

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 58.

In order to best highlight Earl's embodiment of Baldwin's search for artistic integrity, I turn to the final paragraph of "The Artist's Struggle for Integrity":

The time has come, it seems to me, to recognize that the framework in which we operate weighs on us too heavily to be borne and is about to kill us.

This passage provides a simple question with which to interrogate *Some Rap Songs*. Does Earl "recognize that the framework in which [he] operates is about to kill [him]"? Put simply, yes. The theme of bodily weight—something weighing too heavily on the speaker—reappears constantly on Earl's album. One finds the first appearance on the first track, "Shattered Dreams":

Hate swimmin' through your bloodlines  
 Motherfuck the judge, same goin' to the one time,  
 Come and take a stroll in the mud  
 Dip a toe in it, heard the hammer like a grudge  
 When you holdin' it close, we was on the cusp  
 It was holes in the boat, we ain't make a fuss

In these lines, most notable is the fluidity of pronouns: the speaker begins by describing a second-person "you" with hate flowing through them. From here, the speaker orates a line of hatefulness: with "one time" likely standing as a colloquial name for police, the speaker is articulating for a racially-rigged judicial and legal system. The hatred may be our speaker's for the discriminatory system just as much as it may be that of a member within the corrupt system—a judge or police officer—who has a predisposed dislike for non-white defendants. From here, the speaker switches to a command without subject—"come and take a stroll in the mud." This line offers multiple readings: the mud may be red as mental low-point as much as it may be something more specifically brown. If

one assumes Earl is condemning the American legal system for its racial prejudice, then one would read this line accordingly: a speaker beckoning those who've not been explicitly discriminated against legally to empathize with him in this space. The listener is beckoned to, as the speaker requests, "dip a toe," to be read as the imagining of only a fraction of this struggle. The hammer in the following line supplies further ambiguity, it may be the gavel of a judge, who, when holding a racially-motivated grudge would be more inclined to adjudicate in a certain manner. Similarly, this hammer may be that of a gun which would similarly appreciate the trigger-happiness that would accompany a grudge.

With the final couplet, the speaker changes pronouns: "we was on the cusp / we ain't make a fuss." These lines are read productively through the lens of diaspora. Holes in the boat create clear imagery of a sinking ship: perhaps a ship travelling across the Atlantic carrying enslaved people to America, perhaps the racialized framework that the modern and historical American legal system operates through. Whichever of these one chooses, the ship is sinking, doomed, which our speaker conveys. When analyzed, these lines show Earl's description of a framework which is "about to kill [him]," just as Baldwin asks us to recognize. One can read the "sinking" of "Red Water" in a similar fashion.

From using the lyrical space of this album to convey his hardships, to creating instrumental atmospheres which border on excruciating when listened to, Earl on *Some Rap Songs* is fundamentally tied to conveying his personal suffering. Just as Baldwin says:

you can use [your suffering] to connect with other people's pain; and insofar as you can do that with your pain, you can be released from it, and then hopefully it works

the other way around too; insofar as I can tell you what it is to suffer, perhaps I can help you to suffer less.<sup>31</sup>

But, in light of this passage, is Earl released from his suffering on *Some Rap Songs*? The past tense verbiage on “Nowhere2Go!” implies that he may be released:

Yeah, I think I spent most of my life depressed

Only thing on my mind was death

“I spent most of my life depressed” is a different statement than, say, “I have been depressed my whole life.” The past tense may be read as implying that Earl is no longer depressed; otherwise, he wouldn’t speak in such a retrospective tone.

This brings me to the album’s final track, “Riot!” As stated in the first chapter, this track stands out from those that precede it. It’s a song that is brought to life by a light guitar, swinging piano chords, and trumpets screaming in harmony. It’s a lyricless closing to the album. The song, though without words, is a release. It’s Earl coming out of a tunnel of suffering. After fourteen tracks of suffering, Earl finds release on “Riot!,” surrounded by the sounds of family and home.

This section has served to show how Earl’s invocation of Baldwin functions on *Some Rap Songs*. Through inquiry steered by passages of Baldwin’s speech, “The Artist’s Struggle for Integrity,” I have highlighted the many ways in which Earl’s album is a manifestation of the very speech it invokes as the album’s first words. While the first chapter of this thesis has shown how *Some Rap Songs* frequently borrows formal tactics from the invoked Keorapetse Kgositsile, this second chapter has analyzed the many ways in which the album’s lyrical content aligns with Baldwin’s meditation on art

---

<sup>31</sup>James Baldwin, “The Artist’s Struggle for Integrity,” *The Cross of Redemption: Uncollected Writings*, edited by Randall Kenan, by James Baldwin, Pantheon Books, 2011, pp. 53.

with integrity. All of this diasporic intertext (and interaction) is made possible by Earl's medium of sample-based hip hop.

#### IV - Earl's Reimagination of Genre: A Conclusion

*Why it's so muddy in the creek, poet?*<sup>32</sup>

Through the recruitment of voices and their orators' ideas, Earl emboldens his own craft. That Baldwin's words are the album's first words is no mistake. It is calculated, and signals to any attentive listener the foundation of Earl's art, a foundation that is literally tied to the work of black artists, poets and musicians, of a separate era. The album's bookends, Baldwin's speech and Masekela's grooves, hybridize Earl's artistic involvement. While "The Artist's Search For Integrity" and "Riot!" are not Earl's work, they become his own work by way of his reformatting them. Baldwin's speech, until *Some Rap Songs*, has no musical involvement, and is not being actively applied to present-day society. Similarly, "Riot!," when recorded by Masekela, wasn't intended to be twisted into a joyously psychedelic immersion in sonic relief—that is, until Earl repurposed it, surrounded it with his own words and those of his parents, and left it as his final offering to the listener. In the process, Earl builds upward from a constructed ground of diasporic expression, simultaneously relying on and breathing new life into the selected works.

Interpretation of these tracks is further complicated by the fact that neither "Peanut," nor "Playin' Possum," are songs as much as spoken word, and that "Riot!" is not traditional hip hop. As already shown to some degree, this album is amorphous in its assemblage. I hope to show briefly how it pushes boundaries of music and poetry. Beginning with "Playin' Possum," the track's title alludes to Earl's invisible involvement, concealed like a possum. Here, Earl doesn't put forth any words. Instead,

---

<sup>32</sup> Earl Sweatshirt, prod. RandomBlackDude. "Eclipse," From "Some Rap Songs by Earl Sweatshirt," iTunes Store. Released on November 30, 2018.

as shown above with Earl's sampling work on "Riot!," what I call Earl's methodical sonic-masonry is pushed to the forefront. Methodical, as Earl has deliberately placed sections of Keorapetse reading "Anguish Longer Than Sorrow" aloud amidst sections of his mother, Cheryl Harris' keynote address at UCLA School of Law's 2014 Critical Race Studies Symposium. Only through a methodical application is Earl able to create an imagined conversation between the two parents. I term this "masonry" for lack of a more accurate concept. Masonry is the practice of building something, be it a wall, home, or song, by carefully laying individual units which together yield a whole structure, conceptual or physical. Here, the instrumental that Earl places beneath the two voices acts as the mortar, holding speech-bricks in place. The words bring new meaning to each other only in Earl's revisioning of them. I've put Keorapetse's words in parantheses:

Thank you to my family

(Can you see them now?)

To my partner Mysteria who I love and depend on more than I can say

(For some children)

To my son Thebe (Words like)

Cultural worker and student of life (Home)

Whose growth and insights inspire me, a thousand kisses

(Could not carry any possible meaning) [...]

(Perhaps I should just borrow

The rememberer's voice again

While I can and say)

You know the real deal

("To have a home is not a favor")

Keorapetse's poem is no longer one written to displaced people, but implied by context is that it is addressed directly to Earl. The same applies to Harris' keynote address. Even the form of Keorapetse's poem is manipulated, no longer written, but spoken over a collage of sound. Earl's form is also manipulated by this exchange: this song is not a song at all, but spoken word. The two voices follow no beat.

In a similar way, "Peanut" is somewhere between spoken word and song. As previously mentioned, the distorted song follows no rhythmic pattern, rather it progresses as an evolution of Earl's lines, from thought to thought. Again, these lines are pitted over a demonic and static-ridden instrumental. Earl's voice is slurred, albeit maintaining more rhythm than the instrumental beneath him. With no tempo, no bass, and occasional-at-best harmony, I hesitate to call this track hip hop. Instead, "Peanut" is much closer to spoken word, because Earl's lines bring movement to an otherwise stagnant track. With this track and many others, Earl pushes the boundaries of traditional hip hop.

More broadly, *Some Rap Songs* presents a disorienting conception of time on the surface-level. The twenty-four minutes of actual song-time are so dense that they disrupt a casual listening experience. It feels, when listened to completely, as though one is listening to the re-evolution of a character. As such, the metric twenty-four minutes is deceptive; it feels much longer. And of course, Earl's textual invocations of the past and integration with the present illustrate what Yogita Goyal terms "diaspora time."

All of these features are unique to Earl's album. I have yet to find another hip hop album that interacts with the texts it invokes. Rarely do I even hear an album with intertextual references, let alone the sampling of spoken poetry. Furthermore, I've shown the album to be shorter and more volatile

than other hip hop albums released at a similar time. Similarly, I've shown how some of the songs seem to push back against the classification of being a song. In all of these ways, and most specifically through consistent interaction with invoked diasporic artists, Earl reimagines diasporic expression aboard sample-based hip hop. Herein lies the formal simultaneity of Earl's reimagination which is *Some Rap Songs*.

Earl's evolution of forms has been analyzed within two discrete capacities: as a continuation of rhetorical devices with the invocation of Keorapetse, and one of content and design via Baldwin. The ideas of these thinkers are invoked literally on the album when a listener hears their voices. Within a theoretical dimension, these invocations occur in the process of growth, reuse, repurpose, which stood as rationale for the terming of evolution. This album stands as a bricolage of the past, turning preceding diasporic works into future-oriented expression. Within this framework, the invoked artists are essential for Earl to act out this reimagining—he can't interact with a text he does not first invoke. As Jaji and Phalaphala have shown, temporal dimensionality collapses within the syntax of Keorapetse's poetry. This thesis has shown how in a similar fashion, Earl Sweatshirt's *Some Rap Songs* collapses the temporal dimension. By invoking the voices of the very diasporic artists with whom he interacts, time—past artists, current parents, ad infinitum—occur simultaneously.

In all, only when analyzed through the lenses of the very diasporic artists he invokes is Earl's album shown to evolve musical expression. While Keorapetse's poetry has been presented as a window into trans-national streams of art and influence by other scholars, Earl's music illuminates the constants of identity searches in an ever-progressing world timeline, and the always-developing art form of music. I hope further work will find space to extend this lineage to a future-oriented outlook of creative expression, and the global exchange of it, in a world growing more interconnected every day.

## Bibliography

*Peace to every crease on your brain*<sup>33</sup>

- Baldwin, James. *The Cross of Redemption: Uncollected Writings*. New York: Pantheon Books, 2011.
- Bradley, Adam. *Book of Rhymes: The Poetics of Hip Hop*. New York: Basic Civitas, 2017.
- Caramanica, Jon. "After Exile, Career Reset." *The New York Times*. May 2, 2012.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/06/arts/music/earl-sweatshirt-is-back-from-the-wilderness.html>.
- Chang, Jeff. *Cant Stop Wont Stop: a History of the Hip-Hop Generation*. New York: Picador Publishing; Ebury Digital, 2011.
- Crawford, Margo Natalie. "Productive Rites of 'Passing': Keorapetse Kgositsile and the Black Arts Movement." *Black Renaissance Noire*, Vol. 7 Issue 3 (2007): p. 112-20.
- Deleuze, Giles, and Guattari, Felix. "A Thousand Plateaus." In *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, translated by Brian Massumi, 3–28. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.
- Gates, Henry Louis, Chuck D, and Common. *The Anthology of Rap*. Edited by Bradley, Adam and Dubois, Andrew. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010.  
[www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1nq45c](http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1nq45c).
- Goyal, Yogita. "Africa and the Black Atlantic." *Research in African Literatures* Vol. 45, Issue 3 (2014): v-xxv. <https://www.muse.jhu.edu/article/555708>.
- Jaji, Tsitsi. "Sound Effects: Synaesthesia as Purposeful Distortion in Keorapetse Kgositsile's Poetry." *Comparative Literature Studies*, Vol. 46, Issue 2 (2009): 287-310.  
[www.jstor.org/stable/25659717](http://www.jstor.org/stable/25659717).
- Jaji, Tsitsi. *Africa in Stereo : Modernism, Music, and Pan-African Solidarity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. p. ii-22.

---

<sup>33</sup> Sweatshirt, Earl, prod. RandomBlackDude. "Veins." From "Some Rap Songs by Earl Sweatshirt". iTunes Store. Released on November 30, 2018.

Keown, Michelle, David Murphy, and James Procter. "Introduction: Theorizing Postcolonial Diasporas." *Comparing Postcolonial Diasporas*, 2009, 1–15.

[https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230232785\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230232785_1).

Kgositsile, Keorapetse. "Culture and Resistance in South Africa." *The Black Scholar* Vol. 17, Issue 4 (August 1986): 28–31. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00064246.1986.11414418>.

Kgositsile, Keorapetse. *If I Could Sing: Selected Poems*. Roggebaai: Kwela, 2003.

Kgositsile, Thebe. Earl Sweatshirt, *Some Rap Songs*. Tan Cressida, 2018, MP3.

Levine, Caroline. *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network*. Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015.

Pearce, Sheldon. "Earl Sweatshirt Does Not Exist." Pitchfork. January 14, 2019.

<https://pitchfork.com/features/profile/earl-sweatshirt-does-not-exist/>.

Phalafala, Uhuru Portia. "Black Music and Pan-African Solidarity in Keorapetse Kgositsile's Poetry." *Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Studies* Vol. 18, Issue 4 (August 17, 2017): 307–26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17533171.2017.1358934>.

Phalafala, Uhuru Portia. "Setswana Roots En Route in Keorapetse Kgositsile's Poetry." *English Studies in Africa* Vol. 60, Issue 1 (June 29, 2017): 60–78.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/00138398.2017.1332799>.

Phalafala, Uhuru Portia. "Time Is Always NOW: Animist Materialism in Keorapetse Kgositsile's Temporal Order." *Scrutiny* 22, no. 2 (October 4, 2017): 33–48.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/18125441.2017.1344873>.

Schloss, Joseph. *Making Beats: the Art of Sample-Based Hip-Hop*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2014.

Smethurst, James Edward. *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005.

Thomas, Lorenzo. "'Communicating by Horns': Jazz and Redemption in the Poetry of the Beats and the Black Arts Movement." *African American Review* 26, no. 2 (1992): 291–98.

doi:10.2307/3041856.

White, Gillian. *Lyric Shame: the "Lyric" Subject of Contemporary American Poetry*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014. p. 1-42.

Young, Robert J.C. "World Literature and Postcolonialism." *The Routledge Companion to World Literature* Vol. 1 (September 14, 2011): 213–23. Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge.  
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203806494>.