

Cultural Remix: Polish Hip-Hop and the Sampling of Heritage

by

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To my parents, for everything.

(Except hip-hop. For that, thank you, DH.)

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Abstract

Asked about the nineteenth-century Romantic poet Adam Mickiewicz, the Polish rapper Doniu suggested, “If Mickiewicz was alive today, he’d be a good rhymer.” This dissertation examines the history, literary reception, and musical discourse that have positioned the legacy of Romanticism as a model for contemporary hip-hop musicians. It argues that Polish hip-hop’s appeals to the nation’s Romantic heritage serve as a means of negotiating and performing belonging both within the global genre and contemporary Polish culture. The conventions of hip-hop—rooted in sampling, intertextuality, decontextualizing the familiar, and privileging poetic prowess—create a music that is both a performance of reception and a lens through which to engage the nation’s cultural traditions. The national understanding of Polish Romanticism has always been the product of reading and negotiating meaning, and the performances analyzed in this study contribute to a rich tradition of interpretation. Though they speak to the past, these hip-hop artists are not confined by it. Rather, they “sample” history and tradition in a way that echoes the work done by Mickiewicz and his peers. Blending history and art, they cultivate a Polishness that preserves Romantic patriotic ideals of sacrifice and poetic service, while framing them within a global conversation of hip-hop artists speaking to and for marginalized communities.

This dissertation begins by considering how conventions of national and genre authenticity become mutually reinforcing as Polish hip-hop communities cultivate an artistic lineage that reaches back to the poets of the nineteenth century. Employing the career of

Peja/Slums Attack as a case study, Chapter One argues that the group's evolution from privileging appeals to American rappers to fashioning themselves as a contemporary incarnation of Poland's Romantic poet-patriots exemplifies a localization of the genre that adapts rap conventions of speaking for oppressed communities to position Poland itself as the marginalized subject. The second chapter shifts focus to sampling as a formal and historical appeal to the past, exemplified in the rapper L.U.C.'s 2009 album *39/89 Zrozumieć Polskę (39/89 To Understand Poland)*. Composed of sampled archival audio against a live orchestra, the album illuminates the ways sampling represents the blending of document and narrative in the creation of memory—a dynamic the chapter argues infuses not just culture, but also political discussions of history. Chapter Three turns to rappers who perform texts written by Adam Mickiewicz, a choice analyzed as challenging Romantic and hip-hop ideas of authorship and originality, while also demonstrating how reading (via performance) might be understood as a marker of creative credibility. The final chapter examines Dorota Masłowska's musical and literary play with the idea of authenticity and its tropes. Performing ironic appropriations of both hip-hop and Polish national conventions, Masłowska draws on the traditions preserved in the works of the other artists considered and in so doing, challenges them while also evincing their lasting power. In their diverse engagement with tradition, the artists considered highlight not only the persistence of Polish Romantic thought, but also the power of artists to “remix” the Romantic legacy to speak to the present.

Introduction

If Mickiewicz were Alive Today

...Merging with eternity, that face flickers with memories, roams through a series of faces, ever paler, more condensed, until out of the heaping up of those faces there settles on it at last, and hardens into its final mask, the countenance of Poland—forever.¹

In 2002, the Polish Rapper Doniu told a reporter, “If Mickiewicz was alive today, he’d be a good rhymers.”² This project is born from a desire to understand that characterization. That is, to understand how a long-dead Polish Romantic poet comes to be reimagined as a performer in a contemporary genre born in the South Bronx. It is thus a project about music, poetry, history, and memory. In analyzing the work of Polish hip-hop musicians alongside the Romantic narratives they claim as inspiration, this dissertation tells a story of mythmaking and literary reception. Throughout, I argue that the work done by Polish rappers reflects a contemporary interpretation of Romantic narratives and thus enters into a long tradition of both scholarly and popular considerations of the poets who gave voice to the stateless Poland and have since persisted as lasting voices of the nation. In this, I work to clarify what memories and various “faces” are elevated or discarded in the legend of Mickiewicz and Polish Romanticism and consider the “final mask” and contested Polishness it so often has been claimed to support. Polish hip-hop offers a language with which to bring Mickiewicz

¹ Bruno Schulz, “The Formation of Legends,” *Letters and Drawings of Bruno Schulz*, trans. Walter Arndt with Victoria Nelson (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1988), 62.

² Peter S. Green, “Poznan Journal; Polish Hip-Hop Rocks the Homies on the Blok,” *The New York Times*, April 5, 2002.

back to life. In sampling his texts and legend, the artists in this dissertation recognize him not only as a voice of the past, but also as one that can speak to the present.

Adam Mickiewicz and Polish Romanticism

Though hailed as “the first among Poles,” Adam Mickiewicz (1798-1855) was born into a “Poland” that did not exist on the map of Europe.³ The nation’s territory having been stripped away in a series of partitions by the neighboring empires of Russia, Prussia, and Austria in 1772 and 1793, a third partition in 1795 marked the end of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.⁴ This loss of sovereignty lasted until 1918 and indelibly shaped Mickiewicz’s life, work, and legacy. Forced to spend much of his life outside the territory of Poland, Mickiewicz worked to create a “Poland” that would preserve the nation until it was reborn politically. In so doing, Mickiewicz and his contemporaries cultivated a uniquely Polish Romanticism that elevated suffering and sacrifice as definitive values of the nation and thus positioned Polish statelessness as but a stage in a historical progression that would eventually see the “resurrection” of the nation.⁵ Whether in *Pan Tadeusz*’s literary preservation of a Poland lost to time, the articulation of an artist who *becomes* the nation in *Dziady (Forefathers’ Eve)*, or the messianic vision of *Księgi narodu polskiego i pielgrzymstwa polskiego (Books of the Polish Nation and Polish Pilgrimage)*, Mickiewicz was an essential

³ Maria Janion, *Maria Janion. Prace wybrane, vol. 1* [Maria Janion: Selected Works, Vol. 1] (Kraków: Universitas, 2000), 142. Original: pierwszym z Polaków

⁴ The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (1569-1795) was a dual state (of Poland and Lithuania) ruled by a single monarch. For more on the Commonwealth and partitions, see: Norman Davies, *God’s Playground: A History of Poland, Volume I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 386-411.

⁵ Mickiewicz was certainly not alone in this project and Polish Romanticism encompassed diverse perspectives and voices. Among these poets, three—Mickiewicz, Juliusz Słowacki (1809-1849), and Zygmunt Krasiński (1812-1859)—are elevated as *wieszczę*, prophetic poets or bards of the nation. Throughout this introduction and in the chapters that follow, I have chosen to focus my attention on Mickiewicz not only because he is the primary architect of the narratives that inform the messianic tradition whose contemporary reception I analyze, but also because he is the figure most often cited by rappers and their fans as a model and inspiration.

voice not only in shaping the Polish nation under partition, but also in creating a national narrative that would endure long after his death.

The publication of Mickiewicz's *Ballady i romanse (Ballads and Romances)* in 1822 "opened for good the era of Romanticism in Poland."⁶ Introducing the ethos of the movement, the preface to that collection, the poem "Romantyczność" ("Romanticism"), declares "the people believe reverently:/Faith and love are more discerning/Than lenses or learning."⁷ This is a time, Mickiewicz suggests, of belief—of faith in that which is beyond the science and scholasticism of "lenses or learning." While this privileging of the individual and emotion reflects the influence of Mickiewicz's Romantic models from abroad—Schiller, Goethe, and Byron—it also presages a literature that would come to speak specifically to the Polish nation.⁸ Poland was, at that time, a nation in which "people believed reverently," but not one that existed as a political state. The Romantic "cult of love...and the yearning for heroic action" were thus in Poland largely "subordinated to a higher, national cause," as the spirit of Romanticism allowed Poles to look beyond their current statelessness and create a literature that articulated, and thus preserved, the nation.⁹

Within this framing of Polish Romanticism, the individual is both subordinated to and the preserver of the nation. In Mickiewicz's 1823 drama *Dziady III (Forefathers' Eve, Part III)*, the poet-patriot Konrad declares, "Now my soul is incarnate in my country,/My body has

⁶ Czesław Miłosz, *The History of Polish Literature* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1983), 210.

⁷ Original: *A gawieź wierzy głęboko;/Czucie I wiara silniej mówi do mnie/Niż mędrzc szkiełko i oko*. Translated by W.H. Auden in Miłosz, *History of Polish Literature*, 213.

⁸ For more on European Romantic movements, see: Lilian R. Furst, *Romanticism in Perspective: A Comparative Study of Aspects of the Romantic Movements in England, France and Germany* (London: Macmillan, 1979); Paul Magnuson, *Reading Public Romanticism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998).

⁹ Dariusz Skórczewski, "(Polish) Romanticism: From Canon to Agon," *Being Poland: A New History of Polish Literature and Culture since 1918*, eds. Tamara Trojanowska, Joanna Niżyńska, Przemysław Czapliński (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), 70.

swallowed her soul,/And I and my country are one.”¹⁰ With these lines, Mickiewicz articulates what became a defining feature of Polish Romanticism—the devotion of the individual to the collective (national) cause. Because of Poland’s political position, dedication to the collective often was framed in terms of fighting for national independence. Distinguishing Polish Romanticism from the broader European tradition, Dariusz Skórczewski argues,

Romanticism in the Polish lands, while oriented towards the aesthetic, the spiritual, and the psychological, was also marked by strong political engagement. This last quality spoke to the Polish Romantics’ desire to forge poetic words into collective action – to bring about an anti-imperial insurrection under the leadership of a prophet-priest.¹¹

For the Poles, Skórczewski suggests, poetry was bound with political action—words became deeds. This call to arms was both literary and literal. In creating a national literature, Mickiewicz and his peers preserved Polishness in the absence of a state and thus became keepers of the nation. Their texts, however, were not the only means of resistance; and in 1830 and 1863 Poles led armed uprisings against the partitioning powers.¹² As Romantic literature came to reflect the failures of the uprisings it had helped inspire, it was increasingly consumed with finding meaning in the suffering of the nation.

Following the failure of the November Uprising in 1830—a rebellion against Russian authorities—Polish Romanticism became increasingly defined by messianism and Christian motifs.¹³ In the face of the defeat and increasing improbability of national restoration in the

¹⁰ Adam Mickiewicz, *Dziady III* [Forefathers’ Eve, III], <https://wolnelektury.pl/media/book/pdf/dziady-dziady-poema-dziady-czesc-iii.pdf>, 31. Original: *Teraz duszą jam w moją ojczyznę wcielony; Ciałem połknąłem jej duszę./Ja i ojczyzna to jedno.*

¹¹ Skórczewski, “(Polish) Romanticism,” 70.

¹² Though Mickiewicz’s words may have inspired the cadets who stormed the Belvedere Palace in the 1830 uprising—lines of Mickiewicz’s “Ode to Youth” were said to have been painted on walls around the city—Mickiewicz himself was not among his peers as they fought for Polish freedom. For more, see: Roman Koropeczyk, *Adam Mickiewicz: The Life of a Romantic* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 157.

¹³ Maria Janion, *Gorączka romantyczna* [Romantic Fever] (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1975), 75. Janion cites Ireneusz Opacki’s *Poezja romantycznych przełomów* (1972) in noting that though Polish Romanticism

near future, Mickiewicz turned to framing Poland's statelessness within a longer historical narrative that looked forward into the future. In his 1832 publication *Books of the Polish Nation and Polish Pilgrimage*, Mickiewicz articulates his vision of Poland as the "Christ of Nations"—suffering but destined to rise. Outlining a history where "in idolatrous Europe there rose three rulers," Mickiewicz positions the leaders of the partitioning powers as "a Satanic trinity, contrary to the Divine Trinity."¹⁴ This "Satanic trinity," he writes, "martyred the Polish nation and laid it in the grave and the kings cried out: 'We have slain and we have buried Freedom.'"¹⁵ Poland, here synonymous with "freedom," is also positioned as a Christ figure—a nation that stayed true to its (Christian) values, even at the cost of its life. This devotion to Christian values and freedom, Mickiewicz argues, will be rewarded—Poland will rise again:

For the Polish Nation did not die: its body lieth in the grave, but its spirit hath descended from the earth, that is from public life, to the abyss, that is to the private life of people who suffer slavery in their country and outside their country, thus it may see their suffering.

But on the third day the soul shall return to the body, and the Nation shall arise and free all the peoples of Europe from slavery. [...]

And as after the resurrection of Christ bloody offerings ceased in all the world, so after the resurrection of the Polish Nation wars shall cease in all Christendom.¹⁶

With this text, Mickiewicz gave purpose to Poland's suffering, elevating it to a pious value and positioning it as a necessary condition in the nation's destined role as a savior of Christian Europe. Messianism, though "neither exclusively Polish nor specifically Romantic," is here

always had a moralistic quality, after the November Uprising in 1830, it took on even strong Christian motifs, particularly among émigré Poles.

¹⁴ Adam Mickiewicz, "The Books of the Polish Nation and of the Polish Pilgrimage," in *Konrad Wallenrod and Other Writings of Adam Mickiewicz*, trans. Dorothea Prall Radin (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1925), 138-139.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 142.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 143.

framed as fundamental in an understanding of Poland's past and future.¹⁷ This is a narrative that—like its imagined Poland—did not die, but rather kept returning to prominence across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.¹⁸

The Mickiewicz of Memory

Since his death, Mickiewicz and his writings have been variously interpreted in service of diverse political and social agendas. Stanley Bill comments on the “astonishing range of political projects finding either inspiration or legitimation in Romanticism.”¹⁹ He continues:

The Romantic poets and their works were congenial for traditionalists and progressives, rulers and revolutionaries, reactionaries and rebels, Catholics and communists. Among others, I will point to Józef Piłsudski and the interwar state; Bolesław Bierut and the postwar communist regime; the left-wing student rebels of 1968; Pope John Paul II; and the Solidarity movement.²⁰

In this history, we see evidence of both the power and malleability of the legend of Mickiewicz and the Romantic narratives he helped craft. In all of Bill's examples—to which I would add the fighters in the 1944 Warsaw Uprising—we see the resurgence of Romantic ideals at moments of national crisis and uncertainty. Piłsudski helped define and stabilize Poland after it regained independence in 1918; the Warsaw Uprising asserted a claim to sovereignty in the midst of Nazi occupation; and in the years following the Second World

¹⁷ Skórczewski, “(Polish) Romanticism,” 82.

¹⁸ Though deeply concerned with the nation, Mickiewicz's view was not strictly nationalist. While at times openly hostile to foreign powers, we see in *Books of the Polish Nation and Polish Pilgrimage* a sense of Poland's role within an international community. Andrzej Walicki describes this relationship between national and international concerns as “Romantic universalism”—an ethos that promoted the “brotherhood of nations” and “spirit of sacrifice,” while condemning “the egoist principle of non-intervention” (*Philosophy of Romantic Nationalism: The Case of Poland* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 74-76). While this international perspective was at times evoked in later appeals to Mickiewicz's texts, it was just as often neglected as his work was positioned in support of exclusionary, nationalist principles. In the works considered in this dissertation, we see shades of both readings.

¹⁹ Stanley Bill, “The Splintering of a Myth: Polish Romantic Ideology in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries,” in *Being Poland: A New History of Polish Literature since 1918*, 52.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 52.

War, actors on all sides jostled for ownership of Mickiewicz's legacy.²¹ Even after the democratic transition in 1989, Solidarity leader Lech Wałęsa continued to position himself "within a long-standing tradition of the Polish Romantic hero" in the 1995 presidential election.²²

While the rhetoric of Romantic nationalism often is used by politicians, Mickiewicz's vision of the poet as serving the patriotic cause also has endured in Polish culture. Bill notes that "the doomed Warsaw Uprising of 1944 took its place in the national insurrectionary tradition of heroic catastrophes, while poets like Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński (1921-1944) and Tadeusz Gajcy (1922-1944) revived Romantic tropes of personal sacrifice for an idealized Poland."²³ In this case, Baczyński and Gajcy not only offered their verse to the cause, they also gave their lives. It is this vision of the patriot-poet that I also find animating Polish rappers as they position themselves as contemporary versions of Mickiewicz and offer musical visions of the nation's character and history.

Though these enduring images of both the nation and its artists emerge from Mickiewicz's words, they are importantly also the product of the poet's reception and canonization. Mickiewicz crafted his verse, but it was others who wrote his legend. Eulogizing Mickiewicz, the poet Józef Bohdan Zaleski declared, "For an entire age he pilgrimaged to the grave of his Mother-Country—in order to breathe life into her corpse for its resurrection."²⁴ In this reflection upon Mickiewicz we hear not only the echoes of his own vision of the artist and the nation, but also the way in which Mickiewicz himself was

²¹ For more on historical invocations of Mickiewicz and Romanticism, see: Bill, "Splintering of a Myth," 52-59.

²² Adam Jaworski and Dariusz Galasiński, "The Last Romantic Hero: Lech Wałęsa's Image-Building in TV Presidential Debates," *Text & Talk* 18 no. 4, 527.

²³ Bill, "Splintering of a Myth," 56.

²⁴ Cited in Koropeckyj, *Adam Mickiewicz: The Life of a Romantic*, 462.

memorialized as a totem of those ideals. Where he once “pilgrimage[d] to the grave” of Poland, subsequent generations have “pilgrimage[d]” to him and continued to “breath[e] life” into visions of the nation and its artists. Each “resurrection” of Mickiewicz, however, bears the imprint of its own moment—in reviving Mickiewicz, politicians and artists continually give new dimensions to his legend.

This work of crafting the legend of Mickiewicz, Maria Janion argues, began among Polish writers who “canonized Mickiewicz’s work in a specific way”—one that privileged texts and narratives that served the country.²⁵ The Mickiewicz we see today “was created by national writers” who “freed themselves from some works” and “surrendered to others.”²⁶ The Mickiewicz we know, Janion suggests, is not so much a simple reflection of the man, but a composite of selected texts and the narratives accumulated over the years—designed to serve Poland. This “Mickiewicz” is born from critical reading, selection, and promotion. It is the product of ongoing reception.²⁷

The sampling of text and remixing of legend done by the artists in this study is but a contemporary form of the negotiation and performance of Mickiewiczian myth that has been going on for almost two hundred years. At this intersection of Polish Romanticism and hip-hop, not only does the music communicate a contemporary reading of the literary tradition, but

²⁵ Maria Janion, *Purpurowy płaszcz Mickiewicza. Studium z historii poezji i mentalności* (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Słowo/Obraz Terytoria, 2001), 119. Original: *To oni głównie w określony sposób skanonizowali twórczość Mickiewicza, dokonali w niej wyboru – dla kraju.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 119. Original: *Ten Mickiewicz, którego dzisiaj jeszcze ciągle widzimy oczyma Wyspiańskiego, został stworzony przez pisarzy krajowych. [...] Tym bardziej zatem znaczący jest ich wysiłek dokonania selekcji, uwolnienia się od jednych utworów, by poddać się innym.*

²⁷ This mythmaking around foundational figures represents another point of contact between Polish Romanticism and hip-hop. Of Afrika Bambaataa—one of hip-hop’s “three kings”—Jeff Chang writes that he is “someone who lives twice simultaneously—once as a man in history, and separately as a myth above temporality” (*Can’t Stop Won’t Stop* (New York, NY: Picador, 2005), 90). In this description, we hear echoes of Mickiewicz, a man who both inhabited a specific historical period and a figure whose legend has transcended that period to speak to and for Polishness for generations.

that tradition also offers an interpretive lens through which to understand the arc of history leading up to the present day. This project and those of the artists I analyze thus enter into a conversation that has been taking place since Mickiewicz's lifetime—one of what “Poland” means and how Mickiewicz speaks to it.

Reading (and Rapping) Romanticism

While the history of Polish partition and the Romantic literature of the era provide the foundation for this dissertation, the project is ultimately concerned not with the Romantic era and the lives of its authors, but with the contemporary reading and reshaping of its narratives in Polish hip-hop communities. The legend of Mickiewicz and the vision of Poland he articulated have always been the product of reception and selective circulation; Skórczewski notes that “Romanticism has long been the subject of multiple rereadings and passionate discussions.”²⁸ It is in these “rereadings and passionate discussions” that Romantic narratives of the nation become material for the hip-hop texts of today. Like the authors of his time who elevated some works (while neglecting others) to position Mickiewicz as a voice for their vision of Poland, the hip-hop community of contemporary Poland similarly “rereads” and mines the texts for messages that speak to the present. There is a work of performed reception that employs hip-hop as an interpretive lens through which to engage the nation's cultural legacy.

This framing of my analysis as one of reception that highlights the critical role of the reader is guided in part by Hans Robert Jauss' work, which speaks to this process of constant rereading, pointing out that the life of a work across time is the result of a “perpetual labor of

²⁸ Skórczewski, “(Polish) Romanticism,” 90.

understanding” that emerges “through the interactions of author and public.”²⁹ Throughout this dissertation, I position hip-hop as the site of this “labor of understanding.” Whether rapping passages of Mickiewicz’s verse or claiming the mantle of a voice of the people, Polish hip-hop musicians perform their reception of the Romantic tradition. Jauss notes that a literary work “is not a monument that monologically reveals its timeless essence,” and the hip-hop readings of Mickiewicz I consider reflect this. Though he is a “monumental” figure, Mickiewicz’s texts and legend are open to varied readings and interpretations. Many of the artists considered in this dissertation reflect on Mickiewicz as “timeless;” but while the vision of the nation he articulated may still resonate, it does not do so unchanged.

The dynamics of those interpretive changes come with time and shifting context—“Mickiewicz” and Polishness become what various groups read them to be. In an analysis of the ways in which reception functions in the understanding of a literary history, Jauss offers not only the impetus to consider how the interpretation of texts is dependent on the audience and their time, but also highlights the dynamic interplay between author, text, and reader that shapes the work’s reception. Stressing the critical role of the reader, he writes, “in the triangle of author, work, and public the last is no passive part, no chair of mere reactions, but rather itself an energy formative of history.”³⁰ It is with this formative energy—the creative work of reading and performance—that this project is concerned. Animating the words and memories of centuries past, the Polish hip-hop I analyze offers an example of the ways in which the public (both artists and their audience) shapes the understanding of Romantic traditions.

²⁹ Hans Robert Jauss, *Towards an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 15.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 19.

My analysis of works of selected Polish rappers and the discourse in their fan communities aims to illuminate not only how they understand and employ the texts and legends of the nation's past, but also how the genre of hip-hop shapes that reading. In the analysis of "literary experience," Jauss advocates a consideration of the "system of expectation that arises for each work in the historical moment of its appearance from the pre-understanding of the genre, from the form and themes of already familiar works, and from the opposition between poetry and practical language."³¹ As I work through the case studies in this project, I position them within the "systems of expectations" born of "pre-understanding" of both hip-hop and Polish national and literary traditions. In so doing, I argue that hip-hop conventions shape rappers' reading of Romantic tradition, while that tradition simultaneously offers a model for understanding hip-hop in Poland.

Hip-Hop Histories

Positing a definition of rap, Tricia Rose frames the music as "a form of rhymed storytelling accompanied by highly rhythmic, electronically based music."³² This "rhymed storytelling," she explains, "prioritizes black voices from the margins of urban America."³³ In this brief description, rap music is positioned as telling the stories of marginalized (black American) communities. In speaking to these communities, rap stories are deeply rooted not only in the lived experience of those groups, but also in their history. The music draws connections to the past as it tells the stories of its present. Though the content of these stories—and certainly the context of their origins—might appear far removed from Polish Romantic

³¹ Ibid., 22.

³² Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 2.

³³ Ibid., 2.

traditions, the two forms share an investment in history and an imperative to give voice to the experiences and concerns of their communities. This dissertation engages rap music—and hip-hop culture more broadly—as a means of considering the legacy of Polish Romanticism not only because the music offers a contemporary genre that performs critical reading as part of its creative practice, but also because I (and the rappers I study) find resonance between the concerns of the music and those of the nineteenth-century poets framed as forefathers of Polish hip-hop.³⁴

Reflecting on hip-hop’s relationship to history, Russell A. Potter suggests, “[i]t is not so much that hip-hop *tells* history, it’s that it is history; drop the needle anywhere and you will find lyrical vectors to every other site on the hip-hop map.”³⁵ This vision of hip-hop *as history*, as a vital point at which threads of the past are concentrated and disseminated, speaks to the music’s power to draw on the past to speak to the present. Hip-hop remembers the past, but is not confined by it. It rather serves as a means of reading texts of the past—it is a genre that performs creative reception. The American rapper Nasir “Nas” Jones suggests, “...we’ve forgotten our past. We’ve forgotten our genesis. And we suffer for this loss.... No movement can thrive if it doesn’t recall its birth. We need to be able to learn from our history if we are going to take control of our future.”³⁶ Though he is writing about hip-hop and the feeling that it has “forgotten

³⁴ “Hip hop” is traditionally considered a culture that expands beyond rap and is framed as encompassing “four elements.” Outlined by hip-hop pioneer Afrika Bambaataa, these elements include: MCing (rapping); DJing (making music with records and mixing); b-boying (breakdancing); and graffiti. Bambaataa later added a fifth element—“knowledge.” (For more on this, see: Jeff Chang, *Can’t Stop, Won’t Stop*). Throughout this dissertation, I use “hip-hop” to refer to both the community generally and often to the musical elements of the community. While breakdancing and graffiti are parts of Poland’s hip-hop history and culture, they are not my focus. When drawing attention to the skills involved or specifics of the music, I will specify what elements of “hip-hop music” I mean—rapping or turntablism.

³⁵ Russell A. Potter, *Spectacular Vernaculars: Hip-Hop and the Politics of Postmodernism* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1995), 117.

³⁶ Nas, “Outro,” in Michael Eric Dyson, *Know What I Mean?: Reflections on Hip Hop* (New York, NY: Civitas Books, 2007), 154-155.

its past,” his statement echoes the concerns of the genre he is discussing. He articulates the relationship between history and the future—to control the latter, you must understand and be able to wield the former.

One of the ways in which hip-hop artists “learn from” their history and employ it in service of the future is through the citation and sampling of the texts and narratives of their communities. Potter posits citation as “the fundamental practice of hip-hop,” describing it as “the relentless sampling of sonic and verbal archives.”³⁷ Indeed, sampling is both a formal technique and a way of understanding historical relations within hip-hop.³⁸ In replaying or interpolating texts and stories of the past, hip-hop becomes a work of historical preservation and interpretation. It assembles snippets of the past into a narrative that it performs in the present. These practices are, Potter suggests, “a kind of genealogical *research*.” This is a framing that further underscores the degree to which the creation of an artistic lineage is interconnected with a sense of grounding in a family or community lineage. The art is personal, it tells the story of the individual and their place in a community both present and past. Engaging with and expanding upon this understanding of hip-hop citation, this dissertation considers a range of approaches to “sampling” the past—evoking familiar national narratives, sampling audio archives, performing canonical texts, and parodying familiar tropes. Though not always strictly “sampling,” the approaches of each artist I consider draw on this genre approach to situating itself with “a long and complex musical [and poetic] continuum.”³⁹

³⁷ Potter, *Spectacular Vernaculars*, 53.

³⁸ For examples of analysis on hip hop’s engagement with and sampling of earlier artistic traditions in the American context, see, for example: Reiland Rabaka, *Hip Hop’s Inheritance: From the Harlem Renaissance to the Hip Hop Feminist Movement* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011); Salamishah Tillet, “Strange Sampling: Nina Simone and Her Hip-Hop Children,” *American Quarterly* 66, No. 1 (March 2014), 119-137.

³⁹ Potter, *Spectacular Vernaculars*, 53.

The imperative for this investment in history and storytelling is born of the genre's roots in marginalized communities. As Rose notes, rap elevated marginalized voices of urban America and offered a means to express histories and experiences otherwise suppressed in dominant narratives. This is echoed by Potter, who positions hip-hop as, "reanimating 'dead' sounds, bringing repressed histories back to vivid life" and "fram[ing] contemporary struggles within a continuum of African-American history."⁴⁰ Hip-hop offers the potential to restore "repressed" histories—by replaying their voices and recalling their stories—and in so doing to create a lineage that connects the artists of today to figures of the past. In their replaying of Romantic narratives—which are far from repressed—the Polish rappers considered in this dissertation complicate this picture of hip-hop storytelling.

While linked to earlier traditions, hip-hop originated in the South Bronx among African-American and Afro-Caribbean youth in the mid-1970s.⁴¹ It was, as explained by rapper KRS-One, "the final conclusion of a generation of creative people oppressed with the reality of lack."⁴² Considering one dimension of this lack, Jeff Chang suggests that "if blues culture had developed under the conditions of oppressive, forced labor, hip-hop culture would arise from the conditions of no work."⁴³ As the American history of racial oppression and inequality intersected with economic trends of rising unemployment and housing instability, it created a generation with little prospect of social mobility in a country that did not seem to care.⁴⁴ Hip-hop offered the youth of this community—those otherwise largely unheard—an outlet to express themselves. Their stories sometimes took the form of emancipatory frivolity and at other times

⁴⁰ Ibid., 25.

⁴¹ Rose, *Black Noise*, 2.

⁴² KRS-One quoted in Adam Bradley, *Book of Rhymes: The Poetics of Hip Hop* (New York, NY: BasicCivitas Books, 2009), xiv.

⁴³ Chang, *Can't Stop, Won't Stop*, 12.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 12-18.

expressed deadly serious political and social concerns.⁴⁵ Across this spectrum, however, it was a voice of and for the community and “articulated the pleasures and problems of black urban life.”⁴⁶ Likening rap to a “slave song speaking of the conditions and hopes of a people,” Alonzo Westbrook starkly underscores the urgency of the musical storytelling and cultural community—hip-hop becomes a site of preserving and celebrating histories and identities silenced by their oppressors.⁴⁷

As hip-hop has spread around the world, this connection to expressing marginalized identities and histories has largely guided international artists’ adoption of the music. The genre’s spread speaks to the music’s adaptability as an expressive form, and Michael Eric Dyson suggests that hip-hop “renew[s] its intellectual identity when it begins to forge alliances with the cultural expression of degraded and oppressed people around the world.”⁴⁸ Positioning hip-hop as an expression of the “degraded and oppressed,” Dyson reflects its roots and highlights a common thread connecting global hip-hop scenes to the origins of the genre. Analyzing Turkish rap in Berlin, Ayse S. Caglar notes the music is, “[s]een as the political expression of those on the margins of the power structure,” and “celebrated as the new, emancipatory and creative form of expression of the minorities—Black Americans in the USA and of immigrant youth in Europe.”⁴⁹ Of Palestinian hip-hop, Usama Kahf writes of rap being “[a]ppropriated and transformed by local artists in different parts of the world who are searching for emancipatory

⁴⁵ The period between 1979 and 1982, for example, saw the popularity of lyrics ranging from the playful “Then you throw your hands high in the air/You’re rocking to the rhythm, shake your derriere” (The Sugarhill Gang, “Rapper’s Delight,” *Sugarhill Gang*, 1979) to the critically charged, “You’ll grow in the ghetto living second-rate/And your eyes will sing a song called deep hate/The places you play and where you stay/Looks like one great big alleyway” (Grandmaster Flash & The Furious Five, “The Message,” *The Message*, 1982).

⁴⁶ Rose, *Black Noise*, 2.

⁴⁷ Alonzo Westbrook, *Hip-Hoptionary: The Dictionary of Hip Hop Terminology* (New York, NY: Harlem Moon, 2002), i.

⁴⁸ Michael Eric Dyson, *Know What I Mean?*, 49-50.

⁴⁹ Ayse S. Caglar, “Popular Culture, Marginality and Institutional Incorporation: German-Turkish Rap and Turkish Pop in Berlin,” *Cultural Dynamics* 10, no. 3 (1998): 244.

and empowering avenues of expression in the midst of a reality that continues to shut doors in their faces.”⁵⁰ Anna Oravcová notes that the Roma communities in Prague and other cities are often sought out by visiting American rappers looking to connect with that nation’s minority population.⁵¹ These global scenes—which represent only a fraction of those across the world—reflect the power of hip-hop as a form that offers avenues of expression to marginalized communities.⁵² Informed by, but not entirely beholden to, the African-American and Afro-Caribbean roots of the genre, these international hip-hop scenes draw on the music’s grounding in storytelling and community development. In its focus on the Polish case, this dissertation contributes to a growing body of scholarship concerned with analyzing the dynamics of the genre’s global spread and the practices by which the music is made local by communities whose racial and national identities are far removed from that of the genre’s founders. Within this discourse, the Polish case offers a unique perspective on the negotiation of genre and community identity as Polish hip-hop artists and fans express identities and histories that are privileged within the nation.

Like the music it analyzes, hip-hop studies have spread around the world to tell the stories of the music’s transfer and its place within varied communities. The first scholarly treatments of the genre started to appear in Poland in the early 2000s, and an increasing number

⁵⁰ Usama Kahf, “Arabic Hip-Hop: Claims of Authenticity and Identity of a New Genre,” in *That’s The Joint!: The Hip-Hop Studies Reader*, eds. Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal (New York, NY: Routledge, 2012): 117.

⁵¹ Anna Oravcová, “In Search of the ‘Real’ Czech Hip-Hop: The Construction of Authenticity in Czech Rap Music,” in *Hip-hop in Europe: Cultural Identities and Transnational Flows*, eds. Sina A. Nietzsche and Walter Grünzweig (Zürich: LIT, 2013): 130.

⁵² There is an increasingly rich collection of scholarship on global hip hop and the ways in which the music’s foundations as a form of minority culture are reflected as it travels around the world. In addition to the work cited above, see: *Global Linguistic Flows: Hip Hop Cultures, Youth Identities, and the Politics of Language*, edited H. Samy Alim, Awad Ibrahim, Alastair Pennycook, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2008); *Global Noise: Rap and Hip-Hop Outside the USA*, ed. Tony Mitchell (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2001).

of encyclopedic and critical texts have emerged in the years since.⁵³ Alongside these works that profile artists and offer histories of the genre, Polish scholars have conducted sociological surveys of Polish hip-hop fans and offered analyses of hip-hop fan culture and the socio-economic identities of its listeners.⁵⁴ Recent years also have seen articles published on Polish hip-hop's attitudes towards wealth, commercial brands, and commodification of the genre.⁵⁵ In this work, scholars of Polish hip-hop position the national scene in dialogue with international hip-hop studies' understanding of the genre as a means of expressing the concerns of marginalized communities and articulating local identities.

In conversation with these studies that illuminate the socio-economic and commercial character of the genre in Poland, scholars writing in both Polish and English have begun to analyze the political dimensions of Polish rap. Renata Pasternak-Mazur, for example, situates hip-hop as the voice of "new others" born of the post-socialist transition and argues that hip-hop took on a patriotic character as artists began to articulate "domestic values" and notions of Polishness in their music.⁵⁶ Piotr Majewski similarly identifies a number of Polish rappers as espousing nationalist rhetoric and illuminates the ways in which they draw on Polish history in

⁵³ For example: Barbara Adamczyk and Piotr Tarasewicz, *Encyklopedia Polskiego Hip-Hopu* [Encyclopedia of Polish Hip-Hop] (Poznań: In Rock Music Press, 2004); Andrzej Buda, *Historia kultury hip-hop w Polsce: 1977-2013* [History of Hip-Hop Culture in Poland: 1977-2013] (Głogów: Andrzej Buda, 2011); Renata Pawlak, *Polska Kultura Hip-Hopowa* [Polish Hip-Hop Culture] (Poznań: Kagra, 2004); Dominika Węclawek, Marcin Flint, Tomasz Kleyff, Andrzej Cała, Kamil Jaczyński (eds.), *Antologia Polskiego Rapu* [Anthology of Polish Rap] (Warsaw: Narodowe Centrum Kultury, 2004).

⁵⁴ See: Tomasz Kukołowicz, "Polacy słuchający rapu. Wyniki reprezentatywnych badań sondażowych" [Poles Listening to Rap: Survey Findings], *Societas/Communitas* 2, no. 1 (2014): 139-151; Joanna Rychła, *Ucieczka, bunt, twórczość. Subcultura hip-hopowa w poszukiwaniu autentycznego stylu życia* [Escape, Rebellion, Creativity: Hip-Hop Subculture in Search of an Authentic Lifestyle], (Kraków: IMPULS, 2005).

⁵⁵ Though not focused on commercial brands, this dissertation is similarly interested in how rappers sell Romanticism as a "brand." For more on commercial branding in Polish hip-hop, see: Tomasz Kukołowicz and Kamil "Jakuza" Jaczyński "Dumni z pieniędzy. Artysta jako przedsiębiorca w (sub)kulturze hiphopowej" [Proud of Their Money: The Artist as an Entrepreneur in Hip Hop (Sub)Culture], *Zarządzanie w Kulturze* 1 (2015): 61-79; Miłosz Miszczynski and Przemysław Tomaszewski, "Wearing Nikes for a Reason: A Critical Analysis of Brand Usage in Polish Rap," in *Hip Hop at Europe's Edge: Music, Agency, and Social Change*, eds. Adriana N. Helbig and Miłosz Miszczynski (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017): 145-162.

⁵⁶ Renata Pasternak-Mazur, "The Black Muse: Polish Hip-Hop as the Voice of 'New Others' in the Post-Socialist Transition," *Music & Politics* 3, no. 1 (Winter 2009).

their articulation of a conservative Polishness.⁵⁷ Again, the question of how elements of the genre are adapted into the Polish context is foundational to these studies. As Polish hip-hop studies consider what makes the genre “Polish,” they critically engage with themes of community identity, marginalization, and political power that resonate across global hip-hop studies. These dynamics are also central to this dissertation as I argue that Polish hip-hop uses genre identity inherited from American hip-hop in its reanimation of Romantic myths of political poets and national victimization.

While this study identifies many of the same central narratives—of historic marginalization and national pride—that other scholars suggest are present in the development and politicization of Polish rap, I locate them specifically within the tradition of Polish Romanticism. Rather than examining the political implications of a broad “sampling” of the past, this dissertation analyzes how hip-hop artists participate in the ongoing process of remembering (and rewriting) that past. It thus approaches hip-hop as a literary art form and positions it within the nation’s poetic and critical tradition. In its positioning of Polish rappers in conversation with the legacy of Romanticism, this work resonates with that of Tomasz Kukołowicz, whose *Raperzy Kontra Filomaci* (Rappers Versus Philomaths) offers a comparison of rappers and the artists of the Philomath Society (which included Adam Mickiewicz).⁵⁸ Whereas Kukołowicz provides a detailed comparative analysis of the two creative movements, this study is interested not so much in how the artists formally or philosophically compare, but

⁵⁷ Piotr Majewski, “African-American Music in the Service of White Nationalists: Polish ‘Patriotic Rap’ as a Pop Cultural tool to Promote National Values,” *European Journal of American Studies* 13, no. 3 (2018): 4. For more on Polish rap and politics, see: Andrzej Antoszek, “Hip-Hop Domesticated: On the Political Messages of Polish Rap and Hip Hop Lyrics,” in *Hip-Hop in Europe: Cultural Identities and Transnational Flows*, ed. Sina A. Nitzsche and Walter Grünzweig (Zürich: LIT, 2013): 257-290.

⁵⁸ Tomasz Kukołowicz, *Raperzy Kontra Filomaci* [Rappers Versus Philomaths] (Warsaw: Narodowe Centrum Kultury, 2014).

rather in the ways rappers engage the memory of those earlier artists and create their *own* comparisons in service of contemporary projects and community narratives.

It is in this foundation of telling the stories of the community that the Polish rappers in this study establish their connection to the roots of the genre. In this dissertation, I engage hip-hop (and hip-hop scholarship) as a venue for and means to consider the ways in which Poland's Romantic heritage is read in the present moment. I share this with the subjects of my study, who also engage with hip-hop as a means to negotiate the weight of their nation's past and its role in their present. Hip-hop offers a particularly rich body of material for a consideration of the contemporary reception of Romantic myths because it is a genre not only interested in grappling with and performing readings of the past, but also because it is a genre that often pushes artists to mine their past and consider how it forms a lineage with the present. As such, the artists I consider turn to the poets of nineteenth-century Poland not only to consider their own national identity, but also as a means of performing a hip-hopness shared by artists around the world. Finally, the conventional marginalized identity of hip-hop performers enters into a (negotiated and shifting) conversation with Polish ideas about the nation's history of foreign oppression (despite its current independence and relative global strength). Again here, the myths of Romanticism—Mickiewicz's "Christ of Nations"—find new voice as a way of performing "hip-hop marginality."

The (Chapter) Breaks

Each chapter, in its own way, is concerned with the interpretation of Poland's Romantic heritage and its intersections with hip-hop performance. Hip-hop music—rooted in intertextuality, sampling, decontextualizing the familiar, and privileging poetic prowess—is itself

a performance of reception that invites artists to rethink the cultural texts of their community. Negotiating national and genre ideas of authenticity, each of the artists considered offers a distinct perspective on the ways in which contemporary Polishness might find its voice in hip-hop.

I begin by considering how conventions of national and genre authenticity become mutually reinforcing as Polish hip-hop communities cultivate an artistic lineage that reaches back to the Romantic poets of the nineteenth century. I posit that both hip-hop and Polish conceptions of authenticity are rooted in demonstrating knowledge of one's heritage, telling a narrative bound to one's own experience, and speaking broadly to one's community. To illustrate a shift from early Polish rappers' attempts to ground their work in American traditions to later efforts to instead localize its narratives within Polish heritage, I consider two tracks from the rapper Ryszard "Peja" Andrzejewski and his group Slums Attack. The first of these recordings, 1999's "Prawdziwe czy nie" ("Authentic or not"), namechecks a litany of American rappers in an effort to demonstrate its rightful place in the genre—its hip-hop authenticity. On 2011's "Poznańczyk," rather than rooting their claim to authenticity in American traditions, Peja/Slums Attack position themselves as contemporary incarnations of the Romantic poet-patriot—telling stories of the nation's proud sacrifices for freedom. In this performance of the archetypal Polish artistic agitator—and in Polish hip-hop communities' more general embrace of comparisons between Romantic poets and contemporary rappers—I argue we see not only an effort to localize the traditions of hip-hop, but also an updating of the Romantic idea of Poland as the "Christ of Nations." Capitalizing on hip-hop's traditional character as a music that speaks to and for marginalized communities, the association of Polish rappers with Romantic poets positions Poland itself as the oppressed subject.

Chapter Two is similarly concerned with issues of authenticity and establishing ties to the nation's past, though I shift focus from work that traffics exclusively in the narratives of history towards that which foregrounds documentary evidence of the past. Here, I center my analysis on Łukasz "L.U.C." Rostkowski's 2009 album *39/89 Zrozumieć Polskę (39/89 To Understand Poland)*, a record on which he samples audio from the Polskie Radio archives to tell the story of Polish history between the years 1939 and 1989. Building upon L.U.C.'s own language describing his source material as "authentic and magic," I argue that his record exemplifies the way in which historical narratives offer the "magic" that brings "authentic" documentary evidence to life. Though he draws on elements of Mickiewiczian messianism to give shape to his record, I posit that L.U.C.'s sampling demonstrates a more ambivalent relationship to such narratives and opens a space for reconsidering the ways in which suffering in Poland's past is exploited in political rhetoric. My analysis of his tracks "A Więc Wojna" ("And So War"), "Do Roboty Bez IQ" ("To Work Already Without IQ"), and "Everest Hipokryzji" ("Everest of Hypocrisy") highlights L.U.C.'s pronounced manipulation of the sampled audio and juxtaposition of conflicting political agendas that draw on the same historical narratives for support. I read this composition as opening a space to critique the uncritical acceptance of historical documents or recognized narratives as "authentic," particularly when they are used to support extreme political positions. Running counter to such extremes, I suggest that in *39/89 Zrozumieć Polskę* we see L.U.C. advocate for a "nationalist internationalism" that both celebrates the nation and looks towards international cooperation.

While Chapter Two explores genre and national practices of reflecting history, Chapter Three is focused on understandings of creativity rooted in individual inspiration. Introducing accounts of Mickiewicz's improvised performances alongside discussions of hip-hop freestyling

and debates about copying and ghostwriters, I posit a resonance between Romantic and hip-hop notions of inspiration in their elision of author and text and the privileging of experience. Having thus introduced this conception of creativity, I consider how Polish rappers who perform rap renditions of Mickiewicz's texts position themselves within these discussions of inspiration and artistry. Illustrating both the frequency and diversity of "Mickiewicz raps," this chapter discusses recordings from a broad selection of artists. I begin with Kabaret OT.TO's comic performance of "Rap Tadeusz," before offering a short survey of young artists who post videos of themselves rapping the "Inwokacja" ("Invocation") from Mickiewicz's *Pan Tadeusz*. While some of these artists gesture towards symbols of genre or historic authenticity, their focus is generally the pedagogical value of the music. Turning to the hip-hop group Trzeci Wymiar's 2009 recording of Mickiewicz's "Reduta Ordona" ("Ordon's Redoubt"), I argue that in their recording we see the meaningful work done in processes of editing and performance as they transform the account into a dehistoricized message of Polish bravery in the face of foreign foes. Finally, I return to Peja and his 2015 recording of "Wielka Improwizacja" ("The Great Improvisation") from *Dziady (Forefathers' Eve)* and consider how he frames the work of interpretation as analogous to that of improvisation. Though their approach to source material differs, I read these performances in concert as once again reflecting an effort to draw connections between Romantic poetry and hip-hop, while also illustrating the creative and expressive potential of performance and interpretation.

Having addressed various ways in which Polish artists negotiate and perform national and genre authenticity, Chapter Four turns to the work of Dorota Masłowska whose parodic performances of these norms both critiques and affirms them. Analyzing her use of humor and parodic "sampling" of tropes, I read Masłowska's work as a challenge not only to the notion of

authentic types, but also as evidence of their pervasiveness in shaping our worlds. I focus on Masłowska's 2014 album (recorded under the name Mister D) *Spoleczeństwo jest niemile* (*Society is Mean*) and contextualize it within her body of literary work—including *Wojna polsko-ruska pod flagą biało-czerwoną* (*Snow White and Russian Red*), *Między name dobrze jest* (*No Matter How Hard We Try*), and her “hip-hop novels” *Paw Królowej* (*The Queen's Spew*) and *Inni Ludzie* (*Other People*). After introducing the threads of ironic critique in her literary work—tracing how they “blow up” Romantic tropes and ideas about artistic authenticity (and its marketability—I offer close readings of two musical tracks, “Chleb” (“Bread”) and “Tęcza” (“Rainbow”), as illustrative of her parodic critiques of both genre and national types. In framing this analysis within scholarship on parody and humor in hip-hop, I highlight the critical potential of the work to negotiate difference and work within and against formal and ideological norms. In her writing and performance, Masłowska speaks to the lingering power of Romantic narratives in contemporary Poland, while also exposing the ways in which that tradition is rendered ridiculous and/or damaging in its contemporary incarnations.

Chapter One

You Can Do That in Polish?!¹ *Performing Genre and National Authenticity*

“One minute you’re watching the show. The next minute, you’re in the show.”
– Ice-T, Sopot Marlboro Rock, July 5, 1995²

In July 1995, Sopot—a Polish resort town on the Baltic coast—hosted Sopot Marlboro Rock. The first two days of the festival featured performances from prominent artists of the Polish hard rock scene. The third and final day opened with Liroy, a hip-hop pioneer in Poland, and was headlined by the American rapper Ice-T and his “rapcore” band, Body Count. Addressing what appears to be an exclusively white male audience, Ice-T invited a few fans to join him on stage, referencing his track “Virtual Reality” as he tells them that they will not just watch the show, they’ll join the show. Of the young men welcomed on stage, Ice-T singled out one—dressed in an Ice Cube t-shirt, baggy jeans, a large grey hooded sweatshirt, and a white bandana—and invited him to the mic. The fan addressed the crowd in English, yelling “What’s up motherfuckers?!” before beginning to energetically freestyle in Polish over a beat from American rapper Craig Mack’s “Flava In Ya Ear.” Though his rhyme was perhaps a bit rough, his jabbing hand gestures and rhythmic movement projected a hip-hop swagger and earned him cheers from the crowd.

The young fan was Ryszard Andrzejewski, who in the following years—performing under the name Peja with the group Slums Attack—would become one of the biggest names in Polish hip-hop.

Comments on the video of Peja and Ice-T, posted online in 2009—14 years after the performance—assert that “this is the history of Polish hip-hop”³ and “this is one of the most

¹ This title refers to a scene in the 2012 film *Jesteś Bogiem [You Are God]* in which a young man’s life-long devotion to hip-hop begins upon hearing Magik (of the Polish hip-hop group Kaliber 44) rapping in Polish. This scene, and the young man’s exclamation, highlight the way in which Polish artists’ decision to rap in their native tongue expanded listeners’ conception of what their language was capable of expressing.

² “Sopot Marlboro Rock In Ice-T & Peja (1995 r),” posted by Pejaslumsattack, January 4, 2009. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GLd32bt4LrM>.

³ Dorian Ranieri, comment on “Sopot Marlboro Rock In Ice-T & Peja (1995 r).” Original: *to jest historia polskiego hip-hopu*

important moments of Polish rap :).”⁴ In Peja’s performance, we see deference to American artists, linguistic negotiation between Polish and English, the association of rap with other “street musics,” and the whiteness of fans and artists. Negotiating these elements, along with the constellation of influences and conditions that shaped Polish reception and performance of the genre, Polish rappers and their fans have developed a “Polish hip-hop” that draws on conventions of the globalized genre, while simultaneously adapting them to speak to and for Polish communities. As such, hip-hop becomes a site where Poles negotiate global and local identities and engage in a dialogue about what Polishness means today.

A sense of authenticity is at a premium in both hip-hop and discussions of national and community identities. This chapter introduces a framework for discussions of authenticity and credibility in hip-hop, a discourse guided by notions of speaking for a community, exhibiting respect for the origins of the genre, and addressing topics with which one is personally engaged. These discussions in many ways echo those that frame debates about Polish national identity and thus contextualized, the voices of Polish rappers and their fans serve to illustrate the ways in which Poles looked to position themselves within hip-hop communities, as well as to define and express their Polishness. I argue that the character of the identification with the genre has shifted over time, and after initially asserting a shared condition of economic marginalization as the basis for hip-hop affiliation, some Polish hip-hop communities came to articulate a nationally specific vision of hip-hop subjectivity tied to literary and historical narratives of Polish sacrifice as the basis of their place in the genre. Two tracks from Peja/Slums Attack—1999’s “Prawdziwe czy nie” (“Authentic or not”) and 2011’s “Poznańczyk”—serve to illustrate this shift and

⁴ P81Ziom, comment on “Sopot Marlboro Rock In Ice-T & Peja (1995 r).” Original: *to jeden z najważniejszych chwil polskiego rapu :*)

demonstrate that Polish artists' concurrent reading of hip-hop conventions and national traditions produces a "Poland" that can legitimately lay claim to hip-hop credibility.

Keeping it Real: Negotiating Legitimacy in Genre and Nation

"You really couldn't doubt their legitimacy 'cause they were down with Def Jam and Run DMC, and the beats were right. As long as they talked about white boys and beer and stuff like that, who could knock their topics?" – Chuck D, Public Enemy⁵

Hip-hop culture is full of demands that artists "keep it real"—that their art remain authentic. Despite the common call for authenticity, however, it remains a nebulous concept. In his study of hip-hop authenticity, Kembrew McLeod concludes "[k]eeplin' it real and other claims of authenticity do not appear to have fixed or rigid meaning throughout the hip-hop community. Keeplin' it real is a floating signifier in that its meaning changes depending on the context in which it is invoked."⁶ Though hip-hop authenticity may not have a fixed meaning, it is nevertheless a powerful standard for evaluation within hip-hop and is generally understood in association with the origins and traditions of the genre, as well as a perception that the artist is staying true to themselves. Reflecting on the (all white) New York-based hip-hop trio the Beastie Boys, Chuck D (Carlton Douglas Ridenhour) of Public Enemy articulated criteria for hip-hop legitimacy, suggesting if artists were producing quality beats, were versed in the seminal figures and labels of the genre, and addressed topics with which they were personally familiar, "you really couldn't doubt their legitimacy." Darryl "DMC" McDaniels, founding member of the pioneering group Run-DMC, echoes Chuck D as he reflects on his time touring with the Beastie Boys:

⁵ Alan Light, "An Oral History of the Beastie Boys: 'The Story of Yo'," *Spin*, September 4, 1998, <https://www.spin.com/1998/09/story-yo-oral-history-beastie-boys/2/>.

⁶ Kembrew McLeod, "Authenticity Within Hip-Hop and Other Cultures Threatened with Assimilation," *Journal of Communication* 49, no. 4 (December 1999): 139.

What bugged me out about the Beasties was that they knew everything about hip-hop – the Cold Crush Brothers, the Treacherous 3 and Afrika Bambaataa, all the old-school shit. In addition, they could rap, they could sing and they could play instruments.... [Crowds] loved them, because they weren't trying to be black rappers. They rapped about shit they knew about: skateboarding, going to White Castle, angel dust and mushrooms. Real recognizes real.⁷

Here, the qualities Chuck D identified as legitimizing are similarly underscored as elements of a credible, “real” hip-hopper. That Chuck D and DMC were asked to comment on whether or not the Beastie Boys were “legitimate” hip-hop artists reflects the premium placed on notions of authenticity and credibility within the genre, as well as the role established artists have in defining the community.

In their evaluation of the Beastie Boys, Chuck D and DMC illuminate both common criteria of evaluating authenticity in hip-hop and the degree to which such standards are malleable. Identifying six “dimensions” of hip-hop authenticity claims, McLeod suggests “hip-hop music, racial identification, the music industry, social location, individualism, and gender and sexual roles” are all components in assessing artists.⁸ Though these qualities often are performed in concert with one another, their significance depends on context and individual artists. So too do the ways in which artists engage with each criteria shift; the Beastie Boys, for example, have a different relationship to race than Chuck D and DMC. Similarly, while Polish rappers adopt the concept of “authenticity” as a hip-hop value, their understanding of and connection to these specific criteria are different than those of American pioneers of the genre. Overwhelmingly white, Poles are largely removed from the racial origins—and authenticating identity—of the genre. In many case, national identity—framed, like race, as formative of a historical and cultural community—comes to serve as a factor in evaluating authenticity.

⁷ Darryl “DMC” McDaniels, “The Immortals: Beastie Boys,” *Rolling Stone*, April 21, 2005.

⁸ McLeod, “Authenticity,” 138.

Though race is but one category in McLeod's analytic schema, it intersects with perceptions of gender and sexuality, cultural connection to the roots of the genre, position in the music industry, and social location. From its roots, hip-hop has been associated with the African American experience. Noting its close ties to African American vernacular speech, musical culture, and political traditions, Imani Perry argues of hip-hop, that "[e]ven with its hybridity, the consistent contributions from nonblack artists, and the borrowing from cultural forms of other communities, it is nevertheless black American music."⁹ This association with blackness shapes both the performance and perception of hip-hop, positioning the genre as an expression of a historically marginalized population. This foundational element of the genre also positions hip-hop as deeply rooted in preserving and promoting community. One's relationship to that community and its expression is thus at the core of evaluations of authenticity. Those communities are also, importantly, the ones who evaluate the authenticity of artists and deem them credible.

In his study of "sounding race" in rap, Loren Kajikawa theorizes this relationship between credibility and community more broadly, noting, "from the frequently used phrase 'keeping it real,' which describes the practice of staying true to one's culture and values, to numerous song titles...rap musicians and fans ascribe great value to authentic expression."¹⁰ In stating that the value of "authentic expression" is ascribed by rappers and fans, Kajikawa underscores the role reception plays in ideas of hip-hop legitimacy. While the performers are

⁹ Imani Perry, *Prophets of the Hood: Politics and Poetics in Hip Hop*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 10. Much more could—and has—been said about race in hip-hop. See, for example: Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1994); Gilbert B. Rodman, "Race...and Other Four Letter Words: Eminem and the Cultural Politics of Authenticity," in *That's The Joint!: The Hip-Hop Studies Reader*, ed. Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2012): 179-198; Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation* (New York, NY: Picador, 2005); Russell A. Potter, *Spectacular Vernaculars: Hip-Hop and the Politics of Postmodernism* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1995).

¹⁰ Loren Kajikawa, *Sounding Race in Rap Songs* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2015): 5-6.

expected to convey their “authentic” experience, it is in the process of listening that credibility is granted. In this, we see that issues of credibility and authenticity go hand-in-hand, yet represent different aspects of belonging—credibility is perceived and granted, whereas authenticity is rooted in performing one’s identity without affectation. The relationship of the individual to their community is central to both of these issues, and evaluations of both authenticity and credibility reflect an assessment of the ways one frames and performs their belonging.

Rooting an assessment of credibility in a perceived performance of an authentic identity raises the question of how we evaluate what constitutes communities and membership within them. How do we determine if an expression is authentic? Who has the power to grant credibility? Assessing if a rapper is “keeping it real” points to discourses on genre expectations, race, and marketing. Those deemed credible—like Chuck D and DMC—have the power to vouch for newcomers and thus define the boundaries of the genre. In the case of Polish hip-hop, these ideas about legitimacy within the genre blend with issues of national identity. To speak authentically of one’s experience and to one’s community—to be “real”—Polish rappers must express Polishness. This Polishness then also becomes a site of negotiating authenticity and credibility.

The Beastie Boys Cultivate Credibility

The Beastie Boys are often cited as an early influence on Polish rappers, and the ways in which the Brooklyn-based trio negotiated their legitimacy within the genre is illustrative of the ways personal identity and genre credibility intersect and the degree to which those negotiations may become obscured in critical and popular discussions of authenticity. Though the Beastie Boys produced the first hip-hop album to reach the number one spot on the Billboard charts

(1986's *Licensed to Ill*), their genre-blending and irreverent comedic take on hip-hop—and their identity as white men—appear to have positioned them as a group particularly in need of a guarantee of credibility from established rappers.¹¹ It was not merely their commercial success, but also acceptance from their contemporaries and comments like those quoted from Chuck D and DMC that legitimized the Beastie Boys as credible rap artists.¹² In their evolution from a post-punk hardcore band to hip-hop stars, Adam Yauch, Michael Diamond, and Adam Horowitz appealed to hip-hop's privileging of authentic performance by rapping about topics familiar to their experience over music that recalled their roots in rock. This authenticity, however, is not as simple as it may seem; it reflects both process and performance that saw a “trio of young, upper-middle-class male Jews” enact a vision of whiteness whose humor and relatability garnered them support among both black and white fans and artists in the hip-hop community.¹³

One element of the Beastie Boys' authenticity stemmed from their ability to blend elements of white culture with hip-hop, thus allowing them to both acknowledge their difference from the African American roots of the genre and to “be themselves.” Rather than attempting to perform some notion of blackness, the Beastie Boys “kept it real” and performed their (negotiated) whiteness in their music. Discussing 1986's *License to Ill*, Kajikawa notes that the hit singles “No Sleep Till Brooklyn” and “Fight for Your Right (To Party),” featured rapped lyrics over a backbeat of rock electric guitar—“the stereotypical sound of white youth culture in

¹¹ Keith Caulfield, “Beastie Boys Blazed Billboard Chart History,” *Billboard.com*, May 4, 2012, <https://www.billboard.com/articles/news/489107/beastie-boys-blazed-billboard-chart-history>

¹² Though their commercial success elevated their position in a national (and global) conversation, it did not unambiguously contribute to their claims to authenticity or credibility. In fact, many scholars note that commercial “mainstream” success runs counter to the “underground” authenticity of hip-hop. For example, see: McLeod, “Authenticity”; Ayse S. Caglar, “Popular Culture, Marginality and Institutional Incorporation: German-Turkish Rap and Turkish Pop in Berlin,” *Cultural Dynamics* 10, no. 3 (1998): 243-261.

¹³ Jon Stratton, “The Beastie Boys: Jews in Whiteface,” in *Jews, Race and Popular Music* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009): 105-128.

the 1980s.”¹⁴ The subjects of these tracks—jerk teachers, strict parents, “fly women,” and parties—similarly blend the swagger and irreverence of early hip-hop with topics that resonated among white audiences. Kajikawa suggests that even though these songs “seemed to take an ironic stab at the apathy and narcissism of privileged white youth,” the critique appeared to largely be lost as white fans eagerly bought the group’s records.¹⁵ Not only did their humorous performance of whiteness endear them to white fans, it also solidified their claim to authenticity—they were not trying to claim an African American experience, but rather were performing (a modified and stylized version of) themselves.¹⁶

Though the particular circumstances of the Beastie Boys’ evolution into “credible rappers” are perhaps not immediately relevant to the Polish hip-hop scene, they do illustrate one way in which authenticity and credibility are negotiated and evaluated. Authenticity is not uncomplicated “natural” expression, but rather framed by numerous social conditions and expectations. Gilbert B. Rodman notes “[w]e need to remember that authenticity must always be performed to be recognized and accepted as such.”¹⁷ Garnering credibility in hip-hop is similarly tied to these dynamics of reception. The processes and forces behind this evaluation, however, are often lost in discussions of hip-hop legitimacy, particularly as the genre was introduced to Polish audiences. Though the Beastie Boys are often cited by Polish rappers as an early influence, absent in these discussions is an acknowledgement that the group’s credibility was not always taken for granted and that it is the result of a musical evolution and conscious performance.

¹⁴ Kajikawa, *Sounding Race*, 126.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 126.

¹⁶ For more on the Beastie Boys’ negotiations of genre conventions and race, see: Kajikawa, *Sounding Race*; Stratton, *Jews, Race*; Charles Hiroshi Garrett, “‘Pranksta Rap’: Humor as Difference in Hip Hop,” in *Rethinking Difference in Music Scholarship*, eds. Olivia Bloechl, Melanie Lowe, Jeffrey Kallberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015): 315-337.

¹⁷ Rodman, “Race...and Other Four-Letter Words,” 186.

This lack of reflection on the cultivation of hip-hop credibility is perhaps a result of what Andrzej Antoszek argues is a loss of history and complexity in the Polish adoption of hip-hop. Antoszek argues this erasure is not intentional, but rather resulted from a lack of awareness among Polish artists and fans about the genre and culture's development. He suggests, "American hip-hop was embraced by Polish artists as a very homogenous if not 'pure' genre, which, of course, stood in direct opposition to American hip-hop's inclusiveness of various traditions and genres."¹⁸ The Polish reading of the genre as homogenous not only neglected hip-hop's diversity, but also obscures negotiations like those that conferred credibility to the Beastie Boys. As is evident in the tracks and fan commentary cited later in this chapter, the Beastie Boys are invoked uncritically as legitimate (and legitimizing) figures. In removing the Beastie Boys—and other rappers—from the American discourse and market that molded their "authenticity" and credibility, the Polish hip-hop community naturalizes these traits. The credibility of the Beastie Boys—and thus their authenticity—is taken for granted and divorced from the complexities that shaped reception in the United States.¹⁹

¹⁸ Andrzej Antoszek, "Hip-Hop Domesticated: On the Political Messages of Polish Rap and Hip Hop Lyrics," in *Hip-Hop in Europe: Cultural Identities and Transnational Flows*, ed. Sina A. Nitzsche and Walter Grünzweig (Zürich: LIT, 2013): 259.

¹⁹ Antoszek notes that primary among these forces was marketability: "The novelty and expressive power of the new phenomenon that future Polish hip-hoppers were so enraptured by at the beginning of the 1990s might have prevented them from noticing that what they considered an independent, authentic, and off-the-mainstream channel of expression, had by then transformed in the United States into a highly marketable and financially viable enterprise, conquering, eventually with the help of Viacom's MTV, new territories with a view to capitalizing on the genre's 'dark' aura and appeal. And the customers with appropriate purchasing power were often white rather than black kids. Therefore, what the community of Polish hip-hop artists forming at that time considered original, authentic, and 'real,' had in fact no relation to any particular US counterpart, the whole idea being very idealistic if not simulacral," (260). The music that found its way to Poland was that which was most marketable, which in the US, meant the most appealing to white audiences. As such, the model for Poles of hip-hop "authenticity" was actually a highly mediated vision of the genre shaped by racial and commercial dynamics lost in the music's export. Polish rappers who then looked to establish their credibility by citing their knowledge of American rap thus end up imitating an imitation.

Hearing Hip-Hop

Even if Poles did not fully understand the complexities behind negotiations of identity in imported American hip-hop, they nevertheless identified the premium the genre placed on authenticity.²⁰ As the case of the Beastie Boys and the definitions of legitimacy from Chuck D and DMC show, credibility within the genre is affected by factors beyond an artist's musical production and, in turn, affects the way that music is received. The cultivation and definition of hip-hop authenticity and credibility within American musical discourse is complex and becomes even more so as the genre spreads around the world. If authenticity is at least partially derived from "rapping what you know" and speaking to one's community, then the subjects and sounds of the genre are necessarily in conversation with locally specific narratives and traditions. Yet, as a genre with specific roots in African American communities, it bears foundational narratives of speaking for marginalized communities—narratives with which global hip-hop scenes must engage as they claim the genre as their own.

Discussing the "rise of multiple 'Hip-Hop Cultures,'" Marina Terkourafi notes that while differentiated by their focus on local issues, global hip-hop cultures "enter into a dialogue with the whole of hip-hop culture, acknowledging its supra-local origins and drawing cultural capital from them."²¹ She continues to explain, rappers "claim authenticity through both form (musical samples and language varieties used) and content (topics and genre referred to, and attitudes expressed), creating multiple—and sometimes conflicting [...]—authenticities in the process."²²

²⁰ This is true of many international hip-hop scenes. For example, Anna Oravcová notes that from the start, "the phrase 'keeping it real' or its equivalents are widely used in Czech hip-hop. The emphasis is put on the 'real' and 'true' representation of one's life" ("In Search of the 'Real' Czech Hip-Hop: The Construction of Authenticity in Czech Rap Music," in *Hip-Hop in Europe: Cultural Identities and Transnational Flows*, ed. Sina A. Nitzsche and Walter Grünzweig (Zürich: LIT, 2013): 129).

²¹ Marina Terkourafi, "Introduction: A Fresh Look at Some Old Questions," in *Languages of Global Hip Hop*, ed. Marina Terkourafi (New York, NY: Continuum International, 2010), 7.

²² *Ibid.*, 7.

Indeed, this is the case in Polish hip-hop as artists call on genre conventions and display their knowledge of hip-hop tradition, while also working in varied ways to address local issues. The complexity of these claims to authenticity speaks to the malleability of the concept, as well as the ever evolving process by which hip-hop communities define themselves musically and socially.

As this chapter explores the work of Peja and the discourse of Polish hip-hop fans, I argue that we see Polish claims of hip-hop credibility shift from privileging a recitation of fluency in the “supra-local origins” of the genre to highlighting national narratives and associating with figures of Polish literary traditions. This evolving negotiation of generic legitimacy occurs not only in the recorded music of Polish rappers, but also in the discourse of promotion and reception that frames its performance. As Terkourafi suggests, the meaning of hip-hop tracks and belonging in hip-hop communities is constructed through a wide, social confluence of texts and context. This is not unique to hip-hop. Simon Frith argues, “to grasp the meaning of a piece of music is to hear something not simply present to the ear. It is to understand a musical culture, to have ‘a scheme of interpretation.’ For sounds to be music, we need to know how to hear them...”²³ Though Frith is speaking more to the recognition of “music” among sounds than to specific meaning within music, he nevertheless offers a compelling articulation of the notion that listeners must learn how to hear—that is, that there is a learned context for interpretation that shapes one’s experience of music. If his point is that for sounds to be “music” we need to know how to hear them, we might also consider that for music to be hip-hop, we need to know how to hear it. How then, is hip-hop heard and performed—particularly in Poland, an ocean away from the genre’s birthplace?

²³ Simon Frith, *Performing Rites* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 249.

Hearing Poland

Much as the Beastie Boys cultivated a performance of whiteness that then served to bolster their credibility as artists who spoke “authentically” for their community, so too are Polish rappers faced with the task of authentically voicing their Polishness. As we question how Poles “hear hip-hop,” it is worth asking the related question of how they “hear Poland.” Just as hip-hop is mediated through individual performance and community reception, so too is Polishness subject to varied interpretations and expressions. If rapping the experience of one’s community is an essential aspect of hip-hop authenticity, then Polish rappers must grapple with how to define their community. As such, hip-hop offers a particularly valuable site to investigate ideas of contemporary Polish identity, as it brings together individual assertions of authentic Polishness and community evaluations of the credibility of those visions.

Whereas a central aspect of hip-hop authenticity is fluency in the language of the genre and knowledge of its roots, so too does national belonging draw on such foundational myths and language communities. While the formation and definition of national identity and belonging is a complex subject, my research suggests that the Polish hip-hop that is engaged with Polishness defines it in terms of a community formed around a sense of shared culture and descent.²⁴ The genre’s engagement with this vision of the nation is not surprising, as Polish identity more broadly is largely rooted in such national mythologies. Referencing the eighteenth-century thinker Johann Gottfried Herder, Gerhard Wagner argues that the nations of Eastern Europe were distinguished from their Western neighbors by a lack of “a political, institutional, or ideological

²⁴ While my research is focused on the conception of shared descent rooted in Polish history and culture (particularly Polish nationalism), such an understanding is not the only way in which Polish artists frame their definitions of Polishness. Some, such as the rapper and producer Donatan, draw on pan-Slavic mythology (which also found a place in Romanticism) in his vision of the nation. Others, like Tadeusz “Tadek” Polkowski, offer a more exclusionary nationalist vision of Poland.

frame in which the nation could be defined.”²⁵ Though contemporary Poland of course has political and institutional frames that could define the nation, its history of centuries in which the state lost local autonomy or was wiped off the map by partition has fostered a definition of the nation rooted in “common language and culture”—or, as Wagner distills it, by “a cultural community of descent” dependent on, “blood ties, habit, language, and religion.”²⁶ Belonging in such a nation is thus not defined by political citizenship, but by cultural knowledge and shared traditions.

Much as this understanding of the nation is rooted in Poland’s history of lost sovereignty and the need to culturally preserve the nation in the absence of a political state, so too are the narratives that sustain that culture bound with that loss. Ewa Domańska argues that “the category of ‘victim’ is a key concept in order to understand the Polish approach to Poland’s history. Polishness is manifested in the myth of the victim and his/her tragedy.”²⁷ This reading of Polishness recalls the writings of Poland’s “national bard,” Adam Mickiewicz, who articulated the notion of Poland as the “Christ of Nations”—a vision rooted in national suffering and the eternal promise of a “resurrection” and redemption in the future.²⁸ Polishness is thus maintained in narratives, and those narratives tell the story of national suffering and sacrifice. This story has been replayed and adapted in the years that followed—from the uprisings under partition,

²⁵ Gerhard Wagner, “Nationalism and Cultural Memory in Poland: The European Union Turns East,” *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 17, no. 2 (Winter 2003): 193.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 193.

²⁷ Ewa Domańska, “(Re)creative Myths and Constructed History: The Case of Poland,” in *Myth and memory in the Construction of Community: Historical Patterns in Europe and Beyond*, ed. Bo Stråth (Brussels: P.I.E., 2000): 257. This reading is echoed in, for example: Norman Davies, “Polish National Mythologies,” in *Myths and Nationhood*, eds. Geoffrey Hosking and George Schoepflin (New York, NY: Routledge, 1997): 141-157; Wagner, “Nationalism.”

²⁸ Adam Mickiewicz, “The Books of the Polish Nation and of the Polish Pilgrimage,” in *Konrad Wallenrod and Other Writings of Adam Mickiewicz*, trans. Jewell Parish, Borothea Prall Radin, George Rapall, and others. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1925): 132-143.

through the conflicts following independence in 1918 and occupation during World War II, to the struggles against socialist control, and into the present day.

This national understanding of constructing belonging based on shared culture and history, as well as the foundational accounts rooted in oppression, echo elements of hip-hop. Both rely on narratives of origin—for in both cases it is the community's stories about the past that are privileged and that shape the present. For Polish hip-hop artists, authenticity in the genre is often connected to a sense of authentically speaking for the nation and thus Polish mythology and narratives of the past offer a valuable source of material with which to bolster claims of legitimacy on both fronts. Similarly, the stories of Polish suffering offered by Mickiewicz and others provide Poles a point of association with a music that developed among marginalized communities in the United States. In performing readings of the past, Polish rappers do the work of national preservation in a genre that traffics in many of the same markers of authenticity as Polish nationalism. Hip-hop and Polish authenticity thus become mutually reinforcing.

Setting the Stage: Hip-Hop Comes to Poland

Though there is not a singular, all-encompassing definition of Polish hip-hop (nor is there one for any global hip-hop scene), notions of the genre's character reflect the influence of early American rappers, as well as the social and musical context into which they were first introduced into Poland. As Poles began to hear tracks from the Beastie Boys and Public Enemy, they interpreted the artists and their words against the backdrop of familiar social and cultural touchstones—punk rock, irreverent performance art, political graffiti, and feelings of (first economic, then national) marginalization.

Polish exposure to hip-hop initially came from satellite radio and television. Robert Brylewski, a prominent Polish singer in punk-rock and reggae circles, recalls watching the Beastie Boys video for “You’ve Gotta Fight for Your Right (To Party)” on TV “Dwojka” in 1987.²⁹ The first Polish radio show to broadcast hip-hop began in 1993, when journalist Bogna Świątkowska—the “Godmother of Polish Hip-hop”—returned from travels abroad with an ear for the genre. She recalls hearing hip-hop in London and Israel, but upon returning to Poland finding that radio stations were more interested in playing rock and pop acts like Led Zeppelin and Michael Jackson.³⁰ Świątkowska started playing hip-hop and inviting black artists from New York and London onto her program to discuss the music.³¹ From this early exposure, there grew an experimental hip-hop scene as Polish artists started to release their own hip-hop recordings. The enthusiasm for the genre only grew as rap artists and their music videos started to appear regularly on commercial television channels like Atomic TV, MTV Poland, and VIVA Poland.³²

This period in the early 1990s marked the debuts of early Polish hip-hop artists like Kaliber 44, Molesta, and Liroy, as well as the early exposure to the music for slightly younger artists who would soon become some of the most popular hip-hop musicians in Poland. Leszek “Eldo” Kaźmierczak of the group Grammatik recalls getting “the cable television and all this stuff and I remember watching MTV with Ed Lover and Dr. Dre, you know very old school.”³³

²⁹ Andrzej Buda, *Historia kultury hip-hop w Polsce: 1977-2002* [History of Hip-Hop Culture in Poland: 1977-2002] (Głogów: Andrzej Buda, 2001), 7.

³⁰ Andrzej Buda, *Historia kultury hip-hop w Polsce: 1977-2013* [History of Hip-Hop Culture in Poland: 1977-2013] (Głogów: Andrzej Buda, 2011), 41.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 41.

³² Piotr Majewski, “African-American Music in the Service of White Nationalists: Polish ‘Patriotic Rap’ as a Pop Cultural tool to Promote National Values,” *European Journal of American Studies* 13, no. 3 (2018): 4.

³³ Michael L. Torrence, “Polish Hip Hop as a Form of Multiliteracies and Situated Learning” (PhD diss., Tennessee Technological University, 2009), 94, <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED527183>. Ed Lover and Dr. Dre were co-hosts of the hip-hop television program *Yo! MTV Raps Today*.

Peja also comments on the early influence of music videos on MTV. Michael L. Torrence argues that this early period of exposure to music videos from abroad not only influenced musical tastes, but also shaped the way in which Polish artists performed hip-hopness, suggesting MTV “transfer[ed] multiliteracies” as “early listeners adopted speech patterns and familiar Hip Hop phrasings like the three step counter ‘yo, yo, yo’ in preparation to deliver rhymes.”³⁴ The growing availability of hip-hop music and videos not only offered Polish listeners a chance to easily access the foreign genre, but also provided them a model for performing their own stories in their own language.³⁵ By the late 1990s, most Polish hip-hop fans were listening almost exclusively to recordings from Poland.³⁶

Though Polish hip-hop music largely emerged in the mid-1990s, many of the elements of the genre and culture existed long before they became understood as “hip-hop.” Andrzej Buda’s *Historia Kultury Hip-Hop w Polsce 1977-2002* (Cultural History of Hip-Hop in Poland 1977-2002), one of the first books on Polish hip-hop, begins its account almost twenty years before what Renata Pasternak-Mazur labels the genre’s “early stage” (1995-1999).³⁷ This discrepancy reflects the ways in which early Polish discourse on hip-hop looked to incorporate the genre into musical and artistic movements already present in Poland, professing an understanding of the culture that includes graffiti, breakdancing, DJing, and MCing.³⁸ Highlighting the existence of

³⁴ Ibid., 130.

³⁵ Prior to Świątkowska’s radio show and the debut of hip-hop television programs, access to hip-hop recordings was much more limited and often relied on receiving tapes from abroad and trading homemade copies. The rapper Wojciech “Sokół” Sosnowski recalls getting music from his brother in Chicago, telling Torrence, “I got my first cassette from my brother. You know, he was sending me cassettes that nobody knew in Poland. It was Public Enemy stuff and things like that...ahh Run DMC or the Fat Boys you know it was something like this and a mix you know? Many, many things like the Beastie Boys” (“Polish Hip Hop,” 96).

³⁶ Renata Pasternak-Mazur, “The Black Muse: Polish Hip-Hop as the Voice of ‘New Others’ in the Post-Socialist Transition,” *Music & Politics* 3, no. 1 (Winter 2009).

³⁷ Renata Pasternak-Mazur, “Silencing Polo: Controversial Music in Post-Socialist Poland” (PhD diss., Rutgers University, 2017), 154, <https://rucore.libraries.rutgers.edu/rutgers-lib/52247/PDF/1/play/>.

³⁸ See, for example, Joanna Rychła, *Ucieczka, bunt, twórczość. Subcultura hip-hopowa w poszukiwaniu autentycznego stylu życia* [Escape, Rebellion, Creativity: Hip-Hop Subculture in Search of an Authentic Lifestyle], (Krakow: IMPULS, 2005); Renata Pasternak-Mazur, “The Black Muse.”

many of hip-hop's "four elements," Poles claim to have engaged with "hip-hop culture" before rap music made its way to their radios.³⁹ Hip-hop was not introduced to Poland against a blank slate, but rather entered a culture already versed in some resonate elements. Hip-hop took on and was thus understood through existing traditions, including political graffiti and punk-rock "outsider" posturing.

This broad understanding of "hip-hop" and the tendency to try to associate it with existing genres is evident in the early association of hip-hop with punk and "skater" music. Reflecting on his early days as a hip-hop fan and aspiring performer, Peja recalls "attempts to link us to punk in the 1980s. To say that we are anti-authoritarian, poorly educated...that we are brutish."⁴⁰ This initial link with punk music might be read in two, largely complementary, ways. First, the comparison between the musics is not unfounded, and artists like the Beastie Boys and Ice-T's Body Count incorporated elements of hip-hop with punk and hard rock music. Secondly, hip-hop—both in the US and Poland—largely spoke to marginalized youth communities. While this character mostly lost its racial component in the translation to Polish, the sense that hip-hop spoke to and for "othered" communities remained central. As a youth oriented "street music," hip-hop appeared to address the same concerns and demographics as punk. It is therefore not surprising that Poles initially associated the two, as the language of punk offered an introductory lens through which to try to understand hip-hop.

In grasping for a recognizable point of comparison between hip-hop and established Polish musical culture, Polish artists and fans attempted to find a "way in" to a genre that

³⁹ We might also understand this "backdating" of Polish hip-hop history as part of a claim to legitimacy in the genre. While such an assertion neglects the specific character of hip-hop, it suggests that Poles were "doing hip-hop" before American rappers put a name to the art form. They therefore are not outsiders or latecomers to the genre, but rather its pioneers.

⁴⁰ "Peja: Jestem tylko muzykiem z krwi i kości który spełnia swój sen [Peja: I am just a musician of flesh and blood, who has fulfilled his dream]," *Gra muzyka*, <http://gramuzyka.redblog.gk24.pl/2012/03/17/peja-jestem-tylko-muzykiem-z-krwi-i-kosci-ktory-spelnia-swoj-sen-wywiad/> (accessed December 3, 2013).

initially appeared racially coded and perhaps not fully accessible. Considering Poland's lack of racial diversity, it is unsurprising that class—rather than race—became a dominant concern as hip-hop initially negotiated a new Polish context. Addressing issues of economic and social stagnation, early Polish hip-hop artists and fans translated the feelings of marginalization and anger expressed by African American performers to the Polish scene by recontextualizing the music as a reaction to the period of post-Soviet transition. Świątkowska describes an early hip-hop scene in which “language was no barrier. They were angry too. They don't have to understand the words. They can see it.”⁴¹ Miłosz Miszczyński and Przemysław Tomaszewski echo this claim:

Although the American and Polish social contexts differ significantly, the less salient aspects of Polish society, such as racial discrimination, became transferred into different spheres, carrying a similar message based on inequality. Though not many rappers in Poland have a good command of English, their texts and attitudes are profoundly influenced by both the aesthetics and conventions of American hip-hop.⁴²

Here again, comprehension of lyrics is not important, nor is the specific racial dimension of the music's message. Instead, a shared sense of inequality serves at the foundation of Polish hip-hop fans' identification with the music, an identification they express in references to the ways they read the look and attitude of American rappers.⁴³ Given this dynamic of reception, the process of simplifying the nuanced and diverse genre in its translation to Polish is unsurprising. Broadly

⁴¹ Peter S. Green, “Poznan Journal: Polish Hip-Hop Rocks the Homies on the Blok,” *The New York Times*, April 5, 2012.

⁴² Miłosz Miszczyński and Przemysław Tomaszewski, “Wearing Nikes for a Reason: A Critical Analysis of Brand Usage in Polish Rap,” in *Hip Hop at Europe's Edge: Music, Agency, and Social Change*, eds. Adriana N. Helbig and Miłosz Miszczyński (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017): 150.

⁴³ This is a reception of English-language hip-hop that is not limited to Poland. In his reading of hip-hop in eastern Germany, Timothy S. Brown quotes a fan: “We felt almost exactly like [the characters in the 1984 hip-hop drama *Beat Street*]. Of course, we had cash for a doctor, and here it didn't rain [through the roof of] the apartment, and we didn't have any gangsters on the street, but our life was just as dreary,” (Timothy S. Brown, “‘Keeping It Real’ in a Different ‘Hood: (African-)Americanization and Hip Hop in Germany,” in *This Vinyl Ain't Final: Hip Hop and the Globalization of Black Popular Culture*, eds. Dipannita Basu and Sidney J. Lemelle (Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto, 2006), 138). Like Poles Świątkowska describes, the German fan who speaks to Brown heard an echo of their own struggles in American hip-hop—despite the distances that separated them geographically, economically, and linguistically.

understood dissatisfaction and passion come to define the content of Polish hip-hop.⁴⁴ Young Polish men, feeling excluded from the promise of social and economic development, adapted elements of the style and energy of American artists to express their own issues.⁴⁵

Though Polish audiences often minimized the racial dimension of the music as essential for understanding, they nevertheless were quick to recognize the genre's roots in African American culture. Responding to Joanna Rychła's question about the origins of hip-hop, one fan asserted, "We are not black. That's not the point."⁴⁶ They might not be black, but Polish fans recognize the music's roots are. Pasternak-Mazur notes Polish hip-hop fans describing the music in terms of a "black muse":

In Poland, fans of hip-hop call their genre *czarna muza* ("black muse"), applying this name to African American as well as to Polish hip-hop. *Muza* ("muse") functions in this context both as a word for "an inspiration" and as an abbreviated form of *muzyka* ("music").⁴⁷

This discussion of a "black muse" that infuses both imported and domestic hip-hop speaks to a perception of Polish hip-hop as inspired by American artists, but also capable of expressing the spirit of that music. Blackness is framed as essential to the music, but also divorced from racial identity.

⁴⁴ For more on the political and economic conditions that led to the "new margin" in Polish society in the 1990s, see: Renata Pasternak-Mazur, "The Black Muse"; Piotr Majewski, "African-American Music." The 2001 film *Blokersi* (dir. Sylwester Latkowski), a documentary about hip-hop communities located in large apartment complexes (*blokowisko*), also offers a look into the ways in which "marginal" youth adopted hip-hop as a way to tell their stories.

⁴⁵ While the character of Polish identification with the genre might initially have been framed in terms of economic marginalization, as the genre grew and diversified, the perspectives expressed similarly opened to different hip-hop subjectivities. The "hard" *uliczny* (street) hip-hop that echoed American gangsta rap gave way to other voices, including *inteligentny* (intellectual) rap that offered more engagement with the nation's own cultural traditions and found greater mainstream success. The rappers considered throughout this dissertation largely fall under the umbrella of *inteligentny* hip-hop (though they may not identify as such). Renata Pasternak-Mazur's "Silencing Polo" offers a more thorough timeline of this evolution and diversification.

⁴⁶ Rychła, *Ucieczka, bunt*, 101.

⁴⁷ Pasternak-Mazur, "The Black Muse."

From the outset the emotions expressed in Polish hip-hop came naturally and were easily rooted in specific Polish contexts, but the formal and performative aspects of the genre remained heavily influenced by imported American tracks and videos. Describing his relationship with American musical influences, Peja notes, “It’s fine to imitate. I had idols and imitated them. I would not be here today if not for American rap. I studied specific performers, I believed in them. I bought their CDs and I watched their videos. I did everything to become part of that culture. And I have.”⁴⁸ This reflection points to the degree to which Polish hip-hop was performed in dialogue with the work of American artists. For example, Peja’s performance in Sopot was largely an act of imitation—his clothing and bearing reflected the style of gangsta rap, an influence that was highlighted in the t-shirt featuring Ice Cube. He addressed the crowd in the vernacular of American hip-hop. And his rap, though in Polish, was delivered with a physical deference to Ice-T.

Hip-hop from the start found resonance with existing forms and attitudes in Poland. As the genre developed, the network of associations grew and Poles’ fluency in the imported conventions increased. Always a site of negotiation between varied local and global influences, Polish hip-hop reflects an interplay of national traditions and foreign influences that are at the heart of contemporary discussions of Polishness. As “speaking what you know” and voicing the concerns of a community emerge as defining elements of hip-hop authenticity, Polish artists are left to consider what “they know” and how it is that they defined their community.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ “Peja: *Jestem tylko muzykiem z krwi i kości który selnia swój sen.*”

⁴⁹ A Polish-language hip-hop dictionary, includes definitions of both an “authentic person” (*prawilniak*) and “authentic” (*prawilny*). Defining a *prawilniak* as “a person connected with the street, following the rules of the environment” and *prawilny* as “honest, connected with the street,” the *Hip hop Słownik* (Hip Hop Dictionary) offers a Polish definition of authenticity that echoes those of other global hip-hop scenes. “Keeping it real” means giving voice to your own “streets.” See: Piotr Flicieński and Stanisław Wójtowicz, *Hip hop Słownik* [Hip Hop Dictionary] (Warsaw, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2007), 134.

‘Authentic or not’? Negotiating Pedigree and Polishness

In 2008, while visiting New York City, Peja made a pilgrimage to the Queensbridge South Houses, the largest public housing development in the United States and the early home of a number of hip-hop artists.⁵⁰ Wearing a shirt promoting his 2006 album *Szacunek ludzi ulicy* (Respect People of the Street), Peja posed in front of the gates of the apartments that loom large in the history of hip-hop (Figure 1.1).⁵¹ In this photo, which he posted to Instagram in 2016, Peja demonstrates the negotiation of hip-hop conventions and performance of authenticity. He knows and respects the history of the genre and he insists upon his place within it.



Figure 1.1. Peja at Queensbridge South Houses on Instagram (2008)

Peja is, indeed, a central figure in the history of hip-hop in Poland. He formed Slums Attack with fellow Poznanian Marcin “Iceman” Maćkowiak (whose nickname referenced his love for the American rapper Ice-T) in 1993 and released a number of cassette mixtapes. These early recordings were “strongly inspired by the sound of rap from the west coast of the USA, but

⁵⁰ For a brief history of the Queensbridge Houses and the rappers who memorialized it in their work, see: Julian Kimble, “How Nas Turned America’s Largest Housing Project into a Historic Landmark,”

<https://www.complex.com/pop-culture/2014/04/how-nas-turned-the-queensbridge-houses-into-a-landmark>

⁵¹ <https://www.instagram.com/p/BJTrC3eAhiX/> (He returned for another photo in 2016:

<https://www.instagram.com/p/BIqd0ndAj72/>)

realistic and close to the streets of Poznań and the sociologizing of “everyday street life.”⁵² In 1998, Dariusz “DJ Decks” Działek replaced Iceman, and a year later the duo released their first studio record, *Calkiem nowe oblicze* (An Entirely New Face), which peaked at number twenty-three on Poland’s *Oficjalna Lista Zprzedaży Związku Producentów* (OLiS, Official Sales List of Audio Video Producers) sales chart.⁵³ The group continued to find critical and commercial success, and Peja became known as “one of the most important and controversial figures in the history of Polish rap,” famous for his “high voice, offensive, fast flow, and hardcore lyrics.”⁵⁴ In 2004 he ranked forth on the weekly *Wprost*’s internet poll of “Most Popular Poles” (Mickiewicz came in first).⁵⁵ In 2011, Peja was hailed as the best rapper in Poland by the music magazine *Machina*.⁵⁶ Both as a musician and a public figure, Peja is a recognized voice in Polish popular culture.

Though most famous for his “hardcore lyrics,” Peja’s career has also seen him record tracks that explore hip-hop history and Polish traditions. Much as his visit to the Queensbridge Houses reflects a desire to connect with the history of hip-hop, so too does the track “Prawdziwe czy nie” (“Authentic or Not”) express Peja’s appreciation for the genre. Featured on Peja/Slums Attack’s 1999 *Calkiem nowe oblicze*, “Prawdziwe czy nie” pays homage—both lyrically and stylistically—to the music that changed their lives. The question posed by the song’s title—“authentic or not?”—signals the negotiation of authenticity Peja undertakes on this reflection on

⁵² Andrzej Cała, “Peja,” *Antologia Polskiego Rapu* [Anthology of Polish Rap], eds. Dominika Węclawek, Marcin Flint, Tomasz Kleyff, Andrzej Cała, Kamil Jaczyński (Warsaw: Narodowe Centrum Kultury, 2014), 372. Original: *Mocno inspirowana brzmieniem rapu z zachodniego wybrzeża USA, ale realistyczna, bliska poznańskich ulic, socjologizująca “zwykła codzienność”...*

⁵³ OLiS was inaugurated in October 2000 and tracks the weekly top fifty best-selling albums in Poland. The charts are based on data from over 230 points of sale (including Empik, Media Market, and Saturn, and digital downloads).

⁵⁴ Cała, “Peja,” 371. Original: *Jedna z najważniejszych i budzących największe kontrowersje postaci w historii polskiego rapu. Artysta, którego znakiem firmowym jest wysoki głos, ofensywny, szybki flow i hardcore’owe teksty.*

⁵⁵ Reproduced in Andrzej Buda, *Historia kultury hip-hop w Polsce: 1977-2013*, 416.

⁵⁶ https://web.archive.org/web/20120115040808/http://www.machina.pl/rankingi/ranking_id,28/id,16/Najlepszy-Polski-Raper.html

his introduction to hip-hop. This contemplation of authenticity is itself indicative of the group's immersion in the genre, and the track further signals this engagement with hip-hop norms as Peja raps about the artists who were his introduction to the music that has become his livelihood. On this early track from the group, authenticity is figured in relation to American models as the history that is privileged is that of the foreign genre. Though the song primarily looks outside Poland in cultivating a hip-hop lineage, Peja/Slums Attack do begin to assert a place for Polish artists within the tradition as they rap in Polish over a sample from the Polish 80s synth-pop band Papa Dance and introduce the names of early Polish rappers into the musical pantheon Peja documents. In this ode to classic hip-hop, Peja/Slums Attack offer a playful mix of reverence and appropriation that points the way to a framework for asserting authenticity that positions Polish rappers as part of communities that are both local and international. The track "keeps it real" by recounting Peja's personal journey into the genre, while also showing respect for hip-hop's history.

The opening bars of the track offer a statement of fluency in the genre, as well as a move to link the music with Polish cultural productions. Beginning with a buoyant loop of a slightly syncopated two bar phrase, the musical introduction soon develops more audible scratching, cut with a distorted "hey, hey, hey." Though brief, the introduction's inclusion of looped tracks and the scratched hook places the track in conversation with American hip-hop artists who pioneered such techniques as the genre developed.⁵⁷ In presenting a familiarity and comfort with these aspects of hip-hop, Peja/Slums Attack open "Prawdziwe czy nie" with a musical assertion of

⁵⁷ For more on the development and techniques of hip-hop turntablism, see: Sophy Smith, "Compositional Strategies of the hip-hop turntablists," *Organised Sound* 5, no. 2 (2001): 75-79; Joseph G. Schloss, *Making Beats: The Art of Sample-Based Hip-Hop* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2004); Juliana Snapper, "Scratching the Surface: Spinning Time and Identity in Hip-Hop Turntablism," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 7, no. 1 (February 2004): 9-25.

their belonging in the genre. While the techniques of sampling and musical manipulation establish Peja/Slums Attack as credible artists within hip-hop's sonic landscape, the selection of Papa Dance serves to musically and historically link the track to a Polish musical heritage.

When Peja enters, rapping in Polish, it is instantly evident that, though the track uses the musical idiom of American hip-hop, it also departs from that point of origin. That Polish hip-hop artists immediately performed the imported genre in their native language was unusual in the history of Polish incorporations of genres from the West. When Polish artists started performing rock 'n' roll in the late 1950s, they did so in English.⁵⁸ Similarly, many early punk bands initially sang in English. That this was not the case with hip-hop is perhaps because the rapid delivery and intricate rhythms of the genre made the use of a non-native language prohibitively difficult. The use of the Polish language also serves as a means for Peja to perform his Polishness—to “keep it real” in his native tongue.

Though the decision to forego a period of using English in establishing the genre may have been a departure from tradition in Poland, it reflects broader trends in the global spread of hip-hop, which saw the music overwhelmingly delivered in the artist's native language.⁵⁹ For example, Anna Oravcová notes that Poland's neighbors in the Czech Republic see “[t]he first and foremost criterion for authenticity” as “rap in one's mother tongue.”⁶⁰ While Peja's (and other Polish rappers') use of Polish reflects broader trends in European rap, Jannis Androutsopoulos and Arno Scholz argue it also serves the important role of beginning “reterritorialization” of the genre in its new country. Here, they refer to what James Lull

⁵⁸ For more on early Polish rock 'n' roll, see: Alex Kan and Nick Hayes, “Big Beat in Poland” in *Rocking the state: rock music and politics in Eastern Europe and Russia*, edited by Sabrina P Ramet (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994): 41-54.

⁵⁹ Jannis Androutsopoulos and Arno Scholz, “Spaghetti Funk: Appropriations of Hip-Hop Culture and Rap Music in English,” *Popular Music and Society* 26, no. 4 (December 2003): 473.

⁶⁰ Oravcová, “In Search of the Real,” 129.

identifies as the final stage of the formation of cultural territory.⁶¹ As elements of a culture are introduced into a new setting, Lull argues they are first deterritorialized (this is enacted in “the extraction of a cultural pattern from its original social context”), then undergo a process of “cultural melding and mediation,” which consists of “transculturation, hybridization, and indigenization.”⁶² “Prawdziwe czy nie” might be seen as enmeshed in those processes of hybridization (as a Polish track is remixed in the new genre) and indigenization (as Peja starts to write the genre into local concerns and passions). Peja’s choice to rap in Polish is similarly an act of indigenization that leads to Lull’s final state of reterritorialization, in which the cultural pattern is integrated into its new context.⁶³ As such, it is a choice that not only allows him to engage the virtuosic conventions of the genre, but also to perform the cultural contextualization that he expresses in his lyrics. Peja’s rapping in Polish is crucial to the song’s message of incorporating Poles into the global narrative of hip-hop. This is not only a music that can speak to Poles, but also for Poles and in Polish.

Peja’s rapid-fire rhymes skillfully articulate each syllable, accenting both internal and end rhymes. While word play and rhyme are certainly not new to hip-hop, Peja’s delivery underscores his embrace of his native tongue. Not only is the rap a display of the poetic potential of the language, but the rapid delivery of lyrics evokes a style of delivery present throughout Polish music.⁶⁴ Though the track does not explicitly reference these earlier artists and genres, for a Polish listener, they may well inform the scheme of interpretation that shapes

⁶¹ James Lull, *Media, Communication, Culture: A Global Approach* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

⁶² Androutsopoulos and Scholz, “Spaghetti Funk,” 467.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 467.

⁶⁴ For example, in Ewa Demarcyk’s cabaret performances in the 1960s, or rock band Maanam’s 1981 track “Rat’s Breath.”

reception of the piece. As such, the opening bars of “Prawdziwe czy nie” simultaneously voice Polish musical traditions and global rap style.

While Peja’s delivery might “sound Polish” in its language and echoes of earlier Polish performers, the content of his rhymes is largely devoted to paying homage to the American rappers who have inspired him. He raps that “God was Chuck D” before delivering the song’s only English line—and the title of the American hip-hop group Public Enemy’s first album—“Yo! Bum Rush the Show.”⁶⁵ Having positioned Chuck D as “God,” Peja’s Polish-accented pronunciation of the title of his group’s debut speaks both to his affinity for and distance from the New York rapper. He has internalized the American music, though it sounds slightly foreign coming from his lips. This dynamic is repeated as Peja goes on to describe,

Clips from the satellite, “Yo! Raps” gives new discs
Not any hits, underground issues
I saw De La Soul on the neighbor’s TV
Black magic on these mixes and the walls even more
Apollo Ki Da Capri...
...Spinning everything, awesome riot
Like Eric Bis with Rakim with their original style⁶⁶

Peja here expands on the hip-hop universe within the track, mirroring his own discovery of new artists. Watching the television program “Yo! MTV Raps”—which debuted in Poland in the early 1990s, when Peja was a teen—he is introduced to the Long Island hip-hop trio De La

⁶⁵ Peja/Slums Attack, “Prawdziwe czy nie,” *Calkiem nowe oblicze* [Entirely New Face], Camey Studio, 1999. Original: *Zamias Boga był Chuck D...*

⁶⁶ Original: *Klipy z satelity "Yo! Raps" daje nowe płyty
Nie żadne hity, undergroundowa sprawa
Zobaczyłem De La Soul w telewizji u sąsiada
Potem poszło z górki nowe nazwy nowe twarze
Czarna magia na tych mixach i na murach jeszcze bardziej
Apollo Ki Da Capri...
...Wszystko to kręciło zajebistą zadymę
Jak Eric Bis z Rakimem swoim oryginalnym stylem*

Soul.⁶⁷ Pioneering Bronx DJ and rapper Kid Capri’s “Apollo” and the “original style” of Long Island DJ Eric B and MC Rakim also thrill him. As was the case in his shout-out to Public Enemy, Peja’s Polish-accented articulation of “Kid Capri” and “Eric B” underscores the linguistic divide between the rapper and his idols. Peja knows he is mispronouncing the names—in fact, his flow relies on the improper breaks—and uses this “mistake” to underscore his linguistic and national difference. Throughout, such moments serve to present Peja as both an insider and an outsider to the genre. He clearly respects these artists, and invokes their names to prove his knowledge of hip-hop tradition, yet his distance from them is ever-present.

While his delivery partially sets Peja apart from the American rappers who inspire him, the extensive listing of rap luminaries positions Slums Attack within the tradition. Peja’s knowledge of hip-hop artists continues to emerge as he rhymes about CMW (Compton’s Most Wanted), Spice One, Fat Joe, Lord Finesse, KRS-One, and the Beastie Boys. Enumerating this pantheon of rappers and producers, Peja/Slums Attack stress their knowledge of, and thus credibility in, the genre.⁶⁸ This assertion of legitimizing knowledge requires a similar knowledge from fans to be appreciated and thus works in dialogue with listeners to create a hip-hop community.

Alongside the Americans cited, Peja includes the names Kali (a Polish rapper who occasionally collaborated with Slums Attack) and Ważka G (an underground Polish gangsta rapper). To the degree that “Prawdziwe czy nie” has a narrative, it is one of Peja’s—and

⁶⁷ Yo! MTV Raps was a program on MTV that aired hip-hop videos. It debuted in the United States in 1988 and became available in Poland by the early 1990s. It was, however, only available over satellite television (which was relatively rare) and initially only aired at midnight on Saturday nights (Pasternak-Mazur, “The Black Muse”).

⁶⁸ This demonstration of knowledge of and love for the genre is itself a foundational aspect of hip-hop. Respect for the Beastie Boys’ appreciation of the music was noted by Chuck D and DMC. Analyzing Eminem, another white rapper who has negotiated an authentic performance in the genre, Gilbert B. Rodman notes that, “Eminem’s investment in hip-hop comes across as the sort of genuine passion of a lifelong fan, rather than a temporary mask that can be...removed at the end of the show” (“Race...And Other Four Letter Words,” 189).

Poland’s—introduction to and acceptance of hip-hop. With this track, Peja begins to write himself a creative lineage. This lineage is one with undeniably credible forefathers among preeminent American rappers, but also one that includes his fellow Poles—and that is thus open to him. Asking “is it authentic or not?,” the song is in constant dialogue with associated discourse on credibility and hip-hop heritage; and as Peja narrates his hip-hop journey alongside both KRS-One and Kali, he asserts that Polish voices have a place in that conversation.

This performance of belonging in and knowledge of the genre extends beyond Peja’s recorded music and is evident on his public Instagram page. Peja frequently posts pictures of albums from his record collection, often displaying the catalogues of early American hip-hop artists such as Public Enemy and NWA. In a photo posted in 2015, Peja shows off a segment of his collection that has “slowly left its crates” (Figure 1.2).⁶⁹ Aside from the impressive scope of his collection, the photo highlights albums by American artists the Geto Boys, Tupac, and Company Flow, the French group Suprême NTM, and Peja himself. It is a visual representation



Figure 1.2. Peja’s record collection on Instagram (2015)

⁶⁹ <https://www.instagram.com/p/yHuF1gDcfu/>

of the musical lineage detailed in “Prawdziwe czy nie” and similarly functions to communicate his appreciation for the genre and to carve out a place for himself within it.

In his work on “hip-hop realness,” Mickey Hess argues that authenticity, “is conveyed when an artist performs as a unique individual while maintaining a connection with the original culture of hip-hop.”⁷⁰ In Peja’s cataloguing of hip-hop artists, both Polish and American, he conveys his connection to “the original culture” of, and his unique position within, hip-hop. Like the white artists Hess studies, Peja’s claims to authenticity rest not in trying to equate his experience with those of the rappers he admires, but rather in expressing his own perspective in dialog with them.⁷¹

In “Prawdziwe czy nie,” adoption of the musical elements of hip-hop and admiration for American stars are not the only signifiers of Peja’s immersion in hip-hop. Early in the song he raps,

I recorded the guys from Beastie Boys ...
...Aimed straight at the nose no sleep till Brooklyn
Sealed my fate, the first baseball cap
Cocked to the side and a VW chain
People on the street take it for a laugh⁷²

The Beastie Boys’ “No Sleep ‘Till Brooklyn” having “sealed his fate,” Peja adopts hip-hop style, dressing in a cocked baseball cap and makeshift chain copied from the band’s Mike D.⁷³ Not

⁷⁰ Mickey Hess, “Hip-hop Realness and the White Performer,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 22, no. 5 (December 2005): 374.

⁷¹ Within this dialogue, Peja’s distance from “the original culture of hip-hop” is not only national, but also racial. Though racial identity is often minimized in Polish hip-hop, here Peja gestures towards the genre’s roots in African American musical traditions as he references the “black magic (czarna magia) on the mixtape”—a phrase that echoes the label “czarna muza” (black muse) that was used among fans to describe rap music.

⁷² Original: *Chłopaki z Beasty boys nagraby...*
...Wymierzony prosto w nos nie zasypiaj na Brooklynie
Przesądzony mój los, pierwsza czapka baseballowa
Założona na skos i łańcuch z volkswagenem
Ludzie na ulicach przyjmowali to ze śmiechem

⁷³ After the Beastie Boys’ Mike D appeared wearing a chain with a Volkswagen emblem attached, dealerships in the US reported an increase in the sale of VW hood ornaments purchased by auto owners reporting theirs had been

only musical knowledge, but also “proper” dress, is invoked in Peja’s journey towards becoming a hip-hop artist. As was evident in the video with Ice-T, Peja initially styled himself to resemble the hip-hop stars he knew from television. It is, however, notable in this case that the artists who provided the aesthetic model for Peja are white. Many of the musicians he admires are African American; but when it comes to modeling his style, he turns to the Beastie Boys—a trio who more or less “look like him.” Here, “hip-hop” is performed extra-musically, and the genre affiliation is marked by both style and race. And like the Beastie Boys who found “legitimacy” by rapping about what they knew (“white boys and beer”), so too do Peja/Slums Attack stick to telling their own story—even as they increasingly look to tie it to a broader hip-hop narrative.

Throughout “Prawdziwe czy nie,” Peja/Slums Attack attempt to musically and lyrically affiliate themselves with the tradition of hip-hop and to signal their authenticity as a voice in the scene. The character of this relationship is complicated, as Peja/Slums Attack clearly look to American hip-hop artists as inspiration, yet also somewhat distance themselves from certain (particularly racial) aspects of the established genre. Peja’s rapid rap and the showcasing of scratching sonically link the track to the band’s hip-hop influences. Lyrically, these influences are catalogued in the narrative of Peja’s life-changing discovery of hip-hop. But while this track exemplifies early Polish hip-hop’s deference to and imitation of American artists, the use of both Polish language and a Polish sampled track gesture towards the growing sense that this was a genre that not only could authentically represent local voices, but that could be authentically represented *by* local voices. This turn towards the local also reflects an effort to make the music personal—to tell their own stories and thus “rap what they know.”

stolen, (Margaret Trimer, “Beastie Boys-Inspired Fad Boosts VW Emblem Thefts, *Detroit Free Press*, July 30, 1987). The petty vandalism and resulting exaggerated style are in line with the Beastie Boys’ spirit and aesthetic and, it seems, appealed to Polish fans in the same way it did their American peers.

Namechecking the Nation

While “Prawdziwe czy nie” reflects a fairly common articulation of hip-hop authenticity—based in an appreciation for rap pioneers, the ability to converse in the conventions of the genre, and expressing a personal perspective—it does little to explicitly convey a particularly “Polish” identity. Peja claims that the music resonated with him, but it is not clear why. Turning now to consider the ways Polish fans discuss the relationship between hip-hop and Polish cultural traditions, we see Poles begin to develop a hip-hop identity in which their national identity is not a hindrance to their place in hip-hop, but rather a strength.

In her work on hip-hop subcultures, Joanna Rychła’s interviews with hip-hop fans reveal Polish hip-hop communities’ attempt to frame their nation’s place in the global genre by linking it to national poetic traditions. When asked about the origins of hip-hop, one fan states, “... [it is] from America. It was born in the slums.... Scratching their own discs, poetry. It’s been going on for centuries, across Mickiewicz’s verse, in Krasicki. And this is the modern form.”⁷⁴ He locates the origins of hip-hop in American slums, pointing to the music as the only outlet for those who felt their voices were not being heard. In relating “scratching” and poetry, this fan suggests the genre has spiritual roots in Polish literary traditions. Here hip-hop is but a modern incarnation of rebellious “outsider” expression and as such, Polish hip-hop fans are not foreign to the genre, but rather able to approach it as a native form that has been “going on for centuries.” Appreciating the genre’s heritage means listening not only to Public Enemy, but also to Mickiewicz and Krasicki.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Joanna Rychła, *Ucieczka, bunt*, 101. Original: *Z Ameryki. To się narodziło w slumsach. Ludzie nie mieli też perspektyw. [...] Drapaniem swoich płyt, poezja. To od wieków się dzieje, np. Mickiewicz przez swoje wiersze, Krasicki. A to jest bardziej współczesna forma.*

⁷⁵ Ignacy Krasicki (1735-1801) was a poet of the Enlightenment, known by his contemporaries as the “Prince of Poets.” He was “a cosmopolitan and owed his imposing literary knowledge to his readings in foreign languages,” and his writing was “not pugnacious,” but rather “praised moderation and despised extremes” (Czesław Miłosz, *The History of Polish Literature*, 176-177). Though laced with satire and irony, Krasicki’s oeuvre speaks broadly to

This sentiment is echoed and further explained in the commentary of another respondent, who suggests,

It came from American slums and it spread because there are slums everywhere. Everywhere there are poor people. Everywhere there are people who don't get anything from life. This is where it comes from. This is where the music is from. Music is music. It is like it once was with poetry. When Adam Mickiewicz wrote.⁷⁶

Again, urban America is acknowledged as the specific point of origin of the genre; but like the first respondent, this fan also suggests that the foundations of the culture are more universal—that “music is music.” Speaking of the time “when Adam Mickiewicz wrote” as one in which people did not “get anything from life,” generalizes the history of national partition to refer to a contemporary dissatisfaction with economic prospects and a feeling of malaise. Here not only are “poor people” and their plight not confined to America (or rooted in racial discrimination), but they are linked with Polish national struggles. This move—from rap articulating the conditions of a specific population in “American slums” to its inclusion in a lineage of artistic agitation in the tradition of Mickiewicz—is indicative of a trend in Polish hip-hop discourse that begins to frame Poland itself as the marginalized subject that finds its voice in hip-hop. This understanding of Polish marginalization as a link to hip-hop draws on lingering traditions of Polish Romanticism, which similarly characterizes Poland as perpetually victimized yet resilient.⁷⁷

human behavior, rather than the particulars of Polish politics or ideals. He also enjoyed a warm relationship with King Frederick the Great after his bishopric fell under Prussian control with the first partition in 1772. Thus, despite the fact that he wrote in the era of partition, Krasicki is a curious choice to include as a voice that speaks to the disenfranchised and underscores the degree to which contemporary hip-hop fans privilege general narratives over the specifics of the authors they invoke.

⁷⁶ Rychła, 101-102. Original: *To się wzięło z amerykańskich slumsów i dlatego to się wszędzie rozpowszechniło, bo wszędzie są slumsy. Wszędzie są biedni ludzie. Wszędzie są ludzie, który nie mają co z życiem zrobić. Stąd to się wzięło. Stąd muzyka się wzięła. Muzyka to muzyka. To jest tak, jak kiedyś była poezja. Adam Mickiewicz kiedyś pisał.*

⁷⁷ While I read these comments through the lens of a literary and cultural historical narrative, they might also be considered as reflecting dissatisfaction with the post-1989 conditions of a Poland embracing capitalism—a transition that left many people feeling left behind and as though they “don't get anything from life.” The articulation of this economic anxiety is of course not entirely removed from narratives of historical marginalization, for the European Union and global markets offered updated examples of “foreign influence” that challenged Polishness and disenfranchised Poles. This understanding of social exclusion as economic rather than racial is heard throughout

The narrative of hip-hop as spiritually and artistically connected to Polish literary traditions is not confined to fan discourse; it also appears in public statements from Polish rappers and offers a framework for interpreting their creative efforts to articulate Poland's place in the genre. As noted in the introduction to this dissertation, the Polish rapper Doniu playfully summed up this attitude with his assertion that, “[i]f Mickiewicz was alive today; he’d be a good rhymers.”⁷⁸ Like his fans who discuss rap and Polish poetry as related forms, so too does Doniu engage in this genre comparison. It is a comparison in which both hip-hop and the figures of Polish literature are redefined in relation to one another. Despite the frequency with which Mickiewicz’s name appears, rarely do fans or artists offer explanation as to why “he’d be a good rhymers.” The association with hip-hop’s history of representing marginalized voices suggests that Mickiewicz (and other poets referenced) speak for “the people,” though what “people” and what Mickiewicz offers them is left largely undefined, perhaps because it is assumed to be understood by the Polish audience. The meaning of “shout-outs” to Polish literary tradition is thus as contingent on its hip-hop context as Polish hip-hop tracks are on their associations with these national “rhymers”—both are best understood in conversation.

Despite the ambiguity of the “Mickiewicz as rapper” image, Peter Green of *The New York Times* echoed Doniu’s sentiment in a 2012 profile of the Poznań hip-hop scene:

To the hundreds of thousands of young Poles with little prospect of a good job or a secure future, Peja...and dozens of other hip-hop rhymers who have emerged in the past several years are their generation’s poets, expressing the hopes and despair of young men in the Polish projects.⁷⁹

Polish hip-hop communities (noted earlier in this chapter) and not only allows Polish artists and fans to assert a connection to American artists with whom they do not share racial identities, but also to position their own struggles within a broader arc of Polish history.

⁷⁸ Green, “Poznan Journal.”

⁷⁹ Ibid.

Repeating the comparison between rappers and Polish poets, Green also links economic status with hip-hop subjectivity. This association of those in the present who have “little prospect of a good job” with Polish poets whose lack of a “secure future” was often due to foreign invasion and occupation creates a parallel between the anxieties of the past and present and reflects the pattern of a cultural nationalism that roots the contemporary nation in shared history. It is a comparison that also exists in the works of contemporary rappers, who, in drawing a line from their work to that of nineteenth- and twentieth-century poets whose verse articulated national opposition to foreign domination, might be read as suggesting that the Poland of their rhymes is similarly victimized—perhaps not directly by occupation, but instead by threats of growing Russian power, perceived EU incursions on national sovereignty, and unpredictable global markets.⁸⁰

These concerns about political relations with neighboring countries and Poland’s place in global affairs are central issues in contemporary Polish politics, yet echo issues that have occupied Polish political discourse for centuries. In fact, the engagement with historical parallels as a means to address these contemporary issues is perhaps fueled by the character of the political dynamics facing Poland. Domańska identifies the return to foundational myths and

⁸⁰ The history of partition and subsequent occupations in the twentieth century resonates throughout Polish politics. For example, in a speech delivered to the Sejm in May 2016, Polish Prime Minister Beata Szydło of the ruling Law and Justice Party railed against the European Union and her political rivals, who she accused of welcoming the EU’s critiques of Poland. Addressing these issues, she engages the narratives of Polish sacrifice and struggles for freedom, asserting, “This love of freedom is a result of our difficult history. Let me remind you: Poland did not always have a place on the map of Europe. Our national borders and community was built by the blood of our fathers and grandfathers. One should also remind Europe what Poland has sacrificed for freedom and democracy on this continent. ‘For our freedom and for yours’: these are not empty words. It is important that you remember this today. Poles died in all the wars. They died for Poland’s freedom but also for the freedom of Europe. One should not be afraid to remind people of this.” In this, we see Szydło using the mythology of Polish Romanticism—the narratives of Poles fighting “for our freedom and for yours”—to oppose Polish compliance with EU demands. This suggests that not only are these narratives still present and effective in appealing to the Polish public, but also that this history is used to frame current debates about Polish politics in terms of the nation’s dramatic history of occupation and war. For more on Szydło’s comments, see: “Poland PM: Polish is a sovereign state,” *Polska.pl*, May 23, 2016. <https://polska.pl/politics/home/polish-pm-poland-sovereign-state/>.

shared histories as “an effect of an identity crisis,” and “the outcome of the problem caused by the decline of the nation-state” in ascension to the European Union and entanglements in an ever more globalized world.⁸¹ Traces of this “identity crisis” are evident in the discussions of hip-hop fans who are described as having “little prospect of a good job or a secure future,” who express a feeling of not “getting anything from life”—they see the future of their country as uncertain and thus their futures as uncertain. Unsure of how they fit in a unified Europe, these fans (and conservative elements of Polish politics more broadly) draw on narratives of the Polish past to ground them, both in a sense of a secure identity and a framework to articulate the dynamics of the struggle they feel.⁸²

This move by artists and fans to frame the present in terms of Polish history and traditions might be read as a means to define an authentic Polishness—in this case, one rooted in Polish Romanticism. Wielding these narratives, they assert a claim to speaking of and for Poland. Similarly, the invocation of these traditions in discussions of hip-hop gestures towards the quest for legitimacy in two related ways. First, it appeals to hip-hop as a historiographical genre. Discussing American hip-hop, Alonzo Westbrook suggests rappers “communicate history—they collect it, speak it and keep it alive.”⁸³ This sense of “speaking history” is a return to the notion of legitimacy accruing via one’s immersion in the traditions and narratives of genre and community. In associating themselves with (and eventually directly citing—see Chapter

⁸¹ Domańska, “(Re)creative Myths,” 251.

⁸² Though any engagement with national narratives and definitions of community is inherently political, Polish hip-hop is, in general, not as politically engaged as its American counterpart. Pasternak-Mazur notes that the genre “does not represent a coherent ideology” (“Silencing *Polo*,” 181) and Majewski argues that “Polish rap cannot be seen as a political music” (“African-American Music,” 5). Again, while I argue that engaging history and cultural narratives *is itself* political, it is true that the artists considered in this dissertation generally shy away from discussing the political positions. Though the “sampling” of Romantic nationalism done by these artists echoes that of right-wing conservative politicians, the rappers I consider should be distinguished from artists whose work openly celebrates chauvinistic nationalist ideology (the rapper Tadek, for example). The rappers in this study, rather, might be described by Pasternak-Mazur’s label of “liberal and patriotic” (“Silencing *Polo*,” 201).

⁸³ Alonzo Westbrook, *Hip-Hoptionary: The Dictionary of Hip Hop Terminology* (New York: Harlem Moon, 2002), i.

Three) the history and literary traditions of Poland, Polish rappers and their fans are participating in a genre-specific practice of musical memorialization. Here though, rather than exclusively expressing their knowledge of the history that gave birth to hip-hop (a history that is foreign to them), they are voicing a national history and thus framing the genre within a broader Polish cultural tradition.⁸⁴

Additionally, in this Polonizing of the practice of “speaking history,” Polish hip-hop communities’ focus on artists and narratives of national struggle frames contemporary issues in terms of national subjugation. Though there is some degree of focus on socio-economic position, the links to Mickiewicz and his legacy suggest a more general sense of marginalization. In these narratives, hip-hop speaks not for a community within a nation—as is typically the case—but rather for the nation itself, which is cast as the marginalized subject. Reflecting on his own journey to hip-hop, the Polish rapper Wall-E located his experience within a broader trajectory of Polish history, asserting, “Poland, man, three times in our history we did not exist, we did not exist man, think about it.”⁸⁵ Thus opening the scheme of interpretation to include history and poetic traditions offers Polish hip-hop artists an established network of narratives and language with which to interrogate and articulate their belonging in both their musical and national communities.

⁸⁴ This turn to literary citation as a means to voice community history in rap is not unique to Poland; and even in these literary associations, Poland fosters ties with American hip-hop. American rappers, for example, have cited poets of the Harlem Renaissance in their verses. See: Reiland Rabaka, *Hip Hop’s Inheritance: From the Harlem Renaissance to the Hip Hop Feminist Movement* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011).

⁸⁵ Torrence, “Polish Hip Hop,” 118.

“Thanks to our forefathers”: Rapping and Remembering

“It’s fine to imitate. I had idols and I imitated them.”⁸⁶ Though these words were spoken about his musical idols, Peja might just as easily have been referring to his emulation of Adam Mickiewicz. Much as the nineteenth-century poet memorialized battles of his time, Peja/Slums Attack’s track “Poznańczyk” recalls the 1918 Wielkopolska Uprising. Featured as a bonus track on the group’s 2011 chart-topping album *Reedukacja*, “Poznańczyk” offered a history lesson alongside tracks that contemplated “true hip-hop” (“Oddałbym”) and unprotected sex (“Dura Sex”).⁸⁷ Though the chronical of the historical event might seem like a departure from the otherwise generic topics, Peja’s association of the rapper with the Romantic patriotic poet suggests that the Wielkopolska Uprising can be just as “hip-hop” as songs about genre credibility and sex.



Figure 1.3. Peja remembers the Wielkopolska Uprising on Instagram (2016)
(<https://www.instagram.com/p/BOhsaYTA9I/>)

⁸⁶ “Peja: Jestem tylko muzykiem z krwi i kości który sелnia swój sen.”

⁸⁷ *Reedukacja* reached number one on the OliS charts March 14, 2011.
<http://olis.onyx.pl/listy/index.asp?idlisty=654>.

In offering a narrative of Polish history and embodying the role of chronicler of Polish traditions, Peja illustrates how the hip-hop traditions of speaking for the community and remembering your past might be expressed in concert with Polish Romantic traditions of celebrating figures of the past and offering historical narratives to speak to the present. In shifting the focus of his storytelling from the heroes of hip-hop towards those of the Polish nation, while maintaining a foundation in telling the stories of the community, Peja performs aspects of both hip-hop and national authenticity. As Polish stories become hip-hop stories in “Poznańczyk,” Peja/Slums Attack make a case for hip-hop authenticity that is grounded in the types of cultural narratives that have demonstrated Polish national authenticity for centuries.

The uprising recounted in “Poznańczyk” began on December 27, 1918 as an attempt to reclaim lands initially lost to the Germans in the nineteenth-century partitions of Poland. Underground Polish military organizations in the district of Wielkopolska (Greater Poland, in the west-central region around Poznań) successfully claimed a significant territory, and their gains were later to be recognized and formally granted by the Treaty of Versailles. Though a fairly obscure historical event, the Wielkopolska Uprising fits within the trend of Polish artists’ calling on stories of national uprisings, sacrifice, and perseverance in the name of national sovereignty.⁸⁸ In expressing pride in those who fought in the Uprising, Peja/Slums Attack enact a patriotism that Pasternak-Mazur argues is a “manifestation of protest and resistance” that extends from the end of the eighteenth century through the present.⁸⁹ Patriotism is thus framed as bound with this history of struggle and the heroic narratives in which it is remembered. In recalling this story, Peja/Slums Attack both lend credibility to this characterization of Polishness and use it to frame

⁸⁸Anna Radziwiłł and Wojciech Roszkowski, *Historia 1871-1939* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Szkolne PWN, 1998).

⁸⁹Pasternak-Mazur, “The Black Muse.”

themselves as authentic (hip-hop) poets of Poland—a new incarnation of the very lineage they promote.

The title of the piece, “Poznańczyk,” refers to armored trains used in the 1918 Uprising and later in the Polish-Soviet War and World War II—trains that take their name from Peja’s hometown. This is a song about the strength and fortitude of Poznań—the city, her people, and her machines. While the subject of “Poznańczyk” reflects broader trends of national historiography within Polish hip-hop, it is also an expression of local patriotism by the Poznań-based group. Identified in Rychła’s study as an important element of Polish hip-hop culture, such local patriotism is characteristic of Polish culture more generally, and might also be read as a Polish equivalent of localized hip-hop identities in the United States (East Coast, West Coast, etc.).⁹⁰ Hip-hop’s attachment to local spaces, McLeod argues, is itself a means of asserting authenticity, noting, “[f]or many, keepin’ it real means not disassociating oneself from the community from which one came...which partially explains why so many hip-hop artists mention the name of their neighborhood in their songs.”⁹¹ This local patriotism is thus yet another element of global hip-hop culture that finds expression in localized Polish music scenes.

Celebrating a local scene and history is not only a way Polish rappers mirror their American models, but also an opportunity to further their claims to authenticity. Noting the specificity with which many Polish rappers describe their locality—distinguishing among specific housing projects within the same city—Antoszek suggests that such detail “seems to suggest that... in Poland hip hop was hardly separable from real/street life, discussing in its lyrics actual events and experiences, without drawing the line between the artistic creation and

⁹⁰ Rychła, 110: “Local Patriotism: Attachment to the place of residence is very strong among hip-hop artists. Even the attachment to those who remain there, to friends, is strong.” See also: Antoszek, “Hip-Hop Domesticated.”

⁹¹ McLeod, “Authenticity,” 142.

the reality.”⁹² In arguing that local patriotism in lyrics stems from a close, lived connection to the place, Antoszek illustrates how such raps might be positioned as models of authenticity—artists display that they are “rapping what they know” by rapping what only they *could* know. Though the local pride expressed in “Poznańczyk” is less rooted in contemporary reality than in local tradition, it nevertheless similarly acts to express a specific, “real” connection between Peja and the material about which he raps.

“Poznańczyk” opens with an extended instrumental sample taken from the Puerto Rican singer Ednita Nazario’s “Vengada” (2005). Over its ominous chimes, strings, and repeated descending piano line, Peja enters, rapping a string of numbers, “*Dwa siedem, dwanaście, jeden dziewięć osiemnaście* (Two seven, twelve, one nine eighteen)”—December 27, 1918, the date of the start of the Wielkopolska Uprising.⁹³ From this introduction, Peja goes on to offer a history of the Uprising in an uncharacteristically relaxed tempo. The goal here is not to prove he can match the virtuosity of other rappers, but rather to tell a story of his hometown history. Though the speed of Peja’s flow is reduced, the track otherwise exhibits few stylistic differences from the other works in the group’s catalogue. The lyrical content is specifically Polish, but this identity is not marked musically.

While “Poznańczyk” locates its narrative in the 1918 Uprising, it speaks more broadly to Polish national ideals rooted in the Romantic notion of sacrificing for independence. Early in the song, Peja stresses the link between “Polishness” and independence, breaking his flow between “*polskości*” (Polishness) and “*niepodległości*” (independence). This very slight pause draws one’s attention to the two rhymed words—associated here not only aurally, but ideologically. The emphasis on freedom returns a few lines later as Peja asserts “independence for a Pole is a

⁹² Antoszek, “Hip-Hop Domesticated,” 272.

⁹³ Peja/Slums Attack, “Poznańczyk,” *Reedukacja* [Reeducation], Fonografika, 2011.

synonym for the word consensus” (*niepodległość dla Polaka to synonim słowa zgoda*). Again, freedom is here underscored as a particularly *Polish* value. Though echoing hip-hop conventions of voicing calls for autonomy and “fighting the powers that be,” in this track the message is filtered through the lens of Polish history as hip-hop ideals merge with Polish ideals.⁹⁴

A similar pairing of terms appears in the song’s chorus. As the track slows and Peja adopts a more lyrical delivery, he begins “*Poznaniacy wolność wywalczyli* (Residents of Poznań won freedom.)” In this line, the repetition of the “w” syllable in *wolność* (freedom) and *wywalczyli* (they won (by force)) serves to underscore the sacrifice and valor required for freedom. *Wolność* is a core element of Polish national identity and is featured in the “unofficial motto” of Poland, “*Za wolność Naszą i Waszą*” (For our freedom and yours). As such, in emphasizing freedom along with armed struggle, Peja draws on a vocabulary that resonates with Polish national ideals. Associating this valor with Poznań specifically, Peja further localizes the track while positioning it within the great tradition of Polish Romantic quests for freedom—as well as the hip-hop tradition of artistic agitation.

Here again, we see an appeal to the foundational myths of Polish struggle that play an important part in articulating contemporary Polishness. And like the national poets who came before him, on “Poznańczyk,” Peja forges “the allegories and metaphors which gave sense to [Poland’s] struggle”—a role Norman Davies suggests Mickiewicz served as he “imagined Poland’s suffering to be a necessary evil for eventual salvation of all the world” while “his peers were fighting in vain for the survival of a constitutional Polish Kingdom.”⁹⁵ The armed patriot and the Polish poet are framed side-by-side, both working to further the cause of Polish freedom.

⁹⁴ This focus on freedom also echoes Mickiewicz, whose *The Books of the Polish Nation and of the Polish Pilgrimage* contain the line, “Poland said: Whosoever will come to me shall be free and equal, for I am FREEDOM,” (Mickiewicz, “The Books of the Polish Nation,” 141).

⁹⁵ Norman Davies, “Polish National Mythologies,” 149.

In Peja's case, there is no occupation to fight or rebellion to support, yet his invocation of the Wielkopolska Uprising illustrates the degree to which he is engaged with a specific vision of the Polish nation—one linked with a nationalism of a shared culture of suffering and fighting for freedom. In its patriotism, "Poznańczyk" frames its authenticity in its "sampling" of national narratives and seems to point to earlier Polish poets as its arbiters of credibility.

The articulation of local patriotism and cultural nationalism fully emerges in the last verse of the piece, which turns away from general ideas of Polish independence to focus on an identity rooted specifically in Poznań. Peja raps,

Step by step new cities, towns, districts
Rebounced from the liberating hand of the Pole, who suffered agony
For the battles thanks, years later young people
Thanks to our forefathers, Polish Poznań is reborn
In this language rap awarded
People, from whom to this day proud
Honor to Wielkopolska insurgents
For the Prussians, a final nail in the coffin
Native Poznaniak, Polish patriot, see
What happens in this city, that I love boundlessly
Local patriot...
...Great patriots, great Poles
They sat in exile, loudly talking about us
Maliciously, uncritically Poznań they called Boeotia
Time to reject forever these hurtful epithets
Poznań like Sparta word from the street poet
Tough, brave, capable of sacrifice
In death and life, I love my Poznań...⁹⁶

⁹⁶ Original: *Krok po kroku nowe miasta, miejscowości i okręgi*
Odbił z wyzwoleńczej ręki Polak, który cierpiał męki
Za batalie dzięki lata później ludzie młodzi
Dziękują praojcom, polski Poznań się odrodził
W tym języku rap nagrodził
Ludzi, z których do dziś dumny
Hold Powstańcom Wielkopolskim
Dla prustaków gwóźdź do trumny
Rdzenny Poznaniak polski patriota, zobacz
Co dzieje się w tym mieście, które bezgranicznie kocham
Lokalny patriota...
...Wielcy patrioci, wielcy Polacy
Siedzieli na obczyźnie, rozprawiali o nas głośno
Złośliwie, bezkrytycznie Poznań zwali Beocją

Highlighting toughness and bravery, this passage links the qualities and victories of Poznań's past with its present. Thanks to sacrifices in the past, Peja's city is reborn and he is free to rap his homage to the local patriots. This idea of national rebirth born from the blood of Polish patriots is tied to the notions of eternally struggling against oppression expressed in Mickiewicz's messianic vision of the nation. In her review of Poland's foundational myths, Domańska argues that since Mickiewicz's time, "there has been a deeply rooted conviction in the Polish consciousness that each generation has to give its blood to the Homeland and that such a sacrifice is a necessary condition for the rebirth of the country."⁹⁷ In this, the relationship of the present with the past is framed as one that is still active, as contemporary Poles are forever indebted to those who sacrificed themselves so that Poland could be "reborn" in its present state. The present, then, is also indebted to the past. In voicing his pride and appreciation for those Poznanians who once risked their lives for the independence and honor of his city, Peja strengthens this relationship with history. And in turn, history offers him a language in which to express his current Polishness (and, thus, his localized hip-hop authenticity).

In this history, Peja plays on yet another localized discourse and links it to broader (national and hip-hop) discussions of pride and perseverance in marginalized and underestimated communities. In this case, it is Poznań that is belittled and misunderstood. In referencing the "malicious" label "Boeotia," Peja points to a history in which, during the time of partition, the Wielkopolska region was referred to by the name of the Greek region, which bore a pejorative connotation of stupidity. Peja asserts that the heroism of the Uprising proves Poznań should not

*Czas odrzucić już na zawsze te krzywdzące epitety
Poznań niczym Sparta słowa z ulicy poety
Twardzi, waleczni, zdolni do ofiar
Na śmierć i życie za to mój Poznań kocham...*

⁹⁷ Domańska, "(Re)creative Myths," 256.

be disparaged, but rather celebrated as representative of the military heroism of the Spartans.⁹⁸ In so linking his city with the characteristics otherwise associated with those at the margins of society, Peja performs social and political “otherness” within a national narrative. In the choice to focus on Polish topics, he has not abandoned the hip-hop conventions of speaking for marginalized populations, but rather reframed that perspective in terms of particularly Polish concerns.

Here, struggle is not racial or associated with America, but rather Polish and Poznanian. Again, returning to Mickiewicz suggests a lens through which to view Peja’s notion of a shared community experience of subjugation. Writing in 1832, when Poland had been erased from the map of Europe by partition, Mickiewicz imagined the spirit of the nation as unbowed and watching over oppressed people around the world. His affirmation that “Poland” existed in “the private life of people who suffer slavery in their country and outside of their country,” echoed through the calls for independence that motivated the fighters Peja honors with this song and similarly might be read to motivate Peja.⁹⁹ Though the specifics of the experience about which he raps are not his own, they draw on what Mickiewicz articulated as a timeless Polish character. Peja’s rap expresses a Polishness that is rooted in a feeling of strength in the face of oppression, and thus not only suggests national authenticity rooted in Romantic ideals, but also genre authenticity born of speaking for marginalized communities and suppressed histories.

Read together, Peja’s turn to native topics and his focus on the narratives that sustain Polish nationalism can be understood as a means of integrating hip-hop into Polish culture—of making it a genre in which he can be judged as credible and in which he can express his sense of

⁹⁸ This assertion echoes that of Polish author and military commander Bohdan Hulewicz, who immediately following the Uprising spoke out against the “Boeotian” label, arguing that Poznań had proven itself a Sparta. (<http://www.poznancyk.com/powstanie.html>)

⁹⁹ Mickiewicz, *The Books of the Polish Nation*, 143.

authentic Polishness. In this “indigenization,” Peja/Slums Attack have not rejected the model of American hip-hop, but rather as Androutsopoulos and Scholz suggest, “are engaging in a symbolic struggle for cultural autonomy, whereby simple imitation of the ‘mother’ culture is rejected in favor of a creative integration of rap into the host culture.”¹⁰⁰ In this “struggle,” Peja integrates rap into Polish culture by recontextualizing its conventional status as a music of marginalized peoples to make it speak to and for Poland. In so doing, he draws on and develops narratives that frame Poland itself as fundamentally marginalized. Thus, hip-hop is used to bolster this vision of Polish nationalism and, in turn, Polish nationalism reinforces conventions of the genre.

Conclusion: Rapping Polishness

In this chapter, I explored the ways in which hip-hop artists position authenticity as an important element of artistic expression and credibility within the genre. Though definitions of authenticity shift and are dependent on context and identity, I have drawn on accounts from artists and scholars that underscore the value of speaking of one’s personal experience and rooting it in shared histories as core elements of hip-hop authenticity. This is, I suggest, an understanding of authenticity and community that echoes in discussions of (Romantic) Polishness, which similarly also often draws on historical narratives as symbols of authentic belonging. This common language is one utilized by a segment of Polish rappers and their fans to negotiate a place for the imported genre within national traditions—Adam Mickiewicz becomes a forefather of the music and the history of Polish uprisings offer material for contemporary recordings.

¹⁰⁰ Androutsopoulos and Scholz, “Spaghetti Funk,” 468.

Within the context of these discussions of genre and national authenticity, I read two tracks by the hip-hop group Peja/Slums Attack as evidence of an evolving performance of hip-hop authenticity. Both tracks reflect an interest in establishing the contemporary genre within a broader artistic lineage and thus demonstrate Polish hip-hop's internalization of the genre's language of authenticity. The earlier of the two, "Prawdziwe czy nie," grounds its claims to authenticity in demonstrating knowledge of the genre. The later piece, "Poznańczyk," instead performs a conception of the artists as the voice of national struggles in a way that establishes roots in Poland's Romantic tradition. While both tracks demonstrate a desire to perform hip-hop authenticity, "Poznańczyk" reflects the way in which broader Polish discourse on the genre and its position in national traditions might be figured as artists look to ground hip-hopness in Polishness. Working in a genre that values historical consciousness, turning to Polish traditions allows Peja to "drop knowledge" that engages a local story, rather than exclusively American models.

While I argue that these tracks reflect a negotiation of how the Polish context might shape the conventions of international genre, I also see those conventions offering a lens through which rappers are able to view and express contemporary readings of the nation and its traditional narratives. Hip-hop provides a language with which to give voice to longstanding narratives of Polish marginalization and national loyalty. Drawing on hip-hop's conventional position as a form of expression for marginalized communities, Polish hip-hop's engagement with national history revives Romantic readings of the nation as suffering, yet proud. Promoting this lineage of national victimization and poetic resistance—a lineage in which they present themselves as a contemporary incarnation—Peja/Slums Attack and their fans reaffirm these

national myths, while also drawing on them as a means of communicating belonging within the global genre.

The following chapters consider ways in which the formal aspects of hip-hop sampling and the genre's perceptions of inspiration are invoked by Polish rappers to revive and reflect upon Romantic narratives and traditions. Though more overt, these musical invocations of Mickiewicz and his legacy work in concert with the work done by Peja/Slums Attack to position Polish heritage as a legitimate sign of hip-hop authenticity. Their respective authenticities are born of many of the same qualities and thus national and genre subjectivities prove reinforcing. Peja/Slums Attack and the fan discourse considered in this chapter illustrate that Polish stories can be hip-hop stories and hip-hop forms can give voice to Polish narratives.

Chapter Two

Authenticity and Magic *Sampling Archives and Legends*

*Goin', goin', gettin' to the roots
Ain't givin' it up
So turn me loose
But then again I got a story
That's harder than the hardcore
Cost of the holocaust
I'm talkin' 'bout the one still goin' on
I know
Where I'm from, not dum diddie dum
From the base motherland...*
– Public Enemy, “Can’t Truss It” (1999)¹

On “Can’t Truss It,” a track off their 1999 album *Apocalypse 91... The Enemy Strikes Black*, the American hip-hop group Public Enemy rapped about “gettin’ to the roots,” using their music to tell a “story,” to assert that they know where they are from and are not about to forget their history. Theirs is a story of slavery and racial discrimination—of a past injustice “still goin’ on,” an unbroken thread that binds the past and present. Accompanying this rap, the song samples a variety of music and spoken word. These samples—ranging from audio of a 1964 radio broadcast by Malcom X to a few seconds of drums from Sly & the Family Stone’s 1968 *Stand!* to a reading by *Roots* author Alex Haley—are evidence that the band “knows where they’re from” and create a musical-historical lineage into which the group positions themselves.

¹ Public Enemy, “Can’t Truss It” *Apocalypse 91... The Enemy Strikes Black* (Def Jam, 1991).

The rap tells a story of roots and remembering, while the sampled audio makes those roots audible.

Łukasz “L.U.C.” Rostkowski’s 2009 album *39/89 Zrozumieć Polskę* (*39/89 To Understand Poland*) is similarly interested in “gettin’ to the roots,” though in this case, L.U.C. dedicates his album to his “titanic compatriots” and to the “ideals of the Poles.”² The album reflects a significant evolution from L.U.C.’s previous work—in both form and content. While L.U.C. had long been interested in blending musical styles and creating concept albums that incorporated various media, *39/89 Zrozumieć Polskę* was the first release on which he focused exclusively on themes of Polish history and turned his attention away from rapping to create instead an orchestration to accompany sampled audio. In 2004, L.U.C. articulated a “philosophy of four galaxies which connects music, lyrics, movie and graphics,” and this project allowed him to fully realize such a multimedia production as he turned his sights from “Planet L.U.C.” (the title of his 2008 album) to Poland.³

Though L.U.C. does not rap on the album, he draws on his experience in the genre and employs a number of hip-hop techniques in his musical memorial—first among which is his extensive sampling of archival audio, drawn primarily from the archives of Polskie Radio.⁴ In his remixing of archival audio, Polish songs, and national mythology, L.U.C. engages both documentary evidence of “real” events and spiritual links to narratives of Polishness in his exploration of Polish memory. The interplay between these two relationships to the past—one

² L.U.C., *39/89 Zrozumieć Polskę*, EMI Music Poland, 2009. Original: *Moim tytanowym rodakom* and *Idealom Polaków*

³ “Founders,” *RebelBabel Ensemble*, <http://rebelbabel.com/#about>.

⁴ Polskie Radio (Polish Radio) is Poland’s state-owned national public radio. Founded in 1925, the central broadcasting station was seized during the Nazi occupation and the station went underground for the remainder of the war. It was formally reestablished in 1944 and today still operates as a member of the European Broadcasting Union. The station was thus a voice to and of Poland in the years covered on L.U.C.’s recording. For more on the history recorded on Polskie Radio, see: “Historie Dobrze Opowiedane od 90 Lat” [Histories Well Stored for 90 Years], *PolskieRadio.pl*. <https://www.polskieradio.pl/231>.

that appeals to the stories of a mythologized “Polish spirit” and the other that claims “truth” based in documentary evidence—underscores broader debates about contemporary Polish identity and speaks to the ways complex national narratives are shaped and used. It also produces a document I argue can be analyzed as a critique of the sampling of historical texts in efforts to make the past speak to the present. L.U.C.’s record focuses its critique on those who sample history for the “wrong” reasons (i.e., in support of communism) and in so doing echoes contemporary nationalist rhetoric. Nevertheless, as his sampling and score foreground and problematize uses of the past, he creates a text open to a more critical reading that complicates the relationship between context and meaning, and between the past and the present. I thus suggest that “to understand Poland,” one must not only understand the events of Polish history, but more importantly, the tensions and malleability in the narratives of history. To understand Poland is to understand the workings of mythology and history—that is, to understand how the nation samples its past.

Replaying the Past

L.U.C.’s *39/89 Zrozumieć Polskę* is project focused on Polish history that blends document and mythology in its presentation of the past. Sampling archival audio, L.U.C. provides documentary evidence of the authenticity of the story he tells. It is a story, however, that is also shaped by national mythology and contemporary reflections on the past. History is employed to garner credibility and lay claim to authentic belonging in the community. In asking his audience to “understand Poland,” L.U.C. is directing them towards both aspects of history; and as he weaves a complex picture of the past from sampled radio archives, he suggests that “Poland” is the product of the way its story is told—the negotiation of document and mythology.

In this, his work echoes not only the logic of much hip-hop lyrical sampling, but also reflects broader trends of drawing on Polish history—both archival and narrative—to shape national sentiment in the present.

L.U.C. offers the period bounded by the years 1939-1989 as essential history in an effort to “understand Poland.” Invaded from the west by Nazi Germany on September 1 and again from the east by the Soviet Union sixteen days later, in 1939 Poland saw itself again overtaken by foreign invaders in the twentieth-century “partition” that began World War II.⁵ During the war, massive loss of life and destruction of property befell Poland as a central battleground for the global conflict. More than sixteen percent of the prewar population of Poland (between 5.6 million and 5.8 million) perished during World War II, including ninety-two percent of the nation’s Jewish community (just under 3 million).⁶ Within the Polish narratives of this period, the Warsaw Uprising (August 1 – October 2, 1944) has become a focal point, commemorated each year on August 1 with a moment of silence across Warsaw. The armed insurrection against Nazi occupation left 170,000 Poles dead and 93 percent of the capital city destroyed.⁷ Though occupied by both Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union during this devastating period, the vast majority of Polish casualties came at the hands of the Nazis, who were responsible for at least 5.7 million deaths, whereas estimates of those killed by Soviets are around 150,000.⁸

⁵ This “partition” was the result of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact (the Nazi-Soviet Pact of Nonaggression) that was signed in the summer of 1939 and included an undisclosed agreement between the powers that divided Poland into “zones of occupation.” Describing the effect of the treaty, Brian Porter-Szűcs asserts, “Poland had been partitioned once again” (151). Norman Davies suggests Poles of the time held a similar opinion, writing, “In Polish eyes, the Nazi-Soviet Pact enshrined the Seventh Partition” (312). Such an understanding of the division of Polish territory between its neighbors underscores the enduring memory of the nineteenth-century partitions that wiped Poland from the map (1772, 1793, 1795) and the degree to which history informs the interpretation of subsequent events. For more, see: Brian Porter-Szűcs, *Poland in the Modern World: Beyond Martyrdom* (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2014); Norman Davies, *God’s Playground, Vol. II* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2005).

⁶ Porter-Szűcs, *Poland in the Modern World*, 144-145.

⁷ Davies, *God’s Playground, Vol. II*, 355.

⁸ Porter-Szűcs, *Poland in the Modern World*, 146-147.

Following the trauma of the war, the nation fell within the sphere of influence of the Soviet Union—a subjugation that for many once again echoed the historical partitions and a pattern of Russian oppression. The Polish People’s Republic (*Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa*, PRL)—the Polish state between 1947 and 1989—experienced various degrees of foreign influence and domestic oppression. After solidifying power in 1947, the communist government worked to implement Stalinist programs and continued to hold political prisoners. The “thaw” that followed Stalin’s death saw Władysław Gomułka—accused of “nationalist deviation” in the 1940s—elected First Secretary in 1956 on the promise of implementing a “Polish road to socialism.”⁹ Despite gestures towards liberalization, this period was marked with outbreaks of protest and civil unrest (e.g., 1968, 1970), the most significant of which—the formation of the Solidarity trade union in 1980—eventually forced the communist government to round table talks that led to the first semi-free elections in 1989. Like the 123 years of partition so present in the narratives of suffering and rebellion memorialized by Romantic poets and revived by the rappers explored elsewhere in the dissertation, these more recent fifty years in which Poland was a literal and ideological battleground similarly have imprinted themselves in the mythology of the Polish nation. And like the narratives of partition, those of the twentieth century often obscure the complexity and periodization of the era in service of a broader story of national suffering and perseverance.

The first step to “understand Poland” is thus, in L.U.C.’s estimation, to understand that the period between 1939 and 1989 is foundational to contemporary Polishness. This is not, however, the only history critical to L.U.C.’s narrative. Though it is the voices of 1939-1989 that are sampled, the record exposes the degree to which an understanding of this recent history is

⁹ For more on the shifting dynamics of power throughout these years, see: Porter-Szűcs, *Poland in the Modern World*, 208-239.

contingent on the understanding of a longer Polish history. Just as L.U.C. “samples” the twentieth century to understand the twenty-first, narratives of the nineteenth century shaped twentieth-century Poles’ understanding of their own time. The “Romantic paradigm” that arose in the works of Mickiewicz and his peers in the era of partition continued to inform national narratives through 1989. This Romantic vision, Maria Janion suggests, “for two hundred years constituted the foundation of the nation’s existence” and “organized it around values and allowed Poles to survive the period of catastrophes, partitions and enslavement.”¹⁰ The lasting power of these Romantic narratives to shape historical understanding is perhaps born of their roots in a nineteenth-century Romantic culture that Janion and Maria Żmigrodzka suggest, “yielded to the power of literature that wanted to impose literary patterns on history as directive of understanding and historical action.”¹¹ The literature of Mickiewicz and his peers—the texts that are foundational to the understanding of the nation L.U.C. presents—were intended to serve as a means of understanding history and the place of current struggles in a broader story. “Literary patterns” have indeed become critical in Polish understandings of the nation’s history, and the narratives of the nineteenth century continued to shape both historical understanding and action throughout the period recalled on L.U.C.’s album.

39/89 Zrozumieć Polskę engages narratives born of partition in its history of the twentieth-century, and the organizing power of these literary patterns is evident in the consolidation of the history of 1939 through 1989 into a single story of foreign domination and

¹⁰ Zdzisław Pietraski, “Rozmowa z prof. Marią Janion” [Conversation with Professor Maria Janion], *Polityka*, November 4, 2009. This cited passage is quoted in the interview from an earlier conversation with Janion (also with *Polityka*, in 1991), in which she suggested that “a uniform symbolic-romantic culture” was exhausted. Original: *...która przez dwieście lat stanowiła fundament istnienia narodu, organizowała go wokół wartości i pozwoliła Polakom przetrwać okres katastrof, zaborów i zniewolenia.*

¹¹ Maria Janion and Maria Żmigrodzka, *Romantyzm i Historia* [Romanticism and History] (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1978), 10. Original: *Ale tak właśnie ukształtowała się dziewiętnastowieczna kultura Polaków. Poddawała się ona władzy literatury, która pragnęła narzucić historii wzory literackie jako dyrektywy rozumienia i działania historycznego.*

national resistance. The Nazi occupation lasted less than six years and killed over five million Poles, whereas Soviet influence spanned five decades, included leadership from Poles concerned with the nation's welfare and resulted in far fewer casualties, yet the two are conflated in a familiar story of ongoing foreign occupations. L.U.C. is not alone in this, and similar patterns of historical reflection have been observed by many scholars of Polish memory, including Geneviève Zubrzycki, who notes, "Poles inject communism...into a long narrative vein of conquest, occupation and oppression by powerful neighbors."¹² The history of conquest, given shape and preserved in Mickiewicz's works, forms the "national mythologies" that Zubrzycki argues "structure historical experience and its narrativization."¹³ The understanding of the present, she observes, is mediated by the narratives of the past, thus continuing to enact the very role Janion and Żmigrodzka argue the works were initially meant to serve. In the case of Poland, the narratives of the past are shaped by messianic arcs of victimization and righteous sacrifice for the ideals of the nation. With Poles as the eternally suffering hero of the story, a cycle of foreign enemies (or at times, domestic groups deemed "foreign") are cast in the role of the oppressor.¹⁴

These themes of suffering, loss, and spiritual triumph are all present in L.U.C.'s record, and it is not hard to imagine how his casting of history as an ongoing story of Polish struggle against foreign oppression might be received as an endorsement of familiar messianic nationalist narratives. In "sampling" these themes, L.U.C. produces a record on which recognizable refrains are replayed; yet in so doing, he also creates a text that opens a space to critique the ways in

¹² Geneviève Zubrzycki, "History and the National Sensorium: Making Sense of Polish Mythology," *Qualitative Sociology* 34, no. 1 (March 2011): 38.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹⁴ For more on the ways in which twentieth- and twenty-first-century Polish nationalism and patriotism are informed by historical narratives, see: Dorota Szeligowska, *Polish Patriotism After 1989: Concepts, Debates, Identities* (Bern: Peter Lang AG, 2016); Porter-Szűcs, *Poland in the Modern World*; Timothy Snyder, "Memory of Sovereignty and Sovereignty Over Memory: Poland, Lithuania and Ukraine, 1939-1999," in *Memory and Power in Post-War Europe*, ed. Jan-Werner Müller, 39-58 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Norman Davies, *Heart of Europe: The Past in Poland's Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

which history is used in the service of politics. Though his recording touches on many familiar narrative elements of victimization—there are, for example, three tracks about victims of state violence (“Six Million Murders,” “Fifty Thousand Murders,” and “Dozens of Murders to Freedom 1989”)—he insists he is not aiming to perpetuate a martyrological history. He suggests instead that he cannot deny that millions of Poles were killed, but that this fact does not have to be used to maintain a narrative of eternal Polish suffering. The data are fixed, but the narratives do not have to be. Of the violence and death he chronicles, L.U.C. told Marcin Świerczek of *InfoMusic.pl*, “This is the truth, this is our story, the thing is we have to learn how to talk about it, draw conclusions from it and focus primarily on its positives.”¹⁵ Elements of this past are documented, L.U.C. argues, but “truth” finds its meaning in the stories that are told about it. Without denying that Polishness rests in history, L.U.C. highlights that history is accessed through interpretation and narratives. His record of “Poland” is thus one not only about authentic archives, but also about how to authentically tell stories with those archives—how the facts of suffering and sacrifice might speak to multiple narratives.

Though his aim may not be to perpetuate Romantic messianic narratives, such threads do run through L.U.C.’s album in the stories and imagery he engages. While his music complicates this traditional vision of Polishness, the accompanying liner notes and album design signal that despite his more nuanced view, L.U.C. is nonetheless addressing (as least in part) Polish history and identity through a familiar lens. Much as the narratives of struggle for independence are instantly recognizable, so too are the images he uses to package them. His narrative “sampling”

¹⁵ Marcin Świerczek, “Trzeba zacząć walczyć o pewne ideały – wywiad z L.U.C.” [You have to start fighting for some ideals – Interview with L.U.C.], *InfoMusic.pl*, 7 December 2009.

<https://www.infomusic.pl/wywiad/28136,trzeba-zaczac-walczyc-o-pewne-idealy-wywiad-z-l-u-c>.

Original: *To jest prawda, to jest nasza historia, inną sprawą jest fakt, że musimy nauczyć się o niej mówić, wyciągać z niej jakieś wnioski i przede wszystkim skupiać na jej pozytywach.*

is both textual and visual in the cover art and liner notes of *39/89 Zrozumieć Polskę*, thus signaling, even before one plays his music, that his project is invested in creating a discourse with the history and mythology of Polishness.

The striking image of a white and red eagle locked in battle, with a black eagle to its right and a red eagle to its left, is featured both on the cover of *39/89 Zrozumieć Polskę* and on a fold-out poster included in the packaging of the CD (Figure 2.1). This Polish eagle—the national bird painted in the nation’s colors and rendered so that its right wing visually echoes a furled flag—fights the black eagle of Nazism (positioned over “39,” the year of the Nazi invasion) and the red Soviet eagle (who was finally defeated with the elections in ’89). Such a depiction signals the significance of the numbers in its title and associates the fight against Nazism with the fight



Figure 2.1. L.U.C. *Zrozumieć Polskę* cover art (2009)

against communism. The artwork is thus open to a reading in which both Nazis and communists are remembered as foreign aggressors that were met with unwavering resistance by the Polish nation. In this, we see the familiar narrative association of these two occupying forces, the Polish “injection of communism” into a history of foreign oppression.

This narrative of national resistance is echoed and amplified in the extensive liner notes provided by L.U.C. A brief epigraph on the packaging sets the stage:

The world of people is an eternal struggle of good and evil. I dedicate this to the millions of victims of “evil” and the thousands of superheroes of “good” from the battles of 39-89, an epoch that cannot be described in words. To my titanic compatriots, who were the first to resist and fight bravely against the greatest criminals of human history around the world. To the ideals of the Poles, who won their last and greatest battle at the round table without killing a single man... We remember...¹⁶

Here, the struggle depicted on the cover transcends its historical point of reference and becomes an “eternal struggle of good and evil” in which Nazism and communism are linked not only with each other, but with a broader history of oppression. Against this “evil,” both marked historically and framed as timeless, Poland is cast as an enduring force for “good.”¹⁷ Though perhaps a reflection of L.U.C.’s desire to “focus on the positives” of Polish history and celebrate its victories, this characterization nevertheless echoes Polish messianism and points to the degree to which these tropes shape an understanding of the nation’s past.

¹⁶ L.U.C., *39/89 Zrozumieć Polskę*. Original: *Świat ludzi to odwieczna wojna dobra ze złem. Dedykowane milionom ofiar „zła” i tysiącom superbohaterów „dobra” z batalii 39-89, epkoei, której nie opiszą godnie żadne słowa. Moim tytanowym rodakom, którzy jake pierwsi sprzeciliili się i walczyli dzielnie na całym świecie z największymi zbrodniarzami historii ludzkości. Ideałom Polaków, którzy swą ostatnią i największą bitwę okrągłego stołu zwyciężyli nie zabijając ani jednego człowieka...pamiętamy...*

¹⁷ It is also worth noting that it is *only* Poland that is marked as “good.” L.U.C. credits the “ideals of the Poles” as winning at the Round Table Talks, but the lack of bloodshed in this “last and greatest battle” was, importantly, due not only to the efforts of Solidarity, but also to those in the ruling communist party who met them at the table. While true that Solidarity renounced armed resistance, the stark dichotomy between “good” and “evil” L.U.C. presents neglects the complexities of the negotiations. For more on the negotiations of the 1980s, see: Porter-Szűcs, *Poland in the Modern World*, 300-320.

This dedication also exemplifies L.U.C.'s practice of "sampling" fragments of national mythology, though here he does so textually rather than musically. While this passage draws broadly on narratives of resistance and sacrifice, its reference to compatriots who were "first to fight" echoes the slogan of a well-known poster distributed by the Polish Government in Exile in 1939. The echo of this phrase is amplified by the parallels between Marek Żuławski's poster art (Figure 2.2) and the illustration on the cover of *39/89 Zrozumieć Polskę*. Like the album's evocative Polish eagle, the flag in Żuławski's poster is tattered but remains defiantly aloft. This "sampling"—a visual-textual shorthand—allows L.U.C. to position his work within a tradition of nationally engaged art while also refiguring that tradition to speak to the present. L.U.C.'s



Figure 2.2. Marek Żuławski, "First to Fight," WWII Poster (1939)

evocation of the famous poster offers a message that Poles of 2009 represent the success of earlier commitment to the fight and positions his album as part of a contemporary “fight” to preserve and promote a memory of that struggle.¹⁸ Just as Żuławski’s poster defined Poland as a nation that fights and perseveres, so too does the packaging of L.U.C.’s record root Polishness in this tradition and advocate for such a character to imbue the present.

Though L.U.C. may not want to reproduce messianic nationalist narratives, his casting of history as a story of “good” and “evil”—where Poles are on the side of good and German and Soviet foes join a lineage of evil—might easily be read as supportive of such an interpretation. This is an issue throughout the album, where, despite moments that suggest critique, the overall narrative arc largely validates Romantic tropes. Despite L.U.C.’s intentions, the message of his record is ambiguous and speaks to the ways in which “sampling”—or any use of the past to speak to the present—creates a text that might be “misread.” These recognizable historical notes are rich symbols and as such are in many ways beyond L.U.C.’s full control. In an era when questions of Polish history are matters of national and global debate, L.U.C. is not the only one invoking these national symbols, and thus his album proves open to those looking to read it as supportive of the very narratives and uses of history that it also critiques. Much as he is offering a reading of the past in his work, so too does his audience produce a reading of the past in their reception of his work.¹⁹ This process of reception and engagement with malleable and

¹⁸ In a 2009 interview, L.U.C. explained his turn towards historical themes, asserting, “Besides watching the world and seeing how much chaos and evil are around, I sometimes say that in addition to singing about skinny aliens [the topic of an earlier record], you have to go down and fight for some ideals, because others will not do it for us.” Using the language of “fighting for ideals,” L.U.C. describes the feeling of being called to national service – though his is musical, not military (Marcin Świerczek, “Trzeba zacząć walczyć”).

¹⁹ For example, an animated video set to L.U.C.’s “Tribute to Stefan Starzyński” sparked numerous online comments trumpeting recognizable nationalist tropes. Czaromen221 commented, “don’t worry, people will have a beautiful time when POLAND rules the world. We will show everyone who rules here, who protects their ass when the Turks attack, who defended England against Hitler...” (*nie martwcie się ludzie doczekamy się pięknych czasów kiedy to POLSKA będzie rządziła światem . Pokarzemy wszystkim kto tu rządzi , kto dupę chronił gdy turcy atakowali , kto obronił anglie przed Hitlerem*). In response, Cogito ergo sum suggests that until then, “Poland is

multifaceted histories thus exposes the degree to which “samples” from the past can produce varied narratives in the present.

Composing Memory “In Tune with Facts”

L.U.C.’s engagement with historical narratives reflects a tendency among Poles to read the present moment within a longer historical pattern of suffering and sacrifice. It also speaks to broader contemporary discourses on history and memory that similarly engage the past as they tell stories of and for the present. Within this national discourse, the Institute for National Memory (*Instytut Pamięci Narodowej*, IPN) is a powerful voice in the discussion of national heritage and Poland’s reckoning with its past. An institutional partner in the production of *39/89 Zrozumieć Polskę*, the IPN supports publications and exhibitions on Polish history, as well as prosecuting “crimes against the Polish nation.” It is thus engaged in the writing and enforcing of the narratives with which L.U.C.’s record is in conversation. Across work sponsored by the IPN, we see not only the cultivation of a narrative that sustains Romantic nationalism, but also a language that speaks to the ways historical documents are figured in contemporary memory and identity. Much as L.U.C. positions archival audio as evidence of credibility in his narrative, so too does the IPN point to “historical facts” (rooted in their extensive archives) as the basis on which “true” national narratives can and should be constructed. Archives are wielded in a struggle to define contemporary narratives, underscoring the degree to which these raw materials

choked and sold out” and we “must wait for the resurrection of Jesus Pole almighty” (*Póki co i do nadal Polska jest dławiona i wyprzedawana, więc musimy liczyć na cud w którym zmartwychwstanie Jezus Polak wszechmogący*). The comments reflect a reading of L.U.C.’s work that sees it as an affirmation of Poland’s role as a “bulwark of Christendom” and “Christ of Nations”—two characterizations that challenge L.U.C.’s desire to cultivate an appreciation for Polish history without sparking traditional, nationalist (jingoistic) sentiment. For the video and more comments, see: “L.U.C - TRIBUTE TO STEFAN STARZYŃSKI - 39/89 Zrozumieć Polskę,” posted by L.U.C. Films, April 28, 2010. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WPzBLDpLYa8>.

of history are made to speak to the present by those who “sample” them in service of their respective positions.

The foundational document of the IPN, The Act of National Remembrance—passed by Polish parliament in 1998—begins by framing the circumstances of the Institute’s creation with language that draws on the same narratives as L.U.C.’s dedication and illustrates their prevalence and power. Before describing the mission of the IPN, the document notes the need to remember:

...the enormity of the number of victims, the losses and damages suffered by the Polish people [nation/*naród*] during World War II and after it ended; the patriotic tradition of the struggle of the Polish people [nation/*naród*] against the occupiers, the Nazism and communism; the actions of the citizens for the sake of the independence of the Polish State and in defense of freedom and human dignity; the obligation to prosecute the crimes against peace and humanity and war crimes; as well as the obligation of our state to compensate all the aggrieved by a state which violated human rights.²⁰

Much like the dynamic evoked by L.U.C.’s cover art and liner notes, the IPN frames Polish history as a struggle between the victimized yet defiant Poles and foreign occupiers. The opening language of Polish victims and national “losses and damages,” as well as that of a “patriotic tradition” of a nation and people struggling against occupiers, speaks to the history of the twentieth century through the lens of narratives developed in the era of partition. Alongside the familiar tropes of suffering and struggle, the Act also foregrounds independence, freedom, and human dignity as values for which Poles have “traditionally” struggled. While the celebration of these values is certainly not unique to Poland, they are here bound with the Polish

²⁰ Institute of National Remembrance, “Documents: The Act of the Institute of National Remembrance,” June 16, 2016. <https://ipn.gov.pl/en/about-the-ipn/documents/327,The-Act-on-the-Institute-of-National-Remembrance.html>. Though the English translation of the document speaks of the “Polish people,” the term in the Polish version (“*narod*”) can also refer to the “nation.” I have included both versions, as the relationship between the concerns of the IPN and the “nation” evokes its role in shaping “Polishness” and national identity—rather than a broader connotation of “Polish people.”

state—fighting for political independence of Poland is inseparable from the people’s struggle for “human dignity.”²¹

As Poland is framed as a state and people committed to values of freedom and dignity, Nazism and communism are conflated as “occupiers” who threatened both national sovereignty and ideals. Like the combative red and black eagles featured in the art for *39/89 Zrozumieć Polskę*, the IPN positions communism and Nazism as alike both in their crimes and their role as enemies of Poland—they are foreign elements and bring with them injustice antithetical to Polish principles. This association of communism with Nazism reflects the trends observed by Zubrzycki and works to foster a narrative in which Poles are innocent victims in the crimes of both regimes. Dariusz Stola describes this dynamic, writing, “the IPN has a tendency to polarize the communist past of Poland,” pitting “the Soviet-imposed totalitarian regime, alien, illegitimate and cruel,” against the “patriotic, freedom-loving and God-fearing” Poles.²² This, he suggests, “underestimates the size and role of the gray zone in-between the poles,” and pays “insufficient attention to support for and adaptation to the [communist] regime.”²³ Brian Porter-Szűcs

²¹ This framing of the universal value of human dignity as tied to the Polish nation-state underscores a tension in Poland’s version of the “memory laws” that are common across Europe and, at the time of its implementation, were viewed as a prerequisite for accession to the European Union. In his comparative study of memory laws across Europe, Nikolay Koposov writes: “Although adopted largely on the initiative of the European Union and in compliance with its recommendations, some Eastern European memory laws differ significantly from their Western prototypes. I argue that in Eastern Europe, legislation on the issues of the past is often used to give the force of law to narratives centered on the history of the nation-states, which is the opposite of what such laws were meant to achieve in Western Europe and what the European Union intends to accomplish by promoting them. The latter’s goal is to create a common European memory centered on the memory of the Holocaust as a means of integrating Europe, combating racism, and averting the national and ethnic conflicts that national narratives are likely to stimulate,” (9-10). Conceived as a means to foster a common, and thus integrating, European narrative of the past, the IPN has often rather served to promote projects that reify national narratives of Polish innocence and suffering. This tension is something to keep in mind also in L.U.C.’s association with the IPN and his work on *39/89 Zrozumieć Polskę*. In interviews he has claimed to support Poland’s role in the EU and asserted “I am a Pole and a European.” Like the memory laws, L.U.C.’s record has the potential to either contribute to shared European memory or be used to calcify national(ist) narratives. For more, see: Nikolay Koposov. *Memory Laws, Memory Wars: The Politics of the Past in Europe and Russia* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2017).

²² Dariusz Stola, “Poland’s Institute of National Remembrance: A Ministry of Memory,” in *The Convolutions of Historical Politics*, eds. Alexei Miller and Maria Lipman (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2012): 56.

²³ *Ibid.*, 56-57. One of the ways Stola suggests this polarized narrative is crafted is through the IPN’s “overemphasis” on moments of conflict, which tend to paint the opposition between Poles and occupying forces in

similarly observes “a tendency among some Poles to depict the four decades between 1945 and 1989 as a time of foreign occupation, dominated by an illegitimate puppet government that ruled Poland but was not genuinely Polish.” Such a narrative, he argues, produces “the main storyline” as “the struggle for liberation.”²⁴ In creating a monolithic “foreign evil,” against which Poland repeatedly must fight, this narrative of the twentieth century not only perpetuates Romantic notions of Poland as a “Christ of Nations,” but more practically also serves to absolve Poles of responsibility for the suffering commemorated and investigated by the IPN. Challenges to “freedom and human dignity” came from *outside* and were forced upon the people of Poland by occupation.²⁵ As such, contemporary Poland does not so much have to work through the complicity of the state with the crimes of the past, but rather root out foreign elements who perpetrated crimes against the nation.

This perspective has led to a number of controversial positions, including the 2018 debate about an “anti-defamation bill” (Amended Act on the Institute of National Remembrance) that would punish:

sharp relief. One can see evidence of this tendency reviewing the exhibitions prepared by the IPN, which are focused largely on moments of historical crisis and protest. The exhibitions “The Phenomenon of Solidarity: Pictures from the History of Poland, 1980-1981,” “Our pastor and us: Father Jerzy Popiełuszko in photographs and memories of Jerzy Szóstka,” “Archbishop Ignacy Tokarczuk – church, government, social resistance,” and “March 1968” focus on resistance to the communist state; “The Destruction of the Polish Elite, Operation AB – Katyń” and “The Katyń Massacre” both commemorate Polish suffering at the hands of the Soviets; and “Rotamaster Witold Pilecki – volunteer to Auschwitz” and “Righteous Among the Nations: Polish help for Jewish population in the south-eastern part of Poland in 1939-1945” honor Poles who risked their lives to oppose the Nazi’s genocidal program. In all of these, outside forces (Soviet communism and Nazism) stand in opposition to the Polish people, who respond by risking their lives in protest. (<https://ipn.gov.pl/en/exhibitions/873,Exhibitions.html>)

²⁴ Porter-Szücs, *Poland in the Modern World*, 186. Porter-Szücs identifies further evidence of this narrative in the naming of the state, arguing “[t]his understanding of the past is captured by the curious nomenclature used to describe the Polish state. Interwar Poland was known as the Second Republic, and today’s country is called the Third Republic. In between was the Polish People’s Republic... which is not even deemed worthy of a number. It becomes a rupture in Polish history, not part of that history” (187).

²⁵ This trend is not only observed by Stola, but noted by other scholars of “memory laws” across Europe. Nikolay Koposov notes, “...lawmakers have done their best to minimize the Polish state’s responsibility for the communist terror ‘against the Polish nation....’ The communist regime is implicitly viewed in the law as an occupation, which simplifies the historical reality and calls into question the need for the Polish state to repent for the repressions of the communist period” (Koposov, *Memory Laws*, 162). As long as the state was one of “occupation,” it was not “authentically” Polish and Poles do not have to reckon with or repent for its actions.

Whoever publicly and contrary to the fact attributes to the Polish Nation or to the Polish State responsibility or co-responsibility for the Nazi crimes against peace, humanity or war crimes, or otherwise grossly diminishes the responsibility of the actual perpetrators of these crimes.²⁶

Announcing his decision to sign the law in June 2018, Polish President Andrzej Duda noted, “One must protect the good name of Poland and Poles, it is also a question of sensitivity. We also have the right to be sensitive, we also have the right to historical truth and we also have the right to be judged in tune with facts.”²⁷ Duda claims the law is not “Holocaust denial” or “changing history,” as some critics have charged, but rather promoting a narrative “in tune with facts”—a “historical truth.”²⁸ “Facts” are invoked both by the proposed law and in Duda’s defense of it and in both cases, the concern rests in the relationship between historical narratives and facts. Though neither the law nor Duda specify what constitutes “fact,” there is a sense that facts support one reading of history—a narrative is either “in tune” with facts or dissonant and false. They thus minimize the degree to which facts, or historical evidence, might be open to interpretation. It is here that L.U.C.’s project offers a valuable example of the ways archives and facts are molded—that what is “in tune” depends on one’s orientation.

Duda’s assertion that Poles have “the right to historical truth” echoes statements released by the IPN in response to criticism of the proposed law. They, too, assert the necessity of “defending the good name of our nation against statements that have nothing to do with

²⁶ “The text of the Act submitted to the Senate under art. 52 of the Rules and Regulations of the Sejm: Certified Translation from the Polish Language.” <https://www.ms.gov.pl/pl/informacje/news,10368,nowelizacja-ustawy-o-ipn--wersja-w-jezyku.html>.

²⁷ “President decides to sign anti-defamation bill into law,” *Polska.pl*, June 2, 2018. <https://polska.pl/politics/home/president-decides-sign-anti-defamation-bill-law/>.

²⁸ Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reacted to the proposed law in a statement that asserted, “One cannot change history, and the Holocaust cannot be denied.” It was a reaction that underscored the ambiguities and politicizations of history. Considering the same past, Duda’s “historical truth” is Netanyahu’s “changed history.” See: Rick Noack, “Poland’s Senate passes Holocaust complicity bill despite concerns from U.S., Israel,” *The Washington Post*, February 2, 2018. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2018/02/01/polands-senate-passes-holocaust-complicity-bill-despite-concerns-from-u-s-israel/?utm_term=.315b6e8bf005.

historical truth” and penalizing those who spread “historical lies.”²⁹ Critiques are decried as a “manifestation of a false narrative about Polish history.”³⁰ In this, we again see the sense that history can be presented either in truth or lies. Despite the assertion that there is a “truth” to be found, this language speaks to a recognition of the diversity of historical narratives.

In their statement, the IPN offers an outline of their sense of “historical truth,” asserting Poland was “the first country in the world [to] mount armed resistance to the German Reich in 1939. It was conquered after a lonely fight, abandoned by its English and French allies, crushed as a result of the cooperation of two totalitarian regimes: German and Soviet.”³¹ To be “in tune with facts,” it seems is to accept a narrative of Poland as innocent victim, “abandoned” and “crushed.” The IPN does not deny that there were Poles who collaborated with the Nazis, but it asserts that such individuals “compromised [their] civil duties” and that their acts were a “betrayal of the Republic of Poland.”³² Collaboration is thus not “Polish” and therefore Poland need not grapple with the complicity of some Poles in the violence and oppression of the twentieth-century. While evidence points to instances of Polish collaboration, the IPN here composes a narrative in which this fact is evidence not of Polish guilt, but of an individual’s personal failings. The narrative allows for a reading of facts that does not challenge Poland’s innocence, though one could imagine such facts presented to tell a different story.

²⁹ Institute of National Remembrance, “Statement of the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN) in reference to the appeal of the Ambassador of Israel to change the amendment to the Act on the IPN – 28 January.” <https://ipn.gov.pl/en/news/1014,Statement-of-the-Institute-of-National-Remembrance-IPN-in-reference-to-the-appeal.html>.

³⁰ Institute of National Remembrance, “Reaction of the IPN to a feature in ‘The Washington Times’,” <https://ipn.gov.pl/en/news/1051,Reaction-of-the-IPN-to-a-feature-in-quotThe-Washington-Timesquot.html> It is worth noting that the article the IPN responds to here is inflammatory, at one point referring to Poles as “murderous anti-Semites.” See: Menachem Levine, “Why Poland’s new Holocaust law is mockery,” *The Washington Times*, February 20, 2018. <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2018/feb/20/why-polands-new-holocaust-law-is-a-mockery/>.

³¹ Institute of National Remembrance, “The criminal nature of the German occupation of Poland 1939-1945. Standpoint of the Institute of National Remembrance.” <https://ipn.gov.pl/en/news/1048,The-criminal-nature-of-the-German-occupation-of-Poland-1939-1945-Standpoint-of-t.html>

³² Ibid.

This perspective from the IPN was apparent years earlier in their contribution to the liner notes of *39/89 Zrozumieć Polskę*. Hitting many of the same notes as L.U.C., the IPN begins its account “[a]t dawn of September 1, 1939,” when “German troops suddenly attacked Poland” and “the whole nation rose in defense of the homeland.”³³ After a predictable account of Polish sacrifice during WWII and the subsequent betrayal by world leaders at Yalta, the text notes Poland “found itself on the communist side of the ‘Iron Curtain.’” As a new “program of terror and propaganda” began, “the mass resistance of the society was suppressed by force. The system, however, did not succeed in imprinting communist slogans in the minds of Poles. They expressed their disagreement in repeated mass protests in 1956, 1968, 1970 and 1976.”³⁴ The suppression of these protests, however, was “in vain” for “in 1989, the ideals of Solidarity, those same ideals that guided the defenders of the Polish borders in September 1939, won. Poland regained independence and returned to the family of free European nations.”³⁵ Here again, Poland is positioned as occupied and thus not responsible for any “terror and propaganda” in the country. Polishness is rooted in those who protested and were not corrupted by “communist slogans.” Such a description neglects the role Polish communists played in the state and denies such actors a sincere interest in serving the nation.³⁶ Presented alongside the artwork of the fighting Polish eagle and L.U.C.’s own reflections on his “titanic compatriots,” this contribution

³³ L.U.C., *39/89 Zrozumieć Polskę*. Original: *O świcie 1 IX 1939r. wojska niemieckie zniemacka zaatakowały Polskę. Cały naród powstał w obronie ojczyzny.*

³⁴ Ibid. Original: *Polska znalazła się w 1945 roku po komunistycznej stronie “Żelaznej Kurtyny”. Rozpoczęła się budowa nowego systemu, wzorowanego na stalinowskim związku sowieckim, opartego o terror i propagandę. Masowy opór społeczeństwa został stłumiony siłą. Nie udało się jednak do końca wtłoczyć do głów Polaków komunistycznych haseł. Swojej niezgodzie dawali oni wyraz w powtarzających się masowych protestach w latach 1956, 1968, 1970 i 1976.*

³⁵ Ibid. Original: *Na próżno. W 1989r. ideały “Solidarności”, te same które przyświecały obrońcom polskich granic we wrześniu 1939r., zwyciężyły. Polska odzyskała niepodległość i wróciła do rodziny wolnych narodów europejskich.*

³⁶ Porter-Szücs, for example, notes that “whatever dictates might emanate from Moscow, the local communists were not mere stooges” and “they believed that what they were doing would ultimately lead to a better future for Poland, and for the world.” See: *Poland in the Modern World*, 215.

from the IPN affirms the outlines of a traditional narrative—a narrative with which L.U.C. is often “in tune,” but one his music also at times suggests is the product of conscious construction rather than unquestionable “truth.” These are the sanctioned narratives of the state; and as we listen to L.U.C., we see them both affirmed and opened to critique as he samples the past.

Sampling Stories and Sounds

“Subtract sampling and you get ignorance ... Cats are not open to learning about what was before them.” – Pete Rock, American hip-hop producer³⁷

Sampling—the art of cutting snippets of audio from one source and incorporating them into a new work—has been a central element of hip-hop music since its beginnings as a soundtrack to parties in the Bronx and is an essential tool in the genre’s engagement with its musical and social predecessors. Wayne Marshall describes “the art of sampling” as “akin to a firstborn child—one that artists have loved dearly, nurtured, and watched grow over the last quarter century.”³⁸ Characteristic of the genre from the beginning, sampling is part of hip-hop history that also allows artists to position themselves within broader traditions and communities. Though the “firstborn” of the hip-hop community, sampling is the link between hip-hop and other branches of the family tree. Evoking a similar language of hip-hop familial lineage, Russell A. Potter writes of “DJ raids upon the music of previous generations [that] reach back well before their own birthdates, such that their own search for sounds becomes a kind of genealogical *research*.”³⁹ The process of identifying samples educates artists about what came

³⁷ Quoted in Erik Nielson, “Did the Decline of Sampling Cause the Decline of Political Hip Hop?” *The Atlantic*, September 18, 2013.

³⁸ Wayne Marshall, “Giving Up Hip-Hop’s Firstborn: A Quest for the Real after the Death of Sampling,” *Callaloo* 29, no. 3 (2006), 868.

³⁹ Russell A. Potter, *Spectacular Vernaculars: Hip-Hop and the Politics of Postmodernism* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1995), 117.

before and reinforces a creative and community lineage, while utilizing the samples tests their artistry and provides an opportunity to draw connections to the histories and figures they sample. As it draws on its own set of conventional narratives and historical figures, hip-hop sampling echoes the historical reading and narrative reception evident in contemporary Polish accounts of the nation's past and present.

In sampling, hip-hop artists offer readings of the past—providing interpretive context for historical voices and thus making them speak to the present.⁴⁰ When Public Enemy sampled Malcolm X's critique of nonviolence "in the face of the violence that we've been experiencing for the past 400 years," his voice not only spoke to the politics of 1964, but also the persistence of racial inequality and violence in 1991. Malcolm X's address is not only evidence that Public Enemy "knows where they're from," but also part of the "story" they have to tell of their own experience. The hip-hop group is not only showing that they *know* history, but that they are a part of it. Sampling the revolutionary critic, Public Enemy foster a connection between their work and his, positioning themselves as contemporary voices calling for justice and demonstrating an allegiance with Malcolm X's teachings. L.U.C. engages in a similar relationship with voices of the past as he samples figures like Lech Wałęsa and Pope John Paul II on *39/89 Zrozumieć Polskę*. These artists use sampling to "get to the roots," or as Pete Rock

⁴⁰ Potter suggests that "the fundamental practice of hip-hop is one of *citation*, of the relentless sampling of sonic and verbal archives" (*Spectacular Vernaculars*, 53). Though fundamental to hip-hop, citational practices are not new to musical composition and performance. While the dynamic of the relationship between original texts and new compositions may vary, early music and classical composers included musical and poetic citation in their work, as do jazz and blues artists incorporate earlier compositions into their performances. In the Polish context, I find a particularly strong resonance between L.U.C. and Henryk M. Górecki's *Symphony No. 3*, which incorporated Polish folk melodies, as well as texts of political graffiti and accounts of political uprising in its lyrics. Both musicians, I think, create musical "time machines" that blend the experience of the past and present. For more on poetic and musical citations among early music and classical composers, see: Amanda Sewell, "A Typology of Sampling in Hip Hop" (PhD diss., Indiana University, 2013). For a reading of Górecki's symphony as a "compendium of Polish history," see: Luke Howard, "Production vs. Reception in Postmodernism: The Górecki Case," in *Postmodern Music/Postmodern Thought*, eds. Judy Lochhead and Joseph Auner, 195-206 (New York, NY: Routledge, 2002) and Luke Howard, "Henryk M. Górecki's Symphony No. 3 (1976) as a Symbol of Polish Political History," *The Polish Review* 52, no. 2 (2007): 215-222.

suggests, as a way of fighting ignorance and “learning about what was before.” This practice of audio quotation is thus historical, archival, interpretive, and political.

Audible Authenticity

In comparing sampling to hip-hop’s “firstborn,” Marshall underscores its centrality in the history of the genre—a history that has contributed to sampling’s lasting significance as a marker of both genre and historic authenticity. Citing a conversation with Ahmir “Questlove” Thompson, the drummer of the American hip-hop group The Roots, Marshall notes that Questlove’s group eschews the use of sampled music, yet he “concedes that authenticity accrues to sampled-based music and that sampling is central to hip-hop aesthetics.”⁴¹ This sentiment is echoed by musicians and scholars alike. In 1988, the rapper and producer Marley Marl declared, “rap died last summer if you ask me. Everybody stopped cutting up old breaks and everything...”⁴² Without sampling, Marley Marl suggests, rap is dead. Producer Jake One noted, “there’ll always be *some* sampled element in what I do. I think that’s what kinda makes hip-hop, though, you know?” and went on to suggest hip-hop recorded with live instruments, “just doesn’t sound *authentic*.”⁴³ Sampling, these artists suggest, is a significant marker of hip-hop authenticity.⁴⁴ As Joanna Demers posits, “[f]or rappers and DJs, authenticity hinges on

⁴¹ Marshall, “Giving Up Hip-Hop’s Firstborn,” 878.

⁴² John Leland and Steve Stein, “What Is It,” *The Village Voice* 33, no. 3 (January 19, 1988), 29.

⁴³ Jake One (1998), cited in Joseph G. Schloss, *Making Beats: The Art of Sample-Based Hip-Hop* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2004), 67.

⁴⁴ This sense that sampling is a central aspect of hip-hop was not lost in the music’s move to Poland. On his 1999 track “Prawdziwe czy nie” [Authentic or not] (discussed in Chapter One), Peja signals his fluency in the genre not only by listing the American artists he admires, but also by demonstrating his sampling skills in his use of a break from the Polish band Papa Dance. On his 2000 track “Nie ma skróconych dróg” [There Are No Shortcuts], the Polish rapper Grammatik instructs those who want to be rappers to “first buy your first CD/then learn to stick together a sample with a beat!”—an imperative delivered over a sample from the American jazz pianist Carla Bley’s 1977 “Dining Alone.” Sampling allows Polish artists to cultivate authenticity by referencing both specific artists and genre conventions in the music, thus signaling knowledge of and fluency in global musical traditions.

loyalty to tradition, and identity is defined in relation to the past.”⁴⁵ Sampling—in both the sounds and stories it connotes—performs that loyalty to tradition and allows artists to define themselves in relation to the past.

In comments from hip-hop musicians and scholars, we see not only the notion that sampling is an essential part of the history of hip-hop, but also an essential element of its sound. Sampling conveys authenticity audibly—the sound of a sample is a marker of genre authenticity. Part of this aesthetic results from the specific musical character made possible by sampling—that is, the isolation of rhythmic “breaks” and the recognition of familiar tunes—but part is also the result of being able to discern the archival quality of the records sampled. Regardless of whether or not listeners recognize the specific tune, they easily hear its “classic” sound—the audio quality of the archival recording. Marshall notes that even though The Roots generally do not use samples, they work diligently to mimic the sound of samples. The group, “make a pointed effort to record their instruments...in such a way as to produce the illusion of sounding sampled.”⁴⁶ What “sounds sampled” is somewhat ambiguous. Marshall describes a “dirtiness” or “telltale quality” that “is at once an effect of the snaps-and-pops of old, dusty vinyl and of the unique, nostalgic, and often fetishized quality of recordings made in a predigital age.”⁴⁷ In its sonic signaling of historic authenticity, the “dirty” sounds of sampled audio also signal an appeal to genre authenticity. Demers notes that “[r]ap recordings often sound deliberately chaotic or ‘dirty,’ precisely because they stand a better chance at claiming authenticity when their source materials are unmistakably older.”⁴⁸ To be “authentically hip-hop” is thus tied to being

⁴⁵ Joanna Teresa Demers, “Sampling as Lineage in Hip-Hop,” (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2002), 148.

⁴⁶ Marshall, “Giving Up Hip-Hop’s Firstborn,” 873.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 877.

⁴⁸ Demers, “Sampling as Lineage,” 147-148.

authentically historical. While other discourses on hip-hop authenticity underscore knowledge of earlier musical and cultural traditions, here history is heard.

Despite Jake One's claims that sampling "sounds authentic" and Marshall's descriptions of the fetishized "telltale quality" of old recordings, The Roots' discussion of "producing the illusion of sounding sampled" speaks to the degree that "authentic" sound is an element of performance. As The Roots' careful recreations of earlier recording conditions demonstrate, the sound of old recordings can be reproduced.⁴⁹ The "sonic dirt" of "snaps-and-pops" can be added to a track.⁵⁰ This play between archival authenticity and sonic authenticity speaks to the ways in which sampling offers an ambiguous link to the past and the credibility granted by that history.

"Groove-robbing" or "Ancestor-Worship"

There is some debate among rappers and hip-hop scholars about the degree to which the choice of samples reflects purely aesthetic concerns or broader interest in making connections between identity and intention of sampled and sampling artists. This is also a question of the degree to which samples signal authenticity formally or contextually as a sign of relationships to musical or historical tradition. Describing "the break" drawn from sampled audio, Kodwo Eshun

⁴⁹ The Roots' Questlove comments in the liner notes for the track "Double Trouble" off the group's 1999 album *Things Fall Apart*, "...of all the songs I drummed on, this is my proudest moment. For the longest I've been trying to achieve some sonic dirt sounds on these drums since the pre-Organix days. I had the style down, the right room, mics, et al. There was one thing missing [2], and this time I found what I needed to sound more like an old school Marley Marl joint....as opposed to a Brand New Heavy joint. [2] like you thought I was gonna reveal that one!!!!!!" In this, Questlove describes looking for (and finding) the secret to achieve "sonic dirt sounds" that will sound like the samples of early hip-hop, rather than the studio recording that they are. Here again, we see an articulation of the special quality of archival sounds, as well as Questlove's assertion that such sounds can be performed. In citing "old school Marley Marl" as his model, Questlove demonstrates again that belonging in hip-hop is performed both by knowing its history and producing music in accordance with genre traditions. (The Roots, *Things Fall Apart*, 1999)

⁵⁰ Demers associates this production of "old" sounds as a genre technique of fabricating (Benjaminian) aura, suggesting "the fabrication of aura also persists today through hip-hop culture, as evidenced by the use of digital samplers to reconstruct the noises of vinyl scratching. Here again, technology plays a key role in creating the illusion of distance, though with hip-hop it is temporal distance where 'past' sounds are resurrected into a 'present' mix." For more, see: Demers, "Sampling as Lineage," 147.

argues it is “any short captured sounds whatsoever. Indifferent to tradition, this functionalism ignores history, allows HipHop to datamine unknown veins of funk, to groove-rob not ancestor worship.”⁵¹ Coming down on the side of “datamining,” Eshun’s description privileges the sounds of the sample over its symbolic potential. Despite this orientation, Eshun brings to the fore the centrality of history in the practice of sampling—both “groove-robbing” and “ancestor-worship” entail a return to the past. Whether aesthetics or tradition are the motive for sampling, hip-hop’s “datamining” reflects a relationship with history—even if that relationship is one of rejection.

Though the intention of artists may vary as they look to earlier recordings as a source of samples, both “groove-robbing” and “ancestor-worship” establish a relationship to the past and an engagement with earlier artistic communities. Jennifer C. Lena describes samples as “a way of paying homage and a means of archival research.”⁵² Even if done exclusively with an ear towards finding an appealing groove, the search for samples is a form of “archival research” that acts to connect artists not only to broader musical currents, but also to hip-hop history. Joseph Schloss describes the practice of “crate digging”—that is, searching through crates of vinyl records for recordings that might lend interesting samples—as “an almost ritualistic connection to hip-hop history” that “is valued as a central act of hip-hop culture.”⁵³ These descriptions illustrate how archives offer a sense of connection to communities that is both documentary and spiritual. Turning to old records is framed as a communal “ritual” and “paying homage” to earlier musicians. Even if the end goal is simply finding a good sample, the practice of using

⁵¹ Kodwo Eshun, *More Brilliant Than the Sun: Adventures in Sonic Fiction* (London: Quartet Books, 1999), 14.

⁵² Jennifer C. Lena, “Meaning and Membership: Samples in Rap Music, 1979 to 1995,” *Poetics* 32, no. 3-4 (June 2004), 305.

⁵³ Schloss, *Making Beats*, 92.

audio archives is discussed in terms that underscore both intellectual and emotional engagement with the past.⁵⁴

This relationship to the past—both documentary and mythologized—comes to the fore in L.U.C.’s sampling of archival audio and reflections on Polish history. While the acoustic qualities of his samples might convey a sense of their ties to history and echo the “dirtiness” of archival recordings, they do so in conjunction with the content of the sampled speech, as well as the narratives of its speaker. As L.U.C. claims that his samples are both unimpeachable documents of history and magical links to the past, he engages not only in this discussion of hip-hop sampling’s relationship to history, but also speaks to the degree to which historical narratives operate on similar terms. The “Polish history” he relays is born of the blended reading of both document and myth that also characterizes the “authenticity” heard in hip-hop sampling.

Truly Transported

L.U.C.’s claim to offering a credible history is based on the authenticity of his samples—both audio and narrative. Foregrounding the archival material at the root of his project, he discusses and employs sampled audio in a way that reflects on issues present in discourse on hip-hop sampling and presentations of national history. The use of historical documents to produce texts that resonate in the present is central to both endeavors; archives provide a documentary

⁵⁴ While I contend that even those samples that obscure their source and thus sever a direct link with narratives of the past are nevertheless performing a historical lineage—evoking “ancestors” even if undefined—it is worth considering the way in which different types of sampling affect the dynamics of the relationship between the hip-hop text and the material it samples. Amanda Sewell offers a “typology of sampling” that identifies “three main types of samples: structural samples, surface samples, and lyric samples.” She argues that “[e]ach of these types has a distinct function in a sample-based track: structural samples create rhythmic foundation, surface samples overlay or decorate the foundation, and lyric samples provide words or phrases of text.” (26). I am primarily concerned with “lyrics samples,” which Sewell positions as often offering the most direct link with their source, for they largely preserve its original form. Structural samples, on the other hand, are perhaps more open to “groove robbing” as they become the raw material for producers who often manipulate them beyond recognition. For more, see: Sewell, “A Typology of Sampling in Hip-Hop.”

(and in this case audible) link to the past, as well as a narrative and emotional connection to heritage. Introducing the archival audio he samples as both “authentic and magical,” L.U.C. offers a framework that can be employed to illuminate the way texts of the past are granted meaning and significance in the present. The credibility of narratives based in archives rests not only in the textual authenticity of the source, but in an ineffable “magic”—the reader’s sense that they speak to the present. Because such an understanding reveals the role of reception—or perceiving the “magic”—L.U.C.’s introduction to historical writing and national narratives might be read as offering a nuanced vision of the malleability and mediation of what are often presented as “historical truths” accessible through documents of the past.

To this end, L.U.C. highlights two forms of links to the past—narrative and documentary—and suggests that they can be applied together, that historical documents are a vehicle to the mythologized past. While his vision of Poland as defined by a mythology of oppression and resistance might initially appear to be drawn from broad narratives, L.U.C. repeatedly underscores that he is not dealing with abstract ideals, but with historical realities. In foregrounding the archival element of his project—both formally in the mix and textually in liner notes—L.U.C. suggests that this album is “in tune” with facts. Focusing on the documentary elements of his project, he not only asserts a claim to the authenticity of his record, but also to the authenticity of the narratives and ideals it conveys.

In his blending of history and myth, L.U.C. is not only in conversation with hip-hop ideas of authenticity accrued in sampling, but also with the character of the Polish Romanticism that shapes the narratives he cites. Considering the role of myths and traditions in Romantic thought, Janion and Żmigrodzka note that Polish Romanticism had “the tendency to abolish the

opposition between myth and history” and combined “historical and mythical thinking.”⁵⁵ This mingling of historical and mythical thinking not only shapes an understanding of the nation in time, but also the character of the nation itself, which finds definition in and from the memories of its people. L.U.C. similarly draws on memory and mythos in his presentation of an “authentic” history of Poland. Like the Polish artists who articulated national history centuries earlier, L.U.C. crafts his vision of the nation and its history from both history and myth—the authentic and the magical.

L.U.C. opens his remarks in the liner notes with an assertion that this is a historical work to be considered thoughtfully. He recommends, “sitting down and listening to this CD in silence, on the best headphones possible.”⁵⁶ This is not background music, nor a hip-hop soundtrack to a night out. Rather, it is a document worthy of the listener’s full attention. This introduction frames the album not only as entertainment, but also education. Upon the release of the album, L.U.C. noted that he hoped it would get young people interested in their history, telling *Wyborcza.pl*, “Polish history is fucking awesome. It’s a good thing that’s crushed in schools with mindless memorization of dates. [...] All this digging up of old grudges discourages young people from getting interested in history.”⁵⁷ His record, L.U.C. suggests, offers a history of a different sort, neither rooted in “old grudges,” nor made lifeless with the “mindless memorization of dates.” As listeners tune in with quality headphones and their full attention,

⁵⁵ Maria Janion and Maria Żmigrodzka, “*Romantyzm i Historia*,” 35. Original: *zarysowała się wyraźnie tak znamienita dla romantyzmu dążność do zniesienia opozycji między mitem a historią, połączenia myślenia historycznego i mitycznego*

⁵⁶ L.U.C., 39/89 *Zrozumieć Polskę*. Original: *Polecam sygodnie usiąść i posłuchać niniejszej płyty w ciszy, na możliwie dobrych słuchawkach.*

⁵⁷ Robert Sankowski, “L.U.C. Polska historia jest zajebista” [Polish History is Fucking Great], *Wyborcza.pl*, September 18, 2009, http://wyborcza.pl/1,75410,7051401,L_U_C___Polska_historia_jest_zajebista.html?disableRedirects=true
Original: *Poza tym polska historia jest zajebista. To kawał dobrej sensacji, która w szkołach rozbija się pod kilofem bezmyślnego kucia dat. [...] Całe to wygrzebywanie dawnych pretensji zniechęca młodych ludzi do interesowania się historią.*

L.U.C. promises to make history come alive and uses human stories, rather than a string of dates, to narrate Poland's twentieth century. Insisting on the importance of audio fidelity to the appreciation of his work, L.U.C. underscores immersion in sound as essential to his project, thus introducing the idea that it is in the full experience of his composition that listeners will find historical value. There is "sonic dirt" in the archival recordings and his accompanying instrumentation that is essential for understanding. Hearing these recordings is not enough, one must be immersed in them.

While this insistence on full concentration and audio fidelity might be written off as an artist's pretension, L.U.C.'s fans echo the position and suggest a reception of the album as a moving historical text. Comments on the YouTube videos posted featuring audio from the album offer a glimpse of their reactions. On the video for the track that closes the WWII section of the album, one fan noted these were "very heavy pieces, you must be in a good environment to understand it."⁵⁸ Subsequent commenters agree, one adding, "listen to the whole thing with headphones and your eyes closed :) It makes an electrifying impression!"⁵⁹ and another, "This is not music you listen to in a hurry. Yesterday evening I fell to my knees, recommended."⁶⁰ Video of a later track elicited the instruction to "focus, isolate, let go, listen, and feel."⁶¹ In these comments, listeners not only express a sense that the music should be consumed with care, but also reinforce L.U.C.'s assertion that this attentive listening is essential to either "understanding" or fully feeling the emotional response to the record. This is a work to be understood and felt—

⁵⁸ Krzyżo Pół, comment on "L.U.C.: Pyrrusowa kleska," posted by mmWroclaw, September 1, 2009. Original: *Bardzo ciężkie kawalki, trzeba dobrze się wczuć w klimat tej płyty żeby to zrozumieć*

⁵⁹ Mateusz Jeriorny, comment on "L.U.C.: Pyrrusowa kleska." Original: *Chociaż polecam zakup i przesłuchanie jej w całości, na słuchawkach z zamkniętymi oczyma:) Robi piorunujące wrażenie!*

⁶⁰ Łukasz Szlachta, comment on "L.U.C.: Pyrrusowa kleska." Original: *To nie jest muzyka której słucha się w pośpiechu. Wczoraj wieczorem powaliło mnie na kolana, polecam*

⁶¹ Danio718, comment on "L.U.C. – Plonie Forte Chopina," posted by Bartosz Chmura. Original: *Trzeba się skupić, odizolować, puścić, wsłuchać się i poczuć.*

both of which require a certain degree of attentiveness to the artful production of the recording. In privileging audio as a source of authentic experience of the past, L.U.C. and his fans not only offer a justification for his chosen medium, but also affirm the argument that archival audio can effectively and authentically reproduce the past.

Already in these comments we see that listeners' connection to L.U.C.'s subjects, and their sense of the authenticity of his story is based in both reason and emotion. To the degree that fans speak to the music's "power" to move them, it is based on the album's appeals to historical knowledge and/or personal feelings. While many commenters do not go so far as to recommend listening practices (as those above have), they do record variations on emotional and educational responses. These posts range from "I want to cry..."⁶² and "tears are flowing like a river"⁶³ to "I was sincerely moved, thank you for this memory of great Poles"⁶⁴ and "Moving and beautiful...voices from the past sound dramatic and strong. I've read Starzyński's speeches before, but hear them completely differently."⁶⁵ The first two comments reflect simply the music's ability to make the listener feel something; the investment is emotional. The second two similarly speak to the music's capacity to move them, but link this emotive response to a concurrent intellectual response. That is, they note that part of what moved them was L.U.C.'s evocation of the past, his music's ability to bring "voices of the past" into the present. These responses speak to the music's appeal as both emotional and historical. This blend of feeling and historical document is central to L.U.C.'s project—it is underscored in his liner notes and

⁶² ToMoo00000, comment on "L.U.C - Radosna Katastrofa 1948," posted by Bartosz Chmura. Original: *plakać się chce.....CWP!*

⁶³ A. Popielewska, comment on "L.U.C - Radosna Katastrofa 1948." Original: *a mi łzy płyną rzeką...*

⁶⁴ chatott, comment on "L.U.C. – TRIBUTE TO STEFAN STARZYŃSKI – 39/89 Zrozumieć Polskę." Original: *Szczerze się wzruszyłam, dziękuję za tę pamięć o wielkich Polakach...*

⁶⁵ Gromilo, comment on "L.U.C. – TRIBUTE TO STEFAN STARZYŃSKI – 39/89 Zrozumieć Polskę." Original: *Poruszające i piękne... Głosy z przeszłości brzmią dramatycznie i mocno. Wcześniej czytałem wystąpienia Starzyńskiego, ale usłyszeć je to zupełnie coś innego.*

performed musically on the recording—and, I argue, emerges as a means to “understand Poland.” Polishness is presented as based both in feeling and history, and it is the negotiation between emotional narratives and documentary evidence that shapes contemporary understandings of the nation and fuels its political debates.

Much as his fans responded to his recording with intermingled emotional awe and historical interest, L.U.C.’s description of his own reactions to hearing the archival audio that would come to be the heart of this project reflects a blend of emotion and intellect. He writes in the liner notes:

The material on this album offers only a faint glow from the flames of the hell that was the period 39-89 for the Poles. The first impulse to make this record came from the statements of S. Starzyński, which I heard on the radio a few years ago. [...] When I first listened to all the recordings in the Polskie Radio archives, I was blown away by their authenticity and magic. These texts touched me so much, that I truly felt transported back in time.⁶⁶

L.U.C. underscores the archival nature of his material, which he frames as both historical and mystical. He is “blown away” by the “authenticity” of the source radio archives—they are both “real” and “magic.” This authenticity, L.U.C. suggests, transports him “back in time.” Though this language suggests that “the material” is the source of this link to the past, what L.U.C. describes is in fact the experience of the material; he is not just drawing on these recordings, but (in replaying them) creating a new historical moment. It is in the moment of connection between past and present that the “magic” is born. Like O.S.T.R.’s description of the spark that results from the meeting of jazz and hip-hop sampling and that gives his music its power, here the affective power of the archival audio is in its ability to speak to the present. Its “authenticity and

⁶⁶ L.U.C., *39/89 Zrozumieć Polskę*. Original: *Zawarty na płycie materiał daje jedynie nikły blask z płomienia piekła jakim był okres 39-89 dla Polaków. Pierwszym impulsem do zrealizowania tej płyty były wypowiedzi S. Starzyńskiego, które kilka lat temu usłyszałem w radiu. [...] Kiedy pierwszy raz przesłuchałem w archiwum polskiego radia wszystkie nagrania, zostałem zmiądzony ich autentycznością i magią. Teksty te poruszyły mnie tak bardzo, że czuję jakbym naprawdę przez chwilę podróżował w czasie.*

magic” are born of this relationship between document and reception; it is in the sampling of the archives and the experience of their replaying that they convey history.

L.U.C.’s liner notes and the music on the album offer a complex picture of the place of history in the present and the role played by the archival audio he samples in offering an authentic representation of that history. L.U.C. speaks of the audio archive from which he is drawing in terms both technical and mystical, echoing the language both he and his fans use to describe the experience of listening to these recordings. He presents the archive as an unimpeachable historical record and a magical portal to the mythologized past—the power of the audio lies in its ability to transport the listener to the time of its original recording. Reflecting on the archival recordings, L.U.C. writes:

The membranes of microphones registered the world from over half a century ago. They recorded vibrations from the lungs of Poles – crying, terrified, fearless. Risking their lives. Unfortunately, they also immortalized those who the fatal force of the USSR brought to the dark side. They recorded faces so incredible that for half a year, I could not find a title for this album. Ultimately, I think that there are no words that would describe this time properly. Today, these sounds are part of my music and I feel the burden of my countrymen’s suffering. Sometimes I think that I am not worthy of using these voices. However, I was convinced by the opinion of a witness of WWII: “dead people do not have a voice” – but that does not exempt the living from their obligation to remember. So today I fight with this project. We must remember.⁶⁷

Again, L.U.C. blends the technical and the mystical. He first focuses on the technology of the recording—the “membranes of the microphone”—before turning to its almost miraculous work. These recordings preserve the “vibrations from the lungs of Poles.” This image of the cries and defiant shouts of the twentieth-century Poles captured by the microphone suggests an intimate

⁶⁷ Ibid. Original: *Membrany mikrofonów zarejestrowały świat sprzed ponad pół wieku. Zarejestrowały drgani krtani Polaków, płacących, przerażonych i nieustraszonych. Rzykujących życiem. Niestety również tych, których fatalna siła ZSRR ściągnęła na ciemną stronę mocy. Zarejestrowały fakty tak niewiarygodne, że przez pół roku nie mogłem znaleźć tytułu dla tego albumu. Ostatecznie myślę, że nie ma słów, które by godnie opisały ten czas. Dziś dźwięki te stają się częścią mojej muzyki i czuję ciężar cierpień rodaków. Czasem myślę, że nie jestem godny wykorzystywania tych głosów. Przekonało mnie do tego jednak zdanie jednego ze świadków wspominających II Wojnę Światową „umarli głosu nie mają”, co nie zwalnia żywych od obowiązku pamiętania. Dziś więc projektem tym także walczę. Musimy pamiętać.*

connection to the past—as though the recordings could reproduce the very breath of L.U.C.’s fallen countrymen.

In his sampling of this audio, L.U.C. cultivates an impression of direct contact between his listeners and these voices of the past. When asked why he chose not to rap on this album, L.U.C. answered, “I decided not to fake these events with my texts, not to judge and not to value. I wanted to tell history using it alone, reaching for press releases, i.e., things that are unquestionable. I did not comment on it because I was afraid that I could ruin it.”⁶⁸ Here, L.U.C. again states that his aim was to “tell history” and that he looked to the archives as a way to do so. In this interview, as in his liner notes, L.U.C. positions the audio he samples as “unquestionable” and suggests he relays it without judgement.⁶⁹ This assertion does not acknowledge L.U.C.’s hand in shaping the presentation of this audio nor does it reflect the nuance of the archival documents themselves. While it may be “unquestionable” that these are authentic recordings, L.U.C.’s album reveals that their claims to being true representations of their time is more complicated.

Though microphones may have captured the voices of the past, it is through the lens of history and L.U.C.’s production that they are relayed to listeners. While L.U.C.’s notes suggest unmediated access to the voices of the past, in some ways the WWII survivor he cites is correct—the dead do not have a voice. It is through the living that their stories are told and thus through the hand of the living that these narratives are selected, shaped, and shared. It is not only

⁶⁸ Świerczek, “Trzeba zacząć.” Original: *Postanowiłem w ogóle nie fałszować tych wydarzeń swoimi tekstami, nie oceniać nie wartościować. Chciałem opowiedzieć o historii wykorzystując ją samą, sięgając po komunikaty prasowe, czyli rzeczy jednak niepodważalne. Nie komentowałem tego bo bałem się, że mogę to zepsuć.*

⁶⁹ This is an impression echoed by his fans, one of whom commented that the album was “atmospheric and historical without unnecessary commentary” (“...klimaycznie i historyczna wymowa bez zbędnych komentarzy,” SparrowNoblePoland, comment on “L.U.C.: Pyrrusowa kleska”). This comment reflects an opinion that sampling the audio without spoken remarks is offering it “without commentary” and fails to acknowledge the role supplemental music and editing play in shaping the reception of the sample.

in the archival audio that we hear the breath from the lungs of Poles of the past, but also L.U.C.'s production. He "fills in" the magic—mixing their voices with the sounds of breath, screams, bombs and a dramatic score to create the illusion of experience. With his music—mingling live performance with sampling—L.U.C. creates an experience of the past and in so doing, reflects the ways in which the past is made to speak to the present. In imploring us to "remember," *39/89 Zrozumieć Polskę* also make us think about the mechanisms and implications of remembering.

Tuning into the Past

It is at a moment of looming crisis that L.U.C. begins *39/89 Zrozumieć Polskę*, sampling the recording of Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs Józef Beck's May 5, 1939 radio address on the album's opening track, "Polski Honor" (Polish Honor). In excerpting the final, defiant passage of Beck's speech, L.U.C. draws on both the archival quality of the recording as well as its articulation of familiar tropes of sacrifice and honor to frame the history that follows. Opening the album sampling this speech, L.U.C. signals that in drawing on voices from the past he not only wants to make listeners remember their history, but also reflect on how it speaks to the present. Beck's sense of honor, L.U.C. suggests, resonates with contemporary Polishness, yet the meaning of that ideal is affected by the passage of time.

On May 5, 1939, Józef Beck addressed the nation in a radio broadcast. A week earlier in a speech before the Reichstag, Hitler had nullified the 1934 Non-Aggression Pact between the two nations, thus ending the agreement that safeguarded Poland's territorial integrity against incursion from its increasingly aggressive Western neighbor. Both Beck and international observers believed the tactic was meant to force Poland to turn over the Free City of Danzig and

allow the construction of a highway across Polish territory to link Germany and East Prussia in return for a new guarantee of non-aggression.⁷⁰ Having watched neighboring nations annexed and occupied, the stakes of these negotiations were clear to the Poles—refusal of the Nazis’ terms could mean war. Poland, Beck told the nation, “deserved peace,” not another war. Yet peace, he argued, came with a price. Acquiescing to German demands would cost Poland its honor, and that was a price Beck was not willing to pay. Four months after Beck’s speech—on September 1, 1939—Germany answered Poland’s refusal to give up territory by invading. The attack marked not only the beginning to the Second World War, but also the beginning of an extended period in which Poland again lost national sovereignty.

Before introducing listeners to this speech, L.U.C.’s track opens with an atmospheric drone punctuated by sporadic chords in the piano’s lower register. Over this background Justyna Antoniak enters with a soft, undulating vocal motif. To this contrast of low drone and angelic vocal, L.U.C. mixes the high-pitched scratch of a radio being tuned. The track is audibly “tuning in” to the past, establishing a context for the archival audio that will soon enter. This introductory blend of dramatic scoring and the sounds of radio technology serves to conjure the

⁷⁰ In his radio address, Beck asks: “What is the real object of all this? Without that question and our reply, we cannot properly appreciate the character of German statements with regard to matters of concern to Poland. I have already referred to our attitude towards the West. There remains the question of the German proposals as to the future of the Free City of Danzig, the communication to the Reich with East Prussia through our province of Pomorze, and the further subjects raised as of common interest to Poland and Germany,” (“Speech Made by Józef Beck, the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs, in the Sejm,” <http://polishfreedom.pl/en/document/przemowienie-ministra-spraw-zagranicznych-rp-jozefa-becka-w-sejmie>). Echoing this, *The New York Times* speculated on April 8, 1939 that Hitler’s threats to nullify the pact would be followed by “pressure to make Poland agree to cession of the Free City of Danzig to Germany and permit the building of an extraterritorial highway across the Polish Corridor to link the main Reich and East Prussia. If there is Polish resistance, it was believed here, precedents indicate that Herr Hitler’s demands on Poland might be increased. The German people expected Herr Hitler to decide, among other things, this question: Shall Colonel Beck of Poland be put into the list of Nazidom’s enemies along with Dr. Kurt Schuschnigg, Austria’s imprisoned Chancellor, and Dr. Eduard Benes, Czecho-Slovakia’s exiled President?” (“Poland is Warned by Reich on Pact,” *The New York Times*, April 8, 1939). This reporting in *The New York Times* acknowledged what was at stake in the response of Poland and the international community. Citing the fate of Austria and Czechoslovakia—and their leaders—the paper suggests that if Poland does not agree to Hitler’s terms, they too will face Nazi occupation.

past in ways that echo L.U.C.'s description of his project and his understanding of authenticity—it is both ethereal and technological.⁷¹ As the sample of Beck's speech enters, it does so as a continuation of this duality; it is positioned as authentic both in its medium and emotional resonance.

Having transported listeners “back in time,” the level on the music drops and a recording of Beck's May speech is sampled over the low hum of radio static—again, a reminder of the audio's archival quality. L.U.C. samples only the final lines of the speech and as such, the first words spoken on the track (and the album) are of peace. Addressing his—and L.U.C.'s audience—Beck asserts, “Peace is a valuable and desirable thing. Our generation, which has shed blood in several wars, surely deserves a period of peace.”⁷² Spoken in 1939, this message reached a nation whose independence had been regained just twenty-one years earlier, after which the stability of its borders was yet to be won in smaller battles—both armed and diplomatic. In 2009, the sampled Beck again speaks to a nation barely twenty years into a new era of full independence, though this time won without much bloodshed. This parallel suggests that L.U.C. is not only remembering Poland's past, but also linking it to his present.⁷³ Having

⁷¹ This sense of being transported through time – both spiritually and technologically – is mirrored in the visuals produced to accompany L.U.C.'s live performance of the album. As Antoniuk's vocals and the sound of the radio enter, the title frame of the production—which reads “39/89 Zrozumieć Polskę, L.U.C., Wrocław 2009”—appears to dissipate in curls of smoke. This marker of the present is replaced by the image of a radio dial. This image serves as a transition to archival footage of Beck delivering his radio address—accompanied in the TVP production by the label 1939. L.U.C.'s music and use of archives have transported listeners and viewers from 2009 to 1939. For video of the full live performance, see: “L U C 39 89 Zrozumieć Polskę 2009 (TVRip),” *Youtube.com Video*, posted by Paweł Merlin, January 24, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tU6bqFUsKX8&t=95s>

⁷² Original: *Pokój jest rzeczą cenną i pożądaną. Nasza generacja, skrwawiona w wojnach, na pewno na pokój zasługuje.*

⁷³ The release of L.U.C.'s album was coordinated to mark the seventieth anniversary of the Soviet invasion of Poland in 1939 (on September 17). Though L.U.C. told *Wyborcza.pl* he would have preferred to release the album on June 4 (thus marking the twentieth anniversary of the first round of free elections in 1989), the September 17 release date reflects the degree to which the album was marketed as a work bound with the narrative of Poland's occupation. Whether marking the anniversary of the loss of sovereignty or its return, the release of the record in 2009 offered a significant link to the period it chronicled. See: Robert Sankowski, “L.U.C. Polska historia jest zajebista.”

“shed blood” in the twentieth century—the tragic contours of which will be relayed in the coming tracks—twenty-first century Poland “deserves a period of peace.” Though the sample speaks to and of the past, in L.U.C.’s track it is also a message to the present, albeit one open to varied interpretations. In replaying and generalizing Beck’s appeal to honor, L.U.C. makes it relevant to his contemporary audience.

After introducing this desire for peace, “Polski Honor” expands upon a pause already in the recording before Beck’s qualification that “peace, like almost everything in the world, has its price...”⁷⁴ Slightly elongating this break, the returning vocal line and amplified radio tuning grow in volume before a decrescendo accompanied by a cymbal roll. Heightening the drama of this break—elongating it and building and releasing dynamic tension—the track sets up the listener to feel the weight of the discussion of the price of freedom that follows. L.U.C. musically underscores the centrality of freedom, drawing on Beck for audio material that he can mold to speak to the present. His composition is not transmission—despite the audio signals of such—but rather a reading of the audio. Though this track does not feature the obvious manipulation of sampled audio signaled by looping or scratching, L.U.C. is nevertheless shaping its presentation in his editing and accompanying composition, musically highlighting for listeners’ concepts he feels are important.

As the rolling cymbal gives way to the recording of Beck, the Foreign Minister’s speech continues to play over the sound of radio static. Throughout this section there is minimal scoring, though a piano line accompanies and punctuates Beck’s assertion that the price of freedom is “high, but calculable.” The notion of a “high price” to be paid for freedom is familiar to the Polish audience. Not only are the specifics of the history that followed Beck’s speech

⁷⁴ Original: *pokój, jak prawie wszystkie sprawy tego świata ma swoją cenę*

known, but the notion of paying a high price for national ideals also is very much inscribed in the national consciousness. It is the foundation of the works of Mickiewicz and inextricable from the narratives of sacrificing for the nation that have characterized Polishness since. Musically underscoring this evaluation of the cost of freedom, the track signals that this is a question that will shape the album, much as it shapes memories and narratives of Poland's past and present. Reflecting this preoccupation, Beck continues, "We in Poland do not know the concept of peace at any price."⁷⁵ This expression of defiance and determination to refuse to appease Hitler elicits cheers from the 1939 audience. The anonymous voicing of support from the past is reinforced in the track by cresting percussion and vocals. This defiance, the music suggests, builds strength. The final lines of the speech—"There is only one priceless thing in the life of men, nations, and countries. That thing is honor."—are spoken over static and conclude with the return of the cheering crowd.⁷⁶

This introduction to L.U.C.'s album illustrates the means by which he looks to cultivate credibility in his effort to comment on contemporary Polishness through the texts of its past. His appeals to authenticity are heard in both form (the amplification of radio static and the sampled speech) and content (appeals to ideals of honor and willingness to sacrifice that are familiar in Polish national history). Both of these, however, are simultaneously presented as somewhat "magical" in their ability to speak across time. It is in the work of the artist—their making the voices of the past speak in and to the present—that "magic" is created. Though he may present these words as speaking directly from the past, it is L.U.C. who gives them voice. His mixing and scoring shape listeners' reception of Beck's speech, even as he strips Beck's words and ideals of their historical specificity. "Honor" is still presented in the context of Beck's refusal to

⁷⁵ Original: *My w Polsce nie znamy pojęcia pokoju za wszelką cenę.*

⁷⁶ Original: *Jest jedna tylko rzecz w życiu ludzi, narodów i państw, która jest bezcenną. Tą rzeczą jest honor.*

accede to Nazi demands, but it also is offered as a virtue for the present. L.U.C. and his listeners find authenticity and magic in these words not only because they reflect the nation's past, but because they resonate with a sense of contemporary Polishness. They offer a link with the past—both in their audible “tuning in” to the archive and their appeal to familiar stories.

Artists, Not Archivists

Though the sampling of both musical and spoken word recordings are used as markers of historic and genre authenticity, L.U.C. and other hip-hop artists are not offering listeners unmediated access to an archive. Whether engaging music or speech, hip-hop producers change the meaning of sampled texts. When the American rapper J.Cole samples John F. Kennedy's “ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country,” he does so not to teach listeners about what the president said in 1961, but rather to speak to his listeners in 2013.⁷⁷ History and context have shaped the reception of Kennedy's speech, as has Cole's hand in editing and incorporating it into his track. Similarly, L.U.C. is not merely teaching his audience about Józef Beck, but using the recordings of the past to offer a contemporary message about national ideals and honor.

Hip-hop artists in both the United States and Poland understand this, and many underscore their role in drawing new meaning from existing texts through the process of sampling. They see themselves as transforming, not simply reporting, the past. Describing the use of jazz records in hip-hop, the pioneering hip-hop DJ Jazzy Jay suggests, “[m]aybe those records were ahead of their time. Maybe they were made specifically for the rap era; these people didn't even know what they were making at that time.”⁷⁸ It is the hip-hop artist, Jazzy

⁷⁷ J.Cole, “Miss America,” *Born Sinner* (Columbia, 2013).

⁷⁸ Leland and Stein, “What It Is,” 26.

Jay claims, who draws out the “real” essence of the music. Jazz artists “didn’t even know” what they were producing, and it is hip-hop that releases the potential of the past recording. The Polish artist O.S.T.R. (Adam Andrzej Ostrowski) offers a similar perspective in his song, “Słowo to siła” (The Word is Strength), rapping, “in music, hope, with the use of a sampler, jazz will transfer value/in this connection, between drabness and the glint of light, like a strobe/it brings out anger, the climate of the yard/jazz gives me power...”⁷⁹ Here, O.S.T.R. suggests a transformative mining of the past—through the mediation of a sampler, jazz gives an essential spark to hip-hop and captures the climate of today. It is the past and (more importantly) its transformation into a new sound that give O.S.T.R. his expressive power. Both Jazzy Jay and O.S.T.R. minimize the intention of the original creator, denying them full understanding of the meaning or significance of their work. It is rather the act of sampling that grants meaning to the text and as such allows it to speak across time. Neither music nor words are bound to their originary context, but are malleable and meaningful only insofar as they speak to the present.⁸⁰

Hip-hop sampling is not only part of performance, but also an act of reception and critical reading. Though they may sound like “authentic” snippets of the past (and, in fact, be authentic recordings), hip-hop samples are not only history, but also a lens into the perspectives of the artists and the ways in which they negotiate claims to credibility within the genre and their communities. In sampling audio from the past, hip-hop artists engage history (with varying degrees of directness) to express their contemporary identity—yet again, the past is made

⁷⁹ O.S.T.R., “Słowo to siła,” *Jazz w Wolnych Chwilach* (Asfalt: 2003). Original: *W muzyce nadzieja, z użyciem samplera, by jazz wartości przelal/W tym ta więź, między szarością a światel błysku jak stroboskop/W tym złość co wydobywa, podwórek klimat/To jazz daje mi moc, moc to słowo, słowo to siła*

⁸⁰ It is worth noting that both Jazzy Jay and O.S.T.R. are apparently referring to musical samples—what Sewell categorizes as “structural” or “surface” samples. While musical (rather than spoken/lyrical) samples can be employed to speak from/of the past, they are more likely than lyrics to be mined solely for their rhythmic or musical qualities. This is the “groove-robbing” Eshun describes. L.U.C.’s sampling is heavily lyrical, rather than structural, and thus ripe for analysis as an overt gesture to an identifiable past, but one might also consider the ways in which even structural samples reflect historical storytelling dynamics.

present. In reading these recordings, we see not only how specific texts and narratives are engaged to speak to the present (and thus we gain a perspective on a critical element of contemporary identity), but also, more broadly, the way reading (through hip-hop sampling and production) engenders a blending of documents and contextual narratives to produce meaning.

To War with Words

Despite L.U.C.'s highlighting of audio markers of archival authenticity, *39/89 Zrozumieć Polskę* does not offer an unequivocal argument for audio as an unimpeachable source of "truth." While it is used to signal historical authenticity and to capture the spirit of the past, recorded audio's status as a means of direct communication is complicated in a number of tracks. Foregrounding the production inherent in his storytelling, L.U.C. exposes the ways in which he, as an artist, is shaping the narrative of the past. There are, this audible manipulation suggests, limits to the truth conveyed on records and across airwaves—both in the past and today. As artists draw on the past as material for their compositions, they do so with an eye towards how they can shape it and thus use it to convey their individual perspectives. History "comes alive" only insofar as the contemporary artist imbues it with a "spark" in their composition.

As the album moves into the period of war following the Nazi invasion, the third and fourth tracks begin to frame the complex negotiation of themes of authenticity and the malleable meaning of texts across time. Track Three, "A Więc Wojna" (And So War), introduces recordings of Stefan Starzyński, the mayor of Warsaw at the time of the Nazi invasion, and sets up a two song arc that both engages and critiques the impression of audio documents as a source of authenticity and a record of experience across time and space.

“A Więc Wojna” samples audio of Starzyński addressing the nation following the public announcement that German troops had crossed the Polish border on the morning of September 1, 1939. The album thus positions Starzyński’s as the first voice of Poland at war—marking the start of a struggle that *39/89 Zrozumieć Polskę* suggests does not end until 1989. Starzyński, proclaiming that Poland has “entered a period of war,” asserts that “the whole effort must go in one direction. We are all soldiers. We must think only about one thing: fight for victory.”⁸¹ Looping the end of the audio sample—“fight for victory”—L.U.C.’s arrangement stresses that the battle looming for Poles is one in which “victory” will be the final outcome.⁸² This sampled text also points to the national cohesion and perseverance that Starzyński saw as essential. In sampling this audio and mixing it to underscore victory, L.U.C. presents a reading of Starzyński as a voice that underscores the value of fighting for honor, while also suggesting (from his position in 2009) that the fight was successful; though Starzyński did not live to see it, there was “victory.” As such, he projects Starzyński’s appeals into the future, thus framing the subsequent struggles against Soviet power as part of the “fight for victory.” Editing and mixing here allows L.U.C. to make Starzyński speak to the present and creates a sense of continuity with the past. The sampling and repetition not only signal to listeners that they should value the independence

⁸¹ Original: *A więc wojna. Z dniem dzisiejszym wszelkie sprawy i zagadnienia schodzą na plan dalszy. Całe nasze życie publiczne i prywatne przedstawiamy na specjalne tory. Weszliśmy w okres wojny. Cały wysiłek narodu musi iść w jednym kierunku. Wszyscy jesteśmy żołnierzami. Musimy myśleć tylko o jednym: walka aż do zwycięstwa.*

⁸² This promise to “fight to victory” is echoed in the following track, which again samples Starzyński calling on his city to fight, but in the later instance to “fight to the end.” This shift in directives—fighting “to victory” becoming fighting “to the end”—perhaps reflects the changing realities observed by Starzyński. Warsaw was no longer preparing to meet the Nazi invasion; it had been occupied and military victory was not immediately plausible. L.U.C.’s sampling of these parallel passages from Starzyński (in tracks three and four) underscores a way in which his position as one looking back at these archives allows him to craft a narrative of the experience of the war unavailable to those who lived it. Retroactively telling the story of the war—editing to establish thematic resonance and parallel language—allows L.U.C. to paint a compelling narrative, but also underscores his remove from the period he chronicles. The narrative elements that make listeners feel connected to the past are, in fact, evidence of their distance from that past.

for which many fought and died, but also that they are living in the independent Poland born of that struggle.

The message of Starzyński's speech is presented as speaking across time to contemporary Poles, and the composition that frames it similarly positions the words as conjuring the past to speak to the present. Just as Beck is presented as a timeless voice of "honor," Starzyński is sampled as a call to fight for that honor. The audio of his speech is preceded on the track by the sounds of marching boots, falling bombs, and short clips spoken in German. Though L.U.C. and his listeners suggest that it is archives that transport listeners back in time, here he augments the effect—reproducing what one might imagine was the sonic landscape of Poland at war. When the sample of Starzyński on Polskie Radio enters, it is accompanied not only by these sound effects (and L.U.C.'s instrumentation), but by the pops and crackles of an old recording. Again bringing the sounds of aging technology to the front of the mix, L.U.C.'s work draws on "the unique, nostalgic, and often fetishized" quality of the scratchy audio to signal authenticity—both historical and hip-hop. In this case, L.U.C. uses his ability to mix audio as a means to cultivate a sense of historical credibility built on formally foregrounding the archival element of his samples, while also remixing them with sound effects to further their "time machine" quality. Here we hear authenticity being performed: the radio recording may be original, but the listener's experience of it is not. It is L.U.C.'s scoring that creates the sense of its "magic."

This mixing of sound effects with the sampled archival audio, though it produces the sense of historical immersion for the listener, reveals the role L.U.C. plays in curating and presenting this "authentic" record of history. Drawing on familiar narratives, L.U.C. performs a story of history, moving his audience and art beyond the documentary and tapping into the "spiritual" and emotional to create a portrait of the past that *feels* real. In the track that follows,

“Tribute to Stefan Starzyński,” L.U.C. continues to explore themes of audio’s ability to convey experience—both in the moment and across time. Drawing on familiar refrains of national unity and perseverance to portray occupied Poland, “Tribute to Stefan Starzyński” also begins to critique the use of such narratives and the perception of audio as a conduit of understanding.

Like the track that precedes it, “Tribute to Stefan Starzyński” samples Starzyński addressing Warsaw on the radio. The track opens with Starzyński announcing the German attack on the Polish capital and asserting that “England hears us and won’t abandon us.”⁸³ Until then, he defiantly promises, Poles will “fight to the end,” for “Poland has not yet perished.”⁸⁴ This sample is presented over a propulsive bass line and the high-pitched whine of radio communication. While this scoring evokes the relentless grind of Poland at war, it is perhaps Starzyński’s “Poland has not yet perished”—the first line of the Polish national anthem—that speaks most directly to contemporary audiences. We hear the Polish resistance not only in the sounds of chaos, but also in the familiar assertion that “Poland has not perished,” a phrase left unfinished in the sampled audio, but which Polish listeners might naturally conclude with the following line of the anthem, i.e., “as long as we still live.” In his speech, Starzyński “samples” the familiar song as a means of stirring patriotic sentiment and encouraging civilian resistance to the looming threat of occupation. Using Starzyński’s speech as a sample, L.U.C. similarly draws on the familiar patriotic significance of the lines, though his presentation shades the interpretation of the song. In Starzyński’s speech, the words are defiant and perhaps desperate; sampled by L.U.C. seventy years later, they ring triumphant.⁸⁵

⁸³ Original: *Anglia słyszy nas i nas nie opuści*

⁸⁴ Original: *Jeszcze Polska nie zginęła*

⁸⁵ Samples of the anthem (“Mazurek Dąbrowskiego,” or “Poland is Not Yet Lost”) are heard across *39/89 Zrozumieć Polskę*. The tune of the song is used as the station identification for both Polskie Radio and the underground Radio Błyskawica and is sampled in “Tribute to Stefan Starzyński,” providing the melody that the politician’s words evoked. Track Five (“Diary of Innumerable Crimes”) features a sample of Ignacy Jan Paderewski addressing the National Council in Paris in 1940 and declaring “Poland will not perish.” A subsequent

Though L.U.C.'s sampling of Starzyński's "Poland has not yet perished" signals the power of audio to communicate across barriers, including Starzyński's assurance that "England hears us" complicates the track's perspective on radio's potential. While England did not "abandon" Poland (they did, after all, declare war on Germany), they would not provide the support needed to defend (or liberate) Warsaw. Sampling a promise that allies heard Poland's cry for aid early in an album chronicling a decades long fight for freedom, L.U.C. suggests that "hearing" is not enough. England perhaps "heard" Poland, but the radio transmissions from the fallen capital could not fully communicate the desperation of the fight.

The insufficiency of audio to move allies to action is explored further as L.U.C. intercuts a 1944 broadcast from the underground Radio Błyskawica into Starzyński's final address. The sample features Zbigniew Świętochowski's reading of Zbigniew Jasiński's poem "We Require Ammunition," which was written and recorded in the midst of the Warsaw Uprising in August 1944. Jasiński, both a poet and member of the Home Army, embodies a continuation of the model of the patriot-poet (discussed in Chapter One). Active in the resistance to Nazi occupation, Jasiński worked for Radio Błyskawica and wrote verse that served as a defiant expression of Poles' willingness to fight and die for their freedom.⁸⁶ His poem, like Starzyński's address, resonates with familiar narratives of Polish sacrifice. Unlike Starzyński, however, by 1944, Jasiński has seen the limits of radio appeals to move those abroad.

The portion included in L.U.C.'s work opens with the assertion that in Warsaw, "...girls fight/and small children fight and blood flows joyfully."⁸⁷ Poles—male and female, young and

track, evoking the events of the Warsaw Uprising, also features the anthem—this time performed by the Polish Choir of Refugees in Algiers.

⁸⁶ "Opowieść o Zbigniewie Jasińskim" [Story of Zbigniew Jasiński], *Przegląd Australijski*, February 2009, <http://przegląd.australink.pl/jurata/artykuly/lissowski.php>.

⁸⁷ Original: *...walczą tu dziewczęta/I male dzieci walczą, i krew radośnie płynie.*

old—willing to shed blood (joyfully) for Poland, Jasiński goes on to assert, are the “heart of Poland.” The contours of this story are familiar—poet-patriot lionizes everyday Poles willing to fight and die proudly in defense of their country.⁸⁸ While L.U.C.’s inclusion of this audio might certainly be read as advancing this narrative, it is complicated in the passage that follows.

Sampled in full on L.U.C.’s track, Jasiński’s final stanza offers a critique of those whose appeals to national mythology he sees as made without authentic investment in the country’s interests. It reads:

Hello! Here beats the heart of Poland! This is Warsaw calling!
Cut the funeral songs from the broadcast!
We have spirit enough for ourselves and for you!
Your cheers aren’t necessary! We need ammunition!⁸⁹

The opening salutation echoes that of a radio address and suggests that “the heart of Poland” can be heard in the poem’s imagined broadcast. Though this introduction claims for the speaker the position of an authentic voice of Warsaw, the ability of the medium to transmit that voice is questioned as Jasiński frames his final lines as a message directed to those outside Poland.

Though this audience might “tune in” to the fight, they are not living it and thus do not understand the realities of those in Warsaw.⁹⁰

To those hearing “Warsaw calling,” Jasiński asserts that displays of Polishness, or performative mourning and valor, are neither credible nor productive. Those in Poland “need

⁸⁸ This familiar narrative, which shaped both the execution and memory of the Warsaw Uprising, reflects a long tradition of literature guiding political action. Janion and Żmigrodzka argue that in the nineteenth century, “Mickiewicz and Słowacki wrote the script for Polish conspiracies, patriotic demonstrations, and finally uprisings.” Just as “national uprisings were directed to a large extent by the Romantic worldview of their organizers” then, so too were the actions of Nazi-occupied Poland and the memory of them guided by Romantic views. For more, see: Janion and Żmigrodzka, *Romantyzm i Historia*, 11.

⁸⁹ Original: *Halo! Tu serce Polski! Tu mówi Warszawa! Niech pogrzebowe śpiewy wyrzucą z audycji! Nam ducha starczy dla nas i starczy go dla Was! Oklasków nie trzeba! Żądamy amunicji!*

⁹⁰ In an earlier, unsampled, line of the poem, Jasiński directly addresses those in London, suggesting his audience resides in England—and most likely includes members of the Polish government-in-exile. L.U.C.’s decision to not sample this early part of the poem leaves the population addressed by the poem’s speaker more ambiguous, thus opening it to speak not only to the specifics of its moment, but perhaps also through time. We, the contemporary audience, are like those in London insofar as our experience of the Uprising is always secondhand.

ammunition,” not “spirit.” This text and L.U.C.’s sampling of it alongside the audio of Starzyński’s final recorded speech before his death offer a picture of authentic Polishness as characterized by an agreement between expression and action. Reciting the slogans of Polish patriotism is meaningless without action, and nationalistic appeals can be used (and misused) by anyone. This is a theme L.U.C. explores more fully as he turns towards the patriotic calls made by communist leaders, but Jasiński’s poem introduces the listener to the idea that simply “remembering” Poland is not necessarily the end of the project; words must be accompanied by actions. “Samples” of patriotism and Polishness are empty on their own.

Audio cues of authenticity, as well as familiar narratives of sacrifice and struggle, are both engaged in these opening tracks’ presentation of the Polish experience of the Second World War. Drawing on both documentary and mythology, L.U.C. uses the archival audio to produce a sense of traveling back in time and capturing a picture of “real” history. While open to a straightforward reading of archive and narrative conveying “truth,” L.U.C.’s composition might also be deconstructed to expose the ways in which performances of “authenticity” are created and used. “Remembering” is like hearing audio transmissions; it is a connection to other people, places, and times, but a connection that is mediated by people, place, and time. Artists (and others) who “sample” history to speak to the present are not presenting a direct line to the past, but rather using the materials of the archive to animate old narratives and new perspectives.

Sampling Stories, Perverting Polishness

Where the sampling of Jasiński begins to complicate the picture of expressions of Polish patriotism and the uses of audio to transmit experience, L.U.C. delves deeper into these issues in his critique of communist appeals to Polishness in service of their political agenda. As 39/89

Zrozumieć Polskę turns to the postwar period, the track “Do Roboty Już Bez IQ” (Now Get to Work, Without IQ) samples songs and speeches from the late 1940s and 1950s that draw on narratives of patriotism to present a critique of the dissonance between rhetoric and reality. Moving into the 1960s, the track “Everest Hipokryzji” (Everest of Hypocrisy) similarly samples political speeches, mixing them into an audio collage that suggests hypocrisy in the communist leaders’ appeals to Polishness and national ideals. Both in viewing these songs through the lens of history and through L.U.C.’s production, which is heavily mixed in a manner that reveals and magnifies the artifice of the original tracks’ use of history, “Do Roboty Już Bez IQ” and “Everest Hipokryzji” serve as an indictment not only of the communist regime, but of uncritical use and reception of history and patriotism. In his portrayal of the communist state, L.U.C. highlights the danger in uncritically accepting appeals to Polishness. There is a danger, the record suggests, in accepting something as authentic just because it is familiar; “samples” of national mythology are open to use by anyone as signals of credibility, and audiences must be critical in their evaluation of appeals to the past.

Putting the Past to Work

“Do Roboty Już Bez IQ” signals its sampling of the past already in its title, whose “to work” (*do roboty*) echoes the 1946 tune “Do Roboty” (To Work). This reference is further underscored in the opening bars of L.U.C.’s track, which feature audio from “Do Roboty,” as well as a similar song, “Budujemy Nowy Dom” (We Are Building a New Poland) (1949). Drawing connections to these works and thus textually and audibly evoking post-war Poland, L.U.C. indicates the era on which these tracks comment. In this, L.U.C. demonstrates the power of music to conjure both a mood and a narrative. He also suggests that this power can be

misused as music becomes propaganda for politics and policies at odds with its promise. Musically underscoring the dissonance between the promise of a “new Poland” and the oppressive policies enacted to get there, L.U.C. echoes the IPN’s evaluation of the period in denying the sincerity of the communists. Theirs was not an authentic interest in promoting Polishness, such a view suggests, but rather a lie told by “outsiders” in service of consolidating their power.

Sampling the songs of postwar Poland alongside speeches from the politicians of the era, L.U.C. positions music as a tool of those looking to engage national sentiment in service of their own agenda. He thus opens a space for critical reflection on contemporary projects (including his own) that draw on ties to national pride in service of political ends. “Sampling,” he reminds us, puts the past to work in service of the present, and that work is shaped by individual agendas. While throughout the record L.U.C. himself employs the past (and replays the voices of others who have done the same), his tracks covering the rhetoric of the communist party present a clearer critique of such political uses of history. These tracks suggest that *this* use of history—one in service of communist, rather than nationalist, ends—was “out of tune” with the facts.

Composed in a Poland that was rebuilding after the devastation—both human and material—of the Second World War, “Do Roboty” and “Budujemy Nowy Dom” offered an uplifting message of Poles working together to restore their homeland, set to a catchy melody. The songs were born of a post-war push to produce popular music that would be both entertaining and impart messages supportive of the new state’s socialist ideology.⁹¹ The second verse of “Do Roboty,” for example, reads, “There was both hardship and misery, there was an

⁹¹ David G. Tompkins, “‘Against ‘Pop-Song’ Poison from the West: Early Cold War Attempts to Develop a Socialist Popular Music in Poland and the GDR,” in *Youth and Rock in the Soviet Bloc: Youth Cultures, Music, and the State in Russia and Eastern Europe*, ed. William Jay Risch (Lanham, MA: Lexington Books, 2015), 44-45.

ocean of tears/and heart destroyed by government's thickly stuffed purse."⁹² The pre-war regime brought ruin and sadness; people suffered as the corrupt state grew richer. The solution to this misery is suggested in the song's bouncy chorus, which calls out "hey boys and girls," and implores all "to work" to build a Polish dream of "grain and steel" and "hammer and sickle."⁹³ The success of the new, post-war Poland, the song posits, rests in the Polish people's work in support of the socialist vision. "Budujemy Nowy Dom" offers a similar perspective, telling its audience, "enough complaining and grumbling...roll up your sleeves, take the trowel in your hand and stand with us. Because it is for her, for our Warsaw, every day, with every breath..."⁹⁴ The message in both songs is clear—working for a "new Poland" is a patriotic duty, to be done for the love of one's country.⁹⁵ These songs both represent an effort to use popular music to shape a population's behavior by appealing to its sense of community, the weight of history, and the hope of a strong nation in the future.⁹⁶

While the full text of these two songs offers a rich perspective on the mobilization of popular music for political purposes, in sampling only short fragments of each, L.U.C. uses them

⁹² "Do Roboty," posted by przepisywanie, November 5, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=imKD1msSx9s>. Original: *Był i trud, i nędza, był ocean lez/I burzył serca rząd grubo napchanych kies.*

⁹³ Original: *To kłos i stal - to sierp i młot.*

⁹⁴ "Chór Czejanda – Budujemy nowy dom," posted by MatmanFromLublin, November 28, 2011. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sVSiY7TV1bY>. Original: *Już dość narzekań i gderań... Więc chodź i zakasz rękawy./Do ręki kielnię bierz/I stawaj z nami tu./Bo to dla niej,dla naszej Warszawy/Tak codziennie, tak bez tchu*

⁹⁵ This message was not purely communist propaganda, but also reflected a sincere desire of Poles to rebuild after the devastation of the war. Across the political spectrum, Poles shared an interest in recovery. Porter-Szűcs argues that the early communist leaders who introduced Stalinism to Poland did so with an eye towards "the total transformation of Poland from a mostly rural, impoverished, war-torn country into one that was prosperous, industrial, equitable, and modern" (*Poland in the Modern World*, 215). On the other side, he recalls "once driving through a Polish city with a woman who remembered the 1950s with all the bitterness of a lifelong anticommunist. She interrupted her laments, however, when we drove past an amusement park. 'We built that!' she cried, explaining how she and her neighbors had spent every Saturday for several years transforming empty fields into a recreation center that local residents treasure to this day" (*Ibid.*, 220). Though their motives and methods may have been different, both the communist party and their opponents wanted to "get to work" to "build a new home."

⁹⁶ For more on the promotion of such "work songs," see: Tompkins, "Against 'Pop-Song' Poison" and David G. Tompkins, *Composing the Party Line: Music and Politics in Early Cold War Poland and East Germany* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2013).

not as a source of historical record, but rather as cues to evoke the decade that followed WWII.⁹⁷ Though over sixty years old by the time they were sampled by L.U.C., both the style of these songs and potentially the specifics of the songs themselves were likely still familiar to Polish audiences. The same year L.U.C. released *39/89 Zrozumieć Polskę*, “Do Roboty” appeared as the first song on a *Newsweek Polska* list of “Twelve Songs that Changed Poland.” Describing the song, composer Wojciech Kilar (b. 1932) recalled hearing the tune “hummed on the streets.”⁹⁸ While this does not mean that that song will be immediately recognized by everyone (and it is worth noting that the average L.U.C. listener is likely much younger than Kilar), *Newsweek’s* inclusion of the song suggests the ubiquity and influence of such music. In sampling “Do Roboty,” L.U.C. is thus able instantly to tap into that tradition and history.⁹⁹

L.U.C.’s “Do Roboty Już Bez IQ” opens with a recording of the Polish Radio Chorus performing “Do Roboty” and calling for “boys and girls” to get “to work.” This imperative is followed by the sample of “Budujemy Nowy Dom” that declares “we are building a new, concrete home.”¹⁰⁰ Together, these two songs offer a united vision of a people coming together to build a new home, both personal and national. Having thus set the stage, the track transitions from the buoyant melody of the work songs to an aggressive beat punctuated by radio static,

⁹⁷ Within the spectrum of the ways in which samples index a specific past (vs. offering a desired sound), the use of these bits of post-war song positions L.U.C. closer to drawing on audio quality than lyrical content. He does, however, strategically offer lyrical portions that establish a contrast with the history he portrays.

⁹⁸ Filip Łobodziński and Robert Ziębiński, “Dwanaście piosenek, które zmieniły Polskę” [Twelve Songs That Changed Poland], *Newsweek Polska*, April 18, 2009. <http://www.newsweek.pl/kultura/wiadomosci-kulturalne/dwanascie-piosenek--ktore-zmieniły-polske,38624,1,1.html>.

⁹⁹ The legacy and citation of these socialist era work songs can be observed at points throughout Polish popular culture. For example, the Polish punk band Dezerter’s debut single “Ku przyszłości” [Into the Future] (1983) ironically reproduced the sprightly march tune and inspiring lyrics characteristic of such songs. Dezerter speaks in the idiom of the socialist state, yet their song expresses the opposite of a promise for a brighter future. Using the language of propaganda, Dezerter presents a vision of what this “bright future” has actually become. Though both the members of Dezerter and L.U.C. were born decades after songs like “To Work” were released, they (and their audiences) are nevertheless familiar with the songs and employ them as texts with which/against which their music can work in conversation.

¹⁰⁰ Original: *Budujemy betonowy, nowy dom*

electronic scratching, and fragments of archival audio. Sampled voices speak of the “costly materials,” “faster development of products thanks to which we deliver industrial goods to market,” and “investing a lot in producing sound goods.”¹⁰¹ Another sample promises “full mobilization is growing a new Warsaw.”¹⁰² Though some of this language echoes that of the introductory songs—the idea of “growing a new Warsaw”—the focus and tone has changed. The emphasis is on goods and market exchange—not home and community. L.U.C. stresses this orientation through his manipulation of the samples—looping “to market,” for example, in a repetition that underscores that it is money that drives policy (and the beat of the song). Though the work of rebuilding the country’s cities and economy certainly could be presented as a unifying, patriotic project, in L.U.C.’s treatment, it sounds like an imperative removed from the will of the people—not motivating, but crushing.

It is not only the content of the sampled archival audio that suggests a project removed from the common will of Poles, but also the way in which L.U.C. has incorporated the samples into his track. The sampled voice(s), which are not identified in the track or in the liner notes, provide only short fragments of text—presented by L.U.C. without context or resolution. We are not offered a full expression of an economic plan, but rather a relentless barrage of demands and promises. This depersonalization of the samples’ speaker is augmented by the degree of audio manipulation on the track. Updates on new housing developments and improvements in plumbing become distorted by the stringent sounds of scratching and the looping of segments of the text. This musical treatment further depersonalizes the speakers and audibly throws the authenticity of their statements into question. L.U.C.’s distortion of the audio suggests that its

¹⁰¹ Original: *kosztowy materialy; do szybszego rozwoju tej produkty dzięki czemu dostawy przemysłowo artykułów na rynek; wiele inwestował przysys produktywujące dobro dźwiękowy*

¹⁰² Original: *Pełna mobilizacja rosnie nowa Warszawa*

original message was a distortion of reality. In remixing, he is offering a critical reading of the archive.

The contrast between the cheerfully sung promise of a better future and the industrial grind of the music that follows signals to listeners that the reality of “building a new home” did not unfold as was described. Other than the return of the sample from “Budujemy Nowy Dom,” there are no other vocal melodies in the piece. The community focus of the work songs, evident in their lyrics and choral delivery, is eclipsed in L.U.C.’s track by industrial drive. Joined voices of optimism and national pride give way to individual voices speaking at, not with, the people. “Do Roboty Już Bez IQ” suggests the “new home” being built was depersonalized and the public exploited more for what they could contribute to industrial projects than how they revived Polish community. Signaling this dehumanization after sampling the songs that appealed to national pride in building a new Poland, L.U.C. suggests that such appeals were a lie—or at least a promise unfulfilled. Calls to action were based in national pride and community, but L.U.C. suggests these appeals were a tool of manipulation.

Hyp-Hop(crisy)

As “Do Roboty Już Bez IQ” exposed the divide between promise and reality, the following track, “Everest Hipokryzji” similarly speaks to the vacuity of political promises and the manipulation of national ideals. In this track and the history it references, we see Polishness used as a justification for politics that the record presents as both hypocritical and dangerous. “Everest Hipokryzji,” with its focus on the hypocrisy of the communist party, is built largely around a sample of Władysław Gomułka’s 1956 speech at the VIII Plenum of the Central Committee. The historical arc of the track traces the party’s reaction to Stalin’s death—first

sampling Edward Ochab mourning the Soviet leader in 1953, then moving to Gomułka's address on the excesses of the Stalinist years, before concluding with Prime Minister Józef Cyrankiewicz threatening "provocateurs" who would challenge those in power. As L.U.C. signals with the title of this track, he sees these actions by Polish politicians—commemorating, then denouncing, then replicating Stalinist tactics—as the height of hypocrisy. Their words are empty and inauthentic, and their claims to support the nation are not credible. Like "Do Roboty Już Bez IQ," "Everest Hipokryzji" develops an argument that national ideals are open to manipulation and that when they are politicized and weaponized they lose credibility. L.U.C. presents this hypocrisy, once again, through the contrast of sampled texts. Whereas "Do Roboty Już Bez IQ" revealed the national optimism fostered in work songs to be at odds with the crushing mandates of the state, "Everest Hipokryzji" establishes a dialogue between Gomułka and Cyrankiewicz that suggests Gomułka's claims to speak for Poland were at their core insincere. This reading of history presents L.U.C.'s listeners not only an evaluation of the past, but also a message that "samplings" of history should be evaluated critically, as should those who would have them "remember" in service of politics.

The track opens with a sample of Edward Ochab (a party member at the time who would go on to serve a short term as First Secretary in 1956) memorializing "Comrade Stalin" a few days after his death. L.U.C.'s treatment of Ochab's speech is similar to that of the sampled audio in the preceding track. Cutting the public statement with the frequent injection of the sound of record scratching, L.U.C.'s distortion of the audio suggests a parallel ideological distortion. Having thus positioned the positive portrayal of Stalin as dishonest, L.U.C. transitions to the period after Khrushchev's February 1956 "Secret Speech" denouncing the excesses of Stalinism—an ideological reevaluation that changed the way the Soviet leader was and could be

remembered. In buttressing these texts, L.U.C. foregrounds the degree to which politics determine public memory—heroes can become villains depending on who is telling the story. By the time Gomułka addressed the Central Committee on October 20, 1956 (he would be named First Secretary the following day), he was free to criticize the norms of the period Ochab had praised. In an extended sample, Gomułka speaks to the wrongs done by the state over the past decade:

This system violated democratic principles and the rule of law. With this system human characters and consciences were violated, people were trampled on, their worship was spit on. Slander, lies and falsehood, and even provocations, served as tools for the exercise of power. We came to the tragic facts that innocent people were sent to death. Many others were imprisoned.... We have finished with this system once and for all.¹⁰³

The system Ochab and the voices of the previous track had extolled as fighting for Poland is now recognized as undemocratic and murderous. Here, Gomułka’s argument echoes L.U.C.’s—“lies and falsehood” serve as “tools for the exercise of power.” Gomułka, however, is speaking specifically of politicians under Stalin, while L.U.C. builds a broader case that indicts those across history who “lie” about the past for power in the present. L.U.C.’s sampling of the speech thus serves both to affirm its content and to question Gomułka’s credibility. Yes, Gomułka’s words ring true (both in his moment and more broadly), but in the commentary provided by the piece’s title and the sample’s relationship with the other speeches on the track, L.U.C. suggests that spoken by Gomułka in 1956, they are but another “lie” in service of power. Gomułka’s speech is sampled without significant modulation and an unimposing musical accompaniment. L.U.C. wants us to hear these words clearly, both as a recognition of Stalinist crimes, but also as

¹⁰³ Władysław Gomułka, *Przemówienia: Październik 1956-Wrzesień 1957* [Speeches: October 1956-September 1957] (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1957): 42. Original: *System ten gwałcił zasady demokratyczne i praworządność. Przy tym systemie łamano charaktery i sumienia ludzkie, deptano ludzi, opluwano ich cześć. Oszczerstwo, kłamstwo i fałsz, a nawet prowokacje służyły za narzędzia sprawowania władzy. Doszło i u nas do tragicznych faktów, że niewinnych ludzi posłano na śmierć. Wiele innych więziono nieraz przez długie... Z tym systemem skończyliśmy, względnie kończymy raz na zawsze.*

a record that sounds credible. Presenting Gomułka's words as passably authentic, the challenge to them that follows shows that even narratives "sounding right" can prove to be more complicated.

This challenge comes quickly, as Gomułka's assertion that the undemocratic violence of the previous regime is finished "once and for all" transitions immediately to Cyrankiewicz asserting that "Every provocateur or madman who dares to raise his hand against the people's government, let him be sure that his hand will be chopped off..."¹⁰⁴ Sampling this threat, L.U.C. recasts Gomułka's promise of an end to the violation of human rights as empty. Is this—a system that would destroy those who disagree with it—truly a departure from what had come before?

As the sample of Cyrankiewicz concludes, L.U.C.'s production provides listeners a sense of how Cyrankiewicz came to speak for the state—sampling audio of a vote being taken (no one votes no, only one abstains) followed by heavy reverb and the sounds of sirens. Here, there is a lack of true debate—no voices dare "raise their hand against the government"—and it leads to a soundscape that evokes disharmony. Though the sampled vote offers a record of unanimity, the reverb and siren-like pitches in L.U.C.'s music suggest a less ideal reality. This is most certainly not the bright future promised by the work songs sampled in "Do Roboty Już Bez IQ," nor is it a reformed, humane state pledged by Gomułka. Despite the call for change, L.U.C. suggests undemocratic injustice continued.

¹⁰⁴ "29 czerwca 1956 r. Cyrankiewicz: Każdemu, kto podniesie rękę na władzę, władza tę rękę odrąbie" [29 June 1956 Cyrankiewicz: Anyone, who raises a hand to power, will have it severed], *Interia.pl:NowaHistoria*, June 29, 2014. https://nowahistoria.interia.pl/kartka-z-kalendarza/news-29-czerwca-1956-r-cyrankiewicz-kazdemu-kto-podniesie-reke-na,nId,1447552#utm_source=paste&utm_medium=paste&utm_campaign=chrome. Original: *Każdy prowokator czy szaleniec, który odważy się podnieść rękę przeciw władzy ludowej, niech będzie pewien, że mu tę rękę władza odrąbie...*

While the order in which listeners are exposed to these speeches—Gomułka trumpeting “democratic principles” and Cyrankiewicz threatening to “cut off the hand” of those who would challenge the state—is important to L.U.C.’s case for their hypocrisy, it is not an accurate portrayal of the historical chronology. Cyrankiewicz delivered his radio address on June 29th; Gomułka addressed the Central committee October 20th. L.U.C.’s manipulation of this sequence speaks to the role he plays in producing this narrative. While the archival audio he samples reflects documentary evidence of the past, it is not presented without mediation. Though the contrast between the two speeches might be read as evidence of state hypocrisy regardless of the order in which they are presented, on this track, L.U.C.’s editing and ordering of the samples *create* a sense of dialogue among the speakers and produces meaning for contemporary audiences.

Though L.U.C.’s track is focused on these specific speeches, for listeners who bring with them a knowledge of Polish history, the record’s evaluation of the leaders of this time, particularly Gomułka, might resonate with broader issues of politicians’ claims to Polishness. Polishness was important to Gomułka, and he was known to claim the Party as the rightful successor to continue the legacy established by early Polish kings. He suggested the PRL (which he liked to point out had similar borders to Mieszko’s tenth-century “Poland”) could return Poland to its past glory.¹⁰⁵ With these comparisons, Gomułka drew on Polish history and national pride to legitimize the present regime. He argued that the Party cared about Poland and was the legitimate voice of Polishness—versed in its history and committed to its future.

Gomułka’s claim to speak to Polishness was thus similar in many ways to L.U.C.’s—both rest in a knowledge of the past and an appeal to historical values as guiding the present.

¹⁰⁵ Porter-Szücs, *Poland in the Modern World*, 245-248.

These appeals to the past underscore the degree to which the practice of turning to history to speak to the present is itself an element of Polish culture. Just as L.U.C. retells stories of heroes and villains of the past to speak to his contemporary audience, so too did the figures of his stories draw on earlier narratives in their own times. In questioning Gomułka's sincerity, L.U.C. offers a more general critique of the politicization of the past, suggesting that memory can be misused—that in speaking to the present, the past can lead us astray when given voice by those who would use it to promote their own vision. As this critique emerges in L.U.C.'s work, the parallels between the “sampling” done by those he examines and what he does on this record raise the question of L.U.C.'s position within this lineage of Poles “sampling” Poland.

Conclusion: Hearing History

Nuancing the consideration of authenticity introduced in Chapter One, this chapter focused on the ways histories—both documentary and narrative—are deemed authentic. Again, authenticity proves a nebulous concept as it is used to evaluate the veracity of documents, the soundness of interpretation, and the expression of artists. All of these concerns meet in the practice of hip-hop sampling, which finds artists drawing on sonic archives to tap into musical and social histories in service of contemporary self-expression. Discourse on sampling often distinguishes between the way a sample sounds and the narratives it evokes. I suggest, however, that the sampling done by L.U.C. on his album *39/89 Zrozumieć Polskę* blends these two approaches and highlights the ways in which sonic markers of authenticity (the “dirtiness” of old recordings) and their narrative historical associations (the way they give voice to figures of national mythology) work together in the production of a musical memorial that is both, in L.U.C.'s words, “authentic and magic.”

The sonic archives L.U.C. engages are those of Polskie Radio from the years 1939-1989, but the narrative archive from which he draws is older and largely guided by the Romantic traditions considered in Chapter One. Framing my reading of L.U.C.'s record within scholarship and political discussions of historical memory in Poland and the ways in which it reflects the lasting power of Romantic narratives to shape understanding and experience, I argue that in L.U.C., we see a complex engagement with that tradition. While he draws on familiar Romantic tropes in cultivating the “magic” that animates the emotional response to his archival samples, he does not do so uncritically. Yes, the themes of suffering and sacrifice familiar from Mickiewicz (and projects by the IPN) are present and guide the narrative arc of his record. The use of these narratives to shape politics and behavior, however, becomes a point open to critique, as L.U.C. demonstrates the ways politicians have “sampled” the past in service of projects his record suggests are discordant with Polish values. The voice of Józef Beck exalting Polish “honor” is sampled with little manipulation and presented as a voice from the past (evidenced by the radio static that accompanied his speech) speaking to values L.U.C. still treasures. Samples of communist officials claiming to speak for Poland, however, are fractured and remixed to reveal their hypocrisy. Sampling is used not simply as a way of replaying the past, but of reading it—evaluating its narratives and framing them to speak to the present.

While these issues of historical reception and the role played by sampling in cultivating a performance of authenticity speak broadly to the genre, I also see them speaking specifically to the ways in which contemporary Poles engage their past. Drawing on a reading of Romanticism as a movement that merged myth and history, art and action, I suggest that in Polish hip-hop sampling, artists find a new form with which to perform a familiar approach. Despite L.U.C.'s claims to his record's (archival) authenticity, *39/89 Zrozumieć Polskę* blurs the line between

national mythology, historical record, and contemporary critique. In so doing, he offers an at times critical evaluation of the use of history for political means, while simultaneously engaging the same narratives and practices of historical mythologizing. Complicating the politics and perceptions of authenticity, L.U.C.'s play with sampled audio reveals not only the lasting power of Romantic mythology to breathe life into documents of the past, but also the ways in which that power can be (and has been) used in attempts to wield claims of "authentic Polishness" in service of personal and political gain.

Hip-hop sampling is a tool of memory and reception—fostering a relationship to the past based in fidelity and faith. In "replaying" the past, it opens space for new readings and interpretations, but also reinforces the lasting power of historical narratives. As Chapter Three turns to artists who engage texts, rather than recordings, of figures from Poland's past, we see the relationship between appeals to authenticating narratives and genre expectations of artistic expression shift. This different type of "sampling" exposes both hip-hop and Romantic conceptions of artistic authenticity as tied to originality and inspiration and raises new questions about the ways in which Polish artists cultivate lineage and legitimacy within the genre.

Chapter Three

“Biting” the Bard

Negotiating Authorship, Identity, and Originality

“When it comes to quickness of invention or improvisation I leave [Shakespeare] far behind. More than that, I know of no one who is my equal.” – Adam Mickiewicz¹

“It ain’t hard to tell, I excel and prevail/The mic comes in contact with the third rail/My raps react, they attack the whack just like a maniac/With this, see I’m a brainiac [...]A modern Shakespeare—reincarnated/Brains are elevated, I’m bein/ R rated.” – Nas²

In these words, boasting of “quickness of invention” and raps that “react” and “attack” we see two artists celebrating their creative and improvisatory skills. Nasir “Nas” Jones, an American rapper, and Adam Mickiewicz compare themselves favorably to Shakespeare, for both see themselves as singular artists who can capture an audience with their inspired rhymes. Though their performances are separated by language, culture, and time, the Polish Romantic poet and the American rapper share many of the same ideas about authorship and creativity. Romantic and hip-hop rhetoric on inspiration and performance both elevate individual inspiration and personal expression. In both contexts, improvisers emerge as embodying these qualities—divinely inspired, captivating, and performing the union of word and character. In privileging these skills, both artistic movements signal a perception of the artist that elides the creator and their work, locating authenticity in a melding of creator, content, and performance.

¹ Adam Mickiewicz in Roman Koropeckyj, *Adam Mickiewicz: The Life of a Romantic* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 92.

² Nas, “Nas Will Prevail,” 1991.

Given this image of the poet-performer as necessarily singularly inspired and uniquely capable of expressing both personal and spiritual authenticity, it is not surprising that both hip-hop and Romantic literature often frame the artist as inextricable from the text. Such an understanding seemingly precludes the possibility of an authentic performance that is not of one's own composition. Originality is vaunted, copying is prohibited. After tracing the logic and intersection of Romantic and hip-hop ideas of individuality and creativity, this chapter turns to hip-hop performances that display neither the "quickness of invention" of improvised rhymes, nor the originality of self-penned texts so often demanded by the genre. Instead, the rappers analyzed perform rap renditions of texts written by Mickiewicz.

Whereas earlier chapters argued that drawing on the artistic legacy of Mickiewicz allowed Polish rappers to cultivate credibility within national and genre communities, my analysis here complicates those discussions by considering the dynamics at play when artists move from sampling or referencing Mickiewicz to performing his words. Knowing one's history and sampling tracks of the past may be central to signaling hip-hop credibility, but performing the words of others often has the opposite effect. As I consider the ways in which credibility and creativity are understood, this chapter will address hip-hop discourse on "biting rhymes," placing this prohibition on performing material taken from others into conversation with notions of creativity, originality, and improvisation. Turning then to the "covers" of Mickiewicz's texts, I argue that in their performance of the famous poet's words, these rappers engage Romantic ideas of creativity by elevating Mickiewicz as a sign of "real" inspirations, yet simultaneously perform a type of creativity that is necessarily *not* entirely singular or spontaneous and is thus open to interpretation as a subversion of those very ideals. In so doing, these artists challenge both Romantic and hip-hop notions of creativity, even while replaying the texts that shaped them.

Mickiewicz and the Art of Improvisation



Figure 3.1: Grigoriy Myasoyedov, "Pushkin and his Friends Listen to Mickiewicz in The Salon of Princess Zinaida Volkonskaya" (1907)

In 1823 Adam Mickiewicz's activities with the Philomaths saw him exiled from the territory of Poland and sent to Russia. There, Mickiewicz circulated among Polish artistic circles and met the famous Russia poet Alexander Pushkin.³ In the years that followed, Mickiewicz developed a reputation as a skilled improviser, thrilling audiences with his ability to perform extended extemporaneous verse on any subject suggested by the crowd. Grigoriy Myasoyedov's 1907 painting "Pushkin and his Friends Listen to Mickiewicz in The Salon of Princess Zinaida Volkonskaya" (Figure 3.1) looks back on these performances, positioning the standing Mickiewicz as the center of attention—all eyes on him as he performs, his hand raised in an enunciating gesture. In its depiction of Mickiewicz's audience's response and the Polish poet's

³ For more on Mickiewicz's time in Russia, see: Koropeckyj, *Adam Mickiewicz*; Waclaw Lednicki, "Mickiewicz's Stay in Russia and His Friendship with Pushkin," in *Adam Mickiewicz in World Literature: A Symposium*, ed. Waclaw Lednicki (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1956): 13-104; Ralph E. Matlaw, "Poetry and the Poet in Romantic Society as Reflected in Pushkin's 'Egyptian Nights,'" *The Slavonic and East European Review* 33, no. 80 (December 1954): 102-199; Wiktor Weintraub, "The Problem of Improvisation in Romantic Literature," *Comparative Literature* 16, no. 2 (Spring 1964): 119-137.

proximity to Pushkin, Myasoyedov's painting offers a sense of how his performances in Russia were received and remembered. Though almost all eyes are on the standing Mickiewicz, responses appear varied. Seated directly across the table from Mickiewicz, one listener leans forward, rapt. His companions around the table also look on attentively, albeit with less apparent fascination. Moving away from Mickiewicz, towards the back of the room, guests begin to appear less engaged—a few figures bordering on boredom. Though the general response to Mickiewicz's performance is somewhat mixed, the presence of Pushkin beside him—turned away, but assuming a pose of contemplation—positions the painting as one that affirms Mickiewicz's place within a poetic tradition. In portraying the meeting of the poets, Myasoyedov's work frames Mickiewicz as an improviser who could command a room and had Pushkin's endorsement.⁴ The painting is thus not only a picture of a performance, but itself a visual performance of Mickiewicz's legacy and reputation as a captivating improviser.

The admiration between the artists depicted in Myasoyedov's painting is affirmed in Pushkin's own writing about his interactions with Mickiewicz. Pushkin's 1837 story "Egyptian Nights" recalls Mickiewicz's time in Russia through the fictionalized *improvisatore* who comes from abroad in hopes of making money performing his awe-inspiring improvisations.⁵ Having

⁴ This approach to depicting the relationship between poets—of picturing an established artist passing the baton of creativity—is also evident in Ilya Repin's "Pushkin in Tsarskoe Selo" (1911). It is a painting in which the young Pushkin is shown performing—his gestures mirroring those of Mickiewicz in Myasoyedov's work—while an assembled panel evaluates his verse. Depicted in a red coat that stands out from the crowd is elderly poet Gavrila Derzhavin, leaning forward to give Pushkin his full attention. Like the painting of Pushkin and Mickiewicz, this image of Derzhavin and Pushkin captures a moment that represents the formation of tradition and a conferral of artistic credibility as an established artist offers acceptance and appreciation. While the creation of narratives of Pushkin as a national poet resonates with the reception history of Mickiewicz (Pushkin's name is occasionally mentioned in discussions of Russian rap), this history is beyond the scope of my project. For more on the memory and myth of Pushkin, see: Stephanie Sandler, *Commemorating Pushkin, Russia's Myth of a National Poet* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004); Monika Greenleaf, *Pushkin and Romantic Fashion: Fragment, Elegy, Orient, Irony* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994).

⁵ Alexander Pushkin, "Egyptian Nights," in *Alexander Pushkin: Complete Prose Fiction*, trans. Paul Debreczeny and Walter Arndt, 249-240 (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1983). For more on the relationship between Pushkin and Mickiewicz and its traces in "Egyptian Nights," see: Weintraub, "The Problem of Improvisation in Romantic Literature," *Comparative Literature* 16, no. 2 (Spring 1964): 119-137.

heard the *improvisatore*, the poet Charskii “sat without a word, astonished and moved.”⁶ He cannot believe the ease with which the visiting poet can improvise, an impression Pushkin also had of Mickiewicz. In Pushkin’s tale, much as in Myasoyedov’s painting, Mickiewicz is framed as a figure capable of captivating an audience—including the great Pushkin—by performing improvised poetry with an ease that suggested divine inspiration.

While Mickiewicz’s improvisations are recalled in these creative renderings, the content of his performances was not recorded. Bożena Shallcross notes that the poet did not allow anyone to record his improvisations and that he was “scrupulous in exercising authorial control and acutely aware of the unique quality of his improvised works as a form of art.”⁷ These creations were meant to be ephemeral and necessarily experiential; their value was not so much in the poetic composition of the text, but rather in the performance of inspiration and the moment of connection with the audience.⁸ Shallcross goes on to suggest,

The prevalent view was simply that the poet did not create any great works in the heat of the moment—nor was he expected to. This aside, what so impressed those who witnessed his performances was the charisma and vitality of his actual physical presence—which had less to do with what he said than how he said it; what really mattered, on those occasions was his fiery energy, his expressive gesture, and the ecstatic conviction of his voice. His timing was perfect. All of it he calculated for effect.⁹

This perspective described by Shallcross privileges “charisma”—the poet’s energy, gesture, and timing. “Great works” were not the goal—those would come elsewhere; the point of the improvisation was the performance. The display of the poet’s process of inspiration was privileged over the fruits of that inspiration.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 255.

⁷ Bożena Shallcross, “‘Wondrous Fire’: Adam Mickiewicz’s Pan Tadeusz and the Romantic Improvisation,” *East European Politics and Societies* 9, no. 3 (Fall 1995): 525.

⁸ It is, perhaps, to Mickiewicz’s advantage that these improvisations were largely evaluated based on an immersive experience, rather than technical skill, as one witness lamented that Mickiewicz, “had, alas, the voice of a chicken,” (“A.P.,” quoted in Shallcross, “‘Wondrous Fire,’” 527).

⁹ *Ibid.*, 526.

These criteria offer a point of comparison to contemporary hip-hop rhetoric on improvisation and reflect ideas about authorship and inspiration that have shaped both genres. While contemporary hip-hop fans who claim Mickiewicz as one of their own draw on many aspects of his oeuvre and legacy to justify their claims, his identity as a improviser positions him as a model of poetic inspiration in both his time and today's hip-hop scene.

Audience and Inspiration

“If it doesn't amaze you, it's not freestyle to me.” – Terry “Juice” Parker¹⁰

Terry “Juice” Parker, a Chicago-based rapper known for his freestyling ability, positions the power to “amaze” as a necessary feature of freestyle. In this, Juice frames freestyle—contemporary hip-hop's version of improvised poetic performance—as a social art, one that relies on the interaction of the performer and audience and is born and defined by its reception.¹¹ Writing of improvisation in the Romantic era, Waclaw Lednicki argues “the most characteristic result obtained by a successful improviser is the domination of the audience by his own personality.”¹² Shallcross identifies in Mickiewicz's performances “the transformation of the improviser from a modest person into a powerful personality; a divine origin of inspiration; the intensity of the aesthetic experience conjoined with the transformation of the audience and its spontaneous interaction.”¹³ In all of these accounts, the work of the improviser is framed in terms of the ability to “dominate” an audience. This privileging of audience response, common

¹⁰ *Freestyle: The Art of Rhyme* (dir. Kevin Fitzgerald, 2000).

¹¹ Throughout this chapter, I will use “freestyle” to refer to improvised rap performances. It is worth noting, however, that this is but one understanding of the term within the hip-hop community. While many see freestyling as rapping “off the head” (improvising), some rappers, including Divine Styler, suggest that “freestyling” originally referred to “non-conceptual written rhyme” (*Freestyle*).

¹² Lednicki, “Mickiewicz's Stay in Russia,” 24.

¹³ Shallcross, “Wondrous Fire,” 528.

to both types of performance, positions improvisation as situated in the moment of performance and reliant on a connection between performer and audience.

One way in which improvisation can “amaze” audiences is by cultivating a sense of the relationship between listener and performer as unmediated. Considering how one might explain Mickiewicz’s popularity and acclaim as an improviser (particularly when reviews of his voice and improvised verse were mixed at best), Lednicki suggests it was the immediacy of his performance—the blending of his words with his persona—that so seduced listeners. He writes of “the particular suggestivity of the living word which affects listeners in a way different from that of a formally composed text that is read.”¹⁴ Suggesting, “it is not a question of the results of the act, but of its very process,” Lednicki underscores the value placed on inspiration and performance (that is, on the artist), rather than on the product (the text). Improvised texts are so able to captivate audiences, he suggests, because they appear to offer unmediated access to their creators. In the absence of a composed text, audiences are granted access to the creative process of the artist and are witness to the moment of inspiration.

Mickiewicz himself considered the improviser’s ability to captivate audiences as fundamental to his creative power. Shallcross argues that in his portrayal of Jankiel’s improvised musical performance in *Pan Tadeusz*, Mickiewicz conveys his understanding of the potential for art—particularly improvised art—to move an audience. The scene has a “clear purpose,” she suggests, to demonstrate “the absolute power that the poet was able to achieve with his audience. For Jankiel’s gift of improvisation immediately dominates all his listeners without exception.”¹⁵ In Mickiewicz’s framing of Jankiel as transformed in performance (the

¹⁴ Lednicki, “Mickiewicz’s Stay in Russian,” 23.

¹⁵ Shallcross, “Wondrous Fire,” 529. Shallcross’s article suggests that in Jankiel Mickiewicz composed a literary representation of his own artistic power, thus further suggesting that his description of improvisatory performance reflects his understanding of his own ability to capture an audience.

man himself is “amazed” by his own song and ends his performance flushed and glowing with “youthful ardour”) and holding power of his audience, *Pan Tadeusz* articulates a vision of improvisation that speaks to the affective power of witnessing inspiration.¹⁶

Central to this performance is the improviser’s ability to make their audience feel as though they are witnessing something unique and inspired. Often, this inspiration becomes framed as somehow divine, casting the poet as a conduit between the spiritual and mortal planes. In this conception, the singularity of the artist is further highlighted, as they become the *one* who can communicate their experience—be it divinely inspired or drawn from the world around them. Having witnessed several of Mickiewicz’s performances, Pushkin described the poet as “inspired from above.”¹⁷ His fictionalized improviser is presented as able to access a “divine presence.”¹⁸ Another account of Mickiewicz’s improvisations recalled,

Mickiewicz’s entire persona appeared to be transformed into a superterrestrial being. What an enchanting sound to his voice! What an inconceivable power in his words! The *wieszcz*, the master, the Messenger of God struck with his voice the hearts of his listeners as if with the rod of Aaron, and tears came to their eyes!¹⁹

In all of these descriptions, Mickiewicz is positioned as communicating with the divine—one transformed into a “Messenger of God” in the moment of performance.

In the Romantic imagination, this connection to the divine positions the poet as an “other” to their audience—their access to spiritual sources of inspiration setting them apart. This understanding of the inspired artist as other—of true inspiration and authentic performance as otherworldly and linked to the ancient and foreign—is evident in both Pushkin’s description of his *improvisatore* and Mickiewicz’s framing of Jankiel. Of the *improvisatore*, Pushkin writes,

¹⁶ Adam Mickiewicz, *Pan Tadeusz*, trans. Kenneth R. Mackenzie (New York, NY: Hippocrene Books): 568-569.

¹⁷ Pushkin, quoted in Lednicki, “Mickiewicz’s Stay in Russia,” 22. “Inspired from above” is a description Lednicki notes Pushkin used but twice—to describe Mickiewicz, and again in reference to Peter the Great.

¹⁸ Pushkin, “Egyptian Nights,” 258.

¹⁹ Wojciech Cybulski (1845), quoted in Koropeckyj, *Adam Mickiewicz*, 121.

“the features of his swarthy face were distinctive: his pale high forehead, framed in black locks, his sparkling black eyes, his aquiline nose, and this thick beard, which encircled his sunken tawny cheeks, all revealed the foreigner in him.”²⁰ His is, indeed, a “foreigner,” hailing from Italy—a point of origin to which Pushkin later attributes his “lively gestures,” which are “characteristic of his southern race.”²¹ Though appealing, this foreignness is also framed as somewhat sinister, as the story’s Charskii notes that “if you had met this man in the woods, you would have taken him for a robber; in society, for a political conspirator...”²² Mickiewicz’s Jankiel, repeatedly identified by his Jewishness, is also presented as an other within the community.

In presenting these inspired improvisers as informed by cultures and traditions outside those of the contemporary national conventions, Pushkin and Mickiewicz reflect a Romantic conception of creativity and authenticity that looked towards the “more ‘authentic’ antiquity of Greece.”²³ Monika Greenleaf posits that this understanding of inspiration located the “authentic” as foreign and in the past. It thus framed the poet who “manages to produce a moment of intense, unmediated vision” as performing “a transcendental act of recovery, not just a natural act of observation. He is recovering for mankind what it has lost. The highly visual poetry produced ‘in the spirit of the ancients’ during the Romantic period is thus surrounded by a miraculous aureole, implying a paradisaical unity of spirit and matter once lost and now at least momentarily redeemed.”²⁴ This framing provides insight into Mickiewicz and Pushkin’s conceptions of the

²⁰ Pushkin, “Egyptian Nights,” 251.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 253.

²² *Ibid.*, 251.

²³ Greenleaf, *Pushkin and Romantic Fashion*, 63.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 68.

improvising characters and also speaks to the broader Romantic perception of inspiration as miraculous and spiritual—of turning the poet into a “superterrestrial being.”²⁵

The Romantic association between the artist and the divine returns in hip-hop practices of freestyling. We see it highlighted in hip-hop monikers like those of American rappers Mikal “Divine Styler” Safiyullah and Reco “Supernatural” Price, and Polish rap legend Piotr “Magik” Łuszcz.²⁶ In an statement that begins to explain his chosen name, Supernatural describes freestyling and creativity as “one of the closest energies we have to God. Creativity—being able to do things spontaneously.”²⁷ Here, Supernatural positions the work of the freestyler as close to God (underscoring the presence of the divine in the performance) and importantly frames the sources of that proximity in the practice’s spontaneity. Just as unmediated performance fostered an ecstatic audience reaction, so too does it allow the artist to approach God. Spontaneity, the quality that underlies the work of improvisers and freestylers, is here framed as elemental to the artist’s communication with the divine.²⁸ While the specifics of the divine source of inspiration vary across these accounts, they all share the position that the work of the rapper—particularly in improvisation—brings them into contact with power and inspiration beyond that which is accessible in the everyday. It is a relationship between the artist and the spiritual that echoes that described by Mickiewicz’s audiences and reflects what Shallcross describes as the “romantic notion and the mechanics of divine inspiration.”²⁹ While the style and content of improvised

²⁵ For more on Russian Romantic “Orientalism” and the ways in which Pushkin was represented as a voice of both Russia and the Other, see: Greenleaf, *Pushkin and Romantic Fashion*.

²⁶ The 1996 debut album from Magik’s group, Kaliber 44, was titled *Księga Tajemnicza. Prolog* [Secret Book: Prologue], further cultivating the perception that their performance was tied to otherworldly powers. The “44” of the group’s name similarly conjures a mystical past in its reference to the prophesied “44” of Mickiewicz’s *Forefather’s Eve*—the name of the savior who will finally liberate Poland.

²⁷ *Freestyle*.

²⁸ Drawing on a similar understanding of the spiritual potential of rap, jazz musician Eluard Burt II frames the music as “a stem” on a branch that grows out of the Baptist Church and suggests rappers, like preachers, “get a rhythm going” to communicate the “word of God” (*Freestyle*).

²⁹ Shallcross, ““Wondrous Fire,”” 531.

verse has changed in the years between Mickiewicz and Magik, the sense of the performing artist as a creative medium persists.

This understanding of divine inspiration also importantly links the improvised text with its creator and begins to address the way in which such views of inspiration reflect an understanding of the singular artist and authentic performance. In this case, the contrast between “natural” expression and carefully composed lyrics is not limited to either Romantic poetry or hip-hop; we hear traces of it across the arts and music. The Canadian singer-songwriter Neil Young, for example, described songwriting as “a *release*,” explaining, “[i]t’s not a craft. Crafts usually involve a little bit of training and expertise and you draw on experiences—but if you’re thinking about that while you’re writing, don’t! If I can do it without thinking about it, I’m doing great...*I’m* waiting to see what I’m gonna do next.”³⁰ Though he is not explicitly referencing a divine source of inspiration, his sense that he is somehow removed from the process—“waiting to see” what the moment of inspiration will produce—points to a similar sense of authentic expression as driven by *something* beyond the realm of understanding and control. Hugh Barker and Yuval Taylor cite Young’s understanding of texts flowing from a meeting of individual experience and unconscious inspiration in their investigation of musical authenticity and suggest it reflects “an old Romantic notion” of art. They compare Young’s description of songwriting to Shelly’s call for “unpremeditated art” and Keats’ cry of “O for the Life of Sensations rather than of Thoughts!”³¹ These visions of composing as free from thought—emotional and spiritual,

³⁰ Hugh Barker and Yuval Taylor, *Faking It: The Quest for Authenticity in Popular Music* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007), 212. Mickiewicz, when asked about the significance of ‘44’ in *Dziady*, would sometimes respond, “When I was writing, I knew, but now I no longer do,” (Koropeczyj, *Adam Mickiewicz*, 176). He too, it seems, could be surprised—and even befuddled—by the product of his inspiration.

³¹ Barker and Taylor, *Faking It*, 212.

rather than intellectual—reflect not only a theory of art and creativity, but also an aesthetic preference.

Inspiration and Originality

These views of unmediated inspiration—be it divine or earthly—frame the artist as uniquely positioned to articulate a vision of the world (be it spiritual or material). In the “spontaneity” Supernatural prizes or in Shelly’s “unpremeditated art,” the ability of the artist to express something “true” about their experience captivates audiences and suggests that the artist—the figure who experiences and expresses—must perform their own words, for the words are the product of their individual relationship to the world. Though he frames creativity as rooted in spontaneity, Supernatural acknowledges that it is his observations and opinions that make that spontaneity possible, noting, “Everything I read helps me with my freestyle. Anything I read. All information—news, current events. Whatever. Whatever’s around me, my surroundings. Everything is freestyle.”³² Citing “whatever is around” as essential to the freestyle, Supernatural articulates a vision of the art that positions the performer’s individual experience as an essential source of inspiration and content. If the magic of the poetry is in its spontaneous creation and ability to verbalize the experience of an individual, the words are not transferrable, for they capture the truth of a moment and an individual.

This perspective on the singularity and inspiration of the artist gestures towards poetry as necessarily personal and thus individual. Abiodun Oyewole, a founding member of the proto-hip-hop group The Last Poets, describes his art—one that bridges song and speech—as having “something to say based on your experiences, based on your political understandings” and

³² *Freestyle*.

woven “in such a way that it’s between song and speech, but it’s not a speech and it’s not a song—it’s you becoming you in your poetry.”³³ Here, the “you” emerges from an expression that is both artistic and political, personal and social. In this description, Oyewold puts forth an argument that the work of the rapper is a process of self-discovery and self-expression. An art defined as “you becoming you in your poetry” seems to preclude an artist from performing the poetry of others. In this preoccupation with authenticity and framing of authentic expression as necessarily individual, hip-hop artists offer a contemporary perspective on the same ideals that shaped Romantic poetry.³⁴

Positioning authentic performance as necessarily original, hip-hop enforces this standard of authorship in its “prohibition” of “biting rhymes” and using ghostwriters. Positing that “the most basic ethic is to be original,” Joseph Schloss suggests hip-hop musicians expressed this desire for innovation “in simple terms as ‘No biting.’”³⁵ Schloss defines “biting” as referring “pejoratively to the appropriation of intellectual material from other hip-hop artists.”³⁶ Reflecting on the early days of his career as a rapper, Trevor George “Busta Rhymes” Smith Jr. recalled, “[w]e made a conscious effort not to sound like the other guy, because it was called ‘biting’ and it’s against the law, fundamentally in the traditional day of hip-hop, to ‘bite’

³³ Abiodun Oyewold in *Freestyle*.

³⁴ In the Polish context, this artistic demand for originality became entwined with national political and social concerns (as was so often the case). The nineteenth-century Romantic theorist Maurycy Mochancki was deeply “concerned with the problem of originality, a key issue of all cultures that develop under conditions of strong dependence on foreign thought and foreign norms. He did not desire intellectual isolation of Poland by any means... At the same time, he felt that Polish culture’s great opportunity came from difference and not repetition. Creativity and not imitation” (Jerzy Jedlicki, *Jakiej cywilizacji Polacy potrzebują. Studia z dziejów idei i wyobraźni XIX wieku* (Warsaw: PWN, 1988), 52-53, cited in Skórczewski, “(Polish) Romanticism,” 79). Mochancki saw originality as a particular concern for Poland, for the subjugated nation had turned to its artists for independence.

³⁵ Joseph Schloss, *Making Beats: The Art of Sample-Based Hip-Hop* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2004), 105.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 106. While Schloss’s definition, and the general hip-hop understanding, of biting encompasses “stealing” of beats or rhymes (music or lyrics), I am primarily interested in accusations and practices that involve performing the words of others.

somebody's shit.”³⁷ Originality, Busta Rhymes suggests, was the goal of “traditional hip-hop” and so much as sounding like another artist was “against the law.” Producer “Prince” Paul Houston similarly characterized “stealing someone’s rhymes” as “against the law.”³⁸ Reflecting this sense that “stealing” is “against the law,” journalist Geoff Edgers suggests “If there is a rap jail...it should be reserved for the cheaters and hucksters who took what wasn’t theirs.”³⁹ This is an element of the genre that also exists in Poland, evident in the rap group Paktofonika’s 2000 track “Ja to ja” (I am me), as they rap, “I want to be unusual, unique/Singular and original/If I copy, it’s only at Kinkos/If someone copies someone I consider him a zero/I tell the truth candidly/Because I don’t like when people lie.”⁴⁰ Here, Paktofonika suggest a copy is a “lie” and antithetical to authentic self-expression. In all of these comments, “stealing” the words of others is positioned as a crime against the hip-hop, framing the genre as one fundamentally rooted in the artist performing words that are their own—in being “singular and original.” This elision of author and performer is not surprising in a music that is often discussed as autobiographical—privileging “keeping it real” and “rapping what you know.”⁴¹

It is this interest in preserving an ethos of authenticity in hip-hop that Schloss suggests drives the specific framing of “outlawing” biting. He argues:

³⁷ “Busta Rhymes – on “biting” in hip hop; Chance The Rapper – BURN conference, pt. 2 (Popkiller.pl), posted by Popkiller TV, October 3, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K4tZcktiqIA&t=586s>.

³⁸ In conversation with the author at “Hip Hop in the Golden Age” (Conference hosted by Jacobs School of Music, Indiana University, February 2019).

³⁹ Geoff Edgars, *Walk This Way: Run-DMC, Aerosmith, and the Song that Changed American Music Forever* (New York, NY: Blue Rider Press, 2019), 48.

⁴⁰ Paktofonika, “Ja to ja,” *Kinematografia*, (Gigant Records, 2000). Original: *Pragnę być nietypowy, niepowtarzalny/Jednorazowy i oryginalny/Jeśli kopiuję to tylko w punktach ksero/Gdy ktoś powiela kogoś/Uważam go za zero/Mówię prawdę szczerą/Bo nie lubię gdy ktoś kłamie*

⁴¹ Reflecting on this dynamic, Ice T (whose band Body Count released the track “Cop Killer”) quipped, “If you believe that I’m a cop killer, you believe David Bowie is an astronaut” (Matthew McKinnon, “Hang the MC: Blaming Hip Hop for Violence,” *Cbc.ca*, 2006). This comment reflects the different ways in which listeners understand the relationship between text and author across genres. Bowie’s dreamy rock track “Space Oddity” is, of course, not indicative of its performer’s identity as a spaceman, yet Body Count’s rap-rock “Cop Killer” opened Ice-T to charges that he advocated killing police officers.

...the prohibition against biting reflects an approach to creativity that is similar to that employed in other forms of popular music, with one difference. Since the music is sampled, originality cannot be the ethical “default category.” That is to say, in other forms of music, one is assumed to be creating original work, unless there is evidence to the contrary. In hip-hop, by contrast, one must always be prepared to defend one’s creativity, and this requires standards. The producers’ ethics in general and the “No biting” rule in particular help to promote those standards.⁴²

Because hip-hop is a music so invested in sampling, it demands a more nuanced understanding of originality, as well as a more established standard by which to evaluate and assert it. Being “original,” unlike in other forms, does not simply mean creating something new, but often rather making something new out of existing material. It is the transformation of samples and the degree to which an artist brings their own voice into the use of existing sounds that mark something as authentic, rather than a copy. This dynamic brings discussions of originality to the fore, not only as a core value, but also because it can never be taken for granted.

Despite the strong language used to describe “biting,” it is worth noting that it certainly is not unheard-of in hip-hop and the line between influence and theft is not always clear. In fact, the track that first introduced hip-hop as a recorded music to a wide audience, the Sugarhill Gang’s 1980 “Rapper’s Delight,” is described by Mark Katz as “the most stunning and infamous example of biting in the history of hip-hop.”⁴³ Katz describes the Sugarhill Gang’s Hank Jackson “appropriat[ing] [MC and DJ Grandmaster] Caz’s words—really, his identity.”⁴⁴ Commercial recorded hip-hop, then, was born of “biting” and appropriation, despite the genre’s general celebration of originality. Though “Rapper’s Delight” was influential in shaping the genre into a recorded form, as Loren Kajikawa notes, many accounts instead “highlight the inauthenticity” of the track and “critics have emphasized their lack of credibility....”⁴⁵ This early example of

⁴² Schloss, *Making Beats*, 109.

⁴³ Mark Katz, *Groove Music: The Art and Culture of the Hip-Hop DJ* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 78.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁴⁵ Loren Kajikawa, *Sounding Race in Rap Songs* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2015), 39.

“biting” is quite blatant and speaks both to the long presence of debates about appropriation and credibility with the genre. As the music developed, both aspects would remain, though it would not always be so easy to call an artist on their “theft.”⁴⁶

Much as “biting” is framed as antithetical to artistic credibility, charges of using uncredited “ghostwriters” similarly challenge the artist’s authenticity. While objections to biting and ghostwriting both highlight the centrality of authorship and authenticity in hip-hop, opinions on the practice of performing songs written by others offer a somewhat different perspective on the “crime” of performing another’s work as your own. Unlike “biting,” which implies an act of artistic theft, the attitude against working with songwriters tends to focus on the perceived artifice and the breach of the conventional notion of the artist and author as one in the same.

The rapper O’Shea “Ice Cube” Jackson, reflecting on the use of uncredited songwriters, frames his objections in terms of genre distinctions. He asserts, “I respect rappers more when they write their own lyrics. As far as making a [pop] song, anybody can put a song together. It don’t matter how it come together. All that matters is what’s coming out of the speaker [...] It don’t matter who write it.”⁴⁷ Here, he suggests that in other genres “what’s coming out of the speaker” matters more than who writes it—performer and author emerge as distinct entities. Rap, however, is framed as distinct as Ice Cube insists, “As far as emceeing and being a rapper, you should write your own stuff.”⁴⁸ Making this distinction, Ice Cube articulates a genre-specific convention. Unlike other popular musics, rap, he suggests, requires its artists to compose

⁴⁶ In his discussion of “biting,” Schloss notes that other forms of engaging with existing material—“flipping,” “chopping,” and “looping”—are all acceptable (because, he suggest, they all reflect the artist’s unique engagement in reshaping the older material). The nuance of these discussions speaks to the complex ways in which hip-hop engages the past and asserts authenticity in the present. For more on the specific ways Schloss frames these techniques, see: Schloss, *Making Beats*, 106-109.

⁴⁷ Joe Lynch, “Ice Cube: ‘I Respect Rappers More When They Write Their Own Lyrics,’” *Billboard.com*, August 5, 2015. <https://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/the-juice/6655952/ice-cube-ghostwriting-respect-rappers-write-their-own-lyrics>.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

their own texts. This again privileges the author-performer and frames the value of the music in its expression of the performer's individual experience.⁴⁹

While Ice Cube suggests the problem with using ghostwriters is that it means artists are not responsible for the words they perform, rapper Lupe Fiasco suggests that more significant is the artifice of those who do not acknowledge the role of others in the composition of their rhymes. Weighing in on a public dispute between fellow rappers Drake and Meek Mill over authorship, Lupe Fiasco posted on his Instagram account, "To rappers from a rapper... simply write your own rhymes as much as you can if you are able."⁵⁰ Lupe Fiasco, like Ice Cube, suggests that rappers should write their own rhymes, but also acknowledges that authorship in rap is more complicated. To his imperative to "write your own rhymes," he adds,

Ghostwriting, or borrowing lines, or taking suggestions from the room has always been in rap and will always be in rap. It's nothing to go crazy over or be offended about unless you are someone who postures him or herself on the importance of authenticity and tries to portray that quality to your fans or the public at large. Then we might have a problem.⁵¹

Here, Lupe Fiasco begins by acknowledging that writing rhymes is rarely an entirely solitary project and various "borrowings" have always been a part of hip-hop. Much rap, he suggests, is colored by figures outside the rapper, be they dedicated writers or peers "in the room." Given

⁴⁹ Though hip-hop perhaps foregrounds "who's writing" more than much pop music, Joanna Demers notes that "the mere act of performance has never been considered as creative or original as composition in pop circles." Though the framing of authenticity and originality might find its own voice in hip-hop discourse, it is engaged with evaluations of credibility that extend beyond the genre. See: Joanna Demers, "Sampling as Lineage in Hip-Hop" (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2002), 139.

⁵⁰ https://www.instagram.com/p/5dgq43MKTC/?utm_source=ig_embed The dispute to which Lupe Fiasco is responding began in 2015 when Meek Mill took to Twitter (@MeekMill) to voice his frustration that Drake was not promoting his new release, writing "Stop comparing drake to me too... He don't write his own raps!" He later added that he would have removed a track featuring Drake from his record had he known Drake did not author his own verse, asserting, "I don't trick my fans!" In these posts, Meek Mill denigrates Drake not only for not writing his own rap—suggesting that the use of a ghost writer fundamentally makes Drake inferior to him—but also for "tricking his fans." It is this second charge, that there is something dishonest about performing the words of others, and not acknowledging it, that underscores the degree to which it is taken for a given that a rapper is writing his own rhymes.

⁵¹ Ibid.

the degree to which many rappers claim to speak for their communities and the music's foundational history as a social music that sampled the work of others, Lupe Fiasco's claim here is perhaps not surprising. It does, however, challenge the image of the rapper as a solitary figure who expresses an autonomous identity in their verse.

Though he acknowledges the prevalence of a spectrum of outside voices in the world of rappers, Lupe Fiasco does take issue with artists who “posture...on the importance of authenticity.” This is a critique of the fetishization of authenticity rooted in narrating one's own experience. The problem with using ghostwriters, he argues, is not that it necessarily renders the music inauthentic, but that when their work goes unacknowledged, it makes a public performance of “the solitary artist” inauthentic. Transparency and recognition of one's influences—be they cultural history or individual collaborators—are, in Lupe Fiasco's estimation, key to artistic credibility.

Given these genre conventions around originality, it is perhaps not surprising that great value is placed on the content and composition of rhymes performed by their author. Accusations that a rapper does not write their own rhymes—either because they steal from others or because they hire songwriters—pose a serious threat to the artist's credibility within the genre and offer a reason as to why “cover songs” are rare in rap. Despite an enthusiasm for mining old recordings for audio samples, there is not an equivalent practice of performing old songs. Whereas classical musicians embrace familiar repertoires, blues and jazz musicians frequently perform “standards,” and pop and rock musicians will occasionally release a cover of a popular tune, very few rappers engage in an equivalent performance practice.⁵² The paucity of rap

⁵² Though rare, rap covers do exist. Perhaps the most notable is Run-D.M.C.'s 1986 cover of Aerosmith's 1975 “Walk This Way,” the first rap song to make the Top 5 on *Billboard*. In 1997, a number of prominent rappers contributed tracks to *In the Beginning...There Was Rap*, a compilation of covers of old school hip-hop tracks. Other notable instances include Snoop's cover of Slick Rick and Doug E. Fresh's “La Di Da Di” (1993) and BlackStar's

covers in a music that values sampling and intertextuality speaks to the genre's expectations of the artist and perceptions of creativity (that the artists write their own words), and locates the expertise of rappers in their composition and ability to express *themselves*.⁵³

Though the scarcity of rap covers has yet to be widely explored in hip-hop scholarship, it is a topic often discussed among fan communities online. On a "Rap Genius Archive" forum, in a thread titled, "Why don't people do covers of Rap songs??" a user named "Toothpick Tommy" asks "...why don't rappers cover other rap songs?? I know there's Ghost Writers, but that's not what I'm talking about." Posing an answer to his own question, Toothpick Tommy writes, "I'm thinking it's more along the lines of each rap is sacred and only one person can rap that song and all else would ruin it, somethin like that."⁵⁴ The answers to this query stress that rap is a music in which the artistry is in the writing of personal rhymes, echoing the notion that the poetry is individual and that its value is born of its ability to convey a unique, inspired perspective. Highlighting the unique position of rap as a music that privileges composition over "singing," one user suggests, "cus rap is different, its [sic] all about the lyrics not about the way you sing the lyrics, besides most singers dont [sic] write their own lyrics while rappers do, its [sic] more of a personal statement," while another adds,

remake of Slick Rick's "Children's Story" (1998). Of D.M.C.'s cover of "Walk This Way," Geoff Edgers writes, "Rubin wanted Run and D to do more than rhyme over that beat. They were supposed to do a cover version using Steven Tyler's lyrics. No rapper did that" (7). Even this most famous rap cover, it seems, had to overcome the rappers' reluctance to break with genre conventions and rap words that were not their own. For more on this collaboration, see: Geoff Edgers, *Walk This Way*.

⁵³ Writing on cover songs across popular music genres, Sheldon Schiffer notes that, "while the listener may 'idealize' the myth of original expression from an original performance or recording, a cover song does not really allow for this. The listener usually knows quite consciously that the performer has appropriated and adapted himself to the song with the premise that the listener and re-performer will connect through a common memory of an original recording" (91). Here again, we see the listener's desire to hear "originality" frustrated by the cover version, despite the "original" experience of the "shared memory" heard in performance. For more, see: Sheldon Schiffer, "The Cover Song as Historiography, Marker of Ideological Transformation," in *Play it Again: Cover Songs in Popular Music*, ed. George Plasketes, 77-98 (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2010).

⁵⁴ Toothpick Tommy, comment on "Why don't people do covers of Rap songs??" *Rap Genius Archive* (Accessed February 16, 2019) <https://genius.com/discussions/124127-Why-dont-people-do-covers-of-rap-songs>.

There's no actual talent in covering a rap song, the talent comes from flowing over a beat and writing, if you didnt [sic] write the song then their [sic] is no point in 'covering' it. there's a reason why ghostwriting is highly accepted amongst R&B/Pop artists because the talent comes from the persons [sic] ability to sing, songwriting isnt [sic] really looked at in those genres, i think it should but that's my opinion.⁵⁵

This perspective is repeated across the discussion, as the next commenter notes, "I mean it's good practice or homage but the real talent is writing your own lyrics and creating your own flows," while another suggests, "Cause if you covered a rap song you really can't put your own twist on it. But you can for a rock song or a country song."⁵⁶ In all of these statements, the respondents root their evaluation of rap artists in the text of the track—the "real talent" is in the composition of the verse. In suggesting that there is "no point" in covering a rap song, they articulate the position that there is no creativity in a rap cover—no expressive potential and thus, no point.⁵⁷

In a slightly different interpretation of the aesthetic and norms of the genre, a respondent on a similar online thread suggests "there is a different aesthetic at work here, which is more forgiving of quotation and sampling (within reasonable bounds)—thus making it possible to pay homage to or reword other artists' stuff without doing a complete cover version."⁵⁸ Somewhat

⁵⁵ Odeon and ISmellLeakSmoke, comment on "Why don't people do covers..."

⁵⁶ Slippery Weasel and GentlemanJack, comment on "Why don't people do covers..."

⁵⁷ A thread on a different forum poses a similar question, with the original poster writing, "I find it fascinating that I can't come up with a single example of a Hip-Hop/Rap artist flat out covering another Hip-Hop/Rap artist's song. What is it about Rap that makes it run counter to pretty much every other genre of popular music?" Again, the query is met with responses that "it has to do with the importance placed on 'originality' in ones MC skills" and a suggestion that "the importance of the verses as an extension of the MC's artistry/persona/swagger in the hip-hop culture might put cover versions in danger of looking like copycatting and derivative more so than in other genres." There are a number of other responses in this vein, with "cinemafiend" suggesting "Style and originality is a huge part of hip-hop culture and goes back to the early days of 'battles' between breakdancers, graffers, MC's, and DJ's. There is no reason to do it if it has already been done." "YoungAmerican" notes "In hip-hop, the performance, performer and lyrics are inextricably linked. Rappers create an identity by writing lyrics and performing them. They develop their own distinctive styles/flows/etc, which belong specifically to them." In this, we see echoes of the way in which the rappers cited earlier discussed the process of creating and expressing personal identity through the performance of rap (particularly freestyle). For more, see: "Why aren't there any Rap covers by Rap artists?" *Ask Meta Filter* (Accessed February 18, 2019), <https://ask.metafilter.com/67108/Why-arent-there-any-Rap-covers-by-Rap-artists>.

⁵⁸ googly, comment on "Why aren't there any Rap covers..."

similarly, another user concisely states, “Rap/hip hop artists sample music, they don’t cover it.”⁵⁹ In this line of thinking, the online community of hip-hop fans delineates practices of paying homage to past artists. They agree, as so many artists do, that hip-hop music can and should be open to drawing on voices from the past, but stress that the method of this homage in the genre is sampling and quotation, not covering entire songs. Rappers can draw on sounds or phrases, but not replicate verses or flow. While the motivation behind covers and samples might overlap in their desire to reference and recontextualize the past, the ways in which this is done is largely genre specific.

One way in which we might distinguish between the practices of sampling a song and performing a cover is the openness with which each form signals its borrowing. While an audio sample is aurally marked (when featured, the listener knows that it is coming from a different performer and being employed and manipulated to suit the needs of the hip-hop artist), a cover of a song might not immediately communicate that it is not the original work of the performer. This lack of transparency, coupled with the challenge to the notion that the words of a rap convey the artist’s unique subjectivity, is perhaps what positions performing texts that one has not composed as the mark of a “false rapper.”⁶⁰

As demonstrated in previous chapters, these conversations about originality and artistic authenticity pervade Polish hip-hop discourse and performance. Polish artists and their fans are similarly interested in artistic credibility and their recordings reflect efforts to demonstrate not only their skills, but also their commitment to “keeping it real,” reflecting on their influences, and voicing their own (individual and national) identity and experience. In Mickiewicz, Polish rappers find a figure who has come to represent many of those values and draw on his work to

⁵⁹ saturnine, comment on “Why aren’t there any Rap covers...”

⁶⁰ On “Nas Will Prevail,” Nas raps, “false rappers, you need to write your own song.”

demonstrate their regard for artistic authenticity and inspiration. Yet in using his words as the content of their rhymes, these same artists also challenge those values, requiring listeners to reevaluate their definitions of creativity and originality. Lupe Fiasco ended his post on ghostwriting by stating, “At the end of the day, for better or worse, rap is alive even if some of its greatest moments are written by ghosts.”⁶¹ Turning now to Polish artists who set the words of Poland’s most famous poet to a hip-hop beat, we see the ways in which the ghost of Mickiewicz writes the work of rappers today.

From Improvisation to Interpretation: Rappers Take on Mickiewicz

Comparing freestyling to recording, rapper “Juice” Parker said, “I think, in order for you to be a legend, it’s all on the wax. The freestyle is how you wow a crowd, but the wax is how you become immortal.”⁶² The ability to freestyle, rooted in aweing a crowd in a performance of spontaneous inspiration, might win an artist praise in the moment, but unless they are recording something—putting rhymes “on the wax” of a record—their legacy will fade. Mickiewicz may have wowed crowds with his improvisations, but it is his published work that has made him “immortal.” Schoolchildren across Poland read his work, can recite the opening lines from *Pan Tadeusz*, and recognize Konrad from *Konrad Wallenrod* (and refigured in *Forefathers’ Eve*) as a model of the Romantic hero.⁶³ Immortalized in his verse and enshrined in national mythology, Mickiewicz is very much “alive” today in Poland.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² *Freestyle*.

⁶³ While Mickiewicz’s texts created characters who became synonymous with Polish heroism, they also drew on existing narratives of patriotism, thus enshrining and developing the image of the idealized revolutionary. The titular “Tadeusz” of *Pan Tadeusz*, for example, is named “in memory of [Tadeusz] Kościuszko’s fame,/Since he was born the year of his great fight” (Mickiewicz, *Pan Tadeusz*, 10). In this naming, yet again, reference to the past is used by the artist to create contemporary texts that both honor “where they came from” and speak to the present.

From the comedic “rapping” of Kabaret OT.TO and the faithful homage of YouTube artists to politically and artistically charged adaptations from Trzeci Wymiar and Ryszard “Peja” Andrzejewski, Mickiewicz’s texts have made their way into the works of Polish hip-hop artists numerous times over the last twenty-five years. Though rapping poetic texts is not entirely analogous to covering songs or “biting rhymes,” these hip-hop adaptations are engaged in similar practices of imitation and interpretation and raise resonant questions of creativity and reception. Offering advice on how to avoid charges of “biting,” the American DJ Rectangle suggested, “If you’re going to take someone’s move, I would do it better than that person did it in the first place or slightly change it—put *your* style into it.”⁶⁴ While “doing it better” than Mickiewicz might be a lot to ask, doing it differently is something Polish hip-hop artists are willing to try. The following cases demonstrate the various ways in which rappers “read” Mickiewicz and in so doing, perform the creative work of making the author speak in the present day.

Rap Tadeusz

In 1994, as hip-hop was beginning to become popular in Poland, the musical comedy group Kabaret OT.TO (Ryszard Makowski, Andrzej Piekarczyk, Andrzej Tomanek, Wiesław Tupaczewski) released the song “Rap Tadeusz,” a playful account of memorizing the invocation to Mickiewicz’s *Pan Tadeusz* that incorporated the poet’s words as a chorus. The song’s narrator opens complaining that “My father learned and I have to study a few long pieces from *Pan Tadeusz*.”⁶⁵ Committing Mickiewicz to memory proves a challenge until he hears the music of American rapper MC Hammer playing in the next room and discovers “maybe, you only need

⁶⁴ DJ Rectangle, in Katz, *Groove Music*, 155.

⁶⁵ “Kabaret OT.TO - Rap Tadeusz,” posted by Ala246, September 2, 2010. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kpF9B_TQ5CY. Original: *Uczył się mój ojciec i ja się uczyć muszę/Paru długich kawalków z Pana Tadeusza*

rap.”⁶⁶ Thus inspired, Kabaret OT.TO “raps” the opening lines of the “Invocation” from *Pan Tadeusz* before stepping away from the microphone to perform a stilted version of MC Hammer’s iconic dance moves (Figure 3.2).



Figure 3.2: Kabaret OT.TO's "Hammer Dance" (1994)

Though performed for comedic affect—designed to elicit a laugh at the incongruous pairing of MC Hammer and Adam Mickiewicz—Kabaret OT.TO’s early foray into rapping Mickiewicz reflects trends that reappear as rap grew in popularity and hip-hop artists turned to Mickiewicz as an inspiration and literary source with more seriousness. In “Rap Tadeusz,” we see an early formulation of the lineage between Polish poetry and rap (that is, of rap as poetry set to a beat).⁶⁷ While Kabaret OT.TO’s choice of Mickiewicz’s text does not necessarily reflect the broader political or artistic implications of Peja or Trzeci Wymiar’s later recordings of

⁶⁶ Original: *Nagle słyszę za ścianą MC Hammer, trzeba trafić/I odkryłem, że można, że tylko trzeba rapu*

⁶⁷ This understanding of poetry and music as adjacent forms is not unique to hip-hop, but rather characteristic of oral storytelling traditions that date back centuries. Mickiewicz himself was known to set his words to music and often requested his favorite aria from *The Marriage of Figaro* be performed to accompany his improvisations (Koropeczyj, *Adam Mickiewicz*, 91).

Mickiewicz, it does reveal Mickiewicz's ubiquity in Poland. Like the student and his father mentioned in the track, many Polish students are required to learn passages of *Pan Tadeusz* and, as suggested by Kabaret OT.TO, many turn to rap to memorize the verse.

Perhaps inspired by Kabaret OT.TO, a number of rappers have shared their versions of the "Invocation" from *Pan Tadeusz* to YouTube and found enthusiastic listeners. Siwy's 2012 video has 219,886 views, Żerek Dreszcz's 2014 recording has 99,306 views, PTI (Pan Tysiąca Imion)'s 2016 version has 64,707 views, Maximus's (2012) has 45,016, and SkipeR & Kenny's (2014) has 8,298.⁶⁸ Though varying in style, all of these recordings offer faithful renditions of Mickiewicz's work. Siwy set his recording to a moody black and white video that put viewers in the driver's seat of a car on a country road in winter.⁶⁹ PTI appears onscreen in his sepia-toned clip—a teenager dressed in a hoodie and ball cap rapping on the steps of a monument to Polish airmen in World War II located in Warsaw's Pole Mokotowskie. The Maximus track is accompanied only by a still image of a scroll featuring Mickiewicz's text. In all of these examples, history is signaled visually—videos are cast in sepia and black and white, or focused on images of antique texts.⁷⁰ We see elements found elsewhere to signify authenticity, markers

⁶⁸ "Inwokacja – Pan Tadeusz hip hop wersja by siwy," posted by Pane Wino, February 2, 2012; "Żerek (Dreszcz) – Inwokacja (Pan Tadeusz)," posted by Dreszcz, February 24, 2014; "PTI – Inwokacja (Prod.EpiKali)," posted by PanTysiącaImion official, April 13, 2016; "Maximus-Inwokacja(Pan Tadeusz)-Hip Hop/Rap Wersja," posted by MaximusRecordsPL, September 27, 2012; "Inwokacja Pan Tadeusz Hip Hop/Rap by SkipeR & Kenny," posted by S&K_Studio, October 12, 2014.

⁶⁹ Interestingly, the video appears to have been filmed in the UK and thus might be read to reflect a continuation of the dislocation that colored Mickiewicz's *Pan Tadeusz*. While Polish migration to the UK is largely based on economic forces, rather than the political conditions that led Mickiewicz to Paris, it nevertheless leads Poles away from a perceived homeland and lends itself to nostalgic reflection. Perhaps like Mickiewicz who "sees thy beauty whole, because I yearn for thee," Siwy's version of Mickiewicz expresses a yearning for Poland that is "lost."

⁷⁰ Describing *Pan Tadeusz*, Miłosz writes, "In it Mickiewicz returned to the country of his childhood and adolescence—Lithuania of 1811/1812. Because the world he was describing was gone forever, he could achieve a perfect distance, visible in the kind of humor which permeates the lines," (*The History of Polish Literature* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1983), 227). By including visual signs of age in their videos, these YouTube videos might be similarly reflecting on a time now "gone forever."

of history alongside solemn and solitary performers, yet there is no accompanying performance of something “personal.”

While these videos might be read in part as reflecting notions of authenticity and literary heritage, the vast majority of those who comment on them suggest their main value is as learning aids. Viewers of PTI’s video thank the young rapper, leaving comments like, “thanks to you I learned the Invocation in 2 hours as I listened and rapped”⁷¹ and “I learned the Invocation in 2-3 hours thanks to you.”⁷² Whether or not individual and artistic expression was the goal of these videos, those who take time to comment on them are not reading them as such. Though they may not be facing charges for “biting rhymes,” they are also not praised for their originality. These cases thus illustrate the musical potential of Mickiewicz’s verse, while also speaking to the ways in which a hip-hop text marked as “unoriginal” might be evaluated with different criteria than those thought to express the author’s own subjectivity.

“Our native art”: *Trzeci Wymiar*’s “Ordon’s Redoubt”

The prevalence of rap renditions of the “Invocation” from *Pan Tadeusz* suggests that the poet’s legacy is thriving, yet in 2009 the hip-hop producers behind White House Records insisted that Poland had failed to promote its “native artists” in popular culture. Łukasz “L.A.” Laskowski and Tomasz “Magiera” Janiszewski set out to remedy this with *Poeci [Poets]*, a compilation of Polish rappers performing texts by noted Polish authors.⁷³ Their record, Laskowski and Janiszewski claimed, featured “the texts of outstanding Polish poets set to music

⁷¹ karol0220, comment on “PTI – Inwokacja.” Original: *dzięki Tobie nauczyłem się inwokacji w 2 godziny jak słuchałem i rapowałem :D wielkie dzięki :D*

⁷² beatboxer269, comment on “PTI – Inwokacja.” Original: *Dzięki ci bardzo :D nauczyłem się inwokacji 2-3 godzinki dzięki tobie :D*

⁷³ *Poeci [Poets]*, Warner Music Poland, 2009.

by the best Polish hip hop producers and performed by leaders of the national scene.”⁷⁴ While this claim to be produced by “the best Polish producers”—one made by the producers—might be taken as self-promotion, the record did indeed offer listeners selections from canonical Polish authors performed by many of the big names of Polish hip-hop, including L.U.C. and Peja. Alongside Mickiewicz, the record featured texts from Julian Tuwim, Stanisław Wyspiański (performed by Wojciech “Sokół” Sosnowski, the great-great-grandson of the author), Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, Adam Asnyk, Ignacy Krasicki, Kazimierz Prezerwa-Tetmajer, Jacek Kaczmarski, Jan Lechoń, Ryszard Danecki, and Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński. If this list reads as a sort of Polish Literature 101, it is because the producers intended it to be an introduction to, and celebration of, Polish artists.

Upon the release of the record, Laskowski and Janiszewski sent copies to every member of the Polish Sejm (the lower house of parliament) along with an open letter lamenting the loss of respect for Polish literature and “native music.” Of the situation in Poland, they wrote:

For a long time, the media has had no place for ambitious, alternative, and above all, Polish music. [...] Other countries have long taken care to respect native musical and literary artists. Listening to this album, please realize, that what you hear is disappearing from our lives slowly, but systematically. By doing nothing about it, we all agree to let our native art go deep underground.⁷⁵

The act of sending the album and letter to members of the Sejm is itself political, and the framing of the project elucidates the producers’ position. Poland, they argue, has failed to respect and preserve both Polish literature and “native music.” Their project, this suggests, is a counter to

⁷⁴ “‘Poeci’ – list otwarty do biur poselskich,” *Hip-Hop.pl*, June 26, 2009. <https://www.hip-hop.pl/news/projector.php?id=1246002469>. Original: *Zachęcamy do przesłuchania tekstów wybitnych polskich poetów do muzyki najlepszych polskich producentów hip hopowych a w wykonaniu czołówki krajowej sceny.*

⁷⁵ “‘Poeci’ – list otwarty.” Original: *Już dawno bowiem w mediach nie ma miejsca na ambitną, alternatywną, a przede wszystkim polską muzykę. [...] Inne kraje już dawno o to zadbały, aby szanować rodzimych twórców muzycznych i literackich. Słuchając tego albumu, proszę uświadomić sobie, że to co Państwo słyszają, znika z naszego życia powoli acz systematycznie. Nie robiąc nic w tym kierunku, zgadzamy się wszyscy, aby nasza rodzima sztuka zeszła do głębokiego podziemia.*

both and will encourage listeners to appreciate their “native” arts.⁷⁶ It is thus framed as a nationalist project—one with the political and artistic aim of preserving Polishness in culture.

Given this stated motive, it is not surprising that Mickiewicz was among the poets featured on the album. In selecting his poem “Reduta Ordon” (“Ordon’s Redoubt”) for their text, the Wałbrzych-based hip-hop group Trzeci Wymiar (Third Dimension) not only signals their dedication to preventing the Polish poet from “going underground,” but also the vision of Polishness they wish to preserve. Like Peja and L.U.C., Trzeci Wymiar are not primarily known as patriotic rappers, nor do their most famous tracks directly reflect on national history or identity. With “Reduta Ordon,” however, they reanimate Mickiewicz’s verse as a powerful assertion of Polish strength and righteousness. In his analysis of “biting,” Schloss notes an exception for texts taken from other artists and performed as a “tribute or homage.”⁷⁷ In their performance of “Reduta Ordon,” Trzeci Wymiar offer a homage, while also framing the piece anew.

Written in 1832, “Ordon’s Redoubt” chronicled an episode from the November Uprising against Russian partition (1830-1831). Though Mickiewicz did not fight in the Uprising (nor was he in Poland at the time), he wrote a number of poems based on stories told to him by his friends who were involved in the conflict.⁷⁸ “Reduta Ordon” is based on the story of Juliusz

⁷⁶ Just as any concept of “Polish” or “native” art should be interrogated, this example of producers working in a genre with roots in the United States—not Poland—might make us question what is meant by “Polish” in this case.

⁷⁷ Schloss, *Making Beats*, 204.

⁷⁸ Koropecy notes that, “although in the case of ‘Ordon’s Redoubt’ he was more than willing to give credit where credit was due, in writing these poems Mickiewicz was also appropriating his friends’ experiences for his own artistic—and psychological—purposes,” and cites a veteran of the Uprising who responded to Mickiewicz’s critique of Polish forces, “Mr. Mickiewicz is right, we did not meet our mandate; we should have all died, so that only Mr. Mickiewicz could remain and describe everything in verse” (*Adam Mickiewicz*, 177). In the frustration expressed by Mickiewicz’s contemporary at the poet’s critique, we hear a challenge to Mickiewicz’s standing as the voice of this struggle. Though performing Mickiewicz today might signify an engagement with “authentic” Polishness, perhaps the reality is more complicated, as Mickiewicz himself was/is not an unimpeachable voice of Poland’s struggles—he too faced critique for “rhyming” about things he had not experienced.

Konstanty Ordon, commander of a redoubt during the Battle of Warsaw in September 1831. Outmanned by Russian forces, one of the defenders of the redoubt blew it up before it could be conquered. Though later evidence suggests Ordon was not responsible for the explosion (he, in fact, survived the battle), the act was originally attributed to him, and in Mickiewicz's text he becomes a symbol of Polish sacrifice in the face of looming domination. Dariusz Skórczewski notes that in Mickiewicz's treatment, Ordon joins other Romantic literary heroes "as allegories of Romantic sacrifice and as emblematic figures in a victimizing discourse."⁷⁹ In choosing to perform this piece, *Trzeci Wymiar* exhibits an interest in reviving these familiar narratives and linking them to a vision of Polishness in the present.

In their project of using a text from Mickiewicz to craft a track that speaks to the present, *Trzeci Wymiar* exemplifies the way in which such appropriation can move beyond imitation and instead display innovation. This is a dynamic Sheldon Schiffer considers in his work on cover songs and his analysis of the ways in which they are more than "copies." Noting that even the act of choosing a song to cover is "an assertion of ideology," he argues that "the selection of songs to re-perform and re-record, and the elective process of what music and extra-musical elements to preserve, alter, augment or delete, all are signifying elements in the construction of meaning around and in a re-performed and re-recorded song."⁸⁰ Here, Schiffer details the ways in which the meaning of texts is malleable and shaped by the context of their presentation and reception. Framing the formal choices of the performer as "signifying elements," he underscores the cover artist's power to produce original meaning from an existing text.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Dariusz Skórczewski, "(Polish) Romanticism: From Canon to Agon," in *Being Poland: A New History of Polish Literature and Culture since 1918*, eds. Tamara Trojanowska, Joanna Niżyńska, Przemysław Czapliński (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), 82.

⁸⁰ Schiffer, "The Cover Song as Historiography," 77.

⁸¹ In *The Act of Reading*, Wolfgang Iser posits, "a literary text can only produce a response when it is read, it is virtually impossible to describe this response without also analyzing the reading process" (ix). He later adds that the message of a literary work is transmitted as "the reader 'receives' it by composing it" (21). In foregrounding the

This work of shaping the meaning of text through reception and performance is not only the work of individual artists, but also a reflection of broader cultural memory and reception. Despite claims from Polish rappers that Mickiewicz's words are "timeless," they are both the product of their time and subject to the reevaluation that comes with the passage of time and recontextualization. In deciding to perform the martial "Reduta Ordon," rather than the wistful "Invocation" of *Pan Tadeusz*, Trzeci Wymiar signal a reading of Mickiewiczian Polishness as being defined by messianic sacrifice. Though they are not rapping their own words, Trzeci Wymiar are nevertheless performing their own perspective on contemporary Polishness.

A definition of "Poland" comes early in the track. After a brief introduction of sparse instrumentation, Krzysztof "Pork" Borkusz enters, rapping the first stanza of Mickiewicz's text, which describes the "long black column" of Russian soldiers who "like vultures" approach with "black banners [that] lead on to death."⁸² Picking up the next verse, Pork's bandmate Patrycjusz "Nullo" Kochanowski, describes the "white" and "light" Polish redoubt that stands against the encroachment of the dark foe.⁸³ The contrast between Polish and Russian forces, striking in Mickiewicz's play with dark and light, is amplified in the transition in vocals between Pork and Nullo. This contrast, written by Mickiewicz and performed by the band, frames the conflict in terms of good and evil, painting Poland as the innocent and heroic victim of the irrepressible march of tyranny from the east. This is a familiar narrative from Mickiewicz and one frequently interpolated into contemporary discussions of Polish memory and politics. Revisiting it in this

work of the reader, a "composer" of meaning through their reading, Iser similarly positions the meaning of literary texts as essentially shaped in their reception. We might consider cover songs as a sort of musical reading, making audible the reception and meaning-making process described here. For more, see: Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980).

⁸² Trzeci Wymiar, "Reduta Ordon" [Ordon's Redoubt], *Poeci*. Original: *Długą czarną kolumną, jako lawa błota, /Nasypana iskrami bagnarów. Jak sępy/Czarne chorągwie na śmierć prowadzą zastępy*

⁸³ Original: *Przeciw nim sterczy biała, wąska, zaostrzona, /Jak głaz bodzący morze, reduta Ordon. /Sześć tylko miała armat; wciąż dymią i świecą*

(re)performance of “Reduta Ordona,” Trzeci Wymiar construct a new layer of meaning around the text, framing it as a relevant framework to be expressed in “native” art.

The following verse, delivered by the group’s third member Michał “Szad” Baryła, textually and sonically conveys the calm and chaos of battle. As he describes flying bullets and the “roar of a bull before battle,” Szad’s more relaxed flow and the absence of the strong percussive beat that drove Nullo’s verse create a sense of cessation before, and anticipation of, the coming chaos. This calm will not last; and as Szad delivers the line “the most terrible is not seen, but you can hear the sound,” the driving beat returns. Whereas Pork and Nullo’s verses introduced the warring sides, Szad’s brings the listeners into the fight as Mickiewicz’s words and the rap group’s music evoke the rhythms of battle. Creating a soundscape that musically immerses listeners in the world of the text, Trzeci Wymiar’s track again suggests that the world of the song is one that (in some ways) can still be experienced today—it is made visceral and present.

While the material they perform echoes familiar tropes of Polish sacrifice, Trzeci Wymiar’s choice not to include the final two stanzas of Mickiewicz’s poem shifts the focus of the work from prophesied divine justice to the dynamics of clashing nations. Unlike Mickiewicz, who ends with the promise that “God will blow up this earth, like his own redoubt” to “punish the tribe of victors poisoned by crime,” Trzeci Wymiar conclude without the guarantee of cosmic retribution.⁸⁴ Their piece, rather, ends with death, a vision of “vermin on a fresh corpse.”⁸⁵ As Schiffer noted, the decision of what to delete is itself an assertion of authorial perspective; and in eliminating Mickiewicz’s redemptive justice, Trzeci Wymiar

⁸⁴ Adam Mickiewicz, “Reduta Ordona” [Ordon’s Redoubt], <https://literat.ug.edu.pl/amwiersz/0060.htm>. Original: *Karząc plemię zwycięzców zbrodniami zatrute, / Bóg wysadzi tę ziemię, jak on swą redutę.*

⁸⁵ Original: *Już lazła, jak robactwo na świeżego trupa.*

position the narrative as unresolved and deny the ultimate messianic vision offered by Mickiewicz's text. As such, they both draw and deviate from the original. Mickiewicz gives them the material to tell a story of struggle—both in this text and the mythology of his life—yet they also are able to cultivate a somewhat original meaning from that story.⁸⁶ We see here something akin to the logic of sampling, where the source of creativity is found in the ability to create a “spark” in dialogue between an original text and a new composition. This is not a carbon copy, but rather a contemporary adaptation.

The Great Interpretation: Peja's “Great Improvisation”

As discussed in Chapter One, Peja is no stranger to drawing on the tropes of Polish sacrifice and suffering that characterize Trzeci Wymiar's cover of Mickiewicz. This image of the poet as a political figure, however, is not the only way in which Mickiewicz offers symbolic capital to contemporary hip-hop. Drawing on Mickiewicz's reputation as an inspired poet, rather than as a political figure, Peja's 2015 cover of “Wielka Improwizacja” (“The Great Improvisation”) from *Dziady (Forefathers' Eve)* reflects Mickiewicz's legacy as a *wieszcz* and

⁸⁶ Though Trzeci Wymiar primarily engage with a perspective on Mickiewicz that frames his as a national voice of Polish struggle for freedom, that is not the only way in which the poet can be used—their framing of him in this way, rather, reflects one facet of the memory of the poet. Here, selection both affects and is affected by a reading of Mickiewicz that remembers him through the lens of Romantic messianism. Considering the ways in which narratives of an author color covers of their texts, Schiffer suggests, “a cover song is not only understood by its musical content, but also by the context of other forms of cultural expression that indicate even more clearly a song's association with specific societal strains, namely politics and its representation, as well as fashion and style, as they indicate affiliation with subculture, generation and class” (77). Writing of literature in *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, Jausss similarly notes that the “text evokes for the reader the horizon of expectations and rules familiar from earlier texts” (23) and that “literary work is received and judged against the background of other works for art as well as against the background of the everyday experience of life” (41). In Trzeci Wymiar's “Reduta Ordon,” we see meaning created in the meeting of authorial mythos and genre expectation, as narratives of Mickiewicz as a patriotic voice of Polish struggle blend with hip-hop traditions of giving voice to oppressed populations. The choice of “Reduta Ordon” allows Trzeci Wymiar to amplify this resonance (in a way the “Invocation” from *Pan Tadeusz* would not have) and signals to the reader the character of “background” knowledge on which they are drawing in cultivating a contemporary resonance with the poem.

speaks to a contemporary reading of the transformative power of poetry.⁸⁷ Replaying the Romantic paradigm of the divinely inspired poet, Peja's "Wielka Improwizacja" also challenges it, offering a vision of how one might "keep it real" despite rapping someone else's words.

Dziady is sprawling drama—consisting of four parts (one of which is unfinished) loosely connected by themes of summoning spirits during the pagan rites of forefathers' eve. Czesław Miłosz described it as "a kind of national sacred play" and noted its performance was "occasionally forbidden by censorship because of its emotional impact upon the audience."⁸⁸ "The Great Improvisation" appears in Part III of the drama, composed after the failure of the November Uprising that also inspired "Reduta Ordoña." In a soaring monologue from his prison cell, the poet Konrad reproaches God for letting Poles suffer and, boasting of his poetry's power, asserts that he will fight for the freedom of the nation. He is, Norman Davies suggests, "the arch-advocate of Romanticism, of spiritual values."⁸⁹

Dziady's Konrad is also a voice of political values, and it was the work's indictment of Russian oppression that made performance of the drama, particularly Part III, powerful and provocative. Recalling the opening night of the first performance of *Dziady* following World War II, Jan Kott described an emotional scene:

At the first night of *Forefathers' Eve* people cried – in the orchestra as well as in the balcony. [...] I know of no other drama in the whole of world literature that could move an audience after a hundred and twenty-five years as *Forefathers' Eve* did. *Forefathers' Eve* struck home with greater force than any play written since the war, in its historical aspect as well as in its contemporary relevance... Time did not consume the play's modern spirit, and it still haunts us today. There is dynamite in *Forefathers' Eve*, and it exploded on the first night.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ The recording was commissioned by the National Center for Culture (Narodowe Centrum Kultury, NCK) and released digitally.

⁸⁸ Miłosz, *The History of Polish Literature*, 223.

⁸⁹ Norman Davies, *Heart of Europe: The Past in Poland's Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 191.

⁹⁰ Jan Kott, quoted in Harold B. Segel, "Introduction," in *Polish Romantic Drama: Three Plays in English Translation*, ed. Harold B. Segel (Amsterdam: OPA, 1997), 39.

Kott's account of *Dziady*'s timeless spirit and its lasting ability to speak to Polish audiences perhaps explains why its postwar debut did not come until 1955, as the work's patriotic resonance had made it "virtually impossible to stage" in a time of repressive Stalinist policies.⁹¹ Though the 1955 performance may have sparked emotions, it was a 1968 staging of the play that undeniably exposed the explosive potential of Mickiewicz's work. Under the direction of Kazimierz Dejmek, a new production of *Dziady* premiered at the National Theater in Warsaw. Polish audiences saw in the production a highlighting of "anti-Russian elements" and "applauded at the recitation of the passages depicting Russian tyranny."⁹² The response troubled authorities, who banned further performances of the show on January 30, 1968. In response to the cancellation, students gathered under the statue of Mickiewicz near the University of Warsaw, chanting "We want Mickiewicz!"⁹³ Adam Michnik recalls the protests as crystalizing a sense of Polishness, reflecting that "[e]verything that had been abstract and theoretical until then was suddenly filling with Polish blood. [...] And for the first time I told myself, I'm Polish."⁹⁴ In the midst of protests, Michnik and a fellow student were expelled from university—a move that sparked further unrest, which was violently suppressed. The political, and distinctly Polish, sentiment that was born of the "March '68" protests—and that had Mickiewicz as its symbolic and spiritual center—was formative for a generation of activists. Mickiewicz, once again, gave voice to the struggle for Polish independence.⁹⁵

⁹¹ Segel, "Introduction," 39.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 42.

⁹³ Marcin Zaremna, "1968 in Poland: The Rebellion on the Other Side of the Looking Glass," trans. Maya Latynski, *The American Historical Review* 123, no. 3 (June 2018), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/123.3.769>.

⁹⁴ Adam Michnik, *Letters from Freedom: Post-Cold War Realities and Perspectives*, ed. Irena Grudziński Gross (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), 43.

⁹⁵ For more on the 1968 production of *Dziady* and the political repercussions of its cancellation, see: Zaremna, "1968 in Poland"; Michnik, *Letters from Freedom*; "The Aftermath of *Dziady*," *Minerva* 6, no. 4 (June 1968): 759-769.

Though the political potential of the text is often the focus on contemporary adaptations of *Dziady*, press materials accompanying Peja's version of "Wielka Improwizacja" often instead focus on the "improvisatory" character of the text, suggesting it makes the verse particularly appropriate for a rap cover, as improvisation (or freestyling) is also valued in hip-hop. An article for an online publication in Peja's native Poznań noted, "Mickiewicz wrote Konrad's long monologue in one night, which in a way brings him closer to hip-hop freestyle, which involves rhymes on the spot while performing a song."⁹⁶ The National Center for Culture (*Narodowe Centrum Kultury*, NCK), who commissioned the recording, similarly noted,

While contemporary poetry clearly differs from rap, it is a bit different with Mickiewicz's output. The bard was famous for poems characterized by the fluency of the spoken text. The title, "The Great Improvisation" is not accidental—according to numerous sources, Mickiewicz wrote the long monologue in one night. Such a feat is possible, as Mickiewicz was famous for his ability to improvise (that is, to compose poems "live").⁹⁷

This sentiment—that the relationship between Peja and Mickiewicz makes sense because their respective genres share an appreciation of improvisation—is repeated in much of the press surrounding the release of the track and echoes both nineteenth-century and contemporary discourse that celebrates Mickiewicz's improvisatory skills.

The foregrounding of shared improvisatory skills might also be read as an attempt to foster an association between the social role and authentic artistry of Mickiewicz and Peja. As

⁹⁶ "Czym śpiewak dla ludzi? Rychu Peja w 'Wielkiej Improwizacji'" [What is the Singer for the People? Rychu Peja's "Great Improvisation"], *Naszemiasto.Poznań*, January 22, 2015. <http://poznan.naszemiasto.pl/artukul/czym-spiewak-dla-ludzi-rychu-peja-w-wielkiej-improwizacji,3252796,art,t,id,tm.html>. Original: *Mickiewicz napisał obszerny monolog Konrada w ciągu jednej nocy, co poniekąd zbliża go do hip-hopowego freestyle'u, polegającego na wymyślaniu rymów na poczekaniu, podczas wykonywania utworu.*

⁹⁷ "Wielka Improwizacja" w interpretacji Ryszarda 'Peji' Andrzejewskiego" ["The Great Improvisation" interpreted by Ryszard "Peja" Andrzejewski], *Narodowe Centrum Kultury*, January 21, 2015. <https://nck.pl/projekty-kulturalne/projekty/eneczek-radio/aktualnosci/-wielka-improwizacja-w-interpretacji-ryszarda-peji-andrzejewskiego>. Original: *O ile współczesna poezja wyraźnie różni się rapu, to z twórczością Mickiewicza jest trochę inaczej. Wieszcz słyzył z tego, że jego wiersze charakteryzowały się płynnością tekstu mówionego. Nieprzypadkowa jest również nazwa Wielkiej Improwizacji: według licznych przekazów Mickiewicz napisał obszerny monolog Konrada w ciągu jednej nocy. Jest to bardzo prawdopodobne, bowiem Mickiewicz słyzył z umiejętności improwizowania (czyli układania wierszy „na żywo”).*

noted earlier, both Romantic poetry and hip-hop find value in seemingly unmediated performances of inspiration that speak to the community. The poet, Maurycy Mochnacki suggested in 1825, has a “passion” that “can encompass, permeate and grasp.”⁹⁸ The unique quality of the artist—a quality these articles would have audiences believe is shared by Mickiewicz and Peja—allows them to spontaneously and insightfully produce verse that “grasps” reality, thus positioning them both as artists and political actors.⁹⁹ In this formulation, improvisation emerges as a natural form with which the inspired national artist would articulate their vision of themselves and their nation.

This foregrounding of improvisation across time is also evident among listeners, many of whom draw a connection between Peja and Mickiewicz based on the artists’ shared engagement in genres where improvisation was valued. Comments on Peja’s “Wielka Improwizacja,” posted to his official YouTube channel, suggest, “this is proof that rappers are the poets of the 21st century”¹⁰⁰ or “this only strengthens the conviction that Rappers are contemporary poets.”¹⁰¹ Many identify freestyling as the “proof” that Romantic poets and contemporary rappers are part of the same artistic lineage, one writing, “I have always said that if the poets of that time had the technique to do it, they would have recorded beats and organized freestyle battles. See I wasn’t wrong :)),”¹⁰² and another responding, “Laughing, but the first known freestyle battle was

⁹⁸ Maurycy Mochnacki, “Niektóre uwagi nad poezją romantyczną z powodu rozpraw Jana Sniadeckiego *O pismach klasycznych i romantycznych*,” cited in Dariusz Skórczewski, “(Polish) Romanticism,” 79.

⁹⁹ Such a merging of political figure and artist is familiar from the history of Romanticism, analyzed, for example in Janion *Gorączka Romantyczna*. As Beth Holmgren notes, Polish Romanticism “assayed a remarkable fusion of art and life, cultural expression and national service” (“Witold Gombrowicz within the Wieszcz Tradition,” *The Slavic and East European Journal* 33, no. 4 (Winter, 1989), 556).

¹⁰⁰ S-weK, comment on “RPS/DJ. Zel ‘Wielka Improwizacja,’” posted by Pejaslumsattack, January 22, 2015. Original: *I to jest dowód, że raperzy są poetami XXI wieku.*

¹⁰¹ ZieleAkroS16, comment on “RPS/DJ. Zel ‘Wielka Improwizacja.’” Original: *To tylko umacnia w przekonaniu, że Raperzy to współcześni poeci*

¹⁰² ZieluWaw, comment on “RPS/DJ. Zel ‘Wielka Improwizacja.’” Original: *Od zawsze mówiłem, że gdyby poetom w tamtych czasach pozwalała na to technika, to nagrywaliby pod bity i organizowaliby walki freestyleowe. Widać, nie myliłem się :))*

between Mickiewicz and Słowacki ;). They supposedly recited verse for a few hours :D.”¹⁰³

This comparison of rappers to poets is quite common and takes place in hip-hop discourse even when the performance in question is not based on earlier texts (as seen in previous chapters). It is worth highlighting here, however, that these comments on Peja’s version of Mickiewicz’s “Wielka Improwizacja” focus on freestyling as the common link, despite the fact that the track does not feature a freestyled text from either artist. The source material by Mickiewicz is composed and published, and Peja’s performance remains faithful to that text on his own carefully considered and recorded rendition. Why then is freestyling used to link the two artists, neither of whom demonstrate improvisatory skills on this track?

The answer to this question, I think, returns us to the discussion of the qualities valued in both hip-hop freestyle and Romantic improvisation—aweing an audience and performing an individual, authentic moment of inspiration. Though such a definition seems to delineate sharply between improvised and composed rhymes, the distinction is perhaps not always so clear. Yes, the processes might be different, but there is nevertheless overlap between the forms if one considers their aesthetic and ethos. Returning to the example of the English Romantic poet John Keats, Barker and Taylor—who previously cited him as exemplary of the Romantic interest in “sensation” over “thoughts”—note that his poetry “certainly doesn’t read as if it came ‘as naturally as the Leaves to the tree.’ It’s damn clever stuff, involving regular meter and rhyme.”¹⁰⁴ As Barker and Taylor’s observation suggests, in many instances, the ease and naturalness of “inspired” verse is itself a performance—texts are composed to *sound* improvised,

¹⁰³ MasarniaRecords, comment on “RPS/DJ.Zel ‘Wielka Improwizacja.’” Original: *Śmiech śmiechem, ale pierwsza znana walka freestyleowa była właśnie między Mickiewiczem a Słowackim ;)* *Mówili wierszem ponoć kilka godzin :D* Discussion of the “freestyle battles” between Mickiewicz and Juliusz Słowacki is quite common in certain online hip-hop forums (though Słowacki is less frequently named as an “original rapper” or quoted in raps). Other comments on this video feature listeners declaring themselves “#teamMickiewicz” or “#teamSłowacki.”

¹⁰⁴ Barker and Taylor, *Faking It*, 213.

to give the impression of authenticity and direct connection with the artist. Just as Keats' work reflects an artistry that belies forethought and careful composition, so too does the verse of Mickiewicz performed by Peja. Though the text of "Wielka Improwizacja" came to him quickly—it is said that Mickiewicz wrote over 1,500 lines over the course of one week—it is nevertheless not an "improvisation."¹⁰⁵

Performing this "ease," it seems, posed a challenge for Peja, who claimed he was drawn to the project because it was "challenging and unconventional," adding that he likes "things that nobody has done before, something that gives me new opportunities."¹⁰⁶ The notion that a rap cover of poetry—even Mickiewicz's poetry—is something "nobody has done before" is, of course, not accurate. Peja himself contributed a rap version of a poem by Jacek Kaczmarski to *Poeci*, the same album that featured Trzeci Wymiar's adaptation of Mickiewicz's "Reduta Ordoni."

Aside from the fact that performing Mickiewicz is nothing new, one might also question what in the project of performing someone else's words Peja finds "challenging" or conducive to "new opportunities." While this may be read as Peja trying to explain his decision to take the NCK commission and spark interest in his recording, his claim also allows us to again consider the ways in which performing the works of another artist—of "covering" or even "biting rhymes"—is itself a project that requires composition choices by the artist (in selection, editing, and interpretation). Though Peja's work on "Wielka Improwizacja" is—aside from a short refrain—not "original," it is nevertheless "new" and shifts the focus on creativity and inspiration from improvisation to interpretation. He is adhering to hip-hop conventions that recognize that

¹⁰⁵ Koropeczyj, *Adam Mickiewicz*, 171. Miłosz describes "The Great Improvisation" as "written extremely fast...sometimes sounds as if it had been dictated to a medium," (*The History of Polish Literature*, 223).

¹⁰⁶ "Czym śpiewak dla ludzkie? Rychu Peja w 'Wielkiej Improwizacji.'" Original: *Lubię wyzwania i niekonwencjonalne pomysły, rzeczy, których nikt jeszcze nie robił, coś co daje mi nowe możliwości*

artists “learn by watching and imitating others, and new techniques or moves are often variations on existing ones.”¹⁰⁷ Peja is “learning” from Mickiewicz, taking the poet’s description of artistic power and offering a variation in which it speaks to and in the genre.

Though not entirely a novel project, performing centuries old poetry in the idiom of contemporary rap does present challenges, both technical and interpretive. Peja is not simply “reading” Mickiewicz’s words (though that act of reception would in its own way also be a sort of interpretation), he is editing and reframing them. Peja notes, “rapping poetry is completely different than your own lyrics. Above all it must be interpreted in the right way. That’s why I had to put myself in the spirit of the author’s emotions. However, I am at the level of professionalism where that’s not a problem for me.”¹⁰⁸ In this explanation, we see Peja articulating an approach to interpreting the text that involves identifying with the emotions of the author. This perspective reflects a perception of the relationship between the text and its author that was expressed in discussion of Romantic improvisation and hip-hop freestyling. The author’s “spirit” is essential to the meaning of the text, for the text is born of the artist’s articulation of their personal experience and singular inspiration.¹⁰⁹

Having echoed these ideas about authorship and inspiration, Peja suggests that his “professionalism” in the field of hip-hop enables him to empathize with the Romantic poet and

¹⁰⁷ Katz, *Groove Music*, 155.

¹⁰⁸ Paweł Gzyl, “Peja rymuje Mickiewicza, czyli młodzież poznaje wieszczą” [Peja Raps Mickiewicz, or Young People Get to Know the Bard], *DziennikPolski24*, January 23, 2015, <https://dziennikpolski24.pl/peja-rymuje-mickiewicza-czyli-mlodziez-poznaje-wieszczar/3725232#aktualnosc>. Original: *Rapowanie poezji to zupełnie coś innego niż własnych tekstów. Przede wszystkim trzeba ją w odpowiedni sposób zinterpretować. Dlatego musiałem się wczuć w emocje autora. Jestem jednak na takim poziomie zawodowości, że nie stanowiło to dla mnie problemu - powiedział nam z dumą Peja.*

¹⁰⁹ In her study of hip-hop sampling, Demers notes the shared values of Romanticism and hip-hop. Likening the artistic ideals of hip-hop artists to those of Romantic poets, she suggests “the romantic author was idealized as a transgressor, a manipulator of genre, and original, often heroic thinker” (“Sampling as Lineage,” 139). In this, we see one way in which Peja’s “manipulating genre” might serve to bolster his claim to originality and foster a link with Romantic tradition.

thus interpret and perform his words. Describing his experience working with Mickiewicz's source material, Peja said,

I opened the text and right away it came to me like music notes. The more difficult part was the old Polish words, that's why I had to pay close attention to diction. I think I have successfully encompassed the whole. Maybe it came easily for me because I found in this text a lot of my own emotions: conflict with the world and with God, a sense of power, and rejection of authority.¹¹⁰

With this, Peja begins to describe how his experience as a rapper has prepared him to interpret Mickiewicz, again underscoring both the technical abilities and emotional themes that connect the artists across centuries. What were for Mickiewicz words to be read or performed by actors are transformed in Peja's reading to music notes—the poem a score for the rapper to perform. In this interpretation, Peja is able to employ skills he has developed in his music career—specifically his ear for and facility with the Polish language—and demonstrate how his “professionalism” in the genre is an asset to interpretation. Hip-hop has taught Peja a way of reading—one that privileges both poetic forms and individual expression—and shaped his approach to this piece.

Reflecting further on the composition and challenges of Mickiewicz's text, Peja told Urszula Schwarzenberg-Czerny of *naTemat.pl* that “Wielka Improwizacja” did not naturally lend itself to rap, despite its thematic resonance. He explained,

First of all, the words are not ones we use on a daily basis, they are a bit archaic and quite sophisticated, which should not be surprising. Second, the composition of the poem. The poet does not end couplets with a rhyme, and at some points rhymes don't appear for a few lines, at which point the listener/reader has lost the thread. Fortunately, the intensity

¹¹⁰ Gzyl, “Peja rymuje Mickiewicza.” Original: *Otworzyłem tekst i od razu poszło mi jak z nut. Najtrudniejsze były staropolskie słowa, dlatego musiałem zwrócić uwagę na dykcję. Myślę, że z powodzeniem ogarnąłem całość. Może tak mi łatwo poszło, ponieważ znalazłem w tym tekście dużo swoich emocji: skłócenie ze światem i z Bogiem, poczucie mocy, odrzucenie autorytetów.*

¹¹⁰ This reflects other conversations about the nature and perception of creativity in various musical genres. If we consider the poem as a sort of score, then we might also think of how classical concert musicians or jazz artists figure in conversations about authorship/interpretation.

of emotion and monologue form allows us to lose ourselves in this crazy stream of words.¹¹¹

In this explanation, we see Peja approaching “Wielka Improwizacja” from a compositional perspective and evaluating it with an eye towards performing it for a contemporary audience. In noting that the language is both “archaic” and “sophisticated,” he signals its difference from the conventions of hip-hop, but also its authenticity as a “traditional” text. Like the “snaps and pops” of the archival recordings discussed in Chapter Two, the language that is formally dated is here a sign of its link to tradition. Despite the distance from current readers created by these formal elements, Peja again returns to the emotion of the piece as a conduit to its contemporary appreciation. Having deemed the piece “universal,” Peja privileges the “spirit” of the text (able to speak across time) over its formal elements (which are “archaic”). Here again, emotion and inspiration are positioned as the elements that shape the effect on the audience.

Having suggested that he found in “Wielka Improwizacja” a “lot of [his] own emotions” in the “intensity” of the piece, Peja expresses the way in which he sees the piece speaking across time and addressing “universal” concerns. In comments published in a number of reviews, Peja posits, “I think that it [“The Great Improvisation”] is current above all because of the emotional charge of the monologue and its universalism.”¹¹² Tomasz Kukołowicz from the NCK similarly

¹¹¹ Urszula Schwarzenberg-Czerny, “Rychu Peja Solo nagrał swoją wersję ‘Wielkiej improwizacji’ Mickiewicza. Posłuchaj!” [Rychu Peja Solo Recorded his Version of Mickiewicz’s “Great Improvisation.” Listen!], *NaTemat.pl*, January 21, 2015, <https://natemat.pl/130775,rychu-peja-solo-nagrał-wielka-improwizacje-lubie-niekonwencjonalne-pomysly>. Original: *Po pierwsze słowa, którymi na co dzień nie operujemy, są trochę archaiczne i dość wyszukane, co dziwić nie powinno. Po drugie budowa wiersza. Poeta nie kończy dwuwiersów rymem, a w pewnym momencie rymów nie ma wcale, pojawiają się dopiero kilka linijek później w momencie, kiedy słuchacz/czytelnik zdążył zgubić już tzw. wątek. Całe szczęście natężenie emocjonalne i monologiczna forma pozwala nam zatracić się w tym szaleńczym potoku słów.*

¹¹² “Czym śpiewak dla ludzkie?” Original: *Uważam, że jest on aktualny przede wszystkim ze względu na ładunek emocjonalny monologu i jego uniwersalizm.* This quotation from Peja is also featured, for example, in the NCK announcement of the release and a review from Jakub Grygiel. See: “‘Wielka Improwizacja’ w interpretacji Ryszarda ‘Peji’ Andrzejewskiego”; Jakub Grygiel, “Rap z Mickiewicza – ‘Wielka Improwizacja’ w interpretacji Peji” [Rap with Mickiewicz – “Great Improvisation” Interpreted by Peja], *Rozrywka.Blog*, January 22, 2015. <https://www.spidersweb.pl/rozrywka/2015/01/22/rap-z-mickiewiczem-wielka-improwizacja-w-interpretacji-peji/>.

suggests that Mickiewicz's verse speaks to the present, though does so by linking the text to Peja more specifically, suggesting, "we realize that Peja is not well-known in all environments. But that is precisely why we found motifs in 'Wielka Improwizacja' that were close to him. It is a feeling of being an artist, a desire for immortality, an awareness of creating a new culture."¹¹³ Both of these comments express the notion that Mickiewicz's work voices concerns that transcend his time—be they anxieties of the artist, or a more general emotionality.

Peja's claims in the press speak to his sense that the words of Mickiewicz can communicate across almost 200 years to listeners in 2015 (and beyond). As was the case in L.U.C.'s assertions that the archival recordings he sampled were both authentically historic and transcended history, here Peja similarly suggests that Mickiewicz's verse—composed in response to a specific historical moment—carries in it something universal. Unlike Trzeci Wymiar, whose take on Mickiewicz suggests a political and national position might resonate across time, Peja's "Wielka Improwizacja" appears less concerned with what the piece has to say about Polishness and more interested in exploring the condition of the artist and creativity.¹¹⁴ Given Peja's statements about the timelessness and universality of the piece, it is perhaps not surprising that his rendition of Mickiewicz's work edits out passages that speak more directly to the political context of its composition or the role of the artist in preserving the nation. While these national(ist) topics might also find resonance in contemporary politics, in this reading of the text, Peja focuses on more "universal" ideas of poetry's power and limits. Though the very act of performing Mickiewicz's text might be read as political, the work of editing done by Peja

¹¹³ Gzyl, "Peja rymuje Mickiewicza." Original: *Oczywiście zdajemy sobie sprawę, że Peja nie we wszystkich środowiskach jest dobrze kojarzony. Ale właśnie dlatego odnaleźliśmy w "Wielkiej Improwizacji" wątki, które okazały mu się bliskie. To poczucie bycia artystą, pragnienie nieśmiertelności, świadomość tworzenia nowej kultury.*

¹¹⁴ There are, of course, linked concepts—particularly in Poland. As Polish Romanticism concentrated both artistic power and national service in the figure of the poet-prophet (*wieszcz*), it created a tradition of understanding art and nation as linked. Thus, while Peja may focus more on artistry, even this articulation of identity is inextricably entwined with notions of the national poet and Polish identity.

has not made it overtly so.¹¹⁵ He instead performs a version of “Wielka Improwizacja” that positions hip-hop as the offspring to Romantic poetry, and himself as the heir to Mickiewicz.

When describing the aspects of Mickiewicz’s text that resonated with him, Peja identified “conflict with the world and with God, a sense of power, and rejection of authority” as the themes that spoke to him across time. The passages that Peja selects to rap draw on these themes as they coalesce around the issue of the power and limits of an artist’s expression. Alongside the braggadocio of a poet who feels his power and the potential of his words to move people, the text Peja raps also questions the limits of language to express the depths of the poet’s thoughts and emotions. In this—the tension between artistic power and doubt—there emerges a question of art’s ability to fully convey that individual and thus the limits of expressing an “authentic” self. In his performance of Mickiewicz’s famous text, Peja echoes and responds to these questions, employing the words of the legendary poet to voice his own concerns, while also transforming them in a display of his own artistic power.

Following a brief instrumental opening that introduces the string melody that will reoccur throughout and locates listeners in the genre with familiar sounds of scratching and a beat provided by DJ Zel, Peja begins his “Wielka Improwizacja” at the same place as Mickiewicz—with the artist alone. He enters with “Samotność” (Solitude), followed by a short pause punctuated with a hit in the beat. Peja, like Mickiewicz’s Konrad, positions himself as solitary—a physical reality in Mickiewicz’s text (as Konrad recites the text from a prison cell) that in Peja’s performance is stripped of its physical dimensions and becomes representative only of the

¹¹⁵ In choosing to perform only three stanzas from Mickiewicz’s text, Peja has limited the scope and shape of the message of the piece. Rather than rapping lines like “Now my soul is incarnate in my land;/My body has absorbed her soul./[...]I love, and suffer the rack,/I gaze on my poor land and feel/[...]I feel for the whole nation’s doom...” (Adam Mickiewicz, *Forefathers*, trans. Count Potocki of Montalk (London: The Polish Cultural Foundation, 1968), 174-175), Peja instead focuses on the text’s exploration of inspiration and artistic struggle.

position of the artist who contemplates how to connect with and move his audience. Focusing on the artist as an individual, this introduction echoes representations—evident in both Romantic thought and hip-hop discourse—of the solitary genius, individually inspired and distinguished by a singular talent. Steven Lukes identifies solitude as a foundational element of Romantic conceptions of the artist, arguing that originally rooted in German Romanticism, “the idea of individuality had a remarkable history. Having begun as a cult of individual genius and originality, especially as applied to the artist, stressing the conflict between individual and society and the supreme value of subjectivity, solitude and introspection.”¹¹⁶ Lukes suggests that the very idea of individuality and originality—so central to both Romanticism and hip-hop—rests in a veneration of “solitude and introspection.” Beginning his work “alone,” Peja signals that he is in the space of creation and genius.

The reasons for the poet’s solitude emerge as the text continues with Peja rapping the first stanza of Mickiewicz’s text with only minor modification. As the passage questions “where is the man who will hear from my song the whole idea,” Peja’s delivery articulates artistic anxiety, while also relishing in his creative potential.¹¹⁷ Though the text speaks to the limitations of language and articulation, Peja’s interpretation amplifies the moments that exhibit the power of the human voice. Rapping, “Unfortunate, who for the people, voice and tongue toil/The tongue belies the voice, and the voice belies the thoughts/Thoughts fly from the soul sharply, before they break in words,” Peja accents the repetition of “tongue” (*język*), underscoring both the text’s implication that words fail to voice the depths of the soul, but also his facility in delivering the text.¹¹⁸ Playing on the multiple meanings of “tongue”—both language and the

¹¹⁶ Steven Lukes, *Individualism* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1973), 19.

¹¹⁷ Original: *Gdzie człowiek, co z mej pieśni całą myślucha*

¹¹⁸ Original: *Nieszczęsny, kto dla ludzi głos i język trudzi/Język kłamie głosowi, a głos myślom kłamie/Myśl z duszy leci bystro, nim się w słowach złamie*

organ of its articulation—Peja voices the limits of the former while displaying the skill of the latter.

Though elements of his delivery point to Peja’s sureness in his artistic abilities, his interpretation is not free from the anxieties that plague the source text; despite the depth and skill of the artist, what if the world does not grasp his brilliance? This question posed in the text is underscored sonically in Peja’s version, both in the musical accompaniment and delivery of the text. As the text describes the feelings of the artist “circulating in [his] soul” like “an invisible subterranean river,” the fluid violin melody from the introduction returns, offering a musical current that reinforces Peja’s flow.”¹¹⁹ As this string line crescendos, Peja delivers the final line of the verse, “Only so much do men recognize the strength of my feelings in my songs.”¹²⁰ This line, which he repeats (in the only variation from the original text), articulates the limits of expression that have consumed the artist throughout the verse. Peja and DJ Zel have made the “subterranean river” audible in the mix, but it is still not clear that the words are able to express the entirety of the artist’s intentions.

Having repeated this line, Peja delivers a chorus of his own composition—an assertion of distance from the source text that in some ways reframes the questions of the opening verse. This chorus, repeated six times throughout the piece, both asserts Peja’s creative role and underscores his remove from the creation of the text; in identifying himself as the interpreter, he highlights that he is not the creator. On the other hand, in associating these roles, he suggests that the concerns of the text are not confined to improvisers but shared by those who perform and interpret their words. The chorus reads:

This is the Great Improvisation, a big challenge,

¹¹⁹ Original: *Jak ziemia nad połkniętą, niewidzialną rzeką/Z drżenia ziemi czyż ludzie głęb nurtów docieką/Gdzie, gdzie pędzi, czy się domyślą?/Uczucie krąży w duszy, rozpala się, żarzy*

¹²⁰ Original: *Tylko tyle z mych uczuć dostrzegą w mych pieśniach*

Great Improvisation, my message,
Great Improvisation, Rychu on the beat,
Great Improvisation rap with Mickiewicz.¹²¹

Following the assertion that audiences do not fully recognize the “strength of my feelings in my songs,” the “challenge” and “message” introduced in the chorus are positioned not only in reference to Mickiewicz’s text, but also to the more universal issue of an artist’s ability to fully communicate their message. Yes, performing the famous text is a “big challenge;” but in tackling this challenge, Peja is enacting the creative process articulated in Mickiewicz’s verse. He—like Mickiewicz’s Konrad—is facing the poet’s task of conveying what they feel. In his analysis of imitation and interpretation, Schloss asserts “[t]o do the same thing someone else does is not creative, but taking a new approach to the familiar is.”¹²² Mickiewicz, by this standard *is* being creative, as his approach to the familiar text is new both in genre and context. The method by which he performs this innovation is articulated in the final line of the chorus, which turns from “Great Improvisation” to “Great Interpretation,” thus foregrounding the work Peja is doing, putting interpretation in concert with improvisation. This shift is highlighted in the slight hitch in Peja’s flow; a brief pause before the start of the final line leads to its syncopated delivery and further signals the affective potential of “interpretation.”

Having thus positioned himself as the “great interpreter” and collaborator with Mickiewicz, Peja returns to rapping the poet’s text. Though quoting Mickiewicz, the passage that follows does indeed feel “timeless” in its proud assertion of artistic prowess. The second verse begins, “I have trampled you, all the poets,/All sages and prophets,/Who were adored, adored the world wide.”¹²³ With these lines, Peja asserts his own power, positioning himself first

¹²¹ Original: *Oto Wielka Improwizacja, spore wyzwanie,/Wielka Improwizacja*

¹²² Schloss, *Making Beats*, 107.

¹²³ Original: *Depczę was, wszyscy poeci,/Wszyscy mędrce i proroki,/Których wielbił, wielbił świat szeroki.*

among poets. In this, he echoes the work of other rap artists who boast of their skill (we saw this with Nas earlier in this chapter), reframing Konrad's words into a moment of hip-hop braggadocio.¹²⁴ Though he might have doubts about the ability of his words to fully capture the contents of his soul, here, it seems, the poet feels his strength, not his limits.

This strength, however, is located in solitude—the poet is confident in his skill, but only in the moment of solitary reflection. Exploiting the poetic potential of Mickiewicz's text, Peja's delivery of the line “Kiedy sam śpiewam w sobie, / Śpiewam samemu sobie” (“When I sing alone for myself, / I sing for myself alone”) accents the repetition, stressing the second line's return and rearrangement of the assertion that the artist sings for himself alone. Here again, art is framed in terms of individual expression, with poetry emerging from and for the solitary creator—the words from the self and for the self. In the context of Peja's recording, this assertion becomes complicated, for he is not “alone,” but rather constantly in dialog with Mickiewicz. Though the Mickiewicz's text might express Peja's feelings about his work as an artist—the rapper does, after all, claim the text expresses “a lot of [his] own emotions”—the process of “covering” the track nevertheless highlights the limits of the myth of the solitary artist.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ Adam Bradley notes the “dual modes of braggadocio and narrative” employed by rappers in crafting an “autobiography of greatness” (170). Braggadocio in rap, he argues, is “different from other forms” in that “it extolled excellence not simply in the stereotypically masculine pursuits—wealth, physical strength, sexual prowess—but in something new: in poetry, eloquence, and artistry. Here were young men boasting of intellectual and artistic pursuits” (189). See: Adam Bradley, *Book of Rhymes: The Poetics of Hip-Hop* (New York, NY: BasicCivitas Books, 2009). Braggadocio is also considered as an important aspect of freestyle culture in Polish scholarship on the genre, for example, in Anna Drukała, “Freestyle Battles, czyli kulturotwórcza funkcja werbalnych pojedynków,” [“Freestyle Battles or the Culture-Producing Function of Verbal Contests”], *Literatura Ludowa* 53, no. 4/5 (2009): 76-77.

¹²⁵ Mickiewicz's text and Peja's performance of it also echo the characterization of the improvising artist as in touch with the divine—a notion that resonates in both Romanticism and hip-hop. Framing the artist as operating somewhere between man and god, “The Great Improvisation” suggests that in the moment of creative ecstasy the poet will test his powers against god (“Today I will know if I am one supreme, or only proud”) and at the height of their power, “cast off [his] flesh” and “spread [his] wings” to fly to “the border where nature and Creator meet.”

The third and final verse on Peja's track begins with a demand— "give me rule of souls!"¹²⁶ This passage asserts the artist's power (something Peja highlighted as appealing to him in the text), as well as the immortality of the artist. When read in the context of Mickiewicz's legacy and the vitality of his words centuries after his death, this passage becomes not only a commentary on the power of art, but an affirmation of the truth of its author's claims. These words *have* made Mickiewicz immortal, and in rapping them, Peja might be read as drawing on their power to a similar end. As his delivery becomes more articulated and forceful at this climactic moment, it is as though Peja has fallen under the text's spell, performing it as a sort of incantation to channel Mickiewicz and his inspiration. Rapping Mickiewicz's words, he is affected by their power, yet also working to wield them in service of his own desire to "rule souls."

Following this verse in which the artist claims for himself power of souls, the track ends with a final repetition of Peja's chorus and the return of the string melody. The strings, which are featured throughout the song in association with creativity and internal inspiration (the "subterranean river" of the poet's emotion), are accompanied by a looped sample that repeats the phrase "powerful I am."¹²⁷ This concluding sample not only asserts the power of the artist, but also demonstrates that power. In cutting and looping this assertion of power, DJ Zel (and Peja's track) enacts musical control over "power"—wielding it and reshaping it to their (sonic) ends. Across these assertions of artistic power, we might hear Peja's interpretation as a challenge even to the great poet. Performing the words of Poland's "poet-prophet," Peja voices a superiority to those who were adored and considered poets and prophets. In this, Peja performs another type

¹²⁶ Original: *Daj mi rząda dusz!*

¹²⁷ The sample is modified to the point that it is beyond (my) recognition and its source is not identified in press material, in commentary from DJ Zel, or on whosampled.com.

of creative power—one drawn from remembering and recontextualizing, distinctive elements of the genre in which he works. In 2015, Mickiewicz is enshrined as a great poet and prophet, making his own challenge to older generations resound in the present as one that also tests his authority.

This reflects the always present relationship between the present and the past that exists in cover songs, as well as their creative and affective power. Discussing the “disturbance between the authentic memories of the original” and “the stimuli of the covered version,” Schiffer argues, “the memory of the original is never the same once the trans-historical cover has been heard. The memory ultimately becomes the repository of a historical signified, and the embodiment of meaning transforms the performer into a historical object, a text himself, representing the past during the moment of performance.”¹²⁸ Just as improvisation was framed as a transformative, so too does this formulation of the performance of a cover song elevate the artist beyond the present moment. Words become infused with the power to speak of the past and to the present, as their performer is imbued with power to shape perceptions of past, present, and future. Performing “Wielka Improwizacja” may or may not give Peja “rule of souls,” but it has given him rule over Mickiewicz.

Conclusion: Stealing Rhymes, Making History

This chapter returns to Doniu’s claim that if he were alive today, Mickiewicz would be a rhymer, interrogating what skills are valued in “a rhymer” and considering how the work done by Mickiewicz in the nineteenth century resonates with the artistic concerns of contemporary hip-hop. Again, a sense of authenticity is at the heart of this discourse, though here it is framed

¹²⁸ Schiffer, “The Cover Song as Historiography,” 93.

as reflecting the originality of the artist's work. Like authenticity, originality is a quality that, though widely valued, is subject to shifting definitions. I suggest that Romanticism and hip-hop share a sense of originality that often privileges spontaneity and the performance of inspiration as markers of authenticity, applauding the improviser and the freestyler. This is an understanding that elides the author and their text, thus contributing to genre conventions that position "real" rappers as those who rap their own texts and discourages "biting" the work of others. Within this system of evaluating originality and creativity, hip-hop—a music that from the beginning was rooted in musical borrowing—also offers a guide to how drawing on the work of others can be inventive, so long as the appropriating artist in some way flips it enough to make it their own. Reading and interpreting are thus framed as generative and potentially creative. Rappers "reading" Mickiewicz draw on the poet's words for inspiration (and content), making him a "rhymer" while also performing their own hip-hop identities.

As this chapter considers performances from Kabaret OT.TO, Trzeci Wymiar, Peja, and a number of YouTube rappers, we see the ways in which the various artists make Mickiewicz their own. Multiple Mickiewiczes emerge from these performances: an author of tedious texts to be memorized; a nostalgic trying to evoke a lost place and time; a political and nationalist historian; and a timeless divine artist. The multiplicity and malleability of poet's legacy is, yet again, revealed. Along with their commentary on Mickiewicz, these pieces also point to the lasting legacy of Romanticism's melding of history and art. Though "borrowing" texts from the past might challenge and complicate Romantic ideas of authorship and originality, the more general practice of borrowing themes from history to speak to the present affirms the traditional blurring of history and literature. In this, the use of Mickiewicz's texts might be read as a variation on the sampling explored through L.U.C.'s work in Chapter Two. In rapping Mickiewicz, these artists

are doing their own work of literary and historical reception and preservation, while also negotiating genre and Romantic norms of authorship.

While the work done by the artists considered in this chapter is perhaps the most straightforward appropriation of literary traditions, it also in some ways offers the most direct challenge to prevailing notions of credibility and authenticity in that tradition. Though distinct in their specific techniques for engaging tradition, the artists in this chapter share a general reading of the legacy of Romanticism in Poland. It is, for them, a marker of national tradition, a repository of ideas that speak across time, and a link to authenticity. As Chapter Four turns to the work of Dorota Masłowska, these shared foundations of national and genre credibility are themselves the object of sampling and parodic remixing. Playing with the very idea of authenticity, Masłowska similarly draws on the traditions preserved in the works of the artists considered thus far and in so doing, challenges them while also evincing their lasting power. Even with a voice that is all her own, she finds herself constantly in conversation with tradition.

Chapter Four

Playing Authentic

Masłowska's Critique of Genre and National Conventions

“When we talk we make connections naturally and without thinking, unaware of the whole bustling process taking place behind the words. But in language, there is history, and also a power to create, and therefore, the future. What I do seems like a smear test, a sample, a linguistic biocenosis. In the artistic process I take mental pathogens and blow them up until they appear in their full glory – there are our beliefs, prejudices, and superstitions, but we would never even admit we have them.” – Dorota Masłowska¹

In conversation with Krystyna Lipinska Illakowicz, Dorota Masłowska described her artistic process as one in which she “blows up” language to expose its various component parts—the “beliefs, prejudices, and superstitions” that go unnoticed, yet are essential to expression and communication. Language, the Polish author points out, is an unconscious process of making connections, one in which we “sample” forms and ideas from the world around us. As such, language bears markers of our history. It is an amalgamation of past influences that can be employed to shape the future.²

¹ Krystyna Lipinska Illakowicz, “Theatre More Arresting Than Ever: A Conversation with Dorota Masłowska,” *European Stages* 8 (2016). <https://europeanstages.org/2016/10/21/theatre-more-arresting-than-ever-a-conversation-with-dorota-maslowska/>

² In her interest in investigating the connections between language, culture, and belief, Masłowska echoes the concerns of linguists interested in “linguistic relativity.” Often linked to nineteenth-century scholars, the notion of language dictating culture was articulated a century later by linguists Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf. Though a rigid understanding of language determining how one perceives and understands their environment has largely been discredited, the interest in exploring the influence of language on psychology and community remains. In 1939, Whorf articulated his desire to understand how “such a network of language, culture, and behavior come about historically? What is first the language patterns or the cultural norms?” and suggests “[i]n the main they have grown up together constantly influencing each other” (156). Though her methods and conclusions may be different, Masłowska’s “linguistic biocenosis” and focus on the history and future rooted in language positions her within a long lineage of thinkers focused on elucidating the relationship between language and community. For more on Whorf, see: Benjamin Lee Whorf, *Language, Thought, Reality*, ed. John B. Carroll (Cambridge, MA: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1956).

Masłowska's play with language—particularly the vulgar vernacular of a generation born in the final years of communist Poland—led many to hail her as the “voice of a generation” upon the release of her debut novel, *Wojna polsko-ruska pod flagą biało-czerwoną* (*Snow White and Russian Red*), in 2002 (when she was nineteen years old). In the years since, she has written novels, plays, articles, and verse for children; she has overseen the cinematic adaptation of *Snow White and Russian Red*; and in 2014 she released music and accompanying videos under the name Mister D. Spanning various styles and media, Masłowska's oeuvre reflects a continued interest in interrogating and complicating genre and type. As she “samples” familiar narratives, characterizations, and texts, Masłowska offers a critique of adherence to the traditional tropes that so often appear in contemporary cultural and political discourse. In her replaying and remixing, she also complicates the very notion of authenticity that other artists in this dissertation looked to cultivate with their appeals to familiar narratives. Parodically playing authentic, Masłowska exposes the artifice behind both national and genre conventions, denaturalizing the forms in which they are communicated, while simultaneously evincing their lasting symbolic power. She thus engages in many of the same practices and contemplates many of the same issues as the hip-hop artists considered in previous chapters; but rather than looking to cultivate credibility and sample the past to create a sense of authenticity, she uses their language and techniques to blow it all up. In so doing, she reveals the construction and component parts of authenticity and thus destabilizes the notion that it reflects an essential character or truth.

Parodic Sampling

In her study of parody, Linda Hutcheon argues that for many artists, “the ironic distance afforded by parody has made imitation a means of freedom, even in the sense of exorcizing

personal ghosts—or, rather, enlisting them in their own cause.”³ This formulation of parody—one that defines it as form that offers a means to process history by engaging its texts in the present—reflects a similar logic to that which motivates hip-hop sampling. Sample-based hip-hop “enlists to its cause” texts from the past. As Lupe Fiasco noted during debates about authorship discussed in Chapter Three, “rap is alive even if some of its greatest moments are written by ghosts.”⁴ Practices of sampling allow hip-hop artists to commune with “ghosts,” enlisting them in a contemporary artistic process. While these earlier artists reflect the imitative aspect described by Hutcheon, their engagement with voices of the past is largely one that elevates and amplifies the message of the sampled material.⁵ Mickiewicz is evoked not to critique his vision of Poland, but rather to revive it. What we have seen is not so much an exorcism as a séance.

Unlike Peja, L.U.C., and those who are content to let Mickiewicz (and his Romantic vision of the nation) speak for Poland today, Masłowska’s interest in exposing both the history and prejudices in contemporary language motivates a more critical engagement with the texts of the past—those narratives “sampled” unconsciously in day-to-day thought. While her work is deeply rooted in imitations of familiar forms—that is, in samples of contemporary discourse—her relationship to them tends towards an ironic “repetition with critical distance” that Hutcheon identifies as constitutive of parody.⁶ In thus conjuring the voices of the past, but also marking

³ Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teaching of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 35.

⁴ https://www.instagram.com/p/5dgg43MKTC/?utm_source=ig_embed

⁵ In *Making Beats*, Schloss cautions against analysis that takes for granted an ironic or critical framing of sampled material. Citing interviews with a number of hip-hop producers, he instead argues “ironic intent is *not* the default presumption of hip-hop listeners” and that while ironic recontextualization does exist, it is thus also not the “default” for musicians. The Polish case bears out this analysis, as artists employ samples for their appealing sonic qualities, emotional resonance—and, in the case of Masłowska, ironic parody. For more, see: Schloss, *Making Beats: The Art of Sample-Based Hip-Hop* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2004), 148-149.

⁶ Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody*, 6.

her own perspective distinct from that prescribed by a centuries-old Romantic mythos, Masłowska controls the narratives of the past, rather than fully being controlled by them.

This is not to say, however, that she fully rejects or escapes this legacy, for the specter of Polish Romanticism looms over Masłowska's work. Though her performance of familiar tropes often reveals their artifice and subverts their solemnity, she is nevertheless still engaging them. This dynamic of simultaneous critique and reification is characteristic of parody, a form Mikhail Bakhtin described as generating a humor that "denies, but revives and renews at the same time."⁷ Following Bakhtin, other scholars have also articulated this dynamic, with Hutcheon noting "parody always implicitly reinforces even as it ironically debunks,"⁸ and Simon Dentith observing parody's "paradoxical effect of preserving the very text that it seeks to destroy."⁹ Indeed, Masłowska's engagement with narratives of Romanticism—her play with myths of suffering and perceptions of authenticity—continues to inscribe these ideas into contemporary culture, albeit without the earnestness so often characterizing an engagement with national traditions.¹⁰ In repeating and magnifying these familiar tropes of narrative and genre, Masłowska exposes their construction and essential malleability. Playfully regurgitating the elements of authenticity, she works against a vision that would posit them as essential or unchanging.

⁷ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), 11.

⁸ Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody*, xii.

⁹ Simon Dentith, *Parody* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2000), 32.

¹⁰ Though I have not centered it as an analytical frame in this chapter, it is worth noting the important position theories of Signifyin(g) hold in discussions of rhetorical and linguistic repetition and play in hip-hop. Henry Louis Gates Jr. theorizes Signifyin(g) as a trope for "repetition and revision," one that "repeat[s] and revers[es] simultaneously" (71). This tradition, Gates posits, is rooted in the African-American experience and culture. Many scholars of hip-hop engage Signifyin(g) in their discussion of the genre's sampling of existing music in its performance of original compositions. Joanna Demers, for example, suggests, "Signifyin(g) takes place when a song or style is imitated or repeated *with difference*" (71), a definition that reflects the workings of parody as "repetition with critical difference." For more, see: Henry Louis Gates Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); Joanna Demers, "Sampling as Lineage in Hip-Hop" (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2002), 68-72.

“I Still Remember”: Sampling the Legacy of the Past

Hutcheon not only framed parody as a means of “exorcizing ghosts,” but also as a way to grapple with what W. Jackson Bate describes as “the rich and intimidating legacy of the past.”¹¹ As the performances considered elsewhere in this dissertation illustrate, in Poland the legacy of the past is indeed both rich and intimidating. Like those other artists, Masłowska is also interested in this historical legacy, and the weight of history is felt deeply in the worlds she creates. Her 2008 play *Między nami dobrze jest* (*It’s Good Between Us*, translated as *No Matter How Hard We Try, Or We Exist on the Best Terms We Can*) begins with an elderly woman stating, “I still remember the day the war broke out...,” a statement that could serve as a tagline for Poland.¹² It is a nation that *remembers* its history, particularly that of its victimization. This memory, importantly, is national, rather than personal. While the elderly woman experienced the war, the framing of her memories of that time is focused on the nation—the recollection is of generalized Polish suffering, rather than embodied personal experience. Placed in service of nationalist discourse, memory shifts from private to public. The command to “remember” becomes a national (and moral) imperative.¹³ The past not only haunts the present, but also demands the subjugation of individual memories to the shared memory of the nation.

¹¹ Walter Jackson Bate, *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 4.

¹² Dorota Masłowska, *No Matter How Hard We Tried; Or We Exist on the Best Terms We Can*, trans. by Artur Zapałowski, in *(A)pollonia: Twenty-First-Century Polish Drama and Texts for the Stage*, edited by Krystyna Duniec, Joanna Klass, and Joanna Krakowska (2014), 421.

¹³ The recent “Campaign for Moral Hygiene” (Ruch Higieny Moralnej) reflects these attitudes, demanding Poles “Remember to Remember” (“pamiętaj pamiętać” is a slogan featured on Wojciech Korcuć’s “Wołyn ’43” poster). Alongside their demands for war reparations from Germany, the group’s posters also promote anti-LGBT, anti-feminist sentiment. For more, see: Daria Różańska, “Nieznana organizacja i znany rysownik. Ruch Higieny Moralnej walczy o reparacje wojenne i denerwuje kobiety” [Unknown Organization and Known Illustrator: Campaign for Moral Hygiene Fights for War Reparations and Annoys Women], *NaTemat.pl*, December 2, 2018, <https://natemat.pl/256189,kto-stoi-za-ruchem-higieny-moralnej>.

Masłowska's debut novel *Snow White and Russian Red* replays national memories as drug-addled, provincial youth prepare to fight against "Polish annihilation." In this "war," the shared narrative of national suffering and sacrifice is parroted and perverted by a generation removed from personal memories of war. The novel begins with Andrzej "Nails" Robakowski's ex-girlfriend giving him the "good news" that "in town it looks like there's a Polish-Ruski war under a white-and-red flag."¹⁴ Initially portrayed as the purveyors of bootleg cigarettes, "the Russkies" are soon framed as posing an existential threat to Poland. Nails explains that he has heard,

[T]he Russkies want to cheat the Poles out of this place and establish a Russki government here, maybe even a Belorusski one, that they want to shut down the schools, the government offices, to kill the Polish newborns in the hospitals in order to eliminate them from society, to impose protection fees and tribute for industrial and grocery products.¹⁵

Here, the threat of protectionist trade policy mingles with that of a genocide. The "Russki," Maria Janion notes in her analysis of the novel, "need to be hated and traded with."¹⁶ In conflating concerns of international trade policy with those of occupation by a foreign power, Masłowska's text frames contemporary economic anxieties within a broader narrative of national victimization. This history of partition is inescapable as it colors contemporary concerns; and almost a hundred years later, it is still evoked in this imagined war.¹⁷ The Russian "other," a characterization rooted in Polish traditions, serves to "fundamentally cement the xenophobic

¹⁴ Dorota Masłowska, *Snow White and Russian Red*, trans. Benjamin Paloff (New York, NY: BlackCat, 2005), 1.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹⁶ Maria Janion, "Poland between the West and East," trans. Anna Warso, *Teksty Drugie* 1 (2014): 33.

¹⁷ The history of partition is invoked throughout Masłowska's work. The voice of the radio in *No Matter How Hard We Tried*, for example, recalls the time when "our nation's heyday eventually came to an end. [...] [T]hey took Germany...the Poles living there were immediately Germanized and forced to yodel. And last of all they carved off Russia, where the Polish populace was made to speak in some outlandish dialect" (456). As this narration continues into discussion of World War Two, these instances of foreign occupation blend and become the soundtrack against which the characters experience contemporary Poland.

Polish identity.”¹⁸ This Polishness, once again, is dependent on the continuation of narratives of conflict.

Though the titular “war” of the novel is against the “Russkies,” they are not the only ones Nails sees as posing a threat to Poland. He envisions,

[A]n annihilation prepared for the country by the fucking aristocrats, dressed in overcoats, in aprons, who, if only the conditions were right, would sell us, the citizens, to whorehouses in the West, to the German army, for organs, for slave labor. Who finally want to sell our country out, like some old secondhand crap, a bunch of rags...¹⁹

In his drug-addled paranoia, Nails prepares to fight the “fucking aristocrats” who want to “sell our country out.” He imagines a future in which Poles are traded as a commodity—sent to “whorehouses,” harvested for their organs, or sold into “slave labor.” While the enemy here has shifted, the threats’ grounding in national history and contemporary concerns has not. A skepticism of being “sold out” by the West echoes opinions expressed during the Second World War—opinions that returned with Poland’s accession to the European Union.²⁰

Poland’s history of partition and its tumultuous twentieth century resonate throughout the formulation of this “war,” in which Nails—and Masłowska—infuse historical traumas with contemporary anxieties. This “sampling” of the past is not unique to Masłowska; every artist considered in this dissertation is similarly engaged with replaying these historical narratives.²¹

¹⁸ Janion, “Poland between the West and East,” 33.

¹⁹ Masłowska, *Snow White and Russian Red*, 20.

²⁰ Poland’s recent celebration of its fifteen years in the EU (May 1, 2019), for example, was met with protests from far-right groups. Many expressed concern about Poland submitting to the “dictate of Berlin and Brussels,” while one man was pictured carrying a sign reading “The EU is Anti-Catholic” and illustrated with a skull-and-crossbones equated with “EU” (“Poland, others mark 15 years in EU amid far-right protests,” May 2, 2019. https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/other/poland-others-mark-15-years-in-eu-amid-far-right-protests/ar-AAAN1BR#image=AAAN1BR_1|1). For more on narratives of Western betrayal in WWII, see: Norman Davies, *God’s Playground, Vol. II* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2005), 361-365; Anita Prażmowska, *Britain and Poland 1939-1942: The Betrayed Ally* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

²¹ The nation’s past is not the only thing sampled in Masłowska novel. In crafting her portrait of Poland, she also recreates the language of popular and commercial culture. Janion describes, “the narcotic trance talk composed of clusters of languages heard on television, in soap operas, *Big Brother*, school and office” as reflecting “what goes on in the minds of Poles” (“Poland between the West and East,” 32). Polish thought, Masłowska and Janion suggest, is itself the product of constant “sampling.”

Masłowska, however, samples these narratives not to celebrate them or to frame her work as “authentically Polish,” but rather to interrogate their lasting power in Poland. Filtering this rhetoric through Nails—perpetually high on speed—Masłowska magnifies and distorts it. The memory of partition becomes the looming threat of “Russkie”-led annihilation. Sampling the familiar tropes of Polish victimization in this way, Masłowska enacts what Dentith identifies as a central aspect of parody as she “seize[s] on particular aspects of a manner or style and exaggerate[s] it to ludicrous effect.”²² Yes, Masłowska is trafficking in familiar narratives, but she is also blowing them up—pushing them to an absurd extreme. In what becomes a farce of nationalist fervor, Masłowska critiques visions of Polishness that so elevate historical narratives in framing the present. With this hyperbolic performance of Polish Romantic nationalism, Masłowska reveals the ludicrous nature of clinging to a nineteenth-century worldview in the present.

All About the Authenticity: Sampling Types

Much as Masłowska imitates the rhetoric of Polish nationalism to critique its symbolic power in the present, she similarly plays with markers of both national and artistic authenticity. As *Snow White and Russian Red* critiques the mythology that plays such an important role in Polishness, so too does it question any conception of an “authentic” Poland. Though he is determined to save Poland from annihilation, Nails’ version of what “Poland” is remains less clear. Despite his numerous assertions that economic relations with the West are predatory, he reflects on the profitability of “the Western buck” that “flies into your pocket” when “the tourist groups show up.” He notes that these visitors come to Poland to enjoy “throwback rides, those

²² Dentith, *Parody*, 32.

old-timey relics,” all of which he then notes are “a sham, of course, but the group likes it.”²³ Here “Poland” is again defined by narratives of the past, but instead of being cast as a proud nation of eternal sacrifice and suffering, it plays the role of a charming historical “throwback.” This is a role performed for tourists who are happy to pay to experience Poland as a series of “beautiful, historical facades.”²⁴ There is no depth or complexity to the portrayal, Poland becomes a relic; one cultivated to signal historical authenticity, even if that sense of history is nothing but a convincing façade.²⁵ Here, Masłowska introduces another element of “Poland”—the conscious performance of itself for an outside audience.²⁶ This vision of the nation—one constructed to be sold—is acknowledged as a “sham,” yet it is perhaps no less a representative portrayal than that of Poland still living its history of oppression.

It is not only constructions of “Polishness” that Masłowska critiques, but also perceptions of personal and artistic authenticity. Many of Masłowska’s characters are described within the text as “empty,” their personalities filled in with elements drawn from their surroundings and calculated to present the most desirable image of themselves. Nails deems Arleta “false, empty inside,” comparing her to a Russian cigarette that is “false, bogus” and full of “stuff the teachers wouldn’t dream of.”²⁷ In this world in which characters are empty, they work to craft personae by performing various symbols of authenticity. Though not labeled “empty” like Arleta, *Snow*

²³ Masłowska, *Snow White and Russian Red*, 85.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 84.

²⁵ It is not only foreign tourists who prove susceptible to being seduced by a “throwback” vision of Poland, for the characterization of Poland as threatened by its neighboring powers is also “old-timey” and in the current moment, revealed a bit of a “sham.” Even Nails himself seems to question the truth of this narrative towards the end of the novel, asking, “Is the Polish-Russian war a documented historical fact or a set of occasional prejudices? How does the collective hallucination evolve with respect to wars with the imagined enemy...” (280).

²⁶ Masłowska further explores the topic of a “Poland” performed for foreigners in her essay, “Faraway, So Gross.” In that case, however, the Poland performed is one of communist “grayness and nausea,” not “beautiful, historic facades.” See: Dorota Masłowska, “Faraway, So Gross,” trans. Benjamin Paloff, in *The Wall in My Head: Words and Images from the Fall of the Iron Curtain* (Rochester, NY: Open Letter, 2009): 160-165.

²⁷ Masłowska, *Snow White and Russian Red*, 2.

White and Russian Red's Angela outlines a plan to create for herself an identity as an artist. She tells Nails what she is planning:

Reveal a suicide attempt, since that always comes in handy, it'll wipe away the so-called screen between the author and audience. [...] It'll gush out how, in my art, I express motifs of modernism, of demonism. Of Przybyszewski's Satanism. That always sells, it's in fashion. It'll gush out that I'm totally young and yet already so talented.²⁸

Angela recognizes the value in convincing an audience of the openness of a public persona. Appearing accessible—"without a screen between the author and audience"—contributes to the perception that one is authentic, performing their "real self." This elision of the artist's personal and public selves is a phenomenon that "sells" in many genres, including hip-hop. The sense that a rapper is "keeping it real" partly rests in the perception that listeners have direct access to them, that they are not performing a character, but rather revealing their authentic self. Here, Masłowska suggests that such openness might also be a form of performance, calculated to make an audience think that they have direct access to the performer. In Angela's plan, we see traits she has deemed characteristic of "personal expression"—she will demonstrate her vulnerability (and emotional turmoil) by leaking news of a suicide attempt. The fabricated brush with death, she hopes, will not only give audiences a sense that they see the "real" her, but will position her within an artistic lineage of tortured artists.²⁹ She is looking to be "in fashion," which reveals a motive distinct from self-expression and suggests an emptiness similar to that which Nails saw in Arleta—it is as though "Angela" will become whatever is most profitable. In this portrayal, we do not so much see Masłowska "sampling" traits of authenticity, but rather creating characters

²⁸ Ibid., 77. In the assertion that she will be received as "totally young and yet already so talented," Angela's imagined reception echoes that of Masłowska, who was hailed "young" and "so talented" when *Snow White and Russian Red* debuted. Though "Dorota Masłowska" will make an appearance later in the novel, this nod the author's own youth (and talent) further plays with the relationship between the characters and their author and perceptions of artistic authenticity.

²⁹ Stanisław Przybyszewski (1868-1927), a decadent Polish author, though not known to be suicidal, lived a volatile life, marked with murder charges, complicated romances, and alcoholism.

who draw on earlier models of an artist to cultivate a perception of authenticity. In so openly exposing the artifice behind “the artist,” Masłowska offers a critical perspective on the ways in which artist and audiences create authenticity, thus denaturalizing what is often framed as somehow intrinsic in a performance.

After sampling the rhetoric of Polish Romanticism and poetic suffering in *Snow White and Russian Red*, Masłowska turned her attention to playing with hip-hop conventions in her second novel, *Paw Królowej* (*The Queen’s Spew*, also translatable as *The Queen’s Peacock*). Again grappling with “empty” characters who build themselves identities with elements of popular culture and national discourse, *Paw Królowej* takes the form of a “hip-hop anthem,” complete with samples of figures ranging from Peja to Marcel Proust.³⁰ While replaying elements of the genre, it simultaneously offers a critique of popular culture and performances of authenticity.³¹

Though it was described and reviewed as a “hip-hop novel”—Wojciech Staszewski of *WysokieObcasy.pl*, for example, told the author that he heard in it “a slight hysterical tone like Wienio, Pele, or Peja”—Masłowska notes that the work “distorts” freestyle and that the novel’s “MC Doris” is “an absolute parody of a rapper in a FUBU sweatshirt.”³² With *Paw Królowej*, Masłowska skillfully evokes hip-hop, while also offering a parody of public performances of

³⁰ Thomas Starky, “Fourth Partition,” *Ulbandus Review* 11 (2008): 138.

³¹ While *Paw Królowej* signals Masłowska’s first turn to “writing hip-hop,” from the very beginning of her career she engaged in a project of “total art” that reflected hip-hop culture’s all-encompassing vision of performance, music, and visual art. *Snow White and Russian Red*, for example, was released as an illustrated volume and later made into a film. Her books continue to be released with accompanying illustrations and her most recent novel was promoted with a “book trailer” stylized as a hip-hop music video.

³² Wojciech Staszewski, “Dorota Masłowska – rozmowa o nowej książce ‘Paw królowej’” [Dorota Masłowska – Conversation About the New Book ‘The Queen’s Spew’], *WysokieObcasy.pl*, May 21, 2005. <http://www.wysokieobcasy.pl/wysokie-obcasy/1,53662,2715357.html?disableRedirects=true> Original: *Czytając, długo nie mogłem uwolnić się od poczucia, że tekst podaje mi nieco rozhisteryzowanym tonem Wienio, Pele albo Peja...; ... jest absolutną parodią zajebistego rapera w bluzie FUBU* [FUBU is an American hip-hop apparel company founded in 1992 and popular throughout the 1990s]

artistic “authenticity.” The absurdity of this market for authenticity comes to the fore at the end of the novel, as “media expert” Szymon Rybaczko speaks with “Dorota Masłowska.” Telling “Masłowska” he is “all about authenticity,” he pitches a job where she will “add some rhymes” to pre-written texts—it will be a “sort of hip-hop thing” he explains. He goes on to tell her she was chosen because she “symbolizes the authentic.”³³ Asking her to include a “little cursing” (but not too much) and perhaps throw in “a bit of autobiographism,” Rybaczko runs through a list that reflects hip-hop tropes of authenticity. They are also traits that could be used to describe the text that precedes them. Presenting this “authenticity” as a profitable stylistic choice, Masłowska signals her critical distance from the forms and rhetoric she samples, thus framing her work as a critique of a culture that so values the *perception* of authenticity.

The final lines of *Paw Królowej* again turn to Masłowska, this time framing her not as a convincing voice for “authenticity,” but rather accusing her of “first...pretending to be a track-suit ruffian, because back then those track suits were in” and now “trying to play the hip-hop cat.”³⁴ The rapid reversal in the evaluation of her character itself suggests a critique of the degree to which perceptions of “authenticity” reflect shifting motives and values of an audience. If she can symbolize hip-hop authenticity in one moment and merely be playing at it in the next, authenticity emerges as a matter of performance and evaluation—as something one puts on for a desired effect.³⁵

³³ Dorota Masłowska, *The Queen’s Peacock*, trans. Benjamin Paloff (fragment on *BookInstitute.pl*) <http://dev.bookinstitute.pl/ksiazki-detaj,literatura-polska,6778,the-queen%E2%80%99s-peacock.html?tmplng=en>.

³⁴ Ibid. While “playing the hip-hop cat” captures the accusation that “Masłowska” is playing a role, the Polish text more literally positions her as trying to attach or hook herself to the genre. That presentation offers an image of clinging to genre tropes to get ahead, thus underscoring the charge that she is using the culture. See: Dorota Masłowska, *Paw Królowej* [The Queen’s Spew/Peacock] (Warsaw: Biblioteka Twoich Myśli, 2005), 150. Original: *najpierw dresiarę udawała, jak dresy były modne, teraz pod hip hop próbuje się podpiąć*

³⁵ In her 2018 novel *Inni Ludzie* [Other People] Masłowska returns to this hip-hop style, telling the story of an aspiring rapper in a text that again “samples” the styles of hip-hop and snippets of everyday language. Even before opening the book, however, the cover signals the novel’s relationship to music. Designed to look like a cracked CD jewel case, the cover features a “Parental Advisory: Explicit Lyrics” sticker and the image of a holographic label bearing

Even in this cursory look at Masłowska's written work, her interest in mimicking and critiquing elements of popular and patriotic culture comes to the fore. She routinely samples the language and narratives that circulate in contemporary Polish discourse, amplifying and distorting them in her prose and thus creating humorous (albeit often uncomfortably so) worlds that force readers to confront the nature of the beliefs that shape their understanding. She reveals and revels in these systems, using signs of national and artistic authenticity to create her literary worlds. In this, her work reflects the simultaneously radical and conservative potential of parody, as well as a hip-hop ethos of sampling and remixing snippets of an existing cultural catalogue in service of saying something new. It is a hip-hopness that Masłowska made literal in 2014 when she brought "MC Doris" into the real world, rebranding herself as "Mister D." and releasing a record.

Sex, Dough, Problems, Contempt: Introducing Mister D.

Announcing Masłowska's recording debut, her publisher Raster described the album, *Spoleczeństwo jest niemile* (*Society is Mean*), as a "30-minute-long mixture of punk, hip-hop and dance music. Sex, dough, problems, contempt."³⁶ This brief description not only signals the blending of genres so characteristic of Masłowska's work, but also reads like a "greatest hits" of hip-hop themes. What do rappers talk about? Sex, dough, problems, contempt. Raster's description of *Spoleczeństwo jest niemile* reflects the attitude of Masłowska's album. It is a playful mixture of musical styles and artistic tropes that, like her novels, samples signs of

the logo of the novel's publisher. See: Dorota Masłowska, *Inni Ludzie* [Other People] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2018).

³⁶ "Publications/Records," Raster, accessed April 10, 2019, <http://en.rastergallery.com/publikacje/plyty/>.

Polishness and hip-hopness in order to reveal the “sampling” of narratives and types that goes into everyday perceptions of authenticity.

Of her decision to release the album, Masłowska expressed a feeling of being “paralyzed as a writer” and wanting to push herself to “learn something from scratch, to combine, to do gymnastics.”³⁷ With this new project, she again plays the “hip-hop cat,” this time bringing her performance to the medium that inspired it. Introducing audiences to her new musical persona, “Mister D.,” the cover for her album bombards them with signs of hip-hopness—a flashy car, “blingy” accessories, a fur coat, big dogs, and a new rap alias (Figure 4.1).³⁸ The familiar image of the rapper and their ride is slightly altered in Masłowska’s vision as the vehicle is positioned



Figure 4.1. *Mister D. Społeczeństwo jest niemile* cover art (2014)

³⁷ Agnieszka Kowalska, “Córka Rydyzka śpiewa własne piosenki, czyli Dorota Masłowska nagrała płytę [ROZMOWA]” [Rydyżk’s Daughter Sings Her Own Songs, or Dorota Masłowska Recorded an Album [Conversation], *Wyborcza.pl*, February 21, 2014, http://wyborcza.pl/1,75410,15498546,Corka_Rydyzka_spiewa_wlasne_piosenki_czyli_Dorota.html. Original: *Najbardziej kreatywna jestem, kiedy muszę się czegoś uczyć od podstaw, kombinować, gimnastykować*

³⁸ *Mister D., Społeczeństwo Jest Niemile* [Society is Mean] (Raster, 2014).

as a chariot, drawn by large dogs. The canines featured on Masłowska's cover appear to be Amstaffs, a breed closely related to the pit bulls so popular among American rappers.³⁹ Masłowska, ever ready to amplify a convention, features not one, but three of the large dogs chained to her car. The visual hyperbole here serves as a playful wink to her audience; she is playing the part of the rapper, but doing it bigger—and also not quite right. Her dogs, though numerous, are not the snarling watchdogs that Karen Delise described as “the ultimate accessory” in hip-hop, where she argues the breed has become “an extension of your manhood.”⁴⁰ With her three smiling dogs, Masłowska both evokes and subverts the symbolism of the pit bull in hip-hop as a dog that reflects a “street” sensibility and aggressive masculinity.

This play with genre and gender extends to Masłowski's hip-hop moniker. Having previously written herself into texts as “MC Doris,” Masłowska's debut as Mister D. reflects a further engagement with hip-hop naming practices, where performing under an alias is quite common. Polish artists like Peja and L.U.C. perform under assumed names, as do many American rappers. Masłowska's choice of “Mister D.” reflects the practice of combining an initial or nickname with a descriptive title—as seen, for example in the names Master P, Lil Jon, Mister Cee, and Young MC.⁴¹ Introducing the character of Mister D., Masłowska is performing an element of hip-hop culture. Though her rap alias reflects genre conventions, it is nevertheless

³⁹ Pit bulls are featured on albums' covers (DMX's *Year of the Dog...Again*), in music videos (Jay-Z's "99 Problems"), and in publicity shoots (BigBoi on *Dub*).

⁴⁰ Allen G. Breed, "Pit Bulls and the Hip-Hop Culture," *Madison.com*, July 30, 2007. https://madison.com/news/pit-bulls-and-the-hip-hop-culture-the-pit-bull/article_fbab3840-fe2f-58bf-83b2-2b3c990e22cd.html.

⁴¹ Hip-hop naming practices have proven ripe for imitation and parody. A search for “rap name generators” offers dozens of options for creating a personalized “rap name.” Flowcabulary.com, for example, offers options for those looking to generate a rap alias, including “Mister + Your First Initial” (https://www.flocabulary.com/rap_nickname_generator/). The formulaic quality of these names has become a joke both inside and outside the world of hip-hop performers, with the musician Childish Gambino (Donald Glover) joking that he created his name with an online generator, and Saturday Night Live producing comedic shorts about the fictional rapper Lil Doo Doo.

incongruous with the figure it represents. Masłowska is not, after all, a “mister.” In drawing attention to the divide between this public persona and her personal character, Masłowska highlights the degree to which assumed monikers might obscure the individual behind the name. Though it is a genre that generally elevates authenticity, hip-hop is also full of larger-than-life public personae. In so clearly displaying the divide between public and personal identities, Masłowska foregrounds the performative element of such rap personalities. She plays the part, but in so doing, also never lets us forget that she is *playing*—this is not a performance of unmediated access to the artist.

As an introduction to Masłowska’s hip-hop character, the cover of *Spoleczeństwo jest niemile* establishes the parodic dynamic that infuses the work. While this approach offers her a means of critiquing elements of the genre, it also serves to position Masłowska within a tradition of performers who have undertaken similarly humorous projects as they negotiate their place in hip-hop. In his analysis of humor as a means of negotiating and articulating difference in hip-hop, Charles Hiroshi Garrett notes that “aspects of humor have been integral to many elements of rap music” and cites both the playful “party rap” of songs like the Sugarhill Gang’s 1979 “Rappers Delight” and the more aggressive mockery of one’s rivals found in gangsta rap as reflecting the wide reach of hip-hop humor.⁴² Though there are not many examples of humor amongst the performances considered in this dissertation, Polish rap is not without its examples of levity. Kabaret OT.TO’s playful blending of Mickiewicz and MC Hammer reflects this comic element, as do performances from T-raperzy znad Wisły (T-Rappers from the Vistula), a rap group known for their songs recounting Polish history and literature. Alongside these artists who

⁴² Charles Hiroshi Garrett, “‘Pranksta rap’: Humor as Difference in Hip Hop,” in *Rethinking Difference in Music Scholarship*, eds. Olivia Bloechl, Melanie Lowe, Jeffrey Kallberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 317-318.

position themselves as primarily comic acts, there are performers like Sidney Polak who is not exclusively a comic artist, yet both his stage name (with its allusion to film director Sydney Pollack) and pieces like his 2009 song “Skuter” (Scooter) reflect a playful engagement with familiar hip-hop tropes.

As we see with Masłowska’s cover art—and as will become apparent in an analysis of her music—her work as Mister D. is constantly playing with recognizable tropes. The dynamics of this humor are in some ways themselves echoes of familiar hip-hop performances. Reflecting on the early work of the Beastie Boys, the New York trio cited by Peja as fundamental to his introduction to “authentic hip-hop,” Garrett notes that the group constantly “played with established meanings and sought to upend audience expectations.” Their humor is “created when a sense of anticipation is confounded by the unexpected.”⁴³ This is, in many ways, also what Masłowska is doing as she plays with established meanings, seeking not only to “upend audience expectations,” but also to make the audience critically consider the sources of those expectations. She is thus, in her own way, looking to the roots of hip-hop for inspiration.

In this engagement with hip-hop history, Masłowska also negotiates the gendered dynamics of the genre. Masłowska’s hip-hop persona reflects performances like those of American rapper Melissa “Missy ‘Misdemeanor’” Elliott, who similarly uses humor to define her place within the male-dominated genre. Garrett notes that Elliott’s chosen name, in its blending of the playfully feminine “Missy” with the minor delinquency of “Misdemeanor,” “evokes but undercuts the hardcore gangsta imagery popular at the time of her emergence.” It is a move, he argues, that “not only acknowledges but foregrounds her gendered marginality through humor...”⁴⁴ Elliot is gesturing towards the conventions of the genre, but doing so in a

⁴³ Ibid., 320.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 327.

way that signals her remove from them. Mister D. and her three happy dogs similarly project an image that reflects an engagement with hip-hop conventions, but also her remove. Though this humor signals difference, Garrett points out that music like Elliott’s “continues to remind us how comic expression has been integral to hip-hop culture from its roots.”⁴⁵ With her critical comic perspective, Masłowska similarly reminds us that humor—and negotiations of convention and difference—is also integral to Polish hip-hop culture.

This dynamic of a performance that both references and critiques recognizable forms reflects broader forms of parody and the ironic citation of tropes evident throughout Masłowska’s oeuvre. In this play with form and expectations, Masłowska—like Elliott and other humorous hip-hop artists—both challenges and preserves convention. Hutcheon argues that “[e]ven in mocking, parody reinforces; in formal terms, it inscribes the mocked conventions onto itself, thereby guaranteeing their continued existence.” The result of this, she adds, is that “parody is the custodian of the artistic legacy, defining not only where art is, but where it has come from.”⁴⁶ In this, we see a dynamic that reflects the critical historiographic character of hip-hop more generally, as it is a music that is constantly in dialogue with what has come before as it voices a vision for the future. Even when not overtly comic, the music embodies this tension between memorializing the past and molding it to comment on the present.

“Confounded by the Unexpected”: Mister D. makes “Bread”

If, as Garrett (and Plato) suggest, “humor is created when a sense of anticipation is confounded by the unexpected,” then the music video for “Chleb” (“Bread”), off Masłowska’s *Spoleczeństwo jest niemiłe*, might be considered one of the most humorous videos in hip-hop.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 332.

⁴⁶ Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody*, 75.

What begins as a story about daily life in the city ends with Masłowska crying tears made of breadcrumbs as a fantasy version of herself rides off into the mountains on the back of a giant dachshund. Amongst these unexpected twists, the clip samples familiar music video tropes to create a bizarre reflection on contemporary Poland that magnifies (literally, at points) elements of Polish culture to not only reveal its component parts, but also expose the artifice behind tropes of authenticity.

Anticipation was not the only thing confounded by “Chleb.” In the years since its release on March 24, 2014, the music video has amassed over eight million views and seven thousand comments, many from people perplexed by what they have seen.⁴⁷ One viewer suggests, “it’s a very sad song about Polish reality...this is what it really looks like,”⁴⁸ another reads the video as a “very successful joke,”⁴⁹ while a third writes simply, “this song is Poland.”⁵⁰ This array of comments, ranging from interpreting the video as a sad reflection of reality to laughing at it as a joke, reflects the ambiguity of Masłowska’s work, which engages signifiers of artistic authenticity and genre credibility while often simultaneously revealing their vacuity. This ambiguity is perhaps referenced by the viewer who suggests this song “is Poland.” The comment touches on something central to Masłowska’s video: in its collaging of reality and fantasy, “Chleb” reflects a Poland that is similarly a creation of lived experiences filtered through familiar narrative tropes. Masłowska’s video presents a parodic portrait of both Poland and hip-hop and in so doing, speaks to the power of commercial, national, and religious symbols to shape an understanding of the everyday.

⁴⁷ As of April 11, 2019, the official video on Mister D’s YouTube page had 8,283,392 views and 7,366 comments. “MISTER D. x ANJA RUBIK – CHLEB (official video), posted by Mister D., March 24, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-1-z48cJDbc>.

⁴⁸ Hania Wójcik, comment on “MISTER D. x ANJA RUBIK.” Original: *to jest bardzo smutna piosenka o polskiej rzeczywistości... no tak po prostu to u nas wygląda*

⁴⁹ Misiaa M4, comment on “MISTER D. x ANJA RUBIK.” Original: *Bardzo udany żart*

⁵⁰ zachar251, comment on “MISTER D. x ANJA RUBIK.” Original: *ten utwór to jest Polska*

The video begins by locating itself in a recognizable complex of apartment buildings. The camera zooms in through a window to enter a small apartment, where, facing the camera, Masłowska delivers her opening lyrics with a flat, unaffected tone. She begins with a narration of her daily life: “That day I was going to take down the Christmas tree/But I told my mother that first I was buying bread for dinner.”⁵¹ Viewers see the Christmas tree in the small flat and watch as Masłowska first delivers these lyrics straight to the camera, then appears to use the lens as a mirror as she applies makeup in preparation for her trip to the shop. The walk to the store itself is similarly filled with signs of “real life” as Masłowska passes a kebab stand, seemingly endless apartment blocks, and a woman out walking her dachshund (Figure 4.2). All of these images reflect the song’s urban setting and would be recognizable to viewers familiar with (Polish) urban spaces.



Figure 4.2. Street scene from the music video for Mister D.'s “Chleb” (2014)

⁵¹ Original: *Tego dnia miałem rozbierać choinkę/Ale powiedziałem matce że pójde pierwsz po chleb na kolacje*

With these gestures towards portraying urban life, the video for “Chleb” not only suggests a lived authenticity, but also reflects genre traditions of representing authenticity, which are evident in music videos dating to the early days of hip-hop. Analyzing Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five’s 1982 video for “The Message” as an “*urtext*” of hip-hop culture, Greg de Cuir Jr. observes the “low-grade video technology” and “natural lighting and performances” of the video, which was shot on location in the South Bronx.⁵² With its urban setting and markedly “low-grade” technology, “Chleb” demonstrates its engagement with this classic image of hip-hop realness. It is a realness, however, that de Cuir argues is highly mediated, noting that “The Message” “aspires to be ‘real’ through its aesthetic” and “in turn helps to create a strongly mediatized image of what the reality of urban living is.”⁵³ “Chleb,” like “The Message,” contains aesthetic markers of “reality” and, like that earlier music video, reflects the degree to which such authenticity is mediated. It is this reflection of contemporary urban life that perhaps generates the video’s reception as one that “shows...the whole current situation in Poland”⁵⁴ and leads viewers to comment, “Though I don’t know Masłowska, I feel like she’s a homie from my neighborhood.”⁵⁵ This reaction to the video—of recognizing one’s experience in the world depicted—speaks to Masłowska’s ability to evoke the familiar, even as she makes it strange. In magnifying the artifice—and thus foregrounding the aestheticization of reality—Masłowska highlights the performance inherent in all depictions of “real” urban life.

⁵² Greg de Cuir Jr, “‘The Message’ Is the Medium: Aesthetics, Ideology, and the Hip Hop Music Video,” in *Music/Video: Histories, Aesthetics, Media*, eds. Gina Arnold, Daniel Cookney, Kirsty Fairclough, Michael Goddard (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 56.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁵⁴ Weronika Sasza, comment on “MISTER D. x ANJA RUBIK.” Original: *ukazała w tym teledysku i w piosence całą terażniejszą sytuację w Polsce :)*

⁵⁵ mateusz220, comment on “MISTER D. x ANJA RUBIK.” Original: *Chociaż nie znam osobiście Masłowskiej, mam wrażenie że jest ziomalka z mojego osiedla :)*

Even in “Chleb’s” recognizable depictions of urban life, however, something is clearly not quite right. Images of Masłowska’s flat and the world outside its doors may have familiar features, but at no point are they presented entirely as documentary. They are composed as a collage of stock images and characters—housing projects emerge as a series of individual blocks placed together against a cartoonish blue sky and figures like the dog walker and tracksuit-wearing youth appear as though cut out and dropped in against the urban backdrop (Figure 4.3). Masłowska is sampling familiar images throughout her production, and this aesthetic of collage reflects that practice of borrowing and recombining the familiar in service of something new.⁵⁶ She has inserted markers of “real life,” but does so in a way where their edges show, letting the viewer in on the artifice and intentional construction. This might be understood as the visual equivalent to audio sampling—Masłowska portrays a “sampled-based” reality. In so doing, she



Figure 4.3. Collaged setting from the music video for Mister D.’s “Chleb” (2014)

⁵⁶ Patrizia C. McBride writes of the “double-coding engendered by montage, which lies in the ability of the assembled fragments to point back to the contexts out of which they were extracted as though they were affected by an incurable semantic cross-eyedness” (253). This description of visual collage echoes descriptions of both hip-hop sampling and parodic forms. In this way, the aesthetic of “Chleb” mirrors and reinforces its message of experience as assemblage of existing narratives and images. The tropes and images “sampled” are specific to this story, but also spin out associations to their points of origin. For more, see: Patrizia C. McBride, “The Game of Meaning: Collage, Montage, and Parody in Kurt Schwitters’ *Merz*,” *Modernism/modernity* 14, no. 2 (April 2007): 249-272.

frames “Chleb” as reflecting recognizable experiences, while signaling that it does not do so as documentary.

While these aesthetic choices immediately mark the video as not entirely documentary, it is not long before the world of “Chleb” becomes distorted beyond the point of reflecting any recognizable reality. Upon passing the familiar kebab seller and senior citizens on the street, Masłowska encounters two children dressed as strawberries standing in a dumpster, waiting to give her a stuffed animal, which she then cradles as the city drops away and she is framed against a pure blue sky. This departure into the fantastic becomes even more apparent when Masłowska sees a young man “sitting on a bench with a Tiger [energy drink] as usual.” Though she frames the scene as quotidian, it is depicted on screen as anything but. As the young man “stares at [her],” Masłowska’s vocals become a breathy chorus of “I’m walking, he’s staring,” and she and her would-be paramour are transformed into idealized versions of themselves (Figure 4.4).⁵⁷ Here, the familiar—a group of young men sitting around checking out passing women—becomes fantasy.

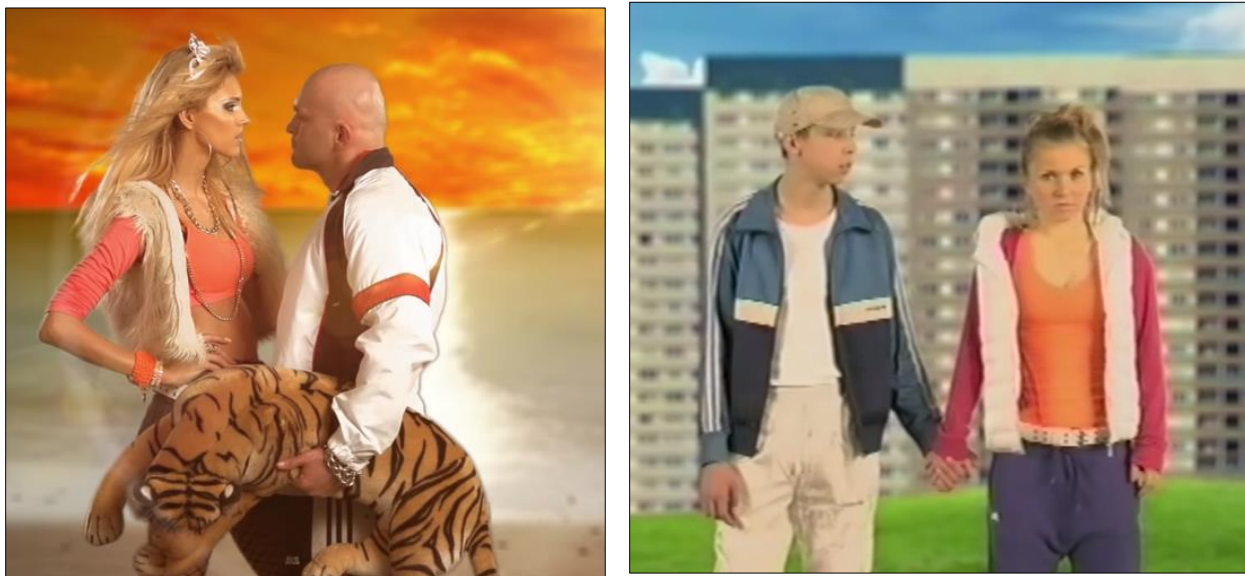


Figure 4.4. Fantasy vs. reality from the music video for Mister D’s “Chleb” (2014)

⁵⁷ Original: *Jak wychodzę, on jak zawsze siedzi na ławce, z Tiger'em i się na mnie.../Patrzy, ja idę, on się patrzy...*

Though depicting no recognizable reality, elements of this fantasy are nevertheless familiar. With her heavy makeup, bold jewelry, and skimpy clothing, Masłowska's fantasy double, played by the Polish model Anja Rubik, mirrors elements of the "video vixen"—the scantily clad women who became a fixture of hip-hop music videos in the early 2000s.⁵⁸ Both she and her tracksuit-wearing partner also evoke the stereotypical *dresiarze*, a Polish subculture named for the tracksuits (*dresy*) that are a feature of their style.⁵⁹ In referencing these types, the fantasy elements of "Chleb" comment on the ways in which experiences are filtered through the images projected in popular culture. As she imagines her interactions with her male companions, Masłowska's character instantly conjures familiar scenes of seductive women and strong men gazing into each other's eyes, holding hands on the beach, and riding off into the sunset. These images are born of familiar narratives, but they are also made strange. It is as if there is a glitch in Masłowska's fantasy, one that foregrounds the implausibility of the familiar narratives and refuses to allow them to appear as natural. It is here that she signals her remove from the tropes she cites, positioning her work as commentary, rather than pure imitation. Establishing the

⁵⁸ For more on the "video vixen" as a hip-hop type, see: Kaila Adia Story, "Performing Venus ~ From Hottentot to Video Vixen: The Historical Legacy of Black Female Body Commodification," in *Home Girls Make Some Noise: Hip-Hop Feminism Anthology*, eds. Gwendolyn D. Pough, Mark Anthony Neal, Joan Morgan (Mira Loma, CA: Parker Publishing, 2007): 389-408; Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1994).

⁵⁹ The video for "Bread" foregrounds this connection, with the credits listing the central figures as "Dresiarza" (Masłowska), "Princess Dresiarza" (Rubik), "Super Dresiarz" (Niezwiestny), and "Dresiarz" (Garnecki). This is not the first time Masłowska's work has been associated with *dresy*—her first novel was frequently discussed as the first literary work concerned with the youth culture. For more on *dresy* (as a style and culture), see: Piotr Brzózka, "Wszyscy byliśmy dresiarzami! Czyli historia szalonej mody na dres" [We were all *dresy*! Or, the crazy history of tracksuit fashion], *Slaskie.NaszeMiasto.pl*, August 5, 2011, <http://slaskie.naszemiasto.pl/artukul/wszyscy-bylismy-dresiarzami-czyli-historia-szalonej-mody-na,1025915,artgal,t,id,tm.html>; Wojciech Staszewski, "Umarł dres, niech żyje dres! (Uwaga! Tematyka młodzieżowa! Podczas czytania należy rapować)" [The tracksuit is dead, long live the tracksuit! Attention! Youth topics! When reading, please rap!], *Wyborcza.pl*, August 27, 2003, <http://wyborcza.pl/duzyformat/1,127290,1635993.html>; Jacek Tomczuk, "Nowi dresiarze" [New Dresiarze], *Newsweek.pl*, January 1, 2014, <https://www.newsweek.pl/styl-zycia/dres-nowi-dresiarze-modne-dresy-newsweekpl/zksm3r2>.

contrast between fantasy and reality—both visually and in style of lyrical delivery—Masłowska underscores how unreal such romantic fantasies conditioned by popular culture are.

Just as the visuals of Masłowska’s video foreground the difference between her work and the models it references, so too does the narrative of her song. The lyrics depart from their familiar “girl meets boy” story as Masłowska and the young man on the bench begin to talk. Returning to her deadpan delivery, Masłowska describes her character’s nerves—her “tongue is tied” and her “legs bend under” (descriptions rendered literally in the video).⁶⁰ Rather than the expected flirtation, however, the two talk mostly of bread. The young man’s mother bakes bread at home—she “used to always be fucked up,” but “now there’s a smile on her face” and “she does not dream of death anymore.”⁶¹ Now, with his mother in intensive care, the boy is looking to sell her bread machine. Having purchased it, Masłowska’s character is consumed by baking, describing a life where “all I do is bake/From floor to ceiling there are loaves [...] Instead of tears, crumbs roll down my face.”⁶² Here, the story becomes one of overabundance as Masłowska churns out bread.

In this, Masłowska not only subverts the expected themes and trajectory of popular song, but also performs a parody of Polish womanhood. In buying the young man’s mother’s bread machine, Masłowska takes on the symbol of her domesticity. Baking bread, we have been told, was the thing that gave the mother’s life meaning—an exaggerated portrait of the contentment promised by traditional views that locate women in the home. The final portrait of Masłowska crying tears of flour and surrounded by bread is one of excess and offers a modified portrait of the “brimming-over abundance” Bakhtin associates with fertility and growth in grotesque

⁶⁰ Original: *język mi się płacze,/nogi się pode mną gną*

⁶¹ Original: *Kiedyś ciągle najebana,/teraz uśmiech ma na twarzy./chleb se wypieka, o śmierci już nie.../Marzy*

⁶² Original: *Od tamtej pory, nic, tylko wypiekam,/aż góra bochenków po sufit zalega,/z chleba upiekłam ściany, krzesła i obrazy,/zamiast łez okruszki, toczą się po mojej.../Twarzy*

realism.⁶³ Here, idealized visions of motherhood and femininity are reduced to a material plane, but even that depiction is twisted in Masłowska's transgressive vision. The relationship between her and the young man does not produce children; it produces bread.

Though Masłowska ends the video weeping crumbs, her double happily ascends over the city and into space. The fantasy tropes that guided the action have in fact ended in fantasy for Masłowska's double, though they have left her overwhelmed with excessive bread in "real life." It is a strange image and offers little clarity. In her abundant sampling of images, Masłowska has created a world virtually unrecognizable, even if comprised of (mostly) familiar elements. This visual and narrative confusion is evident in responses to the video, which features many commenters trying to make sense of it all—many looking to pin down the significance of bread. A number of viewers suggest bread is a symbol for drugs, while another poses the question, "does bread mean God?"⁶⁴ This ambiguity of Masłowska's message is also evident more broadly, with many viewers expressing confusion, writing, "What is this?!"⁶⁵ "My god, what is this 😊,"⁶⁶ "Millions of questions, no answers....,"⁶⁷ "It this serious or not?,"⁶⁸ and "It's some kind of joke, no?"⁶⁹ Though viewers may not be entirely sure how to understand the video, they do express a sense that it is saying *something*—with one writing, "fuck that has a deep message,"⁷⁰ and another confidently stating, "I know art and this is art."⁷¹ The ambiguity of the video's meaning, evident in the variety of readings, suggests Masłowska has created a work in

⁶³ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 19.

⁶⁴ ehh hahaha, comment on "MISTER D. x ANJA RUBIK." Original: *Czy chleb oznacza Boga?*

⁶⁵ Terka Terka, comment on "MISTER D. x ANJA RUBIK." Original: *Co to jest?!*

⁶⁶ Paylo Kubov, comment on "MISTER D. x ANJA RUBIK." Original: *Boże mój, co to jest?*

⁶⁷ 1210leah11, comment on "MISTER D. x ANJA RUBIK." Original: *Miliony pytań, zero odpowiedzi...*

⁶⁸ NADIA 9073, comment on "MISTER D. x ANJA RUBIK." Original: *To było robione na serio czy nie ? XD*

⁶⁹ Wojciech Gradziński, comment on "MISTER D. x ANJA RUBIK." Original: *Co jakiś żart jest, nie?"*

⁷⁰ Kacpor 043, comment on "MISTER D. x ANJA RUBIK." Original: *kurwa to ma głęboki przekaz*

⁷¹ TgiSH IllidanServer, comment on "MISTER D. x ANJA RUBIK."

which signs have no fixed signified—bread can be drugs, God, fertility.⁷² The coherence of the symbols and narratives with which we constitute understanding is challenged. In magnifying and distorting otherwise mundane elements of life, Masłowska destabilizes their apparent naturalness and reveals the artifice and construction behind their use as symbols of authenticity—be it of art or nation.

Thought this lack of clarity about the message might itself *be* the message—that what we often read as indelible symbols are themselves malleable signifiers susceptible to shifting agendas—it also speaks to an ambiguity evident more broadly in the reception of parody. A lack of clarity on what exactly is the subject of the joke appears to be a common issue when hip-hop gets humorous. Of the Beastie Boys’ *Licensed to Ill*, Sasha Frere-Jones writes that it “was a joke for America. Or on America. It was hard to tell.”⁷³ Perhaps it is “hard to tell” because humor often speaks in two voices; there is that which is stated and that which is implied. Reflecting on this character in parody, Hutcheon notes that “in transmuting or remodeling previous texts, [parody] points to the differential but mutual dependence of parody on parodied texts. Its two voices neither merge nor cancel each other out; they work together, while remaining distinct in their defining difference.”⁷⁴ Here, the two voices are that of the cited form and the author’s own voice. Again, the forms of parody echo those of hip-hop sampling, which similarly finds two voices “working together” while remaining distinct. To understand these two voices working together, however, requires an audience to recognize that there are two voices at play. In the

⁷² Claudia Snochowska-Gonzalez identifies a similar dynamic of shifting signifieds in *Snow White and Russian Red*, noting “the tracksuit mentality [depicted in the novel] has become the signifier devoid of the permanent signified...” (13). For more, see: Claudia Snochowska-Gonzalez, “From Rejection to Praise of Irony: Dorota Masłowska in her Search of ‘We,’” *SLH* 5 (2016): 1-50.

⁷³ Sasha Frere-Jones, “Peace, Adam,” *The New Yorker*, May 4, 2012, www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/sashafreerejones/2012/05/adam-yauch-mca-beastie-boys.html. For more on the ways the Beastie Boys’ “Fight for Your Right” was (mis)understood, see Garrett, ““Pranksta Rap,”” 321-322.

⁷⁴ Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody*, xiv.

case of parody, this means that they must be able to identify what is being referenced or else the parody is lost.

“Chleb” presents a dizzying multiplicity of imitated forms, offering familiar elements of hip-hop music videos, romantic fantasies, and urban life. In “sampling” and collaging recognizable images and tropes, Masłowska reveals the artifice and construction behind “true” love and “real” life on film. From this there emerges a challenge to the naturalization or essentialization of identities and narratives. “Chleb” exposes the authentic as a product of the interaction and interpretation of symbols. As such, we might read this performance not only as magnifying the elements of narrative that are often read as natural, but also as critiquing the very idea of fixed or natural identities or authenticities. Authenticity—be it national or artistic—is thus figured as born of shared and circulated ideas and should therefore not be held as sacred. Here, authenticity is an object of play, not worship.

This is Poland: The Parodic Patriotism of “Rainbow”

Masłowska released the video that accompanied her new track “Tęcza” (Rainbow) on November 11, 2014—Polish Independence Day. A year earlier, nationalist youth had set fire to an installation of a rainbow in the center of Warsaw’s trendy Plac Zbawiciela. The installation, “Tęcza” (Rainbow), by Julita Wójcik, was adorned with over sixteen thousand flowers and stood almost ten meters high. The vandalism was an attack against what had become a colorful symbol of an open and tolerant Poland.⁷⁵ The charred remains it left behind also became a

⁷⁵ Sponsored by the Adam Mickiewicz Institute, the installation was initially erected in front of the European Parliament in Brussels. Erected in 2011, it marked the Polish Presidency of the EU. While much of the criticism of Wójcik’s “Rainbow” attacked it as a symbol of LGBT movements, this cannot be totally divorced from the connection to the EU, which many (of the same) Poles also feel imposes policies that challenge “traditional” Polish values and full national sovereignty.

symbol—of conservative nationalist resistance to that inclusive vision. In “Tęcza,” Masłowska samples the language of that conservatism and the narrative of Wójcik’s statue, creating a grotesque vision of Poland as “one gray mass...enjoying the barbeque.”

Though Wójcik has insisted her work “doesn’t stand for anything political or social” and is “free from any assigned meanings”—that its only aim is to bring beauty—opponents to its public display claimed the statue was a “symbol of deviancy” that promoted the LGBT movement.⁷⁶ Prior to the arson on November 11th, the statue had been burned thrice before—once in 2012 by a single perpetrator, again later that year when a New Year’s Eve firework went awry, and a third time by vandals in 2013.⁷⁷ This time, however, as the destruction coincided with a march celebrating Polish national independence, homophobia became unavoidably entwined with displays of patriotism. Reflecting on the march for *Newsweek*, Renata Kim describes the image of the burning rainbow as unforgettable.

Yes, I saw fights on the streets of Warsaw, stones thrown at firemen, firecrackers thrown at the Russian embassy and cars on fire, but the rainbow destroyed yet again hurt me the most. Because it made me painfully aware that there is no chance of getting along with those who consider themselves to be true patriots and deny others this name.⁷⁸

Those who burned the rainbow on November 11th elevated intolerance to a national virtue and performed a vision of Polishness that did not include representation of sexual minorities. Some

⁷⁶ Agnieszka LeNart, “Julita Wójcik’s Rainbow Vandalised in Warsaw,” *Culture.pl*, <https://culture.pl/en/event/julita-wojciks-rainbow-vandalised-in-warsaw>. See also: L.N., “Burning the Rainbow,” *The Economist*, November 18, 2013, <https://www.economist.com/eastern-approaches/2013/11/18/burning-the-rainbow>.

⁷⁷ “Rainbow Will Return in May 2014,” *Culture.pl*, December 18, 2013, <https://culture.pl/en/article/rainbow-will-return-in-may-2014>.

⁷⁸ Renata Kim, “Tęcza znowu spłonie” [Rainbow Burns Again], *Newsweek.pl*, November 11, 2013, <https://www.newsweek.pl/opinie/marsz-niepodleglosci-2013-zamieszki-w-warszawie-tecza-znowu-splonie/yvfvx5>. Original: *Płonąca tęcza – tak zapamiętam 11 listopada 2013. Owszem, widziałam bijatyki na ulicach Warszawy, obrzucanych kamieniami strażaków, petardy rzucone na teren ambasady Rosji i płonące samochody, ale właśnie ta zniszczona po raz kolejny tęcza zabolala mnie najbardziej. Bo boleśnie uświadomiła mi, że nie ma żadnych szans na dogadanie się z tymi, którzy uważają się za prawdziwych patriotów, a innym tego miana odmawiają.*

Poles, the arsonists suggested, are not “real Poles”—Poland could not tolerate a rainbow, only the traditional red and white.⁷⁹



Figure 4.5. “Rainbow” burns as Polish flag waves on Independence Day (2014)

It was into this conversation that Masłowska released her video for “*Tęcza*.” With direct reference to the burning of Wójcik’s sculpture the year before, Masłowska called the fire “an act of hatred that becomes our daily bread,” and asserted that her song meant to convey “that it is wrong when God and Poland are drawn to the banner of this hatred.”⁸⁰ While people were left to debate the meaning of “*Chleb*,” Masłowska’s description of this project left little room for doubt—the violent nationalist vision of traditional Polishness was fueling hatred and it was wrong. While her statement is quite straightforward, her song employs the ironic sampling of

⁷⁹ Though the burning rainbow was the focus of Kim’s piece, it is worth noting that those participating in the Independence March also attacked the Russian Embassy. This attack against a symbol of Russia reanimates historic tensions in the present vision of Polish independence. Those who see tolerance as a threat to Polishness also see Russia as an enemy—fear of a past, occupying other (Russia) melds with fear of what they view as a new other (sexual minorities and tolerance “forced” on them by the EU).

⁸⁰ “Mister D. feat Monsieur Z – ‘*Tęcza*’ (Official Video),” posted by KayaxTV, November 11, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V9XOtdXY9kQ>. Original: *Ale pod całą groteską jest to akt nienawiści, która staje się naszym chlebem powszednim. Ta piosenka jest o tym, że źle gdy na sztandar tej nienawiści wciągany jest Bóg i Polska.*

nationalist rhetoric so characteristic of her work. Repeating “this is Poland,” Masłowska offers viewers a glitchy vision of the showdown between an aggressive grayness and the colorful “threat” conservatives imagine. In a video that regularly deteriorates into indecipherable static, visual distortion mirrors ideological distortion as Masłowska contrasts two conceptions of Poland—one a colorful reflection of the diversity of its community, and the other a gray assertion of an eternal and unchanging nation.

The video opens in black-and-white, focused on Masłowska illuminated by the television in front of her—a device that likely serves to disseminate much of the rhetoric she parrots to audiences across Poland. Dressed again as the “hip-hop cat,” she wears a baggy white tracksuit over a mesh bodysuit. While this is certainly a part Masłowska has played before, her choice to frame this critique of Polish nationalism in the visual and musical vernacular of hip-hop might also be read as a critique of the genre’s largely conservative character in Poland. While the artists considered in this dissertation are not necessarily advocating the conservative nationalism that motivated those who burned the rainbow, they are—often uncritically—trafficking in the same narratives and traditions that motivate such actions.⁸¹ Positioning herself here as a rapper, Masłowska both performs and subverts expectations—her words promote conservative nationalism, and her aggressive delivery echoes that of others in the mostly male genre. Her message, however, is one critical of the views she presents, and her identity as a woman disrupts the genre’s gender conventions.

Against a sparse, but propulsive beat, Masłowska delivers an account of a life as bleak as the video’s color palate—there is “Noise on the block/Trash on TV.”⁸² Looking for some relief,

⁸¹ For more on Polish hip-hop as a conservative form, see: Piotr Majewski, “African-American Music in the Service of White Nationalists: Polish ‘Patriotic Rap’ as a Pop Cultural Tool to Promote National Values,” *European Journal of American Studies* 13, no. 3 (2018): 1-18.

⁸² Original: *w bloku halas/w TV chala*

she thinks to head outside, but what does she find there? The rainbow. Confronted with the colorful symbol, Masłowska begins her screed. “Everyone would get pissed off,” she asserts before asking, “Who was harmed when the norm was empty, gray?”⁸³ Though she had not appeared content with the gray reality described at the start of the video, she certainly was not asking for *this*.⁸⁴

Dissatisfied with the presence of the rainbow, Masłowska repeatedly asserts a vision for how Poland should look. With a sharply articulated rap, she insists, “It’s supposed to be black and white/It’s supposed to be black and white/And preferably gray-gray/One gray race/One gray mass.”⁸⁵ This vision of a Poland without color is an exaggerated distortion of the rejection of the rainbow and, more broadly, of difference. This is not Masłowska directly quoting nationalist rhetoric, but rather pushing it to its absurd extreme. It thus becomes a parody of those who would claim that diversity challenges traditional Polish values. Such nationalist thought, Janion noted in 2006, is perpetuated by those who look to define the modern nation in a language that echoes Roman Dmowski’s right-wing interwar National Democracy movement, with the exception being that they “replaced anti-Semitism with homophobia.”⁸⁶ The “one gray race” the song advocates is a reflection of this rhetoric of exclusion and also serves as a warning, that without divergent perspectives, people become indistinguishable from one another, a nightmare

⁸³ Original: *No każdy by się wkurwił [...] Komu to szkodziło, że normalnie było pusto, szaro*

⁸⁴ It is worth noting that while Masłowska’s accompanying statement associates the video with Wójcik’s sculpture, the song makes no explicit reference to the work. It thus becomes a generalized—and thus even more ridiculous—assault on rainbows.

⁸⁵ Original: *Ma być czarno- biało,/Ma być czarno- biało,/Ma być biało- biało/A najlepiej szaro- szaro*

⁸⁶ Maria Janion, in Jarosław Kurski, “Moje herezje antynarodowe – rozmowa z Marią Janion” [My Anti-national Heresies – Conversation with Maria Janion], *Wyborcza.pl*, May 26, 2006, <http://wyborcza.pl/1,76842,3374302.html>. Original: *Choćby spór o to, czym jest współczesny, nowożytny naród. Język rządzących polityków to język neoendecki, który zastąpił antysemityzm homofobią.*

of a “gray mass”—and not one, the lyrics point out, that has anything in common with a brain.⁸⁷ This is not, Masłowska stresses, a well-reasoned position.

Having bemoaned the presence of the rainbow, Masłowska sees color seeping into the black-and-white world as she raps about “some colors for the faggots.”⁸⁸ Employing the derogatory slur, Masłowska is not only sampling a generalized homophobia, but also perhaps referencing the words of conservative politicians like Bartosz Kownacki (of the Law and Justice Party) who referred to the “burning faggot rainbow” in a Facebook post following the November 11th arson.⁸⁹ Alongside the song’s insistence that everything should be black and white, the hateful slur used to describe a rainbow might appear as another example of Masłowska exaggerating the rhetoric she evokes. The fact that it instead cites a phrase used by a national politician thus appears even more shocking. We might expect this kind of language from the absurd character in Masłowska’s video who would do away with all color, but from someone charged with national policy? Here, through sampling and collage, Masłowska conveys her critique of the homophobic rhetoric—it, like the extreme views and absurdity into which it is interpolated, does not reflect the author’s point of view.

After restating the refrain calling for a black-and-white Poland, the strong beat of the track gives way to a breathy repetition of the word “rainbow” accompanied by a swirling synth line. Aurally evoking a disorienting dream, the video offers a vision of what a “rainbow world” might look like. Michał Piróg, a Polish dancer and choreographer, takes center stage, dressed in a shiny red tracksuit and mesh top and caressing a rainbow-colored dildo against his face (Figure

⁸⁷ Original: *Co jednak z mózgową wspólnego wiele nie ma*

⁸⁸ Original: *Jakieś kolory dla pedałów*

⁸⁹ Żaneta Gotowska, “Mocne słowa posła PiS. ‘Płonie pedalska tęcza’” [Strong Words from PiS Deputy: ‘The Faggot Rainbow is Buring’], *Onet.pl*, November 12, 2013. <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/tylko-w-onecie/bartosz-kownacki-plonie-pedalska-tecza/lt40s>.

4.6). He is soon joined by a group of similarly dressed dancers. Again, Masłowska appears to be pushing homophobic rhetoric to its extreme, presenting their nightmare of a highly sexualized, rainbow-loving dancer who quickly amasses a group of followers.⁹⁰



Figure 4.6. Michal Piróg dances in the video for Mister D.'s "Tęcza" (2014)

This colorful scene ends with a cut to sampled footage of flames, collaged with the smiling face of Masłowska's collaborator Monsieur Z (Maciej Szupica). The brief glimpse into the imagined world of rainbows ends with fire. "This is Poland," Masłowska declares reentering the frame. It is a jarring transition and one that underscores the point Masłowska made in the statement accompanying the video— *this* is Poland, a nation basking in flames of intolerance. As she goes on to describe Poland, Masłowska continues to engage this contrast between the fiery act of intolerance and assertions that traditional Polish (Catholic) values promote love and

⁹⁰ This vision of LGBT movements as characterized by hypersexuality and a desire to "convert" people is common among those opposed to the promotion of equal rights. Catholic priest Marek Dziewiecki suggested LGBT movements want to "make people into infertile erotomaniacs, "while his fellow priest Henryk Grazdko preached, "it comes down to waiving a rainbow flag and trying to steal out internal values like truth, love, human life..." Though these comments were made after the release of Masłowska's video, they reflect the attitudes she playfully engages in this dance sequence. Presenting a caricature of conservative fears embodied in a single figure, Masłowska exposes their absurdity. For more on these comments, see: Małgorzata Rusek, "Wykładowca z seminarium: Homoseksualiści to pedofile, a do LGBT należą też zoofile i nekrofile" [Lecture from the seminary: Homosexuals are pedophiles, and LGBT also includes zoophiles and necrophiles], *Radom.Wyborcza.pl*, March 19, 2019, <http://radom.wyborcza.pl/radom/7,48201,24561848,wykladowca-z-seminarium-homoseksualisci-to-pedofile-a-do-lgbt.html?disableRedirects=true>; Marc Santora, "Poland's Populists Pick a New Top Enemy: Gay People," *The New York Times*, April 7, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/07/world/europe/poland-gay-rights.html>.

acceptance. Having repeated, “this is Poland,” Masłowska continues, “we welcome all of you/these are our bilboards,/these are our churches/and this is our plate for the stray wanderer,/and it’s black over everything,/that’s our rainbow that smokes and sways,/black/enjoy the barbeque.”⁹¹ Here, Masłowska presents a series of what should be symbols of tolerance and warmth—the promise of welcoming all, the traditional empty plate left at the Christmas Eve table as a sign that no one should be turned away, an hospitable invitation to “enjoy the barbeque.” In mixing them over the image of a flaming rainbow, however, she transforms them into their opposite and reveals the hypocrisy of “welcoming all” if “all” only includes those who blend into your “gray mass.” In this unsettling collage, Masłowska suggests that perhaps it is those espousing “traditional” values and nationalist sentiment who are in fact performing a parody of those beliefs—speaking of Christian charity, but implying anything but.

In her sampling of this nationalist and conservative Catholic vision of Poland, Masłowska exposes a specific vision of that nation—one that assumes an authenticity based in the perception of a divinely defined entity. This is a conception Janion contrasts with the notion of the nation as an “imagined community” born of and maintained by the exchange of ideas, history, and culture. Such a nation, Janion notes, is always “still in development.”⁹² “Tęcza’s” gray Poland is instead fixed, reflective of those who do not want to see the nation as malleable, but rather “a community given by supernatural forces, a holy community, containing in itself a heavenly

⁹¹ Original: *To jest polska/Witamy was wszystkich/To są nasze bilbordy/To są nasze kościoły/A to jest nasz talerzyk dla zbląkanego wędrowca/A to czarne nad wszystkim/To co tak dymi i się kiwa/To jest nasza tęcza, cza, cza, cza/Czarna/Zapraszamy na grilla*

⁹² Janion, in Kurski, “Moje herezje antynardowe.” Original: *Wówczas takie dziedziny jak historia idei, historia literatury, historia języka, historia sztuki bądź historia religii mają bardzo istotne znaczenie dla tego zespołu wyobrażeń, bo go bezustannie formują i sprawiają, że idea narodu jest cały czas w rozwoju.* The formulation of the national as an “imagined community” was presented by Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York, NY: Verso, 1991).

element, or a biological community.”⁹³ Such a reading of the nation sees change as a threat to identity, for tradition is framed as reflecting essential character.

Whether interpolating homophobic stereotypes, hypocritical values, or nationalist rhetoric, “Tęcza” exposes the chasm between stated values and actions and magnifies these attitudes to the point of absurdity. In this parody of conservative nationalism, Masłowska’s perspective echoes Janion’s, revealing the inconsistencies with a vision of authentic Polishness that leaves no room for change—that insists the nation *is* something beyond what people make of it. As it engages with the assertion that “this is Poland,” Masłowska’s bleak picture of the colorless Poland stands as an indictment of the rhetoric of the conservative, “gray” Poland. In its place, then, viewers might imagine the nation that recognizes and celebrates both samples of its past and the remixing done by the present, rather than insisting on the fidelity to an essentialized view of the past. Such a reading of the nation as constituted by a network of shared narratives and language resonates with Masłowska’s other work that similarly “blows up” genre, identity, and authenticity to reveal them too as products of shared ideas. Clinging to an idea of (national) authenticity that is anything but a social construct, Masłowska suggests, leads to a glitchy version of Poland where the expressed ideals of freedom and hospitality come to mean their very opposite.

Conclusion: Questioning Authenticity

Like those that precede it, this chapter is about authenticity and the ways in which narratives of the past are sampled in contemporary performances of nation, genre, and

⁹³ Janion, in Kurski, “Moje herezje antynarodowe,” Original: *Jeśli ktoś uważa, że naród to wspólnota dana przez siły nadprzyrodzone, wspólnota święta, zawierająca w sobie pierwiastek nadziemski, albo wspólnota biologiczna, to wówczas stajemy w obliczu dwóch skonfliktowanych wyobrażeń.*

individuality. Across Masłowska's work, she draws on the language and familiar narratives of everyday life to create unreal parallel worlds. In her prose and musical performances, we hear (and see) strains of Polish Romantic nationalism, hip-hop conventions, and romantic fantasy. I position this linguistic and visual collage as reflecting a process akin to hip-hop sampling, which also pieces together elements of existent culture alongside original material in order to produce a text that speaks to the present while drawing on the past. In this critical and recombinant process, I argue Masłowska destabilizes the very idea of the authentic, revealing its artifice and insisting on an art (and nation) that recognizes its own construction.

Drawing from her own articulation of her interest in "blowing up" language to reveal its component parts and varied influences, I read Masłowska's work as an effort to magnify and thus expose the narratives that shape our understanding of experience. Her *Snow White and Russian Red* revives and pushes to the extreme narratives of national victimization, while her "hip-hop novels" play with the idea of genre authenticity by making explicit the profit motives and artifice that underlie "artistic authenticity." The introduction of Mister D. and the music video for "Chleb" represent a further play with genre conventions, as Masłowska performs exaggerated depictions of hip-hopness and romantic fantasy. In the strange Poland of "Chleb," "real" life shows the traces of the various images and narratives that constitute it. Finally, "Tęcza" depicts a reality characterized by a refusal to accept the nation as a malleable construct. It is a Poland where adherence to a strict vision of a national type produces a gray society in which the notion of hospitality is perverted into an invitation to watch a rainbow burn. Though diverse in style and tone, this body of work reflects Masłowska's interest in exposing the various influences at play in our language and thought, and thus challenging the notion of an essential genre or national character.

In this challenge to essential Polishness, Masłowska engages many of the same narratives and histories that offers L.U.C. and Peja the material to craft their visions of the nation. In her sampling of these narratives, the question of how Poland is framed in the present once again becomes an issue of how we understand its relationship to its past. Masłowska's sampling, however, amplifies its construction and critical engagement with its sources. In her parodic engagement with existent narratives, Masłowska insists upon their multivalence. Simultaneously evoking convention, while also undermining it, Masłowska challenges an understanding of tradition that does not allow for multiple interpretations and applications. The lessons of the past, she insists, are not fixed—"Poland" is not fixed. Masłowska's playful engagement with convention thus comes to reflect a reading that insists upon multiplicity, complexity, and the acknowledgement of the processes of reception and performance behind national and genre authenticity.

Conclusion

Mickiewicz is Alive Today



Figure 5.1. Mazury Hip-Hop Festival (2017)

In July 2017, I attended the sixteenth-annual Mazury Hip-Hop Festival in Giżycko, Poland. Dating back to 2002, it is the oldest hip-hop festival in Poland and over the years has featured performances from Peja, L.U.C., Trzeci Wymiar, and many of the other biggest names in Polish rap. This celebration of Polish hip-hop is set against the backdrop of the Twierdza Boyen (Boyen Fortress)—a sprawling red-brick fortress built in the nineteenth-century when the area was part of the Prussian empire. Now a tourist site and slowly being overtaken by nature, the brick walls that served as a backdrop to the festival stage had housed German troops in World War One and served as a headquarters for German military intelligence in World War

Two. That July night, however, they echoed with Polish hip-hop, the music transforming the space as it refashioned the historic setting into a venue for contemporary expression.

In the festival pavilion outside the fortress walls, I was surrounded by the trappings of hip-hop. I lost count of Wu-Tang shirts. There wasn't a night of the festival that went by without at least a few sightings of apparel emblazoned with "Compton," though that mecca of West Coast hip-hop was hard to conjure surrounded by Polish forest. Caps for the LA Dodgers, New York Yankees, and Detroit Tigers cropped up like breadcrumbs leading back to the American cities where the music had first found its voice. Alongside those symbols of hip-hop's origins were reminders of its new life in Poland: Prosto streetwear; SB Maffija shirts; El Polako hats.¹ The crowd performed its allegiance to the genre with a mix of hip-hop symbols from both the US and Poland, embodying the negotiation of hip-hop's American roots in a Polish context while surrounded by the walls of a fortress that had seen the end of an empire, the shifting of national borders, and two world wars. Though it may not have been at the top of anyone's mind as they nodded their head to recordings from DMX and live performances from Polska Wersja and Quebonafide, history—both Poland's and hip-hop's—was perceptible everywhere.

Just as traces of the genre and nation's past infused the setting, so too did contemporary Polish politics make an appearance. The festival was taking place in the midst of nation-wide demonstrations in protest of judicial reforms proposed by the ruling Law and Justice (PiS) party that would have given them immense control over the nation's courts. Serving judges had to be removed, PiS chairman Jarosław Kaczyński said, because they were "protecting people who had served the old regime" and have made the courts "subordinate to foreign forces."² Accusing the

¹ Prosto is a record label and popular streetwear brand started by Polish rapper Wojciech "Sokół" Sosnowski. SB Maffija is a Warsaw-based label. El Polako is another Polish streetwear brand.

² Michał Broniatowski, "Polish Government Moves to Take Control of Top Court," *Politico.eu*, July 13, 2017, <https://www.politico.eu/article/polish-government-moves-to-take-control-of-top-court/>. For more on the proposed

judiciary of ties to past regimes and “foreign forces,” Kaczyński was drawing on nationalist traditions to question the Polishness of serving judges. Walking past the Giżycko courthouse on the way to the festival, I had passed a small group gathered in solidarity with the larger protests in major cities. They stood in front of a fence lined with candles and adorned with the flags of Poland and the EU and a banner that read “We Demand Independence of the Courts” (Żądamy Niezawisłości Sądów). Between sets, the festival’s MCs voiced their support for the protests, speaking broadly of freedom and justice as Polish values. As thousands took to the streets of Warsaw and the European community issued condemnations of the reforms, in front of the Boyen Fortress, hip-hop also took a stand. No one mentioned Mickiewicz, but as artists used their platform to speak to national ideals and push back against a perceived perversion of Polishness, I couldn’t help but think the original poet-patriot would have been proud.



Figure 5.2. Giżycko Protest (2017)

judicial reforms, see: Maciej Kisilowski, “Poland’s Point of No Return,” *Politico.eu*, July 14, 2017, <https://www.politico.eu/article/pis-polands-point-of-no-return/>; Maïa de la Baume, “European Commission ‘Very Close’ to Triggering Article 7 on Poland,” *Politico.eu*, July 19, 2017, <https://www.politico.eu/article/warsaw-judiciary-frans-timmermans-european-commission-very-close-to-triggering-article-7-on-poland/>.

I began this dissertation with the desire to understand the assertion that if Adam Mickiewicz were alive today he would be a “rhymer.” Such a claim, I have found, rests both in the reception of the Romantic poet and in Polish hip-hop musicians’ negotiations with the conventions of the genre. In both, the relationship of the individual to their community and of the present to the past come to the fore. Polish Romanticism and hip-hop both position the artist as a voice for their community; responsible for preserving and interpreting history, for making it speak to the present. Like the Romantic literature that shaped the narratives of Polish history, the Polish hip-hop in this study also looks to give shape to history—a history that today is inextricably bound with Romantic mythology. Hip-hop gives these contemporary Polish artists a form and interpretive frame with which to perform this historical and literary reception. The practice of sampling—of taking snippets of historical texts and incorporating them into present narratives—becomes a method of both reception and social commentary as Polish artists sample not only audio, but also text and legend. Reflecting on the era of Romanticism, Maria Janion and Maria Żmigrodzka suggest, “Literature in Poland had to battle for history—and it won.”³ Today, rap wages a similar battle.

At the heart of this is the reception of Mickiewicz and Polish Romanticism. Sampling not only his words, but also aspects of his legend, the musicians in this study reanimate the poet and position him as a contemporary model of a poet-patriot. Within these characterizations there are varied readings of his legacy—L.U.C. foregrounds practices of using the past as an inspiration to the present, Peja elevates the imperative to express pride in where you came from, Trzeci Wymiar reignites narratives of Polish struggle against “evil,” and Dorota Masłowska cautions against clinging to an essentializing reading of Romantic nationalism. As has been the case since

³ Maria Janion and Maria Żmigrodzka, *Romantyzm i Historia* [Romanticism and History] (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1978), 11. Original: *Literatura w Polsce musiała wydać walkę historii—i wygrała ją.*

his lifetime, the legend of Mickiewicz can take on many forms. While these artists each engage the poet in their own way, they are unified by their grounding in hip-hop and the music's celebration of poetic historiography and community engagement.

It is in this drive to give voice to a community and its history that Polish hip-hop and its reading of Romanticism come to speak to broader issues in Poland today. Poland, for centuries, has grappled with its history and the ways in which that past should inform its present. Brian Porter-Szűcs suggests of Poland, "at least in this country, when history comes alive, bad things happen."⁴ Indeed, appeals to history, particularly those that revive old grievances and elevate the messianic character of Romantic nationalism, can and have led to chauvinistic patriotism, violence, and burning rainbows. At the heart of this discussion of cultural traditions and national history are then not only questions of what Poland was, but of what it is and will be. It is a debate about what is authentically Polish and who gets to decide. These are issues Adam Mickiewicz and his peers faced in the nineteenth-century era of partition. They are issues Poland faces now as it negotiates its position in European and global politics, adjusts to changes in its population, and wages domestic debates on the power of the state and the Church. Blending the local and global, the past and present, and the individual and community, hip-hop has a voice in this conversation. Mickiewicz has been alive in Poland for generations. The nation's rappers have a chance to make him speak productively to the present.

⁴ Brian Porter-Szűcs, "Commemorating the Warsaw Uprising in 2018," <http://porterszucs.pl/2018/08/01/commemorating-the-warsaw-uprising-in-2018/>.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Lyrics to Peja/Slums Attack, “Prawdziwe czy nie” (<https://genius.com/Slums-attack-prawdziwe-czy-nie-lyrics>)

Prawdziwe czy nie bo nie każdy to wie Opowiem więc historię która tak nazywa się Od czasów niepamiętnych byłem wszystkim pochłonięty Rytmiczne gadulstwo czułem się jak wniebowzięty Wielko formatowa sprawa a nie gówniane gadżety Szablonowe postacie sami dobrze to znacie Dla jednego utworu oddać dużo byłem gotów Macie więc tu wszystko czego byłem bardzo blisko Wartościowe ideały przysłaniały w życiu wszystko Zakręcony cały nie przyjmowałem chały Zamiast Boga był Chuck D i jego skład cały	Authentic or not because not everyone knows So I will tell you a story that is called From time immemorial, I was wholly absorbed Rhythmic patter felt like bliss Large-format matter and not shitty gadgets Trite characters you know well I was ready for one song to give a lot So you have everything here to which I was very close Valuable ideals obscured everything in life Totally amazed I did not take shit Instead God was Chuck D and his whole thing
Mając kilkanaście lat wchodziłem w rapowy świat Mały zielony szczyl poznał mocny hardcore styl Szybko wyłapałem z eteru kilka z bitem chwil	I was a teen when I entered the rap world A young little brat met a strong hardcore style Quickly I caught from the ether a few moments with a beat
Nigdy nie zapomnę jakie to dla mnie było ważne Przez większość niezrozumiały, słuchaj uważnie Yo! Bum Rush The Show Wtedy tak to właśnie szło Przegrywanie na jamniku cały nowojorski show To nie było kina akcji tylko hip-hopowy gejzer	I will never forget how important it was to me Through the most incomprehensible, listen carefully Yo! Bum Rush the Show Then that’s how it went Dubbing on tape the whole New York show It was not an action movie, only a hip-hop geyser

Chłopaki z Beastie boys nagrałbym o mały włos
Videoteka 87' weszli z bitem mocny cios

Wymierzony prosto w nos nie zasypiaj na Brooklynie
Przesądzony mój los, pierwsza czapka baseballowa
Założona na skos i łańcuch z volkswagenem
Ludzie na ulicach przyjmowali to ze śmiechem
Jakbym był jakimś pojebem, niczym się nie przejmowałem
Trafiłem mocno message by zobaczyć całą Planet rock cały old-schoolowy show
Uwielbienie dla fat boysów taki był ten
Pierwszy rok, pierwszy krok
Pierwszy rok, pierwszy krok
Pierwszy rok

Prawdziwe czy nie bo nie każdy to wie
Możesz wierzyć lub nie jeśli wierzysz dowiesz się
Prawdziwe czy nie tego nie dowiesz się (x3)

Składanki na piratach miały tutaj sporą wartość
Kilkunastu wykonawców tworzy zajebistą całość
Ryczeć się chciało, zbyt dużo się nie miało
Informacje z talerza, jakże wiele to się działo
Klipy z satelity "Yo! Raps" daje nowe płyty

Nie żadne hity, undergroundowa sprawa
Zobaczyłem De La Soul w telewizji u sąsiada
Potem poszło z górki nowe nazwy nowe twarze
Czarna magia na tych mixach i na murach jeszcze bardziej
Apollo Ki Da Capri a znaczy Hulaut Flow
Afera z Martinezem, który bluzgiem dostał w dziub
Mani Hauti Dance i mix Salota Bipers
Wszystko to kręciło zajebistą zadymę
Jak Eric Bis z Rakimem swoim oryginalnym stylem

I recorded the guys from the Beastie Boys it was a close call
Video collection '87 came with a powerful blow

Aimed straight at the nose, No Sleep Till Brooklyn
Sealed my fate, the first baseball cap

Cocked to the side and a VW chain
Met with laughter from people on the streets

As if I was crazy, I did not care

I found strong message to see it all
Planet Rock, the whole old-school show
Adoration for the Fat Boys, that was it
First year, first step
First year, first step
First year

Authentic or not because not everyone knows
You can believe or not, if you believe you'll find out
Authentic or not this you'll not find out (x3)

Pirated compilations had a lot of value here

A dozen performers create an awesome whole
Wanted to shout out, it was not too much
Info from the plate, how much was going on
Clips over satellite, "Yo! Raps" gave new discs

Not any hits, underground stuff
I saw De La Soul on the neighbor's TV
It went on from there, new names, new faces

Black magic on these mixes and the walls even more
Apollo Ki Da Capri and by name Hulaut Flow
Afera with Martinez, who got curse in the mouth
Mani Hauti Dance and Mix Salota Bipers
Spinning everything, awesome riot
Like Eric Bis and Rakim with the original style

Albo Kool G Rap i Polo

Killerkazz niektórzy wolą, zadowolą się tym
wszyscy

To był fakt oczywisty zdobycie nowej taśmy
Która okupuje listy to wysiłek rzeczywisty ale
efekt fantastyczny

Gdy włączyłem streaty biznes nie
potrzebowałem iskry

Ani żadnego impulsu w stylu pokazania
biustu

Tylko Ja i ta muzyka to co czułem w to nie
wnikaj

Mocne basy z głośnika wciąż od nowa mnie
zatyka

Nowa fala doświadczeń lepsza niż metafizyka

Prawdziwe czy nie bo nie każdy to wie
Możesz wierzyć lub nie jeśli wierzysz
dowiesz się

Prawdziwe czy nie tego nie dowiesz się (x3)

Prawdziwe czy nie bo nie każdy to wie
Świeży powiew nowej fali 93' na topie Kali

Funkujące melodyjki, kronik drogi stan
zyskali całą masę zwolenników

Czas platynowych wyników, kontrowersji,
spornych kwestii

Groźnych min, tyle agresji

CMW, Spice One chłopak doszedł do swych
bram

Asla, Pleya słowa obce znaczą wiele

Ciągły raport z pola walki naroktyki, dziwki,
klamki

A na wschodnim wybrzeżu czarny księżyc w
swym pacierzu

Nowy gangsta, debiut NASa nocny włóczęga
powraca

Pełna klasa nie ma fiasco czarnej owcy, świat
znów czysty

No i stres. jaki stres? Organizer sam wiesz

Trzech fajdżerów - Fat Joe, Lord Finez, KRS
One

Wszystko to złapałem sam

Or Kool G Rap and Polo

Killerkazz some prefer, everyone satisfied

It was an obvious fact getting new tape
Real effort, fantastic effect occupy the list

When I turned on street business I did not
need a spark

No impulse in the style of showing breasts

Only me and this music don't get into what I
felt

Strong bass from the loudspeaker stops me
again and again

A new wave of experiences better than
metaphysics

Authentic or not because not everyone knows
You can believe or not, if you believe you'll
find out

Authentic or not this you'll not find out (x3)

Authentic or not because not everyone knows
The fresh air of the new wave of '93 Kali on
top

Funky melodies, chronicles dear condition
gained a whole lot of followers

Time for platinum albums, controversy,
contentions issues

Menacing expressions, so much aggression

CMW, Spice One, the boy came to their gates

Asla, Playa, foreign words mean a lot

Constant reports from the battlefield of
narcotics, whores, guns

And on the east coast, black moon in his
prayer

New gangsta, Nas's debut, night vagabond
returns

Not a flop or black sheep in the whole class,
the world is clean again

And stress. What stress? Organizer you know

Three fighters – Fat Joe, Lord Finesse, KRS
One

All this I grasped

Mało CD, dużo szumu, czasy imprez i ów cudów
Lawcach nowi słow do bólu alkohol kradł sporo rozumu
Dziki balety u Ważki znaczy Zbycha mego braszki
Czasy mojej osiemnastki, freestyle dawał swe pierwiastki
Na Łorienie rajmund zakwitł brzyni Kali się załatwił
Cały kampus skompletował Ejles tak go już wychował
Ja nic na to nie poradzę, innych rzeczy słuchać karzę
Czasem proszę lub zachęcam przyjacielska rada z serca
On ma rozum i swe racje już odebrał to z przysmakiem
Nieraz dobrze się z nim gada, nieraz skumać nie potrafię i pierdołę
Ciągle biorę wciąż a efekty są takie że nagrywam
Muddy Waters tak by można opowiadać
Co się dzieje jak zabawa spróbuj
Zbadać czy to moje czy sąsiada doznania

Poodślaniam tylko tyle jeszcze bardzo małą chwilę
Z tego co się ze mną działo przez tych długich lat o ile? Heh!

Prawdziwe czy nie bo nie każdy to wie
Możesz wierzyć lub nie jeśli wierzysz dowiesz się
Prawdziwe czy nie tego nie dowiesz się (x3)

A few CDs, a lot of buzz, times of parties and miracles
New word for pain, alcohol stole a lot of reason
Strange dance at Ważka's means Zbychu my brother
Around my eighteenth birthday, freestyle gave me its elements
At Łoren Rajmud blossomed and Kali got it done
Ejles competed the entire campus so he already brought it up
I can't help it, I punish listening to other things
Sometimes I ask for or encourage friendly advice from the heart
He has reason and own rationale already picked it up with delicacy
Sometimes I talk with him well, sometimes I can't manage to get it and talk shit
I keep taking it still and the effects are those I'm recording
Muddy Waters so you can tell
What's happening, how tryout the game
Examine whether it's my or my neighbor's experience
I only revealed so much, only a small moment
From what was happening to me for those long years how much? Heh!

Authentic or not because not everyone knows
You can believe or not, if you believe you'll find out
Authentic or not this you'll not find out (x3)

Appendix 2: Lyrics to Peja/Slums Attack, “Poznańczyk”
(<https://genius.com/Slums-attack-poznancyk-lyrics>)

Dwa siedem, dwanaście, jeden dziewięć
osiemnaście
W godzinach wieczornych pierwsze strzały,
huk nad miastem
Szósty pułk Grenadierów i koszary na
Jeźycach
Zbrojny przez miasto przemarsz, Niemca
A w okrzykach czuć prowokację, deptcą
barwy narodowe
Nie nadstawim policzka, nie pójdziem na
ugodę
Człowiek chwycił za oręż w obronie
polskości
Niepodległości i wywalczył ją
A prości ludzie dumnie wybiegli na
poznańskie ulice
Podjęli przez wroga rzuconą rękawicę
Nie chcą być częścią rzeszy, Polak w siebie
uwierzył
Wroga uderzył z bratem w boju się
sprzymierzył
Wroga zwyciężył, nie zwątpił, wojsk nie
podał
Niepodległość dla Polaka to synonim słowa
zgoda
Nie należy dłużej czekać, na ulicach trwa
walka
Pierwsza krwawa ofiara, to Franciszek
Ratajczak
To dalsza część kawałka, czas wyciągnąć
wnioski
Plac Wilhelmowski stał się Placem Wolności
Niemiec chciał wielkopolską ziemię mieć dla
siebie
Poznaniak nie pozwolił, Niemca trzymał
twarz przy glebie
My za ojczyznę, oni za pieniądze

Two seven, twelve, one nine eighteen
The first shots in the evening, a bang over the
city
The Sixth Grenadier Regiment and barracks
on Jeżyce
Armed men march through the city, German
And in shouts you hear the provocation, they
trample the national colors
Do not turn your cheek, we will not
compromise
Men raised arms in the defense of Polishness
Independence, and they won
And common people proudly ran to the streets
of Poznań
They took on the enemy's thrown gauntlet
They don't want to be part of the mass, the
Pole believed in himself
The enemy attacked, he stood by his brother
in the fight
The enemy won, but he did not doubt, did not
give up the fight
Independence for a Pole is synonymous with
the word consensus
Don't wait any longer, there's fighting on the
streets
The first blood sacrifice is Franciszek
Ratajczak
This is the next part, time to draw conclusions
Wilhelm Square became Freedom Square
Germans wanted the land of Wielkopolska for
themselves
The Poznanian didn't allow it, the Germans
keep face to the ground
We for the homeland, they for money

Wystrzały z karabinów nie słabną, będzie dobrze I kto by przypuszczał, że się zacznie jak sądzę	The rifle shots do not weaken, it will be fine And who would have thought, that it will start like I think
Powstanie wiele znaczące, bo jedyne wygrane Paderewski wysiadł u nas nim odwiedził Warszawę Właśnie tak by się stało, w powstaniu	The Uprising of great significance, because only winnings Paderewski stopped here before visiting Warsaw That's just how it happened, in the Uprising
Poznaniacy wolność wywalczyli W powstaniu tym myśmy zwyciężyli Wielkopolski ziemię obronili 90 lat od tej pamiętnej chwili	The inhabitants of Poznań won freedom Won it in the Uprising They defended the land of Wielkopolska 90 years from this memorable moment
Krok po kroku nowe miasta, miejscowości i okręgi Odbił z wyzwoleniczej ręki Polak, który cierpiał męki Za batalie dzięki lata później ludzie młodzi	Step by step, new cities, towns, districts Rebounded from the liberating hand of the Pole, who suffered agony For the battles thanks, years later young people
Dziękują praojcom, polski Poznań się odrodził W tym języku rap nagrodził Ludzi, z których do dziś dumny Hołd Powstańcom Wielkopolskim Dla prustaków gwóźdź do trumny Rdzenny Poznaniak polski patriota, zobacz Co dzieje się w tym mieście, które bezgranicznie kocham Lokalny patriota, z jeżyckiej gliny chłopak Dumny z bycia pyra, z tego żem się tu wychował Pokpiwali sobie z nas, Poznańczyków, różni tacy Wielcy patrioci, wielcy Polacy Siedzieli na obczyźnie, rozprawiali o nas głośno Złośliwie, bezkrytycznie Poznań zwali Beocją	Thanks to our forefathers, Polish Poznań is reborn In this language rap awarded People, for whom to this day proud Honor to Wielkopolska insurgents For the Prussians, a final nail in the coffin Native Poznaniak, Polish patriot, see What happens in this city, that I love boundlessly Local patriot, a boy from Jeżycka Proud to be from Poznań, grew up here The mocked us, Poznańians, different Great patriots, great Poles They sat in exile, loudly talking about us Maliciously, uncritically Poznań they called Boeotia
Czas odrzucić już na zawsze te krzywdzące epitety Poznań niczym Sparta słowa z ulicy poety Twardzi, waleczni, zdolni do ofiar Na śmierć i życie za to mój Poznań kocham	Time to reject forever these hurtful epithets Poznań like Sparta word from the street poet Tough, brave, capable of sacrifice In death and life, I love my Poznań

Więc przestańcie się naśmiewać, nie słyniemy
ze skąpstwa

Bo nikt tu nie poskąpił krwi i łez, w spokoju
zostaw nas...

So stop mocking, we're not know for
miserliness

Because no one here has not shed blood and
tears, leave us alone....

Appendix 3: Lyrics to Kabaret OT.TO, “Rap Tadeusz”
(https://www.tekstowo.pl/piosenka,ot_to,rap_tadeusz.html)

Uczył się mój ojciec i ja się uczyć muszę
Paru długich kawałków z Pana Tadeusza
No więc chodzę i wkuwam, przecież o to
chodzi
Słowo wkuwam po słowie lecz nic mi nie
wychodzi

Co już umiem, to zapomnę po dziesięciu
minutach
I po co mi to wszystko, i za co ta pokuta

Nagle słyszę za ścianą MC Hammer, trzeba
trafu
I odkryłem, że można, że tylko trzeba rapu:

Litwo, Ojczyzno moja, ty jesteś jak zdrowie

*Ile cię trzeba cenić, ten tylko się dowie kto cię
stracił*

*Dziś piękność twą w całej ozdobie
Widzę i opisuję, bo tęsknię po tobie
Gdzie bursztynowy świerzop, gryka jak śnieg
biała
Gdzie panieńskim rumieńcem dzięcielina
pała.*

I już umiem na pamięć cały dwunastoksiąg
Koledzy patrzą na mnie jak bym żabę połknął

Wiem, że nie ma się czym chwalić, że to
trudu nie warte
Ale czy nie można czasem czegoś zrobić dla
żartu

Gdy zaczepia mnie policjant, czy mam
dokumenty

My father learned and I have to study
A few long segments from Pan Tadeusz
And so I go and cram, after all that's it

I cram word after word but nothing comes of
it

What I already know, I will forget after ten
minutes
And why do I need all this, what is it penance
for

Suddenly, I hear MC Hammer behind the
wall, you need luck
And I discovered, that it's possible, only need
rap:

*O Lithuania, my fatherland thou art like
health*

*I never knew till now how precious, till I lost
thee*

*Now I see thy beauty whole
I see and describe, because I yearn for thee.
Where amber trefoil, buck-wheat white as
snow,
Where clover with her maiden blushes grow.*

And I've already memorized all twelve books
Colleagues look at me as if I'd swallowed a
frog

I know, that it's nothing to brag about, that it
is not worth the trouble
But can you not sometimes do something for
a joke

When the police bother me, do I have my
documents

Odpowiadam mu wierszem: długie,
cętkowane, kręte
Albo mówi dziewczyna: *sięgaj tam gdzie
wzrok nie sięga*
Ja jej na to mówię, że to trzynasta księga.

Litwo, Ojczyzno moja...

No i w szkole zadyma, jest odpytywanie
Polonistka poluje na mnie, zje mnie na
śniadanie
Patrzy na mnie łapczywie, myśli: szanse
raczej małe
Na pewno nic nie umie, postawimy gałę

I tak gała za gałą, chyba od pół roku
A ja patrzę na nią z góry i trochę jakby z boku

Z godnością wstaję, ona pyta mnie czy umiem
Ja przez chwilę stoję cicho, a potem rzucam
dumnie:

Litwo, Ojczyzno moja, ty jesteś jak zdrowie

*Ile cię trzeba cenić, ten tylko się dowie kto cię
stracił
Dziś piękność twą w całej ozdobie
Widzę i opisuję, bo tęsknię po tobie
Gdzie bursztynowy świerzop, gryka jak śnieg
biała
Gdzie panieńskim rumieńcem - a ona: siadaj!
pała!*

Milknę lecz nadal stoję, ręce mam w
kieszeniach
Nie ma sensu próbować, nie warto też się
zmieniać
Ktoś kiedyś powiedział, że życie to nie bajka
A ktoś inny z kolei, że Kain zabił Abła

I tak myślę, co kiedy i kto wypowiedział
Czy wiedział o czym mówi i czy mówił o
czym wiedział
Potem mówię już na głos: więc pokażcie mi
papier

I answer him in verse: long,
mottled, winding
Or I say to girls: *reach places
out of sight*
I tell her, that it is the thirteenth book.

Oh Lithuania, my Fatherland...

And at school it's a riot, there are questions
The Polish teacher is hunting for me, she will
eat me for breakfast
She looks at me greedily, she thinks: chances
are rather small
Certainly he can't know anything, we lock
eyes
And so eye to eye, probably for half a year
And I look at her from above and a bit from
the side
I get up with dignity, she asks if I am able
I stand quiet for a moment, then I drop
proudly:

*O Lithuania, my Fatherland thou art like
health*

*I never knew till now how precious, till I lost
thee
Now I see thy beauty whole
I see and describe, because I yearn for thee.
Where amber trefoil, buck-wheat white as
snow,
Where clover with her maiden blushes grow.*

I fall silent, but I'm still standing, my hands
in my pockets
There's no sense in trying, it is not worth
changing
Someone once said, that life is no fairytale
And someone else, in turn, that Cain killed
Abel
And I think, what when and who declared
Did he know of what he spoke and did he
speak of what he knew
Then I say out loud: so show me the paper

Kto powiedział i kiedy, że Mickiewicz to nie raper?

Litwo, Ojczyzno moja...

Who said and when, that Mickiewicz was not a rapper?

Oh Lithuanian, my Fatherland...¹

¹ Italicized passages are quoted from Mickiewicz's *Pan Tadeusz* and translation is adapted from Adam Mickiewicz, *Pan Tadeusz*, trans. Kenneth R. Mackenzie (New York, NY: Hippocrene Books, 1990).

Appendix 4: Lyrics to Trzeci Wymiar, “Reduta Ordon”¹
(https://www.tekstowo.pl/piosenka,trzeci_wymiar,reduta_ordona.html)

(Pork)

Nam strzelać nie kazano - wstąpiłem na
działo
I spojrziałem na pole dwieście armat grzmiało

Artylerii ruskiej ciągną się szeregi
Prosto, długo, daleko, jako morza brzegi
I widziałem ich wodza przybiegł, mieczem
skinął

I jak ptak jedno skrzydło wojska swego
zwinął
Wylewa się spod skrzydła ściśniona piechota
Długą czarną kolumną, jako lawa błota
Nasypana iskrami bagnatów jak sępy
Czarne chorągwie na śmierć prowadzą
zastępy

(Nullo)

Przeciw nim sterczy biała, wąska, zaostzona
Jak głaz bodzący morze, reduta Ordon
Sześć tylko miała armat wciąż dymią i świecą

I nie tyle prędkich słów gniewne usta miecą
Nie tyle przejdzie uczuć przez duszę w
rozpaczy
Ile z tych dział leciało bomb, kul i kartaczy

Patrz, tam granat w sam środek kolumny się
nurza

Jak w fale bryła lawy, pułk dymem
zachmurza

Pęka wśród dymu granat, szyk
pod niebo leci

I ogromna łysina wśród kolumny świeci

(Pork)

We were ordered not to shoot – I joined the
gun team

I looked at the field, two hundred guns
thundered

Rows of Russian artillery stretch out
Straight, long, far, the sea’s shore
And I saw their leader come rushing, waving
his sword

And like a bird, one wing of his army
collapsed

And the concentrated infantry spills forth
In a long black column, like a flow of mud
Sprinkled with bayonet sparks, like vultures
Black banners lead their hosts to death

(Nullo)

Against them points white, narrow, sharpened
Ordon’s Redoubt, like a boulder in the sea
It only had six cannons, yet they still smoke
and light

And not so much fast words from angry lips
Not so many feelings will go through a soul
in despair

How many from them flew bombs,
cannonballs, canisters

Look, a grenade sinks into the middle of the
column

Like a block of lava in the waves, it covers
the regiment with smoke

In the smoke the grenade bursts, the array
flies into the sky

And a great bald spot in the column shines

¹ Trzeci Wymiar’s song is adapted from the original text by Adam Mickiewicz. See: Adam Mickiewicz, “Reduta Ordon” [Ordon’s Redoubt], <https://literat.ug.edu.pl/amwiersz/0060.htm>.

(Szad)

Tam kula, lecąc, z dala grozi, szumi, wyje
Ryczy jak byk przed bitwą, miota się, grunt
ryje

Już dopadła jak boa wśród kolumn się zwija

Pali piersią, rwie zębem, oddechem zabija

Najstraszniejszej nie widać, lecz słycać po
dźwięku

Po waleniu się trupów, po ranionych jęku
Gdy kolumnę od końca do końca przewierci
Jak gdyby środkiem wojska przeszedł anioł
śmierci

(Nullo)

Gdzież jest król, co na rzezie tłumy te
wyprawia?

Czy dzieli ich odwagę, czy pierś sam
nadstawia?

Nie, on siedzi o pięćset mil na swej stolicy

Król wielki, samowładnik świata połowicy
Zmarszczył brwi i tysiące kibitek wnet leci
Podpisał, tysiące matek oplakuje dzieci

Skinął, padają knuty od Niemna do Chiwy
Mocarzu, jak Bóg silny, jak szatan złośliwy

Gdy Turków za Bałkanem twoje straszą spiżę

Gdy poselstwo paryskie twoje stopy liże
Warszawa jedna twojej mocy się urąga
Podnosi na cię rękę i koronę ściąga
Koronę Kazimierzów, Chrobrych z twojej
głowy

Boś ją ukradł i skrwawił, synu Wasilowy

(Pork)

Car dziwi się ze strachu, drżą Petersburgczany

Car gniewa się ze strachu, mrą jego dworzany
Ale sypią się wojska, których Bóg i wiara

(Szad)

There a bullet flying, threatens, hums, howls
Roars like a bull before battle, thrashes, digs
at the ground

It's already there, curled among the columns
like a boa

Its chest burns, it tears with teeth, kills with
breath

The most terrible can't be seen, but
recognized by its sound

of pounding corpses, of wounded groans
It drills the column from end to end
As though through the army there walked the
angel of death

(Nullo)

Where is the king, who sends those crowds to
slaughter?

Does he share their courage, put his neck on
the line?

No, he sits in his capitol five hundred miles
away

Great king, the sole ruler of half the world
He frowns, thousands of kibitka fly
He signs his name, thousands of mothers are
left mourning their children

He nods, whips fall from Niemen to Chiwa
A strong man, strong as God, malicious as
Satan

When Turks beyond the Balkans are
threatened by your bronze

When the Paris legation lick your feet
Warsaw alone sneers at your power

It raises its hand pulls off the crown
The crown of Kazimierz, Chrobry from your
head

For you have stolen it and covered it in blood,
son of Vasili!

(Pork)

The Czar is startled, the people of Petersburg
tremble

The Czar is angry, his courtiers die of fear
But crumbles armies, for which God and faith

Jest Car, Car gniewny, umrzem, rozweselim
Cara
Posłany wódz kaukaski z siłami
pół-swiata
Wierny, czynny i sprawny jak knut w ręku
kata

Is Czar, Czar is angry, I will die, I will cheer
him
The Caucasian leader is sent with forces of
half the world
Faithful, active and efficient as a knut in the
executioner's hand

(Szad)
Ura! ura! patrz, blisko reduty, już w rowy

Wala się, na faszynę kładąc swe tułowy
Już czernią się na białych palisadach wałów

Jeszcze reduta w środku, jasna od wystrzałów

Czerwieni się nad czernią jak w środek
mrowiaka
Wrzucony motyl błyska, mrowie go naciska
Tak zgasła reduta, czyż ostatnie działo

Stracone z łoża w piasku paszczę zagrzebało?
Czy zapał krwią ostatni bombardyer zalał?
Zgasnął ogień, już Moskał roгатki wywalał

(Szad)
Ura! Ura! Look, near the redoubt, already in
the trenches
They bodies pound on the fascine
There's already black on the white palisades'
embankment
Still in the middle, the redoubt, bright from
shots
Red over black, as though into the middle of
an anthill
A butterfly thrown, ants rush it
So the redoubt was extinguished, is that how
it happened at last,
Thrown out and buried its head in the sand?
Was the last bombardier flooded in blood?
He extinguished the fire, Moskał already
breaking open the gate

(Pork)
Gdzież ręczna broń? dzisiaj pracowała więcej

Niż na wszystkich przeglądach za władzy
książęcej
Zgadłem, dlaczego milczy, bo nieraz
widziałem
Garstkę naszych walczących z Moskali
nawałem
Gdy godzinę wołano dwa słowa - pał, nabij

Gdy oddechy dym tłumi, trud ramiona słabi

A wciąż grzmi rozkaz wodzów, wre żołnierza
czynność
Na koniec bez rozkazu pełnią swą powinność

(Pork)
Where are the riflemen? Today they did more
work
Than on all inspections under princely rule

I guessed, why it's silent, because I have seen
not once
A few of ours fighting with Muscovites
onslaught
When for an hour two words were called—
fire, load
When smoke chokes the breath and arms are
weak
And yet the commander's orders sound,
soldier's action rages
In the end they do their duty without order

(Szad)
Na koniec bez rozwagi, bez czucia, pamięci

(Szad)
In the end without consideration, without
feeling, without memories

Żołnierz jako młyn palny nabija - grzmi -
kręci
Broń od oka do nogi, od nogi na oko
Aż ręka w ładownicy długo i głęboko

Szukała, nie znalazła i żołnierz pobladnął

Nie znalazłszy ładunku, już bronią nie
władnął
I uczył, że go pali strzelba rozogniona
Upuścił ją i upadł nim dobiją, skona
Takem myślał, a w szaniec nieprzyjaciół kupa
Już łązła, jak robactwo na świeżego trupa

The soldier, like a firing mill loads, thunders,
turns
Weapon from eye to leg, from led to eye
Until the hand in the cartridge carries long
and deep
Searched and did not find, and the soldier
grew pale
Without firing a load, he did not control the
weapon anymore
And he felt, that hot rifle burns him
He dropped the gun and fell down, slain
That's what he thought, and enemies were
entering the redoubt
Already crawling like vermin on a fresh
corpse²

² Translation adapted from: "Ordon's Redoubt – Adjutant's Story by Adam Mickiewicz,"
<http://www.allreadable.com/d1a03RJo>; Aleksandra Szymanska, "My Tribute To Adam Mickiewicz,"
<https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/my-tribute-to-adam-mickiewicz/>.

Appendix 5: Lyrics to Peja, “Wielka Improwizacja”¹
(<https://genius.com/Peja-wielka-improwizacja-lyrics>)

Samotność - cóż po ludziach, czym śpiewak dla ludzi?	Loneliness - what about people, what is a singer for people?
Gdzie człowiek, co z mej pieśni całą myśl wysłucha	Where is the man, who will hear from my song the whole idea,
Obejmie okiem wszystkie promienie jej ducha?	Whose eyes will take in its radiant spirit?
Nieszczęsny, kto dla ludzi głos i język trzodzi:	Unfortunate, who for the people, voice and tongue toil:
Język kłamie głosowi, a głos myślom kłamie;	The tongue belies the voice, and voice belies thoughts;
Myśl z duszy leci bystro, nim się w słowach złamie	Thoughts fly from the soul sharply, before they break in words,
A słowa myśl pochłona i tak drżą nad myślą	And words consume thought, and on the thought they tremble,
Jak ziemia nad połkniętą, niewidzialną rzeką	Like the earth above an invisible subterranean river.
Z drżenia ziemi czyż ludzie głębi nurtów docieką	From the trembling of the earth, do people know the deepening currents,
Gdzie, gdzie pędzi, czy się domyślą? -	Or guess where they run? –
Uczucie krąży w duszy, rozpala się, żarzy	Feelings circulate in my soul, igniting, glowing,
Jak krew po swych głębokich, niewidomych cieśniach;	Like blood through its deep invisible body;
Ile krwi tylko ludzie widzą w tej mojej twarzy	As little blood as people see in my face,
Tylko tyle z mych uczuć dostrzegą w mych pieśniach	Only so much do men recognize the strength of my feelings in my songs
Tyle z mych uczuć dostrzegą w mych pieśniach	So much do they recognize the strength of my feeling in my songs
(Ref.)	(Ref.)
Oto Wielka Improwizacja, spore wyzwanie	This is the Great Improvisation, a big challenge,
Wielka Improwizacja, moje przesłanie	Great Improvisation, my message,
Wielka Improwizacja, Rychu na bicie	Great Improvisation, Rychu on the beat,

¹ Peja's song is adapted from the original text by Adam Mickiewicz. See: Adam Mickiewicz, *Dziady, część III* [Forefathers' Eve, Part III], <https://wolnelektury.pl/katalog/lektura/dziady-dziady-poema-dziady-czesc-iii.html>.

Wielka Interpretacja rap z Mickiewiczem

Depczę was, wszyscy poeci
Wszyscy mędrce i proroki
Których wielbił, wielbił świat szeroki
Gdyby chodzili dotąd wśród swych dusznych
dzieci
Gdyby wszystkie pochwały i wszystkie
oklaski
Słyszeli, czuli i za słuszne znali

I wszystkie sławy każdodzienniej blaski
Promieniami na wieńcach swoich zapałali
Z całą pochwałą muzyką i wieńców ozdobą

Zebraną z wieków tyła i z pokoleń tyła

Nie czuliby własnego szczęścia, własnej
mocy
Jak ja dziś czuję w tej samotnej nocy:
Kiedy sam śpiewam w sobie
Śpiewam samemu sobie
Tak! - czuły jestem, silny jestem i rozumny. -
Nigdy tak nie czułem, tak jak w tej chwili -
Dziś mój zenit, moc moja dzisiaj się przesili
Dziś poznam, czym najwyższy, czyli tylko
dumny;
Dziś chwila przeznaczona
I najsilniej dziś wyteżę duszy mej ramiona –

To chwila Samsona
Kiedy więzień i ślepy tak dumał u kolumny

Zrzucę ciało i tylko tak jak duch wezmę
pióra-
Potrzeba lotu
Wylecę z planet gwiazd kołowrotu
Tam dojdę, gdzie graniczą Stwórca i natura

(Ref.)

Oto Wielka Improwizacja, spore wyzwanie

Wielka Improwizacja, moje przesłanie
Wielka Improwizacja, Rychu na bicie
Wielka Interpretacja rap z Mickiewiczem

Great Interpretation rap with Mickiewicz.

I have trampled you, all the poets,
All sages and prophets,
Who were adored, adored the world wide.
Had they walked among the children of their
soul,
If all praise and all
applaud
They had heard, and felt and knew it were
true,
And all the glow of every day fame
Radiated in rays on them,
With all praise of music and wreaths,
decoration
Chosen from all the ages and generations of
praise,
They would not feel their own happiness,
their own power,
How I feel today in this lonely night:
When I sing alone for myself,
Alone for myself.
Yes! - I am sensitive, strong and intelligent. –
Never have I felt like at this moment -
Today, my zenith, my height of power,
Today I will know if I am one supreme, or
only proud;
Today is the destined moment,
Today most strong, I stretch my soul's arms
wide -
This is the moment that was Samson's,
When a prisoner, blind he, by the column,
was proud.
I cast off my flesh and as a spirit spread my
wings -
It's flight I need
From the axel of stars and planets I fly
I will go there, to the border where nature and
Creator meet.

(Ref.)

This is the Great Improvisation, a big
challenge,
Great Improvisation, my message,
Great Improvisation, Rychu on the beat,
Great Interpretation rap with Mickiewicz.

Daj mi rząd dusz! - Gardzę tą martwą budową

Którą gmin światem zowie i przywykł ją chwalić

Żem nie próbował dotąd, czyli moje słowo

Nie mogłoby jej wnet zwalić

Lecz czuję w sobie, że gdybym mą wolę

Ścisnął, natężył i razem wyświecił

Może bym sto gwiazd zgasił, a drugie sto wzniecił -

Bo jestem nieśmiertelny! i w stworzenia kole

Są inni nieśmiertelni; - wyższych nie spotkałem. -

Najwyższy na niebiosach! - Ciebie tu szukałem

Ja najwyższy z czujących na ziemnym padole

Nie spotkałem Cię dotąd - żeś Ty jest,

zgaduję;

Niech Cię spotkam i niechaj Twą wyższość

uczuję -

Ja chcę władzy, daj mi ją, lub wskaż do niej drogę!

O prorokach, dusz władcach, że byli, słyszałem

I wierzę; lecz co oni mogli, to i ja mogę

Ja chcę mieć władzę, jaką Ty posiadasz

Ja chcę duszami władać, jak Ty nimi władasz

(Ref.)

Oto Wielka Improwizacja, spore wyzwanie

Wielka Improwizacja, moje przesłanie

Wielka Improwizacja, Rychnu na bicie

Wielka Interpretacja rap z Mickiewiczem

Give me rule of souls! - I despise this dead form,

Which men call the world, and praise,

I have not tried whether my mere word

Might that structure wholly raze.

But I feel in myself, that if my will

I draw tight, strain, and together illuminate,

Perhaps I can extinguish a hundred stars, and light a hundred sill -

For I am immortal! and in creation's wheel

There are other immortals; - but I've met none higher. -

Supreme in the heavens! - I have sought You here,

I am the highest of those who feel on this earth.

I have not met You yet - You are, I guess;

Let me meet You and feel your higher power-

I want power, give it to me or show me the way!

I have heard of prophets who could rein over spirits,

And I believe; but I can do as they,

I want to have the power that You have,

I want to rule souls as You rule them.

(Ref.)

This is the Great Improvisation, a big challenge,

Great Improvisation, my message,

Great Improvisation, Rychnu on the beat,

Great Interpretation rap with Mickiewicz.²

² Translation adapted from: *Forefathers*, trans. Count Potocki of Montalk (London: The Polish Cultural Foundation, 1968), 165-178; *Forefathers' Eve Part III*, trans. edited by George Rapall Noyes, in *Polish Romantic Drama: Three Plays in English Translation*, ed. Harold B. Segel (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977): 100-111.

Appendix 6: Lyrics to Mister D., “Chleb”
(https://www.tekstowo.pl/piosenka,mister_d_,chleb.html)

Tego dnia miałam rozbierać choinkę, ale
powiedziałam matce,
że pójdę wpierw po chleb, na kolację.
Co nie pójdę do Żabki, nie ma tam kolejki,
może daleko, ale dają te naklejki.

Za 500 dostajesz maskotkę,
bynajmniej dla mnie są one mega słodkie.
Jak wychodzę, on jak zawsze siedzi na ławce,
z Tigerem i się na mnie... patrzy

ja idę, on się patrzy,
ja idę, on się patrzy,
ja idę on się patrzy.

Zatrzymuje się cała ulica,
gdy on mnie co mam w tej siatce pyta,
ja mówię, że nie wiem, że w ogóle, co go to,
język mi się płacze, nogi się pode mną gną,

on mówi, że jego stara
chleba nie kupuje, tylko piecze sama.
Kiedyś ciągle najebana, teraz uśmiech ma na
twarzy,
chleb se wypieka, o śmierci już nie... marzy,

o śmierci już nie marzy,
on łapie mnie za rękę,
tak dziwnie na mnie patrzy.

Podchodzi tak blisko, dotyka mojej twarzy,
rękę moją ściska, od potu śliską, jego oddech
parzy.

Tak się składa, że dziś stara w ciężkim stanie

That day I was going to take down the
Christmas tree, but I told my mother,
that I first I was buying bread, for dinner.
So I go to Żabka, where there's never a line,
it might be far, but they give these stickers.

For 500 you get a teddy,
not at all for me they are super sweet.
As I leave, as usual he is sitting on a bench,
with a Tiger and at me...he stares

I'm walking, he's staring,
I'm walking, he's staring,
I'm walking, he's staring.

The whole street stands still,
when he asks me what I have in my bag,
I say, I don't know, what is it to you,
my tongue is tied, my legs bend under me,

he says, that his mom
never buys bread, only bakes it.
She used to always be fucked up, now there's
a smile on her face,
with bread baking, about death she no
longer...dreams,

she does not dream about death anymore,
he takes me by the hand,
he stares at me so strangely.

He comes so close, he touches my face,
he squeezes my hand, slippery from sweat,
his breath burns.

It just so happens, that today she's in the ICU,

zładowała na OIOM-ie, raczej trochę tam
zostanie,
tomografia dobrze jej nie wróży,
a maszyna do chleba dobra się kurczy.

Ja bynajmniej bym odsprzedał ci ją tanio,
dodał gratis nakładkę i książkę z przepisami,
piekła byś se chleb, no i w ogóle,
byś nie musiała do tej Żabki już tak łązić
ciągle.

Od tamtej pory, nic, tylko wypiekam,
aż góra bochenków po sufit zalega,
z chleba upiekłam ściany, krzesła i obrazy,
zamiast łez okruszki, toczą się po mojej...
twarzy

po mojej twarzy,
po mojej twarzy,
o śmierci już nie marzę.

in bad condition, rather, she'll stay there a bit,
the CAT scan does not bode well for her,
and the bread machine is gathering dust.

It wouldn't be a big deal, I'd sell it to you
cheaply, and throw in a cover and cook book,
You could bake bread yourself,
And you wouldn't have to go to Żabka and
keep walking like this.

From that day, all I do is bake,
from floor to ceiling is taken up by loaves,
I baked walls, chairs, and pictures of bread,
instead of tears, crumbs roll down my face

down my face
down my face
I no longer dream of death.

Appendix 7: Lyrics to Mister D., “Tęcza”
(https://www.tekstowo.pl/piosenka,mister_d_,tecza.html)

Stara haruje, w bloku hałas, w TV chała,	The old lady's working, noise on the block, trash on the TV,
Miało stanąć to znowu podrożało,	It was supposed get cheaper, it's again more expensive
A jak by było mało wychodzę na ulicę zaznać trochę ulgi a tam Tęcza	And I go out on the street to get some relief and there Rainbow
No każdy by się wkurwił Rozumiem, że pogoda deszcz, słońca przebłyśki, ale Tęcza?	Well, everyone would get pissed off I understand, that rainy weather, sun shines, but Rainbow?
To już pedalskie są wymysły Komu to szkodziło, że normalnie było pusto, szaro Ludziom do twarzy przynajmniej pasowało Jakieś kolory dla pedałów, ma być czarno- biało, ma być czarno- białe A najlepiej szaro- szaro Jedna rasa szara, jedna szara masa Co jednak z mózgową wspólnego wiele nie ma	It's gay ideas now Who was hurt, when normal was empty, gray It at least fit the face to people Some colors for the gays, it has to be black- white, it has to be black-white And best gray-gray One gray race, one gray mass It doesn't have much in common with a brain however
Ma być czarno- białe, Ma być czarno- białe, Ma być białe- białe A najlepiej szaro- szaro	It has to be black- white, It has to be black- white, It has to be white- white And best gray- gray
Czerwony dozwolony, zbita mordą i kiełbasa Ma być szaro, od szarego wara, pozdro nara	Red allowed, beaten face and kielbasa It has to be gray, from gray keep away, see ya
Tęcza, cza, cza, cza, Tęcza, cza, cza, cza, Tęcza!	Rainbow, ow, ow, ow Rainbow, ow, ow, ow Rainbow!

To jest Polska!
Witamy nad Wisłą
To są nasze bilbordy
To są nasze kościoły
A to to takie ni to lasy ni to wysypiska
A to czarne nad wszystkim
To co tak dymi i się kiwa
To jest nasza tęcza
Była niegrzeczna, więc trochę się spaliła

To jest polska
Witamy was wszystkich
To są nasze bilbordy
To są nasze kościoły
A to jest nasz talerzyk dla zbłąkanego
wędrowca
A to czarne nad wszystkim
To co tak dymi i się kiwa
To jest nasza tęcza, cza, cza, cza
Czarna
Zapraszamy na grilla

Tęcza, cza, cza, cza,
Tęcza, cza cza, cza,
Tęcza!

This is Poland!
Welcome to the Vistula
These are our billboards
These are our churches
And that's it, not forests, not a dump
And it's black over everything
What so smokes and beckons
This is our rainbow
It was rude, so it burned a little

This is Poland
Welcome to all of you
These are our billboards
These are our churches
And this is our plate for the lost wanderer

And it's black over everything
What so smokes and beckons
This is our rainbow, ow, ow, ow
Black
Enjoy the barbeque

Rainbow, ow, ow, ow
Rainbow, ow, ow, ow
Rainbow!

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