Contemporary Afro-American Poets and
Hip-hop: Rhythm, Rhyme, and Race in the
Poetry of Terrance Hayes and Harryette
Mullen
Master’s Diploma Thesis

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I declare that I have worked on this thesis independently, using only the primary and secondary sources listed in the bibliography.

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Author’s signature
Acknowledgement

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# Table of Contents

Introduction .................................................................................................................................................. 5
Themes and the Development of Black Identity ......................................................................................... 16
  Terrance Hayes ...................................................................................................................................... 21
  Harryette Mullen ................................................................................................................................... 29
Rhyme ......................................................................................................................................................... 41
  Terrance Hayes ...................................................................................................................................... 45
  Harryette Mullen ................................................................................................................................... 55
Rhythm ......................................................................................................................................................... 64
  Terrance Hayes ...................................................................................................................................... 66
  Harryette Mullen ................................................................................................................................... 72
Conclusion ................................................................................................................................................... 76
Works Cited .................................................................................................................................................. 78
Resumé ......................................................................................................................................................... 82
Resumé ......................................................................................................................................................... 83
Introduction

Hip-hop genre has had an undeniable influence on contemporary poetry in the recent years. The influence of hip-hop on poetry is apparent mainly in the racial and political themes it often addresses, the use of rhyme, and rhythm. Such influence can be found in the poetry of Terrance Hayes and Harryette Mullen. These African-American contemporary poets started publishing their work during “the golden age of hip-hop, most commonly defined as the mid-1980s and early 1990s” (42), as defined by David Caplan. Hip-hop is constantly struggling to be acknowledged as a serious genre in literature and poetry. Some critics such as Adam Bradley are considered defenders of hip-hop as a serious art form. In Bradley’s *Book of Rhymes*, he states, “Rap is poetry, but its popularity relies in part on people not recognizing it as such” (12). Bradley’s arguments are put against those who oppose the acknowledgment of hip-hop, such as the poet Mark Strand, “There's no connection between rap and poetry. . . . I can't listen to it. It's like being blasted up against a wall” (qtd. in Infante). Considering the present perception of rhyme, rhythm, and the treatment of the issues of race in contemporary literature, this thesis will discuss and analyze these arguments and show how big of an impact hip-hop can have on poetry.

The influence of music in poetry has a long history. Considering music with African-American roots, blues and jazz were the genres with the biggest impacts at the end of the 19th century. Blues carries the features of the call-and-response format, simple chord repetitions, and its lyrics are based on work songs and narrative ballads. Jazz is considered to have roots in blues, but progresses from the chord repetition to focus on improvisation, combination on rhythms, while the format of call-and-response and the theme of work songs stay. Blues and jazz music were “‘sad songs’ because they manifested the ‘hopeless weariness’ of an oppressed people” (Chinitz 178). First, blues
and jazz poetry only incorporated the allusions and references towards singers and their songs. Later around the 1920s, the Harlem Renaissance manifested and with it emerged Langston Hughes, one of the best-known writers of jazz poetry. He incorporated the structure of blues and jazz into his poems. He borrowed the often used repetition of blues and improvisation of jazz. Syncopated rhythms and free punctuation were used in his poems. He romanticized the social group of the African-American lower class “with which he always identified but to which he himself never really belonged” (Chinitz 178). He focused mainly on race, identity, and freedom but ran into the complication of writing purely African-American poetry. Langston explains his use of jazz in “The Negro and the Racial Mountain”:

But jazz to me is one of the inherent expressions of Negro life in America; the eternal tom-tom beating in the Negro soul--the tom-tom of revolt against weariness in a white world, a world of subway trains, and work, work, work; the tom-tom of joy and laughter, and pain swallowed in a smile.

In this paragraph, the rhythms of blues and jazz are used in the punctuation. The repetitions of “the tom-tom”, “world”, and “laughter” further underline the influence of jazz, while explaining an African-American poet should incorporate a strong sense of racial pride instead of hiding his roots.

Jazz was then further explored and used in works of the Beat generation and the avant-garde New York School and Black Mountain poets during the 1950s. These movements also inspired Amiri Baraka, the poet of the Black Arts Movement, who focused on the racial pride within his jazz poetry in a similar manner as Hughes. This was to insist on the necessity for a political change where African-American people would be fully accepted into American society as citizens with equal rights. Around this time during the 1970s, the genre of hip-hop began to devolve with its roots in jazz and
blues, evolving with a more introspective glance at the struggle of a racial minority being brought into submission.

It is important to note that hip-hop does not refer only to the music genre. It is an art movement also including dancing and visual art such as graffiti or even fashion. While rap is sometimes used interchangeably with hip-hop, it is a distinct element of the music genre. To fully understand hip-hop, it is crucial to observe the history and development of the genre. Similarly as blues and jazz arose from the black man’s desperation over the struggle for freedom, understanding, and ultimately equality, hip-hop was mostly born out of a place of hopelessness and devastation; “the ruined South Bronx of the 1970s, a catalyst for the racial and political issues to rise again to the attention of the general public” (Chang 35). After the destructive riots and frequent instances of arson in the 70s’ turning the borough into a pile of rubble, the Bronx became the epitome of poverty. Numerous gangs formed in the district, gradually developing the genre at block parties. One of the originators of hip-hop music is the Ghetto Brothers, “a Puerto Rican group realizing the cause of the problems of the district” (Chang 36). They tried to bring the African-Americans, Puerto Ricans, and other ethnic groups together with their themes of racial pride similar to jazz. At the same time, Gil Scott Heron, considered to be one of the first rappers “of the Black Aesthetic” (Decker 60), was around 12 when he lived in Bronx. Influenced by the music around him during his childhood, Heron brought together the features of jazz and hip-hop to speak of the race issues and racial identity in his first pieces of rap.

Hip-hop, same as blues and jazz, was influenced by the cultures of the Caribbean and African-Americans from the south of the US, the main inhabitants of the Bronx at the time. “The so-called Golden Age of Rap, the years from 1988 to 1993” (Cheney 278), is the milestone in hip-hop culture. By then hip-hop changed from a
revolutionary and progressive yet marginal musical genre to a part of black culture and consciousness. The genre was considered to stop being marginal in 1979 when hip-hop was “‘commercialized’ in the form of recordings” (Williams 137). That gave the genre the means to spread behind the area of the Bronx. Hip-hop had the similar impact jazz and soul music had on black nationalism and identity. Before the golden age, hip-hop music was marginal as it was still focused on the local area of the Bronx where the genre was still forming and from such terms as the Master of Ceremonies, DJ, “scratching” all originated. Only during the golden age, musicians started to fully explore the genre and to commercialize it. The focus of hip-hop genre shifted from racial pride and identity to individuality and success. The so-called “gansta rap” came into being and with it all the clichés of the importance of money, power, sex, and prosperity.

The genre was revolutionary primarily for its form; it partially adopted the attributes of Africanist principles of performance. These principles, described by Brenda Dixon Gottschild in her work on Caribbean performance arts, generally come from the concepts of continuity, duality, and community, such as “a dialogue between the performer and the audience” (12). Hip-hop was, or arguably has been, the voice of a community for a community. It strengthened the bond among the community by the call-and-response technique, same as the traditional music of the Caribbean, hip-hop music preferred rhythm over melody. During the golden peak of hip-hop, however, its voice began to be heard for its themes of racial issues and authenticity.

With the focus of hip-hop on rhythm, rhyme became the ideal device to create and emphasize the rhythm of a poem based in rap. However, in contemporary American poetry, rhyme has become quite an unpopular device, it appears only occasionally and poets are very careful with its use as they want to avoid predictability and the
skepticism toward it. Rhyme is even treated with condescension; there are poets, such as Donald Davie, who claim that “the era of rhyme is over” (166). It is often generally believed that rhyme sounds out of time and does not fit contemporary poetry. Hip-hop takes a different approach. It is based on rhyme; the need of the genre to rhyme is so strong that it creates rhymes even in such languages which have almost no record of rhyming throughout their history of poetry, which are for example agglutinative languages such as Japanese. Its fixed syntax structure always ending with verb renders it hard to form rhymes, however, hip-hop with its use of the vernacular, the emphasis on sound and pronunciation allows for the rhymes to form. English language, on the other hand, as an analytic language bound to create rhymes easily has a long history of rhymed poetry. Rhymed poetry is, mostly around the 19th century with the start of modernism, looked upon with condescension. “Modernism did not abandon rhyme completely; rather, it recrafted the technique” (Caplan 6). Nonetheless, with the rising popularity of hip-hop, contemporary poets start to use rhyme again, however, rhyme is no longer perceived as an old-fashioned device. Rhyme in hip-hop is combined with the figures of the moment, pop culture, new words, and sometimes modified grammar. Hip-hop artists try to make rhyme as innovative and as new as possible.

The reasons why I chose to introduce the influence of hip-hop in the poetry of Hayes and Mullen lie in my recent studies at California State University, Monterey Bay, where I focused on poetry and social justice writing. Every writing class and workshop addressed the issues of race, multiculturalism, and equality. I also had the pleasure of attending discussions at many open mics and literary events at the Bay Area, which is known for its buzzing literary atmosphere. From the point of view of a person coming from the Czech Republic, the discussions on multiculturalism might seem repetitive as they so far rarely concern the cultural or political spheres of the Czech Republic.
However, taking into account the multicultural population of California, it allowed me to realize these discussions are necessary, which project into the poetry of their contemporary writers. One of these writers is Mullen, who graduated at the University of California, Santa Cruz, where I had the opportunity to attend several lectures on American poetry. To compare and contrast the influence in hip-hop with Mullen, I chose Hayes as he deals with the similar topics as Mullen in his poetry concerning race and is also incorporating musical features into his writing. Furthermore, I chose the topic of hip-hop as it has been a recurring point of the literary discussions whether rap can be considered poetry and whether it should be taken seriously.

Hayes graduated from Coker College in South Carolina and received his M.F.A. in the University of Pittsburg, Pennsylvania. His first two books, *Muscular Music* and *Hip Logic*, are the most prominent with its presence of hip-hop genre and concern the life in a black community and identity. For *Muscular Music*, Hayes won a Whiting Award and the Kate Tufts Discovery Award, while for *Hip Logic*, he was a winner of a National Poetry Series. In Hayes’s later work, *Lighthead* and *How to Be Drawn*, he focuses on the power of language and wordplay. For *Lighthead*, Hayes won the National Book Award in 2010 and for *How to Be Drawn* he was a finalist for the National Book Award and the National Book Critics Circle Award in 2015. Currently, Hayes teaches as a part of the faculty at the English Department at the University of Pittsburg.¹

What Hayes tries to achieve in his later work is described in his interview with *Hot Metal Bridge*:

I’m chasing a kind of language that can be unburdened by people’s expectations. I think music is the primary model—how close can you get this language to be like

¹ Information taken from https://www.poetryfoundation.org/
music and communicate feeling at the base level in the same way a composition with no words communicates meaning? It might be impossible. Language is always burdened by thought. (Russel)

The influence of music in Hayes’s writing is an omnipresent feature, which is applied on many different types of poetry, where he tries to experience with poetic forms such as a sonnet or prose poetry.

Furthermore, in the same interview, Hayes elaborates:

Language is just music without the full instrumentation. . . What would it mean to have a poem replicate the way Lil Wayne usually uses language. What’s different about how Lil Wayne uses language rather than the way Bob Dylan uses language? That’s why I always come back to music—it’s a way to think about using sentences (Russel).

In addition to rhyme, another characteristic feature of Hayes’s poetry is its visual nature. His images are very visual and he uses a numerous pop culture references to visual arts and music in a similar manner to the avant-garde or postmodern poetics such as New York School poets or Black Mountain poets. The explanation for Hayes’s focus on the visual and music is explained in the interview in *Contemporary African-American Poetry*:

To talk about my use and understanding of language, I would have to talk a bit about my background. Growing up in South Carolina, I was primarily a visual artist. . . I tried to apply what I was learning to what I'd learned and loved growing up: music, words, and visual arts. . . I've always been interested in anything that deals with *looking* and *hearing*. Though I studied painting growing up, I also studied, in a less academic
sense, music: Coltrane, RUN DMC, James Brown, Roberta Flack, Bob Marley, chorus tunes. (Rowell 1070)

As Hayes explained, his descriptions of sensory observations of music and the visual are used to create strong emotions when dealing with the issues of race and identity.

Mullen graduated from the University of Texas at Austin and later, as was already mentioned, she attended the graduate school at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Mullen’s first two collections *Tall Tree Woman* and *Trimmings* focus mainly on feminism, gender, and black identity. Both collections also carry the features of blues, especially with its allusions to singers and the use of repetition. In her next collection *S*PERM**K*T, Mullen uses fractured prose poems to emphasize the current effect of consumerism on our society again with consideration of race, gender, identity, and sex. Mullen’s fourth book *Muse & Drudge* demonstrates the two roles of women throughout history, being the object of inspiration in art and being the laboring support behind men. This collection is inspired by hip-hop the most within the context of Mullen’s work. The poems often include rhyme and regular quatrains, which contrasts with her previous collections of mostly prose poetry. In *Contemporary Literature*, Mullen explains her book: "It is very much a book of echoes. Some of the fragments rhyme and some don't, and that is basically the principle of the book—the recycling of fragments of language" (Frost 405). Mullen heavily utilizes wordplay with regards to African-American oral tradition, vernacular language, and pop culture. Mullen continues to explore language and wordplay in her last book *Sleeping with the Dictionary*. She explores the form of sonnet, alphabetarian poem, rewrites classics, or twists clichés. However, her focus stays on the black identity and
consumerism within American society. In *Sleeping with the Dictionary*, Mullen was a finalist for a National Book Award, National Book Critics Circle Award, and Los Angeles Times Book Prize in 2002. In addition, Mullen also won a Gertrude Stein Award for innovative poetry and a Katherine Newman Award for best essay on U.S. ethnic literature. Currently, Mullen works as a Professor of English at University of California, Los Angeles.²

Mullen’s poetry is rhythmic and musical, she uses similar techniques to slam poetry and she focuses on her poems as an oral art, they are meant to be read out loud. An American writer Lisa Mansell describes Mullen’s writing:

> Mullen's text blends the borders of prior defined media by transliterating music into language. The evolution of Hip-hop as an isolation of funk-beats that are then repeated, or funk’s isolating of rhythmic syncopation and bass-beats to privilege them over lyric and traditional melody are examples of Mullen's deconstruction and a development of this ‘isolate-then-blend’ progression (43).

Harryette Mullen’s poetry is a result of many influences intertwined into her playful poetry. The themes throughout the scope of her work stay focused on black feminism, politics, and pop culture. The most apparent influences in Mullen’s poetry explain her playfulness and the use of rhyme. As introduced in an interview with the poet, Mullen’s influences “range widely, from Gertrude Stein to the Black Arts Movement, from Sapho to Bessie Smith, from Language poetry to rap” (Frost 397). This list itself easily affirms Mullen’s above mentioned subjects of focus as all the influences are linked together with the similar characteristics, which further accentuate the hip-hop attributes in her poetry. Stein was known for her repetitive poetry often playing with language.

² Information taken from https://www.poetryfoundation.org/
Repetitiveness and playfulness, common elements with rap as well, are strong features of Mullen’s poetry. The Black Arts Movement, Sapho, Bessie Smith, and rap again are connected together in Mullen’s poetry within the theme of black feminism and musicality. To explain, the Black Arts Movement, during its time a controversial movement for its black identity and political writing, often used blues and jazz literature within its form in both poetry and prose. Sapho was known for her lyrical poetry focusing on the identity of a woman, or what could be called the beginnings of feminism. Bessie Smith, a blues singer, and rap further underline Mullen’s interest in the subject of black identity and musical poetics as blues constantly explores the history of exploitation of African-Americans and rap with the current views on the identity of African-Americans in America. Furthermore, again supported by the interest in the Black Arts Movement and Stein’s writing, Mullen’s poetry mixes the ideas of modernist and post-modernist writing and uses the contrast of intellectualism and anti-intellectualism of the movements. She uses the features of intellectualism in such as her political poetry and inspiration in Sapho, yet the features of anti-intellectualism can be seen in her use of pop culture, including hip-hop, and vernacular language. The thesis will show what impact hip-hop music has on the formal structure of print-based poetry by describing its use of rhythm and comparing the differences and similarities of the work of both poets.

The first part of the thesis will focus on the racial and political themes of the poems with relation to their usage in hip-hop lyrics and the optimistic and pessimistic attitudes toward it. The optimistic attitude suggests that, through the vernacular language, the artists express the true representations of cultural conditions, while the pessimistic attitude sees the themes as the promotion of misogyny, violence, and
ignorance. The influence on poetry will be analyzed through the references to pop culture and to the cliché of hip-hop relating to mainly freedom, sex and money.

In the second chapter, the thesis will analyze the poetry of the aforementioned two poets in respect to the characterization of rhyme introduced by Caplan. The characterization is mainly the description of rhyme throughout time; seeing rhyme as simplistic doggerel or a complex poetic device. In the next chapter, the use of end rhymes will be described within the frame of the characterization, the use of the pairing sounds, and repetition generating a rhythm evocative of hip-hop music.

The purpose of the thesis is to show that hip-hop has an influence on the formal features and themes of the print-based contemporary poetry and should be considered a serious art form in academic writing. The thesis will discuss whether hip-hop should be treated as poetry relating to the academic writing and it will analyze the influence of hip-hop on the present use of rhyme, rhythm, and themes in Hayes and Mullen’s poetry.
Themes and the Development of Black Identity

To understand the themes of hip-hop in Hayes and Mullen’s poetry, it is important to understand the roots of the genre. As was already touched upon in the introduction, hip-hop reached its peak in the 1970s, when it spread out from the ruins of the Bronx. There was an important shift in the African-American history during the ‘70s. The shift was caused by such events as the assassination of Malcolm X, a human rights activist for the rights of African-Americans. The agency of the Black Panther Party was at its best during the ‘70s. The Black Panther Party “was a controversial organization, founded in Oakland” (Joseph 8), California, which supported black nationalism and fought against still prevailing racial segregation, racism, and the police brutality against African-Americans. Concerning the history of black women, the organization put the fight against racism over sexism, resulting in the “womanism ideology” (516) as described by Nah Dove. Within black nationalism of the organization, women were treated equally when it came to the fight against the white oppression. However, in domestic spheres, patriotism still prevailed. The Black Panther Party functioned also as a base for the Black Power. It was a political movement, which included many attitudes and philosophies on the perception of blackness. Taking an example from the Black Panther Party and the preaching of Malcolm X, the Black Power mostly leaned towards the more extremist solutions of violent attacks against police as a fight against racial brutality. The symbol of a black fist of the movement is also sometimes used as a symbol for the Black Lives Matter activist movement as a reminder that racial inequality is still an ongoing issue.

The assassination of Malcolm X caused the beginning of the Black Arts Movement, which basically served as an artistic expression of the Black Power. Although Baraka did not see himself as a part of the movement, he was one of the
prominent writers who influenced the views of the movement towards black writing.

David L. Smith describes Baraka as:

Notorious for his biting critiques of liberalism and of white Americans' sexuality, for his strident black nationalism, and over the past decade, for his equally uncompromising Marxist-Leninist views... Some observers have regarded him as confused and unstable, others have hailed him as the apostle of the Black Aesthetic or as the Father of Contemporary Black Poetry. (235)

Similar to the opinions of Malcolm X, Baraka’s instability in his views represented the shifting views of the black movements of the ‘60s and ‘70s. The fight for black rights and equality called for radical moves, but the prominent figures of the movements had to find the limits of where the fight for racial pride ends and racism begins. The initial extremism of “blackness over whiteness” searched for the precise definition of the identity of blackness. Nevertheless, this definition worked only within the terms of race. The exploration of the substance of blackness caused to delineate the social and gender inequality within the African-American communities and other minorities. The ideologies of the Black Panther Party continued to reject homosexuality, queerness, and feminism as a part of white society philosophies. “Manhood was associated with patriarchal obligations and reproduction within marriage” (Matlin 110). Thus the movements of the ‘70s and later focused on the creation of the “black otherness”, but dismissed the idea of “other blackness” (Mullen, Cracks 12).

Hughes and Baraka are among the most prominent figures of African-American poetry with regards to music. Hughes used the rhythms of jazz and blues to express his ideas of racial pride and to overcome the “racial mountain” of whiteness. He stood firmly behind his beliefs that a black writer has the responsibility to write about black identity as his debt towards African-American nationalism. Hughes believed that if
African-American writers avoid writing about their origins and race, they are ashamed of their roots and try to simulate the writing of white writers. This opinion was quite limiting toward black writing. If black writers should write only pieces concerning their race, it hardly supports the idea of equality and inclusion within the rest of the society. Hughes’s poetry expressing the ideas of black nationality being better than white Americans does not overcome the “racial mountain”, it only creates another one. Anthony Dahaware says:

The purpose of Hughes’s spirited critique of and challenge to white-identified black artists was to shake up the status quo of Anglocentric cultural hegemony.

For Hughes, and many other writers in and around the Harlem Renaissance, "race" must be the foundation of a national art. (26)

Within the use of music, Hughes continued the idea of W. E. B. Du Bois, who, as L.L. Dickson says, “was proclaiming the importance of Black music not only to the Negro community, but to the entire American nation. He called it ‘the singular spiritual heritage of the nation and the greatest gift of the Negro people’” (29). The reason for this was in the mutual interaction between the performer and the audience, which is the main element of black music. The spiritual music brings out a strong sense of community as both sides were required to participate. Hughes partially shared Du Bois’s attitudes toward the functions of music in poetry and he also believed that jazz and blues are the “spiritual heritage of the nation”. However, he did not see the genres as means for the formation of a singular community between black and white people. Hayes saw them as an expression of African-American heritage. Hughes’s celebration of African-American musical genres was used as a foundation for his black supremacy ideas. Hughes’s attitudes of racial pride were appreciated and accepted as one of the
stepping stones towards defining African-American nationalism inspired many poets, such as Baraka.

To analyze the functions of poetry on black rights and to put it in context, there must be mentioned one of the most controversial and influential poems of Baraka, “Black Art”:

Poems are bullshit unless they are
Teeth or trees or lemons piled
On a step. Or black ladies dying
Of men leaving nickel hearts
Beating them down. Fuck poems
…
We want live
Words of the hip world live flesh &
Coursing blood. Hearts Brains
Souls splintering fire.
… we want "poems that kill."
Assassin poems, Poems that shoot
Guns. Poems that wrestle cops into alleys
And take their weapons leaving them dead
…
Until love can exist freely and
Cleanly. Let Black people understand
That they are the lovers and the sons
Of warriors and sons
…
We want a black poem. And a
Black World.
Let the world be a Black Poem
And Let All Black People Speak This Poem
Silently
Or LOUD (156)

This poem is a clear representation of the force of the black movements, which fought against racial inequality. Same as Hughes, Baraka focuses on the definition of black poetry. With the lines such as “poems are bullshit unless they are / teeth”, “fuck poems”, or “we want ‘poems that kill’, Baraka says a black poem should not be only a representation of art; it should first and foremost be a tool to change the status quo. It should not represent a weapon, it should be a weapon. Baraka strives for poetry to become the pen, which is mightier than the sword. It is this palpable quality Baraka attributes to black poetry, which hip-hop seeks to express as well.

The issue of the poem considering the black identity is described by David L. Smith:

In essence, Baraka's poem argues that to be black is to be anti-white. Ironically, this is also precisely the logic of the traditional ideology of race, which serves only the interests of our bourgeoisie. Baraka's sole innovation is to assert that blackness, rather than whiteness, is more desirable. This argument, while attacking the oppressors and their pawns, actually perpetuates the mechanisms of oppression--which is the tendency of any naive nationalism. (243)

This kind of writing only supports racial segregation. It forces black writers to write on the ideas of blackness as only then they are accepting their identity and are true to their
cultural heritage. Baraka’s poem supports the arbitrary social construct of race as he tries to give it a pronounced definition in terms of blackness.

Hip-hop emerged for the same reasons; to reclaim the history of African-American roots, to define African-American nationalism, and to fight against the social conditions racism in America caused. These circumstances lead to the prevalent themes of authenticity, autonomy, racial pride, social issues, politics, and black history.

Terrance Hayes

Charles Henry Rowell, the editor of *Angles of Ascent: A Norton Anthology of Contemporary African-American Poetry*, situates Hayes “as the heir to the ‘First Wave, Post-1960s,’ a heterogeneous group that includes Rita Dove, Yusef Komunyakaa, Nathaniel Mackey, and Harryette Mullen, among others. Rowell then classifies Hayes in ‘the second wave’ of contemporary poets” (Rutter 330). Hayes draws on the poetry of Baraka sharing the conviction black identity should be represented and defined in art. However, he is against Baraka’s ideas of black supremacy. Furthermore, similar to Hughes, Hayes uses musical connections in his poetry as a way to explore black identity, but again, he does not share Hughes beliefs that black pride should stand against the social construct of whiteness. Hayes is in his expression of blackness quite eclectic. His poetry is a collection of formal experimentation, allusions, homages, and parodies. He is not forceful in his poetic portrayal of black image. He writes about being black because that is a part of his identity. In an interview Hayes says: “A young white girl pretty much accused me and said, ‘Why do you write so much about being black?’… Because I am black. I’m black, I’m Southern, I’m male, I’m obsessive, I’m weird, I’m half-blind” (Burt). Hayes shows being black is a part of his identity, but his
identity is not just being black. He fights against the portrayal of blackness in a singular way with the same strategies and does not see himself as a representation of African-Americans, he is African-American. Hayes claims: “Maybe the generation after [the Black Arts Movement] moved even closer to the internal; to the idea that black power could be achieved through the personal, the lyric I …that blackness need not be announced only expressed” (Rowell 1079). Simply put, Hayes believes that the ground work for black identity has been laid down and now is the time to build on it. Black identity has been established, nonetheless, with it many stereotypes and negative views emerged as well.

Hayes does not agree with the use of simple narrative to talk about racial issues. He tosses away the idea of black and white identities. Although he draws on the musical traditions of creating a community to underscore the importance of African-American history on forming black identity, he stresses the concept of individualism. Now is the time to use “I” in black literature to break the limitations of black writing.

Hayes poem “Talk” deals with being a part of a minority:

like a nigger now, my white friend, M, said
after my M.L.K. and Ronald Reagan
impersonations,
the two of us alone and shirtless in the locker room,

and if you’re thinking my knuckles knocked
a few times against his jaw or my fingers
knotted
at his throat, you’re wrong because I
pretended

I didn’t hear him, and when he didn’t ask it again,
we slipped into our middle school uniforms
since it was November, the beginning

of basketball season, and jogged out
onto the court to play together
in that vision all Americans wish for

their children, and the point is we slipped
into our uniform harmony, and spit out GO TEAM!
our heads stacked on end beneath the hands

of our teammates and that was as close
as I may have come to passing for one
of the members of The Dream, my white friend

thinking I was so far from that word
that he could say it to me, which I guess
he could since I didn’t let him taste the salt (*Wind 5*)
The poem is very individualistic. It is a personal confession of how the speaker is affected by the general perceptions and stereotypes of black identity. It is not a representation of blackness against whiteness. It is about an intimate moment between two friends affected by cultural ignorance. The poem is an expression of today’s belief of white community that racism is fading away. It is a representation of colorblindness, which is not a solution of racial segregation. If African-Americans will not express themselves and pretend they do not hear ignorant comments of the “post-racial” America, the problem of colorblindness will remain and Americans will forget the atrocities of black history and the extreme consequences of racism.

There is an emphasis on unity and team in the lines as “school uniforms”, “uniform harmony”, “GO TEAM!”, and “our heads stacked on end beneath the hands”. Hayes portrays the possible overcoming of colorism in America, but not racism. The friend in the poem uses the word “nigger” with such ease that he does not realize the history behind it. Furthermore, the friend asks the speaker to impersonate a “nigger”. The friend does not realize the impact of his words as he asks the black speaker to go back to the history of slavery, to impersonate a stereotype of distorted image built on ignorance and hatred.

Ironically, while the speaker chooses not to speak up for himself, he seems to be closer to “the dream” of Martin Luther King Jr. Hayes portrays the struggle of the individual against personal representation and the representation of a community as the speaker ponders his decision. The choice is to either risk giving up on a friend or betraying a part of one’s identity. William M. Ramsey describes the poem:

Is the request intentionally derogatory and racist or good willed ignorance?...The moment has the feel of a new era’s tentative fusion of old and new. With hip
logic, Hayes improvises a cool behavior, remaining in control of self rather than re-enacting old racial responses. (Ramsey 126)

It is, however, a question whether the use of “the old racial responses” is a step towards this “fusion of old and new” or a step away from it. The speaker does not choose his right to speak for his cause and so his friend will never know that there is an issue with his perception of his friend’s identity.

“Talk” is Hayes’s representation of his attitudes towards race in his poetry. Hayes’s view of race is individualistic and internalized. It is a part of one’s identity, but it is not a defining part. With the reference to improvisations of King and Reagan, Hayes expresses his strategies of impersonating different voices of art, such as O’Hara, Ashbery, Baraka, Hughes, and even singers such as David Bowie or Michael Jackson apparent from his poetic work. Nevertheless, it is important to note that Hayes’s impersonations are reflections of himself and the views of the reader. Thus his black identity pervades his poetry similarly as it is mentioned in the first stanza. The speaker’s friend is unable to avoid the influence of stereotypes and generalizations on black identity.

Hayes continues to speak against the simplified generalizations of black writing and tradition in his poem from “The Blue Seuss” from the same collection of Wind in a Box:

Blacks in one box
Blacks in two box
Blacks on
Blacks stacked in boxes stacked on boxes
Blacks in boxes stacked on shores
Blacks in boxes stacked on boats in darkness
Blacks in boxes do not float
Blacks in boxes count their losses
Blacks on boat docks
Blacks on auction
Blacks on wagons
Blacks with masters in the houses
Blacks with bosses in the fields
Blacks in helmets toting rifles
Blacks in Harlem toting banjoes boots and quilts
Blacks on foot
Blacks on buses
Blacks on backwood hardwood stages singing blues
Blacks on Broadway singing too
Blacks can Charleston
Blacks can foxtrot
Blacks can bebop
Blacks can moonwalk
Blacks can beatbox
Blacks can run fast too
Blacks on
Blacks and
Blacks on knees and
Blacks on couches
Blacks on Good Times
Blacks on Roots
Blacks on Cosby
Blacks in voting booths are
Blacks in boxes
Blacks beside
Blacks in rows of houses are
Blacks in boxes too (Wind 43)

The poem uses alliteration, rhyming, consonance, and the use of pop culture similarly to rap music. The whole poem is a play on expectation and stereotypes.

“Blacks in boxes” are pigeon-holed stereotypes. One cannot see in the boxes as one cannot see behind the filter of a stereotype. Stacked notions one after another create a social construct or a simplified notion of black identity. The four lines, “Blacks with masters in the houses / Blacks with bosses in the fields / Blacks in helmets toting rifles / Blacks in Harlem toting banjos boots and quilts”, are a generalized image of African-American history. The repetition of the same syntax and the word “blacks” emphasizes the repetitions of these notions and of the historical constructions affecting black identity and putting in into a “box”. Hayes indirectly criticizes commercial rap of similar rhythms as the poem, where sound and repetition overpowers its meaning. If a society will repeatedly hear the same simplified images of a community, the community will become those images in the eyes of a majority.

Hayes breaks away from the repetition of the syntactical form to break away from the stereotypes. Such lines as “Blacks on”, “Black and”, and “Blacks beside” suggest that there is an unfinished story. There is originality, there are images which the reader cannot see and the stereotype becomes incomplete and inherently broken.

“Blacks” are on “feet”, “bus”, “couches”, “their knees” or, in other words, African-
Americans do the same as anyone else. Yet their history and tradition cannot be ignored.

In the last stanza, Hayes warns against self-inflicted generalization and double consciousness of W.E.B. Du Bois. Mullen defines double consciousness as “African-Americans’ awareness of a social negation that contradicts our view of ourselves. It is historical self-awareness of African-Americans who are struggling to overcome a legacy of slavery and discrimination as they also claim the rights, responsibilities, and benefits of freedom” (Cracks 50). Hayes continues with this notion and further speaks about African-Americans’ pigeon-holing themselves in “Blacks in rows of houses are / Blacks in boxes too”. The influence of media and music affects the perception of black identity of everyone. Going back to “Talk”, if African-Americans will not speak about the many images of black identity, the images will become blurry and will slur into one general concept where individualism is ignored.

In his poetry, Hayes’s intention is to break the limitations of black writing and to show the many sides to black tradition from the personal point of view of an individual. In an interview with Rowell, Hayes summarizes his view of black poetry:

In fact, the Black Arts Movement foreshadowed the diverse kinds of poetry being written today. There was a Black Art dictum concerning what a Black Arts poem should be. “We want ‘poems’ that kill.” Baraka says in “Black Art”. And then there’s that line which is both sad and melodramatic: “Let there be no love poems written / until love can exist freely and / cleanly.”…[M]y insistence on broadening the scope of poets in the Black Arts Movement directly relates to my wish to be limited by no particular tradition or ideology where Black folk and Black art are concerned. (1078)
Hayes broadens the scope of poets in the Black Arts Movement by breaking the stereotypes in his poems, but apart from his own creation, Hayes also focuses on the development of a community of black poets. He is a co-founder of Cave Canem (Mullen, *Cracks* 47), an organization of African-American poets. Hayes’s intention is to create a community where black poets will feel safe and comfortable to continue and broaden the scope of the Black Arts Writing.

**Harryette Mullen**

While growing up, Mullen was influenced by such pieces as Paul Laurence Paul Laurence Dunbar’s “Little Brown Baby”, Hughes’s “Dream Deferred” or Gwendolyn Brooks’s “We Real Cool”, which were “popular at school, at church, and at various community events” (Mullen, *Cracks* 50). Mullen was especially interested in Du Bois’ concept of double consciousness. Along with the writing of Dunbar, Mullen takes into account the analysis of this perception of black identity and the use of vernacular language from the social and cultural points of view. In her work, Mullen emphasizes there is not only one definition or perception of black identity. She points out the importance of realizing the multiplicity of African-American identities. Even though Mullen has been influenced by the theme of creating a black voice in the Black Arts Movement, she deviates from its generalization of black identity and the idea of black supremacy. Mullen argues:

It appeared to me [the Black Art Movement’s] personal struggle was to overcome and resolve the condition and internal conflict that Du Bois called double consciousness by creating a unitary black or colored self that was capable of
rejecting or denouncing nearly everything of European origin while praising and enhancing blackness. (*Cracks* 51)

She focuses on the black otherness and feminism especially within the context of African-American culture, as can be mostly seen in her *Muse & Drudge* collection.

Similarly to her views on the Black Arts Movement’s ideas of black identity, Mullen sees the concept of blackness in rap music. She is against generalizations of the popular mainstream “gangsta rap”. Rap has its main value in sharing African-American tradition and culture among the youth. However, if the wrong images of violence and misogyny are shared on the background of African-American culture, the elements of double consciousness will keep being a part of the perception of black identity.

It is not only the negative image Mullen minds that “gangsta rap” spreads. It is the fixed tradition and perception that this kind of genre offers and it largely spreads influence caused by the genre becoming commercial and mainstream. Mullen’s poetry is very much about the arbitrariness of the definition of black identity. She observes what it means to write black poetry; when poetry becomes black and when it could not be classified as such. Mullen never offers an exact answer or definition as the Black Arts Movement does, which is exactly her point. There is no such thing as a unified image of blackness, however, that does not mean the concept of blackness does not exist at all.

The problematics of the definition of blackness further leads to the difficulty of the notion of authenticity of black voice in rap as well as Mullen’s poetry. Mullen says in an interview:

We’re still dealing with the question if the authenticity and authority of the black writer. How dare he write like this! Or, we don’t believe he really wrote this,
and if he did, he wasn’t using an authentic black voice in his text. He wasn’t keeping it real. (Griffin)

“To keep it real” is one of the prominent themes in hip-hop. However, “gangsta rap” with its cliché images of opulence, such as golden chains, luxury cars, money, images of violence, sex and the use of black vernacular, offers a very limited perception of black identity. The constant repetition of the similar images and clichés then causes the general perception of an African-American to be narrower and narrower. Mullen condemns this type of genre as she goes in the opposite direction in her poetry. She stresses the importance of the acknowledgment of multiple voices in African-American poetry. Same as are her poetry collections of influences, allusions, and quotes, black tradition is a combination of notions, a mix of cultures. Mullen insists there is no purely black or white literature. African-American cultural identity, being a minority and a diaspora in the U.S., has been naturally affected by its surrounding cultures throughout the history. There is no pure blackness as is presumed in Baraka’s poetry, which could be either completely accepted or denied by African-American poets. Furthermore, there is the idea of a personal voice or simply subjectivity. Even though black tradition in literature and music is built upon the collective voice of community, it does not mean there is no room for individuality. This makes every black voice different, going past the limitations of the perception of black authenticity and further re-conceptualizing the notion of black tradition. To express that, Mullen constantly constructs and deconstructs the “authentic” voices of poetry and one of the tools to do that is the use of musical forms.

Mullen uses the technique of defamiliarization to deconstruct the generalized perceptions of black identity. Viktor Shklovsky, who introduced the term, describes defamiliarization of an image, whose “purpose is not to make us perceive meaning, but
to create a special perception of the object - it creates a vision of the object instead of serving as a means for knowing it” (Shklovsky 16). Mullen achieves defamiliarization by drawing on the strategies of blues, jazz, and rap as was discussed above. Additionally, she uses the techniques inspired by the experimental poetics of “L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E and Oulipo-group poetry” (Lempert 1059). Oulipo was concerned with writing texts using constrained writing strategies. Mullen says, “the most liberating aspect of Oulipo for me was their demystification of ‘inspiration’ in favor of ‘potential literature’… For me, constraints, procedures, and language games are just ways to get past a block or impasse in the process of writing” (Mullen, *Cracks* 45).

Language poets were “a loose network of avant-garde and politically conscious writers whose work is deeply engaged with critical theory” (Mullen, *Cracks* 173). Mullen applies the poetic constraints together with the wordplay and rhythms of rap to root out the stereotypes out of the perception of black identity. She takes the same stand even in the classification of her poetry. Because of her poetic techniques and themes, it is difficult to label Mullen’s writing either as black poetry or as avant-garde poetry, which is exactly Mullen’s point as is introduced in the following interview:

Defying categories and camps, Mullen explores the question of inheritance and kinship among a range of writers… [She] attempts to draw attention to a tradition of African-American experimental writing virtually ignored in constructions of modern and postmodern literature – a tradition that Mullen’s work evokes and continues” (Frost 399-400).

Mullen goes against the idea of literature being exclusively black, avant-garde or anything else. It might be said that there is a tradition of black writing to be simply narrative to show the “truth” clearly, so its readers could understand the atrocities of slavery and cruel behavior towards African-Americans. Commercial rap follows this
idea of simple rhythm and beat combined with easy lyrics to be memorable enough to sell. Mullen is against such simplification of black writing. “To be black is to be innovative…This idea that you can be black or innovative…is what I was really trying to struggle against” (Griffin). Innovation of language is the key to new perceptions of blackness and towards the redefinition of African-American literary tradition.

*Muse & Drudge* is especially trying to build a bridge between black and innovative poetry. The main theme of the book is dualism, double consciousness, and breaking these constructs of society. Mullen shows an African-American individual influenced by many cultures much like any other member of a community in the United States. Russel A. Potter says: “African-American cultures have mobilized, via a network of localized sites and nomadic incursions, cultures of found, the revealed, the used – and cultures moreover which have continually transfigured and transformed objects of consumption into sites of production” (qtd.in Hoover 12). This is why Mullen uses rap in her poetry as well. While incorporating the current pop culture references pointing to the effects of consumption and the effects of media on our thinking and on our understanding of blackness, rap at the same time uses historical references. Rap employs rhythm and the strategies of call and response, which keep in touch with the oral history of African-American culture. Mullen uses this kind of double voice to show the intricacies of black identity with regards to the effects of the past and present literature and media. Every time black identity is being represented, the final effects of the most sources lead to the simplification of the image. That is why Mullen uses the strategies of innovative rap and commercial “gangsta” rap to contrast the differences between the traditional “authentic” and innovative literature and how they can portray the current African-American identity. One of such poems criticizes commercial rap while mocking its strategies:
Mullen starts the poem with alliteration of nonsensical words illustrating the ridiculousness of today’s commercial rap composed only for the sake of rhythm and consonance. No meaning is necessary. Powerful media spreads this idea that rap as a whole and as a part of African-American tradition does not have meaning as well. Mullen further describes this meaninglessness by the simple line “choice voice noise”. The juxtaposition of these three words is enough to express the attitude of the speaker,
who has a choice to use their voice as a powerful tool to tell a story or to use it only to fill silence, to use it as a noise. This line describes the choice of today’s rappers to either dedicate themselves to the redefinition of African-American society and thus society in general or to fame and profit. Either way the artists choose and their images come to life, they “get dress and breath”. The artists have the responsibility for creating and affecting black tradition. Their art is responsible for how they are seen in society.

The following stanza has several layers of meaning with the similar outcome of generalization and simplification of black identity in literature. The stanza basically expresses the core idea of Mullen in few words. It portrays the many forms of black voice, which is then stifled by media into a singular stereotypical image. “Slave-made artifact” refers to African-American history used in current music and literature in order to continue African-American tradition as well as it mocks the type of art which uses the horrifying history of slavery only to draw attention and sell. This is suggested by the next line, “your salt-glazed poetry”. It is wordplay on “salt-glaze pottery”, a special kind of stoneware from the 14th century. Mullen’s wordplay suggests the “slave-made artifact” can be either a real historical artifact or just made up words, a noise to support rhythm or to move audience with the idea of profit. “Salt-glazed poetry” also evokes the image of salty tears. It is an ironical image pointing to the superficiality of today’s African-American writing. The line further comes with the connotation of the idiom of taking something with a grain of salt or taking in media with skepticism. This is also underlined by the following nonsensical rhymes of “jig-rig” and “nitty-gritty”, which again turn the references to African-American tradition into superficial simplification of a complex history.

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The next stanza describes the chase after fast rhythm and its prominence over the meaning of the lyrics of rap. Again depending on the choice of the artist, rap can save or bury the image of African-American tradition. This stanza highlights the necessity of music artists to realize their responsibility of an artist for the perception of black community and arts. The quick rapping of the “coal burning tongues” speaks to a community, uniting the “surviving ruin” of black tradition portrayed in art. In the last line of the stanza, “last chance apocalpso”, Mullen is reminding artists the current necessity of creating meaningful and innovative pieces as the power of media can educate society about the arbitrariness of race as well as the history of African-American community or it can silence the voices of the diaspora forever with its overpowering noise. Within the word “apocalpso”, Mullen combines “apocalypse” and “calypso”. Calypso is a kind of Afro-Caribbean music characterized by distinctive rhythm and its status of music of a community. Furthermore, Calypso is a figure from Greek mythology, who is known for trying to seduce and enchant Odysseus with her singing. The concept of the whole stanza is thus summarized in this last final word merging together the possible fatality of a wrong choice of artists. They do not use the voice of history and community of the music genre to draw on their roots and they simply choose to enchant their listeners with easy rhythm without meaning.

The last stanza continues in the spirit of double meaning. “Broke body stammering spirit / been worked so hard” can refer to dancing masses at a concert. An exhausted dancer who was “worked so hard” by the overpowering noise and rhythm for so long that if they “heard a dream”, they “couldn’t tell it”. The dream here is a clear allusion to the speech of Martin Luther King Jr., “I Have a Dream”, calling for an end to racism. Mullen suggests that media and the affluence of information have an incredible

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4 Information taken from https://www.oxforddictionaries.com/
5 Information taken from https://www.oxforddictionaries.com/
effect on society and the formulation of stereotypes can cause numbness and ignorance towards work with real value. The other meaning of the stanza is of struggling speaker or artist fighting against the generalizations of black identity to such degree that hearing an inspiring piece of art would be seen as a lost battle from the start. The poem warns against giving up on construction and creation of black art against the commercial production, which desensitizes society towards the understanding the necessity of black representation of black identity.

In a way, this poem carries on with the tradition of Hughes. It uses the theme of music to express the importance of portraying blackness in writing. However, contrary to Hughes, Mullen does not see the solution to the elimination of racism in black supremacy or black pride. She sees it in explanation and understanding of the complex constructs of black identity. There is not only one form, one image of blackness. There is no such thing as pure blackness as well. Black identity is a combination of individuals brought together as a community with their common roots and history and diversified by its diasporic nature. Black identity is a mixture of identities, individuals, and influences same as any other identity. No pure blackness against pure whiteness exists. It is the simplification of the issue caused by mass media, which leads to continuation of double consciousness.

It is no coincidence Mullen uses the mythological figure of a woman in the poem as the speaker. A female speaker is prominent in most of Mullen’s poetry. In the poem, the speaker calls for female artists to realize their voice and to realize they have a voice. It carries on with the constant theme of Muse & Drudge, where women overcame their status of a mere inspiration for male artists and their support. Bringing out the image of Calypso expresses the autonomy and the power of women to enchant the masses with their art. Mullen’s poetry is concerned with “what is a woman, what is her
function…As a decorative object…[It is an] ongoing critique of dominant culture” (Griffin). The role of a woman artist is further observed in the following poem:

  go on sister sing your song
  lady redbone señora rubia
  took all day long
  shampooing her nubia

  she gets to the getting place
  without or with him
  must I holler when
  you’re giving me rhythm

  members don’t get weary
  add some practice to your theory
  she wants to know is it a man thing
  or a him thing

  wishing him luck
  she gave him lemons to suck
  told him please dear

  improve your embouchure (Recyclopedia 149)

The poem is a collection of perceptions of a black woman. The first stanza shows how sexism is rooted deeply in history. The stanza carries an abundance of alliteration, consonance, and silly rhyming. It is a song the “sister”, a black woman artist, is expected to sing. The song sounds simplistic, almost like a children’s nursery rhyme
about a lady cleaning her clothes as nubia is “a fleecy collar that Victorian women wore around their necks” (Griffin). The speaker’s expectation of the reader not knowing what a nubia is turns the stanza into sexual innuendo.

The ever present rhythm in Mullen’s poems underlines the influence of rap and music as a whole on African-American identity with relation to race and gender. This poem again draws on the multiple meanings of words portraying a black woman as independent, creative, and embracing their sexuality. The poem is a combination of representations of the collaboration of male and female musicians and a sexual encounter. The line “she gets to the getting place / without or with him” suggests that a woman can perform on her own, especially if the man’s musicianship is not up to par. The second meaning of “members” as male genitalia expresses male insistency of seeing a woman as a sexual object.

In the last stanza, the use of “embouchure” finishes with the female artist telling the man to improve his musicianship, while in fact, the speaker just as well ends the poem on a humorous note of the “embouchure”. It is a euphemism, telling the man his sexual skills are not good enough for the speaker. The poem is one of the many variations of black identity. It emphasizes the autonomy of a black woman. Mullen describes the attitudes of the poem and the whole book in general:

When you think about a black woman in this culture, which one is she going to be? She could be either one, the black woman as a beast of a burden or as a postmodern diva. There’s the black woman who is out of her place, a Josephine Baker, or the supermodels who are admired even as other women are still being oppressed. That is where the title Muse & Drudge comes from. Also, as a woman writing poetry, you are seen as someone else’s muse. So there is tension in that as well. (Frost 412)
Mullen’s poetry is a multifaceted construction of black identity created out of her destruction of the generalizations and stereotypes of African-American culture. In doing so, she portrays the problematics of black feminism, the importance of oral tradition, and the influence of music on the current perception of African-American community.
Rhyme

As was already mentioned in the introduction, the most prominent formal feature of hip-hop is rhyme, which in itself underlines the superficially perceived low-brow quality of hip-hop. From the late 19th century, with the movements of modernism and later post-modernism until the current time, the device of rhyme has not had a good reputation amongst poets and critics. Rhyme has been mostly seen as simple, juvenile, or mundane as English language with its analytic pattern offers a seemingly limited pool of rhyming options due to its repetitive affixes. In the introduction of Caplan’s Rhyme’s Challenge, he begins: “We live in a rhyme drenched era. Rhyme flourishes in advertisements, tabloid headlines, and aphorisms” (1). Although Caplan then further proceeds with his defense of rhyme with the connection to hip-hop and mentions the history of rhyme to put the perception of the poetic device in context, there is still the sense of immediacy, which might not be as alarming as it appears. Similarly to Davie’s already mentioned proclamation, “the era of rhyme is over” (166), the problem is the same; the successful use of rhyme does not depend on an era, trend, or fashion. The issue of the current time is that simple, unoriginal rhymes of advertisement and headlines around us are much more visible due to the Internet and social media.

The poet and critic Reginald Gibbons wrote in his article “On Rhyme:”

In English, rhyme as an indexical marker, that is, at its most conventional and uninteresting, has often enough been at best a pleasing ornament or the merest mechanical marker of the poetic line, when it was not a dulling constraint. For constraints to be artistically productive, they must produce excitement, improvisation, and surprise. (63)

This is exactly why hip-hop is so important for the current evolution of rhyme. As Caplan argues, “[h]ip-hop artists denominate the contemporary art of rhyme; they
remain most alert to the resources that the culture and the language provide” (2). One could easily point out that the influence of hip-hop on the current rhyme might be attributed to jazz or blues with their characteristic elements of “excitement, improvisation, and surprise” (Gibbons 65). But the explanation of the prominence of hip-hop is simple; hip-hop is contemporary. Furthermore, apart from the notion that mainstream jazz or blues are more or less oxymoron in the current time, the two genres are not as rhyme based. Rhyme is the main tool of hip-hop due to the rhythm patterns and phrase dependency of the genre. Lastly, jazz and blues use the distinctive grammar and vocabulary of vernacular language, but again, hip-hop combines it with the current pop culture references and uses the vernacular language consciously, often either in a tongue-in-cheek manner or to show off the theme of authenticity of the piece, which is so popular in hip-hop.

When talking about the use of vernacular language, it is important to mention what H. Samy Alim calls in his essay “Bring It to the Cypher” “Hip-hop Nation Language”, where Alim generally describes the linguistics of hip-hop. Alim argues Hip-hop Nation Language “expands the Black American Oral Tradition” (531) and describes the basic practices of hip-hop, which are “call and response, multilayered totalizing expression, signifyin and bustin (bussin), tonal semantics and poetics, narrative sequencing and flow, battlin and entering the cipher” (Alim 531). Again, it is shown as mentioned above, that hip-hop language, and the genre itself, has roots in Caribbean literature and cultural heritage, which can be seen, for example, in the musical tradition of the call and response. However, the most relevant feature of the language to the given topic of the poetics of hip-hop is the use of rhyme within Hip-hop Nation Language. Apart from the immediacy and cultural and political references, what elevates rhyme in
hip-hop from its criticized simplistic form is the combination of rhyme with repetition, alliteration, and with what Alim describes as “word-sound (which places emphasis on how words are said, in addition to what words are said)” (542).

As was introduced, the rhymes of Hayes and Mullen will be also analyzed in terms of Caplan’s characterization in his *Rhyme’s Challenge* as it easily summarizes the perception of rhyme within the main themes and forms used in hip-hop. Caplan’s main focus is doggerel (3). In relation to hip-hop, doggerel signifies a simple, easy rhyme of monotonous rhythm. Conventionally, doggerel is perceived as a clear example of bad rhyme, however, as Caplan quotes George Saintsbury and Northrop Frye in his book, there is “doggerel which is doggerel, and doggerel which is not” (33). With this notion in mind, doggerel in hip-hop is not a signification of a bad rhyme, but a conscious choice of using simple, rhythmic rhyme, creating seemingly simplistic rules of the written piece which are then broken either within form or theme, addressing serious political or social topics instead of light, cheery subjects of “doggerel which is doggerel”. The strategy of such rhyming in hip-hop also comes from the technique of call and response. There is an ever present dialogue, a communication between the artists and the audience, which is what makes rhyme in hip-hop so immediate.

In *Rhyme’s Challenge*, Caplan often quotes critics and poets such as Marjorie Perloff, saying that “contemporary poets who write noncomic heroic couplets commit a mistake because the form serves as ‘a signifier of “light verse’”’ (30) or Lyn Hejinian arguing:

An English poem in a regular meter and with its lines mannered into position by end-rhymes tends to have a tiresome though sometimes
laughable predictability; at best, it suggests only ancient wisdom, age-old truths. It provides familiarity and, through familiarity, consolation. It gives us respite from the hardships of life. (Caplan 30)

However, it is important to take into account that these critics of rhyme mainly focused on avant-garde and postmodernism in their writing. The fact that Caplan had to reach for these sources, so far back in time, suggests that the perception of rhyme is slowly shifting towards a positive attitude again. Although there are constant debates whether the period of postmodernism ended or still lasts, these critics of postmodernist poetry are mainly concentrated on the artists during its peak such as, in case of Perloff, Frank O’Hara, John Ashbery or Kenneth Koch, that is, the poets of the 50s, 60s, and 70s. Even then, one of the main features of postmodernism in poetry is finding the inspiration in the media of music and visual art, similarly to the influence of hip-hop on poetry now. Ekphrasis, visual lyrics, the perfect collaboration of visual art were prominent elements of the poetry of the period.

It is interesting to note that the combination of poetry with other media shifted now from the visual to the musical due to the easy accessibility of music. With that, poetry again moves from the visual of the avant-garde and postmodernism to the oral art and thus rhyme and rhythm come again into the spotlight. Nevertheless, rhyme is not popular for its predictability, familiarity, or consolation as Hejinian poetically argues. Rhyme is popular because it is easily remembered and it is this “easiness” and accessibility, which is often criticized. Predictability, however, is one of the sins committed by poets. If a poet allows the form to rule over the content and the message of the poem, the poem usually suffers greatly on its quality. That is where the treatment of rhyme in hip-hop comes into play. Rhyme in hip-hop interacts with the expectation and predictability, keeping and breaking the rhythm of the text going hand in hand with
the irony often used when commenting on society in the repeatedly used themes of politics and race.

**Terrance Hayes**

Generally speaking, compared to Mullen, Hayes is still quite careful when using rhyme. As mentioned, to a certain degree it could be said that Hayes is too cautious clinging perhaps too tightly to the references to great artists of blues and jazz, rather than using the experimental nature of jazz poetry. Hayes’s poetry is a mixture of influences, some more obvious than others. Especially in his collection *Hip Logic*, Hayes draws inspiration openly from hip-hop using classic lines used in many song lyrics, for example in his poem “Emcee”, “the riders throw their hands in the air - // ...And wave ‘em like they don’t care” (12). The titles of such poems as “THE-THINGS-NO-ONE-KNOWS BLUES” show the inspiration in blues and such poems as “ARSPOETICA#789”, “IV. Self Portrait/Vision”, or “THE SAME CITY” refer to the practices of postmodernism with their focus on the visual and the art of poetry itself. However, the first Hayes’s collection is heavily affected by Hayes’s life and education in Pittsburg. As is mentioned in the interview in *The New York Times* “Galaxies Inside His Head”, Pittsburg and hip-hop have had a big impact on Hayes’s writing:

Many were still paying attention when [Hayes] began talking about things [the students for whom Hayes read] did know: Pittsburg and hip-hop. ‘I hung out with a lot of hip-hop guys in grad school,’ he said. ‘They would say, “Why you got your book - just come onstage!”’ (Burt)

In response to this, Hayes wrote his own hip-hop performance poem “Ballad of Bullethead” (*Muscular 35*), which was one of the first published poems of Hayes.
“Ballad of Bullethead” is included in *Muscular Music* and the poem introduces the second part of the collection called “Yummy Suite” (35). The Yummy Suite, as Hayes describes in the introduction, “was inspired by events in Chicago the summer of 1994. Eleven year old Robert “Yummy” Sandifer murdered fourteen year old Shavon Dean while firing on a rival gang” (*Muscular* 33):

I was born in metal

-my mother’s kettle

My father peddled

So we settled alone

Metal child & mother of stone

Another story of moans

Bank loans Shut off telephones

Thru spring & winter storms

In my body of arms

carry charms of speech

Tires screech Preachers preach

“The world is full of harms”

The man you couldn’t reach

Mud hunger to eat

O say can you see

Street corner to street

Pantomime of feet

But I’ll beat uncle sam

& I won’t give a dime or a damn
& my willows won’t weep
Tho the dead are asleep
And my mother’s a pillow

Of grief
Bullethead is who
I be

O say can you see
Words sounding absurd
But I gotta get heard
On corner On curb Car garage Back yard
-Lyric fusillade
Sentence propensity This word-
world intensity Past
tense Ten pence
Whatever makes cents
Cause I can’t pay the rent
Pennies spent in my pockets
Pennies bent in my fist
& my body’s a mist
& my body’s a smog

What I mean is
My body’s the dark
& my tongue is a spark
& the light will dismiss me

Cause my words make it woozy

& the anger has bruised me

But my mouth’s screaming Choose me

And my heart

Is a boy

Who’s dizzy (Muscular 35)

It is interesting to note that “Ballad of Bullethead” is Hayes’s only fully rhymed poem of the collection. The form intensifies the meaning and the emotion of the poem. It creates an escalation of the feelings of anxiousness and anger throughout the whole poem. The rhymes are an ideal representation of rhyme used in hip-hop and rap within the rhyme variations and combinations with other formal devices such as alliteration or repetition to break the expectation of rhyme and to avoid true simplistic doggerel. The poem almost sounds as song lyrics itself with its almost repetitive rhythm and the often used theme of a struggling artist coming from poor living conditions. “Ballad of Bullethead” is a strongly emotional poem introducing a chapter of the mentioned story, which induces the idea of belonging, the speaker is the part of the community of Yummy and he is Yummy himself.

The manner of how rhyme is distributed in the poem points to the act of narration, which is reminiscent of a rap battle due to the alternating lines, and the narrated story; the story of someone living in such conditions where a gun is not anything unusual, where violence brought up by poverty, ignorance, and anger - the form is constantly evocative of a gunshot with its barrage of rhymes, or as Hayes writes the “lyric fusillade”, which foretell the topic of the next poems in the collection directly dealing with the murder. The poem starts with couplets of masculine perfect rhyme when read
with American English pronunciation or also with four verses of imperfect rhyme based on the assonance and consonance of the stanza. However, starting with the word “alone”, the rhyming of the end-rhymes, internal rhymes, and off-centered rhymes creates a net within the poem connecting the lines and picking up the tempo of the rhythm of the poem.

“Alone” rhymes with the next three end-rhymes “stone”, “moans”, “telephones” using perfect or near rhymes. The four lines are then further interconnected by the off-centered near rhyme of “settled” and “metal”, “mother” and “another”, and also “moans” and “loans”. These off-centered rhymes are expressive of Spoken Word rhyming style abundantly used in hip-hop and jazz poetry. These seemingly randomly placed rhymes balance out the impression of improvisation and written poetry as when spoken out loud the rhyme scheme seems to be chaotic. This rhyming style is used in hip-hop not only for the sake of keep up the rhythm of the poem, but also to maintain the idea of “being real”, the illusion of coming up with the lines on the spot, not pretending. The impression of the form being in the background, only secondary to the content, must be kept for the emotion, especially of anger, to have a strong impact of the hearer. Thus the off-centered rhymes preserve the appearance of being unprepared, which leads to the production of honest, “real”, words. This impression of improvisation is then also underlined by the similar repeated syntax structures, alliteration, and with that inherently similar rhythm pattern.

There is also the twice repeated sentence, “O say can you see,” the beginning sentence of American national anthem. The repetition is signifying the ironic tone of the poem. The song should express the celebration of freedom of America, but it is debatable if the speaker of the poem feels any freedom in living conditions, where the American dream is only that - a dream and there seems to be no way out of his
situation. There has also always been a constant debate whether the anthem carries the signs of racism with its mention of slaves. The repetition of the sentence highlights the hopelessness of the situation of the speaker being still on his mind, but more importantly, there is a focus on its fit into the rest of the poem with the use of rhyme. The first time the sentence is used, it again slows down the pace of the poem as even though there exists an end-rhyme paired with the previous and the following sentence, “eat”, “see”, and “street”, the rhyme is a very clunky imperfect rhyme and it is more of a case of assonance. The line stands out, it stops the speakers rant to make the reader realize and emphasize the conditions the speaker describes within the community. Same as the line only partially fits is treated the idea of the anthem. Although it is the part of the community as the community is American, but the anthem speaks of freedom only meant for the white from the point of view of the speaker. The second time the sentence is repeated with the end-rhyme paired by the perfect rhyme, “be”, “see”, which is, within the content of the poem, a sign of trying to fit in, a need for equality, which is then elaborated by the following words, “the words sounding absurd”. The contrast of the use of perfect and imperfect rhyme here plays a subtle, but important role on the political opinions as well as the emotions of the speaker with the rhyme being an extension and emphasis of the content of the poem.

In the second stanza, the strategy of rhyming couplets is broken already and the rhyme scheme begins to change into a combination of rhyme schemes with the use of extra rhymes. The lines “Pantomime of feet / But I’ll beat uncle sam / & I won’t give a dime or a damn” do not only show how intertwined the lines are with the internal and end-rhyming, but it is also representative of breaking the expectation inherent to rhyming. In the line “& I won’t give a”, the reader expects the speaker to finish it with the word “damn”, due to the connotation of this often used phrase, but the speaker
switches “damn” with “dime”, breaking the expectation and using the element of surprise while also creating an internal rhyme with the preceding word “pantomime”, yet still keeping up the rhythm with the similar sentence structures and the use of alliteration. The rhyme is used playfully going against the old fashioned real doggerel defined by Saintsbury and Frye above.

The constant rhyming is brought to a sudden stop only in the middle and the end of the poem, slowing down the pace of the flow of the piece, again playing with the expectation of the reader and the quickening pace of the angry speaker for an epiphany and sadness. The final three lines of the poem, “And my heart / Is a boy / Who’s dizzy”, show how the speaker is still just a vulnerable boy brought up in poor conditions, gang wars, and attacked by racism and the only thing that is left is confusing frustration making the dizzy boy turn to violence same as Yummy. The ending demonstrates how the form and rhyme highlights the content and even adds emotional depth to the poem.

In Hayes’s second collection Hip Logic, the poet is quite playful with the forms of the poems. Such playfulness is especially apparent in the second and the fourth part of the book, which consist of series of anagram poems called “A Gram of &s” (Hayes 25). A good example of an innovative rhyming is shown in the poem “a b d u c t o r”:

Because I cannot correct my name. Because the boat
docks each night in the bay & the board-

walk creaks beneath women eager to tour
their dreams. Because I cannot court
the maiden. I am the actor

without a face. In a few seconds I will doubt
your love. I will spill vodka on the birthday card,
the wedding gloves. Because I cannot cart
the goodness from door to door, nor wait on the curb
of bad intentions. Because I cannot coat

my tongue in whispers, I take to the road. (Hip Logic 27)

As Hayes describes, there are three simple rules when writing such poem: “1. Words must be derived from four or more letters. 2. Words that acquire four letters by the addition of ‘s,’ such as ‘bats’ or ‘dies’ are not used. 3. Only one form of a verb is used” (Hayes, Hip Logic 91). It is this limitation of the poetic form which allows for an innovative use of rhyme. The end-rhymes in the poem also almost all represent consonance as all of them are created from the letters of the title. Given the playful rules inspired by daily word games in newspapers, the poet is not burdened with cliché easy rhymes that might come into mind first when writing the poem. It is the limitation which brings out the artists creativity, similar to rhyme in hip-hop. As hip-hop is often committed to rhyme in most of the lines of lyrics, it creates limitations, which bring out the danger of writing a doggerel poem. That is why the artists need to find creative and innovative ways to avoid boring the listener or reader.

The technique Hayes uses in this piece is defamiliarization of words. Bradley describes the term directly with the reference to hip-hop:

Rap does what the poet Edward Hirsch claims the lyric poem does: it ‘defamiliarizes words, it wrenches them from familiar or habitual contexts, it puts a spell on them. It does all of this with rhythm, rhyme, and wordplay… Rhyme
compels the MC to conceive connections between disconnected words and ideas.

(Bradley 90-91)

With the limited use of words including only the letters of the word “abductor”, Hayes “abducts” primary connotations of his end-rhymes. This technique of defamiliarization goes hand in hand with the theme of alienation of the speaker from love. He is “the actor // without a face”. Same as the rhyme here does not have a regular rhyme scheme. The speaker is not regular or stable in his actions. The speaker is not able to love and have a relationship. He cannot promise anything to anyone. The words at the end of the lines are treated similarly. They rhyme only occasionally, often utilizing near rhyme, such as “tour” and “court”. The defamiliarization occurs even in the first couplet; in the meaning of the word “board-” is changed by the line break and is put in context only when the reader connects it with “walk” in the next line. This creates a sense of tension. The words are not what they seem. Defamiliarization continues to be employed when the word “cart” is not used with its “habitual context”, but is used as a verb to rhyme with its proceeding end-rhyme “card”. Such perfect rhyme is unexpected within the context of the rest of the poem, which further highlights the unstable nature of the speaker. The rhythm of the poem is created with the repetition of “because” and the alliteration of words starting with “b” and “c”. These devices keep up the integrity of the poem, while the theme of instability plays the major factor. Same as with Hayes poetic strategy of “The Golden Shovel” (Hayes, Lighthead 6) described below, he combines rhyme with wordplay to enrich his rhyming technique. Bradley also argues that “wordplay gives color and texture to rap’s poetry, allowing MCs to craft subtle shades of meaning and feeling instead of paint-by-numbers lines. Wordplay creates possibility out of limitation.”
Hayes’s more recent work *Lighthead* or *How to Be Drawn* proves that he steers away from simple rhyming himself, but he uses poetry which uses such rhyming techniques more than only as an inspiration. The most prominent example of such poetry is Hayes’s poem “The Golden Shovel” from *Lighthead*. The name of the poem itself became a term for a specific rhyming technique where a poet takes a line from a poem and puts every word of that line at the end of each line of their own poem. The content of that poem is then a tribute paid to the poet of the original line. In case of “The Golden Shovel”, the tribute is paid to Gwendolyn Brooks, an American poet who often found an inspiration in blues, such as Langston Hughes’s music, same as Hayes, and who influenced many contemporary hip-hop writings as well. “The Golden Shovel” uses Brooks’s line of her poem “We Real Cool” (Brooks 99) as follows:

When I am so small Da’s sock covers my arm, we

cruise at twilight until we find the place the real

men lean, bloodshot and translucent with cool.

His smile is a gold-plated incantation as we

drift by women on bar stools, with nothing left

in them but approachlessness. This is a school (Hayes, *Lighthead* 6)

The poem is an elaboration and celebration of Brooks’s poem, while using and paying tribute to a very simple form of rhyming. Hayes also imitates Brooks’s line ending with the repetition of “we”, which highlights the sense of community and belonging, the important aspect used within the critique of society in hip-hop. Within Brooks’s incorporated poem into “The Golden Shovel”, Hayes uses a rhyming scheme so simple to the point of doggerel as well as the vernacular language used as a part of the already
mentioned Hip-hop National Language, where the lack of a verb in a sentence, for instance in “we [are] real cool”, is one of the most used syntax schemes of the language. The poem is a good example of Hayes’s writing where he often balances on the obscure and the obvious. Within content, Hayes uses debatably too many references to writers, poets, and singers, who are explicitly announced, but within the form, Hayes is much more subtle as one can see within “The Golden Shovel”.

The two Hayes’s poems compared, once can see they are strongly different. “The Ballad of Bullethead” is a heavily rhymed piece reminiscent of rap lyrics, where rhyme emphasizes the content and the emotion of the poem as well it helps to set a quick-paced rhythm to it. “The Golden Shovel” technically does not contain any rhyme at all, but it is a tribute to a poem, which is rhymed with couplets. What the poems from very different periods of Hayes’s writing have in common is the given value to rhyme. Both poems see rhyme as something inherent to the African-American Hip-hop Nation Language, a part of the vernacular language, which is a part of the community. Both poems express their authenticity, the notion of being “real”. It is evident that rhyme is treated with originality and invention in the poems; even though they both show the appreciation for rhyme, within the formal features they are absolutely different, one is using rhyme, the other is not.

**Harryette Mullen**

Similar to Hayes, Mullen works with the balance between the obvious and the obscure as well, nevertheless not concerning the references to other poets like Hayes, but directly rhyming strategy. Mullen is known for her easy doggerel, inspired by the simple rhymes used in commercials to point out the effects of consumerism on society.
Mullen uses exactly what Saintsbury and Frye called a doggerel which is not a doggerel; the form shows its absolute simplicity, but has a hidden meaning of irony and mockery at the same time. The perfect example of such doggerel can be found in Mullen’s “Jinglejangle” from her collection *Sleeping with the Dictionary*:

```
ab flab abracadabra Achy Breaky Action Jackson airy-fairy

airfare

Asian contagion analysis paralysis Anna banana

ants in your pants

Annie’s Cranny Annie Fanny A-Okay ape drape argle-bargle

testsy-fartsy awesome blossom

backpack backtrack Bahama Mama balls to the wall Black Arts Movement-a-lam

bandstand

Battle in Seattle beat the meat bedspread bee’s knees

behani ghani best dressed

best in the West BestRest Best Western Betsy Wetsy (34)
```

The poem further continues with its mostly rhyming pairs until the letter “z”. As the title suggests, the poem is a list of commercial jingles, songs, and chants. Just in the quoted section, one can see, for example, Annie’s Cranny, a company making products from cranberries, Bahama Mama, a famous mixed drink, or Best Western, a well-known chain of hotels etc. Mullen shows how deeply consumerism can be a part of society and one’s culture. The poem is also a sound example of the levels of meaning and impact a rhyme can have. The rhyming pairs in the poem have been deeply etched into the minds of the readers already due to companies’ thorough marketing strategies and most importantly the simplicity of the rhymes. Mullen shows rhyme at its worst and uses it to prove how it can be used in an unexpected way to give it a new meaning; as mentioned,
the critique of society. The poem shows originality and proves rhyme is not only a part of an overcome tradition same as rhyme in hip-hop. The influence of hip-hop on this poem and its end-rhymes is also described by Harold Zapf in *Another Language: Poetic Experiments in Britain and North America*:

The end rhymes of “Jinglejangle” also evoke rhyme-oriented forms of the strong African-American vernacular tradition: secular rhymes and songs like “Jack and Dinah Want Freedom” (me-free, ole-col’, free-tree, tub-rub, Nigger-bigger, fac’-back), ballads like the “Sinking of the Titanic” (around-down, Please-knees, there-clear, coal-soul…), songs of social change like “Strange Fruit” (fruit-root, breeze-trees, South-mouth, fresh-flesh, pluck-suck, drop-crop), and especially traditional rap texts. (182)

The poem ends with the line “Zoo Doo zoot suit Zulu”, which brings the end note of the poem back to the roots of hip-hop as Zapf points out: “‘Zulu’ is also an evocation of the origins of global and transcultural African-American Hip-hop culture” (182). This ties together the poem as an example of a global consciousness and its history. The references to commercials tie together a community connected by a previous knowledge, a context of a history of pop culture as well as history. “Jinglejangle” is a clear demonstration of the influence of hip-hop on the evolution of rhyme in connection to pop culture, the present.

The poem also shows the two sides of rhyme; the positive and the negative. The positive shows that rhyme connects not only two or more words by similar sounding syllables, but thanks to rhymes being easily remembered, it connects and creates a shared knowledge, a culture, which then further forms a community, especially in time and place where the need for belonging is heightened, such as African-American communities fighting against racism on a daily basis, which is often a theme of hip-hop
writing. The negative side of the rhyme in the poem is reflected in the simplicity filling our brains with the lines of consumerism, the fallen hopes of American dream, where materialism substituted the ideas of freedom. This shows that everything can be commercialized and turned into profit, even rhyme. That is one of the reasons hip-hop is criticized as it is seen as a production of stale temporary rhymes designed to last a season to earn easy money. Nonetheless, as the art critics accepted and understood the value and meaning in the visual art of materialism and commercialism in pop art, similarly, the poetry critics are starting to see the worth of the seemingly simple rhyming of hip-hop and its combination with pop culture. Although presently, rhyme is still the biggest drawback of hip-hop influenced poetry from the point of view of print-based poetry critics, as was mentioned above, but also its biggest advantage from the point of view of the readers as with its rhythm and the focus on the present, the poetry carries a certain likeability especially among youth. It is the rhyme of hip-hop which helps spreading the knowledge about poetry and works as a gateway to the study of the art of poetry.

Both Hayes and Mullen are encouraging readers to understand both the stylish display and the violent crime of African-American youth as evidence of their spiritual exhaustion and distress in a society that still defers fulfillment of their dreams. Mullen and Hayes support education of literature via their numerous readings at universities and offer understanding to the youth. Lynn Keller mentions in her Thinking Poetry: Readings in Contemporary Women’s Exploratory Poetics:

Mullen’s heterogeneously allusive, polysemic, but not “discourteous” or exclusionary lines cultivate an intellectually alert readership interested in thinking about the linguistic and extralinguistic residues of America’s troubled racial history. (15)
Here, Keller confirms Mullen’s poetry is inducing the sense of belonging to a community and understanding of, not exclusive to, African-American youth through the form of the poem, the linguistic residues, which are often part of the aforementioned vernacular language and its rhythm and rhyming. It is also interesting to note that “the linguistic residue” is quite an accurate term for another prominent form of rhyming in Mullen’s poetry.

One of Mullen’s favorite poetic styles is nonsense poetry. Mullen focuses on how rhymes and phrases change with their repetition into plain sounds, meaningless “linguistic residue”, which constantly surround us from the Internet, newspapers, magazines, billboards, TV, etc. In her poems, Mullen shows rhyme without content or a reason. She shows the extreme form of a nonsensical, empty rhyme, of which hip-hop is being accused. One of such many examples is the poem “Kirstenography”:

K was burn at the bend of the ear in the mouth of Remember. She was the fecund chill burn in her famish. She came into the word with a putty smoother, a handsewn father, and a yodeler cistern. They were all to gather in a rosy horse on a piety sweet in Alligator Panorama. (Mullen, Sleeping 45)

Similar to Hayes’s poems, “Kirstenography” does not seem to contain rhyme, same as any content. However, the rhyme and the meaning is hidden in the context, in what the readers have read many times before in any biography or even primary school text books. The whole poem could be rewritten in this way: “K was born at the end of the month of November. She was the second child born in her family. She came into the world with a pretty mother, a handsome father, and a younger sister. They were all together in a rosy house on a pretty street in Alabama.” The whole poem is a simple biography of Kirsten. The form and the sounds carry the meaning, but the meaning has to be extracted from the rhymes tied to them. Rhyme here is the bridge towards the
content and towards the history of Kirsten. Once it taps into the reader’s memory, it is hard to not make the correction while reading the poem, which shows that rhyme offers a choice either to understand or not to understand the meaning of a poem. It is up to the reader whether they choose to hear only empty senseless sounds or to actually see the message behind them, which could be said about the whole hip-hop writing.

Mullen’s poem presents the power of sound. As a poet who is influenced by blues and hip-hop, Mullen is aware that the melody and the rhythm of a phrase can carry meaning and subtext too, but one has to be willing to listen to it and make the connection between the form and the content, otherwise, all there would be left is a confusing mass of sounds or a simplistic unoriginal story.

The only collection where Mullen uses other forms than narrative poems is *Muse & Drudge*. As mentioned in the introduction, it is a collection, which portrays a woman as a muse, an inspiration of arts, and as a woman standing behind and supporting a man. Mullen experiments with poetic forms and uses allusions to Greek poetry, blues, jazz, rap, and pop culture. There is one of the poems, which clearly shows Mullen’s capacity for the manipulation of end-rhyme in unexpected ways:

get off your rusty dusty

give the booty a rest

you must be more than just musty

unless you’re abundantly blessed

I can’t dance don’t chance it

if anyone asks I wasn’t present

see I wear old wrinkles

so please don’t press me
my head ain’t fried
just fresh rough dried
ain’t got to cook
nor iron it neither

you’ve seen the museum of famous hats
where hot comb was an artifact
now it’s known that we use mum or numb our stresses
sometimes forget to fret about our tresses (Muse 145)
The poem is clearly discusses the role of an African-American woman in a society and
in a relation to a man. This theme is supported by the use of rhyme and wordplay. The
first two lines are an allusion to a blues song “Rusty Dusty Blues” by Count Basie.
These two lines are included in the chorus of the song and they are used to tell a woman
to dance. Mullen turns the roles and instead of a man telling a woman to be his muse or
his support, a woman is telling a man he has to get up and work unless he is very rich.
The words of the vernacular language of “rusty dusty” and “booty” are perceived
ironically when they are rhymed with the word “musty”, where the reader first realizes
the addressee is a man and the phrase “abundantly blessed” concludes the first stanza in
proper English, thus mocking the first two lines of the poem and their original speaker.
The simple alternate rhyme intensifies the irony of the stanza as it mocks the structure
of the blues song.

In the second stanza, the use of end-rhymes stops. It is to suggest the intensity
and seriousness of the speaker to get across her point. She states she will not do as the
man tells her and she will not dance. She feels too old for dancing and she does not
want to be forced. This stanza utilizes wordplay of the internal rhyme of “dance” and “chance”, near end-rhymes of “present” and “press it” and the consonance of the “s” letter mainly. Such wordplay gives the stanza a certain regular rhythm, which is representative of the mundane work women were expected to do to support men or dancing, to show one of the inspirations of women in art. But the speaker will not be forced into any of these roles, as she says in the fourth line of the stanza. Similar to rappers telling their audience not to push them and make them angry because they will stand up for themselves, the speaker warns the addressee not to “press” her. The word “press” in the last line, builds up a reader’s expectation for the speaker to rhyme the line with the preceding “present”, the expectation is not fulfilled once the line is finished, same as the expectation of the man for the woman to do domestic work for him, such as to “press” his clothes.

In the third stanza, the speaker talks about her hair as a metaphor for expressing her racial pride and for feminism. Her hair is naturally curly and she is not going to straighten it. She is not going to conform to the white majority and she is proud of being a black woman. At the same time, to convey this meaning, she is using the verbs of house work. The speaker is not going to fry, dry clothes or cook anything. The woman is not going to do what society expects her to do. The perfect rhyme of “fried” and “dried” underlines the perfect image of a housewife the speaker is expected to be. At the same time the vernacular language “ain’t” along with no rhyming at all in the second couplet of the stanza breaks this image of perfection.

In the last stanza, the hot comb used for hair straightening is a matter of the past. It is no longer necessary to use it to hide one’s curly hair. However, the problem, the “stresses” of accepting a black woman into American society is still there and racism still exists, but the speaker stands up for herself. She is not going to hide her curly
“tresses” and her physical image. The last perfect rhyme of the poem accentuates the racial pride of the speaker making the last words memorable. The last word being “tresses”, there is an ironical attitude expressed within the last couplet, showing it is ridiculous to put stress on something so superficial. It is ridiculous for society to focus on the superficial features of African-American people as if it would be something that should divide society. In this poem, Mullen shows how rhyme underlines parts of the poem to highlight the theme of race and feminism, similarly as Hughes used jazz influence to convey the meaning of racial pride in his essay as cited above.

Both Hayes and Mullen wrote poems which use perfect rhymes to express the current issues of race in American society. However both poets prefer to use those rhymes sporadically or in an innovative way to revive the art of rhyme and to avoid the uninteresting expected lines of doggerel. Hayes proceeds to create rules and limitations for his writing to help his creativity flow. With his “A Gram of &s” or “The Golden Shovel”, he creates a technique or a form to narrow down his possibilities to come up with unexpected rhymes hidden behind the followed rules of each poem. In case of Mullen, it could be said she chooses to go in the opposite direction compared to Hayes. She expands the possibilities of language. Mullen breaks the rules of English syntax, grammar, and semantics. She uses made up words, words from commercials and old songs to focus on the sound of language. She works with connotations and associations to create an original rhyme, which similar to Hayes, might not be apparent at the first glance. Both poets take from hip-hop the creativity of rhyming in combination with the vernacular language and the emphasis on the rhythm of the spoken word. Rhyme helps to underline the crucial points of the poems with allusions to the musical genre, which stem from the African-American history.
Rhythm

The preference of rhythm over melody is one of the defining features of hip-hop. This preference comes from the internalization of the themes of African-American history, race, and gender into the formal features of the genre and mainly into rhythm. Rap needs to be understood. That is why it is written in conversational vernacular language to reach its target audience. Adam Krims argues:

“Musical poetics in some sense transcodes the social dynamics that are otherwise considered external to it; and a relational map of the social world is charted within the genre system…invoking African-American traditions, pre-existing genres, gender relations (and gender domination), class relations, and the possibilities more generally of (especially American) urban life.” (46)

The African-American history shows in the rhythm of hip-hop its roots in traditional Caribbean music, jazz, and blues. The patterns of call-and-response, the use of repetition, and rhyme all allude to the musical predecessors of the genre and they help to create a certain flow in hip-hop.

The term “flow” has varied meaning for hip-hop artists as it is quite a subjective perception of the formal feature of rap, but attempts were made to define this feature. According to Krims, “flow…translates into a relatively high incidence of end-rhymes, few internal rhymes, and frequent two- and four-bar groupings” (56). Flow is not only dependent on the recurring formal poetic features, but also on the manner and speed of the artist’s delivery. Krims further divides flow into “speech-effusive” and “percussion-effusive” style (50), where the fundamental difference between the two is the emphasis either on regularity or irregularity of a rap piece. In “percussion-effusive” style the delivery of the artists brings out the offbeat, “counter-metric gestures” and “the focused points of staccato and pointed articulation, often followed by brief caesuras that
punctuate the musical texture and subdivide regular rhythmic patterns” (Krims 51). It is dependent on the recurrence of rhyme patterns, making the delivered piece rhythmically predictable. “Speech-effusive” styles “tend to feature enunciation and delivery closer to those of spoken language, with little sense often projected of any underlying metric pulse” (Krims 51). It is also important to mention that the “effusion” does not only refer to “an effusion of syllables, but rather to an effusion of rhythmic patterns and polyrhythms” (Krims 51). The styles are not exclusive and are used mostly in combination within rap songs. Similar rules as with rhyme within hip-hop are applied as the regularity and irregularity play the crucial part in making a piece original and unexpected.

The use of the two mentioned styles and the flow in the poetry of Hayes and Mullen internalize the allusion to the roots of African-American culture. The imitation of the rhythm of rap in their poems is not only to underline the meaning of the poems and to express the attitude of the speakers towards the current state of hip-hop culture. It also refers to the oral tradition of African-American tradition. However, it must be emphasized the rhythms described in the specific poems below are only imitations of rap. The poetic structure and forms in the poems are consciously contrasted with the parts of rap imitation to express the opinions of the speakers towards the evolution of the oral tradition and black nationalism in general. The imitation of rap is treated as a mockery or a sigh over the overpowering force rhythm has over meaning. In the ‘70s, rhythm created the force of the words to get the message of African-Americans across and to fight for their equal rights. Rhythm had a meaning. Nonetheless, in a large part of contemporary popularized commercial rap, rhythm functions only as a tool to entertain and to sell. Words are used mostly for their sounds as a device to carry the rhythm. The roles have switched and it is the lyrics of rap songs, which support their rhythm, while
the meaning vanishes. Hayes and Mullen imitate the rhythm of rap to point out this change in the African-American oral history with their poetry. They try to bring the attention back to the themes of black nationalism.

**Terrance Hayes**

In Hayes poetry, one of the most hip-hop elusive poems within its theme and formal features is called “emcee” from *Hip Logic*. The speaker of the poem demonstrates the role of an MC, as well as, he is mocking it:

You get to wear triple X
Jeans for easy access to the lair of first breaths

You get to reveal your shank
Handmade with the tooth of a bed spring and gauze

You get to rhyme about death-

Explicit lyrics, you are the pied piper
Sending children into jerk patterns and grunts
Into tunnels of smoke-

I had to get high to write this-

Your mind twists,
Gleams like lights on the bends of a night-coaster
The riders throw their hands in the air-

You get Grandmaster mantras-

And wave ‘em like they just don’t care

Under your spell I can do anything

Fly girls and Hoochie Mommas, La Femme Fantabulous

Writing your phone number on their tongues

Sucka emcees can call me Sire

Indelible tattoos
The night cut on an open sentence-

You are the Alpha and the Omegaphone

The night cut and you won’t ever be alone-

Your grin of gold-plated windows

You want the exit code from the tenement, the penitentiary-

You want [beatbox  beathbox  beatbox]

Breathlessness (Hip Logic 5)

This poem is a perfect example of Krim’s terms of “speech-effusive” and “percussion-effusive” style. “Percussion-effusive” style manifests itself in the repetition of the same
number of syllables in all the sentences starting with “you get to”. They all consist of seven syllables creating a kind of chorus for the first half of poem, creating a regular rhythm. The rhythm of this chorus changes in the sentence, “I had to get high to write this”. With the one extra syllable the sentence carries, the chorus goes off-beat as the person of the poem switches from “you” to “I”. Similar as the beat of the poem goes off, the speaker is “off” too as is suggested he is under the influence of drugs. The speaker is seeing himself, reflecting on the hip-hop lifestyle of the MC. The poem ironically shows the glamorous life of the rapper.

Hayes often switches between the speed of the pace of the poem and its flow. Every time he uses his repeated lines, the flow slows down and then speeds up again, when Hayes uses lists. The stanzas starting with “explicit lyrics” and “your mind twists” are catalogues of what the MC speaker sees in around himself. These catalogues rush the beat forward, increasing the immediacy and the atmosphere of the perception of the atmosphere of the venue of the intoxicated mind. Hayes mentions the use of listing in an interview for Poetry Foundation: “[M]ost times I’m thinking of rhythm as a kind of pattern. As in the ways, subordinate clauses and repetition can expand a sentence. Especially the way lists can expand a sentence.”6 Even in “emcee”, lists are used in a pattern. Any stanza with three lines is a start of a list, which quickens the pace of the poem, only to suddenly stop with a dash, which signalizes the shift of images.

The structure of the poem manifests the features of “speech-effusive” style. The switching between the longer and shorter stanzas not only highlights the unexpected irregularity of the poem, but it also emphasizes the speaker’s realizations or the fragments of his reflections while bringing up the irony of the whole piece. The speaker points out the power and the fame of the MC, but he also mentions the futility of it. The

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6 Information taken from https://www.poetryfoundation.org/
poem is a parody of commercial rap with its glamorizing the opulence of the rap stars, their life style full of drugs and sex. It mocks the kind of rap which strayed from its original purpose to vocalize the racial and gender issues of African-Americans in the U.S. Generally, it could be said that every time the poem carries a regular beat with a mostly regular meter and is written in “percussion-effusive” style, it parodies commercial rap of the ‘70s. This is also manifested with the allusions to particular rap songs.

The poem alludes to Cold Crush Brother’s song “Weekend” quoting their “throw their hands in the air- // … And wave ‘em like they just don’t care”, Run-DMC’s “King of Rock”, “Sucka emcees can call me Sire” or even “the pied piper”\(^7\), a folk tale figure, which is used in many rap songs to compare it to MC’s, such as Eminem in his “Lose Yourself”. As these are quotes from the actual existing rap lyrics, there is no surprise the style is regular “percussion-effusive”. The style of Cold Crush Brothers’ line is also underlined by the perfect end-rhyme, while in Run-DMC’s case, the style is emphasized by the alliteration of words starting with “s” and “c”. However, the speaker treats these quotes with “speech-effusive” style within the context of the poem. They are split and juxtaposed with the reflections of the speaker. Cold Crush Brothers’ line is divided by the speaker’s “You get Grandmaster mantras-”. “Grandmaster” is also a reference to the rapper of Cold Crush Brothers group. The line preserves the rhythm of the stanza with its consonance and its repetition of “you get”, but the line break at the end of the line slows down the pace again. The dash creates a pause and expectation for a “Grandmaster mantra” and for something great. Nevertheless only a many times repeated, stale phrase appears, which is also a part from

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\(^7\) Lyrics cited from https://genius.com/
OutKast’s “AtLiens” or Kanye West’s “So Appalled” to name a few. The speaker here again ridicules contemporary commercial rap by interrupting the rhythm of his poem.

Throughout the whole poem, its rhythm also supports the impression of breathlessness and immediacy. The poem starts in the first stanza with “first breaths” and ends with “breathlessness”. The poem does not represent rap lyrics, but the impression of rap lyrics and the MC’s delivery of them. The caesuras used rush the poem forward, such as in, “you get to wear triple X / Jeans”, highlighting the feeling of breathlessness. This is then further developed with the listing, “Fly girls and Hoochie Mommas, La Femme Fantabulous”, and with unexpectedly adding syllables, for example: “You are the Alpha and the Omegaphone”. The line includes a well-known phrase, which is then expanded into “Omegaphone”, again ridiculing the braggadocio of the MC. The preceding line has irregular rhythm in comparison with this one purely on the count of the syllables. The following line is parallel with the exact number of syllables and the perfect end-rhyme. The similar pattern then repeats with adding the number of syllables carrying consonance to the line in the next stanza: “You want the exit code from the tenement, the penitentiary-“. The line break here again marks a stop in the MC’s delivery, his need to breathe in and then to quickly continue with “[beatbox beatbox beatbox]”, which suggests the MC’s strong need for rhythm when he imitates the sound of percussions himself. Beatbox is often used at the end of rap songs to suggest the culmination of the rapping speed of a song. Hayes places it at the end of the poem for the same reason to imitate this culmination and end it with silence, with “breathlessness”. The theme of breathlessness concludes the imitation of rap with the rhythm overpowering the sense of its words as the illusion of rap ends in beatbox. Bradley also describes this phenomenon:
Rhythm is rap’s basic element. Whatever else it is, rap is patterned verbal expression. It is the offspring of a voice and a beat. The beat, of course, is the most obvious rhythm we hear. It is the kick drum, the high hat, the snare. It is sampled or digitized, beatboxed, or even tapped out on a tabletop. The MC’s voice has rhythm as well, playing off and on the beat in antagonistic cooperation. For most rap listeners, even for those with a full grasp of the language of the lyrics, rhythm has a way of overshadowing meaning. Feminist women sometimes hit the dance floor when the rhythm is right, misogynist lyrics be damned… The rhythm can make you do strange things. Rap, after all, is more than the sum of its sense; rhythm has a meaning all its own. (4)

Hayes’s poem criticizes rhythm overshadowing meaning to the point where a song loses meaning completely. Rap should not be only a set of words used purely for their sound, it should not be only “[beatbox beatbox beatbox]” to support the MC’s life of wealth and power. Rhythm should be used as a device to support a meaning and to get a message across. As Bradley says, rhythm should have “a meaning all its own”.

Hayes uses rhythm to support the imagery of the poem as well as the social critique. While rap first started as an acute criticism of the treatment of African-American is the U.S. society, it then later changed into the MCs’ bragging about all the money, power, drugs, and sex they have. These rap songs still emphasized the problems of racial inequality as they contain the need to express the exaggerated autonomy the speaker can have, but with constant repetition of the similar phrases, they quickly became a cliché. Using the imitation of the rhythm of a cliché rap song and the use of the often repeated phrases, Hayes calls for the demand for a change in hip-hop, so the social criticism would not be overlooked. What Hayes shows here is the importance of taking the genre seriously not only from the point of view of the listeners and its critics,
but also from the point of view of the artists. Hayes and Mullen take the inspiration from hip-hop in the innovation of rhyme, rhythm, wordplay, allusions to pop culture, and the vernacular language referring to the roots of African-American tradition. The hip-hop artists should take a page out of their book before the popularization of commercial rap. If the hip-hop artists keep repeating phrases connected only to the perks of fame and wealth, only a marginal elements of hip-hop will be preserved and will harm the genre, which will take many steps back in its original function to support and form the ideas of blackness and racial pride.

**Harryette Mullen**

In her collection *Muse & Drudge*, Mullen shares a similar opinion on contemporary hip-hop music, while being inspired by its sense of rhythm:

- rap attacks your tick
- cold fusion’s licks
- could make you sick
- nobody’s dying in this music

- womanish girl meets mannish boy
- whose best buddy’s a doggish puppy
- he dictate so dicty, she sedate so seditty
- the girl get biggity when the boy go uppity

- I’m down to Saint James Infirmary
- getting tested for HIV
the needle broke, the doctor choked
and told me I’d croak from TB

did I say nobody’s dying
well I lied, like last night
I was lying with your mama who was crying
for all the babies born in Alabama (Recyclopedia 161)

The regular rhythm imitating rap is much easily distinguished in this poem compared to Hayes’s “emcee”. The end-rhyme of the first two stanzas sets the rhythm apart from the rest of the poem, mocking commercial hip-hop in the process. Nevertheless, Mullen is more critical towards this kind of rap compared to Hayes as she finishes the poem with the consequences the genre and pop culture caused in a large scale.

The first stanza has a very regular rhythm, imitating a rap song. Again, contrary to Hayes, Mullen starts with breathlessness. Her high tempo of the poem gradually slows down towards the end. Same as “rap attacks your tick”, the poem attacks with its tempo kept up by the end-rhymes and by the consonance of the “k” sound throughout the stanza. “Percussion-effusive” style is used in the stanza as the regular beat is caused by the prevalent use of iambic meter. Although not strictly followed, it could be said it is written in iambic dimeter with the switching unstressed and stressed syllables in “attacks you tick / cold fusion’s licks / could make you sick / … in this music”. The addition of the syllables of “nobody’s dying” in the last sentence throws the meter and with it the rhythm of the poem off, slowing down its pace.

In the second stanza, the speaker still continues with the description of the cliché rap lyrics with the criticism becoming harsher and with it the pace of the rhythm is further slowed down. No regular meter is followed anymore; however, the rhyme is still
applied to highlight the ridiculous use of the vernacular language to promote gender inequality. The speaker criticizes the impropriety of the casually promoted patriotism among young listeners having the extreme consequences described at the end of the poem. The immaturity of the youth is expressed through the repetition of the juvenile word-formation of “womanish”, “mannish” and “doggish” as well as the high occurrence of the “y” at the end of the words in the stanza resulting in assonance. The assonance of “y” in the words “buddy”, “puppy”, “diety”, “sedit”, “biggity”, and “uppity” underlines the continuing ridicule of the words mocking the cliché lyrics of commercial rap used only as carriers of sound with no attention to meaning. As these lyrics full of racial inequality, violence, and misogyny are casually used in majority of commercial hip-hop, the youth listening to such music can be affected in a way, which is described in the following stanza.

The third stanza starts in almost narrative form compared to the beginning of the poem and the pace further slows down with the use of “speech-effusive” style. The change in the rhythm also marks the change of the point of view. The first and second stanzas are written in the second and third person, while the third and last stanzas are written in the first person. The irregular rhythm in this stanza brings the focus to the serious consequences, in which the speaker is involved. Only in the lines, “the needle broke, the doctor choked / … told me I’d croak”, the poem reminds of the iambic dimeter of the first stanza, juxtaposing the casualness of commercial rap music with the realities of the speaker she has to face, which were caused by the effects of rap on the youth.

In the last stanza, the rhythm of the poem is completely irregular starting with the rhetorical question without punctuation, “did I say nobody’s dying”. “Speech-effusive” style is much more prominent in Mullen’s poem than in Hayes piece as she
mixes in a narrative style. This stanza again contains end-rhymes in “dying / …crying” and internal rhyme of “lied, like last night” and “mama / …Alabama”. Along with the alliteration of the words starting with “l” and consonance of “b” and “m”, Mullen uses these formal devices irregularly to contrast the last stanza with the first. She shows how dangerous cliché, mundane phrases of commercial can have a disruptive impact on the lives of the youth and American society in general.

Same as Hayes, Mullen proves that hip-hop must be taken seriously as it has a large influence of the youth of today’s society. In Mullen’s poem, commercial rap not only strayed from the original purpose of voicing out the criticism of American society in regard to African-Americans, it even became a cause of the issues of the society. This turn is marked by the change of the points of view underlined by the contrast of meter and the rhythm between the two halves of the poem. Here, the repetitive, regular rhythm without meaning is the reason for the speaker ending up in a hospital. In her essay, Mullen refers to the imitation of rap in poetry, which could be viewed as follows:

An illustration of the availability of contemporary black vernacular and its formulaic tropes to others besides African-American speakers and writers or, less generously, as a caricature of urban black vernacular that is uncomfortably similar to that found throughout mainstream popular culture, including that used on the gold and platinum CDs of hip-hop artists. (Cracks 76)

Mullen sees it as the repetitive rhythm or as a harmful tool, which must be changed and innovated in order to gain relevance again. Although a crucial part of rap, rhythm should not overpower the meaning.
Conclusion

Hayes’s and Mullen’s writing is thematically focused on social constructions of black identity. Both poets are deeply concerned with the history of black writing and want to redefine the concepts of the Black Arts Movement. With the themes of race, gender, and identity, the poets draw on black musical traditions within the rhythm and form of their poetry. They use the strategies of jazz, blues, and most recently hip-hop. The use of rap in the poets’ work shows the multi-faceted images of black identity and today’s perceptions of it. Generally speaking, there are two sides of rap. One is seen as a genre coming from desperate circumstances, from the need of a minority to be heard and to be equal to the rest of the society. The other side is a simplified version of the first one. It is a negative perception of the roots of the genre accompanied by strong rhythm and catchy rhymes with no meaning, made only to sell. This allows Hayes and Mullen to use rap in both of its versions to portray the difficulty of grasping black identity and its complex development.

Within the use of rhyme, poets show the importance of originality and surprise to deny the claims that rhyme is an obsolete poetic tool. The poets use the strategies of expectation to play with the different sides of rap and to underline their innovative forms of poetic techniques. Rhyme in hip-hop is one of the elements which set the rhythm of a piece. Rhythm carries meaning in rap. Hayes and Mullen are both aware of the importance of rhythm in rap and use it in their poetry to either highlight the meaning of their poetry or parody it. The poets use the techniques of rap to carry across black tradition with regards to the current times. They use the representation of rap as a critique of society and the “post-racist” America, where black identity is simplified and Americans are becoming colorblind, yet the perceptions of racism remains.
The elements of Du Bois’ double consciousness are still preserved in the minds of Americans and Hayes and Mullen use hip-hop as an ideal tool to prove it. Hip-hop music is a collection of expected rhythms and surprising offbeat, cliché and originality, doggerel and well-crafted rhymes. This duality, prominent in the work of both poets, is the cause and the solution to double consciousness. Its seeming simplicity is the source of the contempt for the genre and the audience will rarely time to notice those moments where hip-hop breaks from the stable rhythm and simple rhymes. Hayes and Mullen use rap in their poetry to achieve for their readers to look at the layers of meaning and to take time to notice and realize the layers of black identity as well. Hip-hop, same as the poetry of Hayes and Mullen, is a continuation of the necessity of black culture to be heard. With the important break in the 60’s and the 70’s, literature and music go hand in hand to redefine the forms of black writing and Hayes and Mullen try to do the same with hip-hop.


---. *The Cracks Between What We Are and What We Are Supposed to Be.* The U of Alabama P, 2012.


Resumé

Cílem této práce je dokázat, že hip hop a rap mají vliv na formální jevy a témata současné poezie Terrence Hayese a Harryette Mullene, úspěšných a inovativních Afroamerických básníků. Práce pojednává o tom, zda by měl být hip hop považován za vážnou uměleckou formu. S tímto cílem práce zanalyzuje vliv hip hopu na užití rýmu, rytmu a témat prací obou básníků.

První část práce se především věnuje tématům rasy a vývoji afroamerické identity v básních ve vztahu k textům hudby hip hopu a optimistickým či pesimistickým přístupům k nim. Optimistický přístup navrhuje, že při použití afroamerického dialektu/sociolektu v poezii, autoři poukazují na současné kulturní vnímání identity Afroameričanů. Pesimistický přístup se soustředí na negativní stránky rapu, který je jako médium schopný šíření misogynie, násilí a ignorance. Tento vliv hip hopu na poezii básníků bude pozorován s ohledem na reference na populární kulturu a kliše hip hopu, jakými jsou např. výjevy svobody, sexu a bohatství.

Ve druhé kapitole se práce soustředí na analýzu poezie básníků z hlediska rýmu. Tato charakterizace je zejména popis rýmu na jeho použití v historii. Nabízí se tedy otázka, zda je rým schopen překročení hranice pouhého jednoduchého doggerelu. V další kapitole se pak práce věnuje koncovému rýmu ve vztahu k formování a charakterizaci rytmu, tolik důležitého v hudbě hip hopu.

Analýza témat a formálních jevů poezie s přihlášením k hip hopu dokáže nezbytnost společnosti, aby hip hop dostál seriózního uznání k tomu aby si společnost mohla uvědomit vývoj rasismu afroamerické identity v Americe a aby poznala vliv médií na tento vývoj.
**Resumé**

The purpose of this thesis is to show that hip-hop and rap has an influence on the formal features and themes of the print-based contemporary poetry of Terrance Hayes and Harryette Mullen, the successful and innovative African-American contemporary poets. The thesis will discuss whether hip-hop should be considered a serious art form and the influence of hip-hop on the present use of rhyme, rhythm, and themes in the work of the aforementioned poets.

The first part of the thesis will focus on the racial and racial identity development in the poems with relation to their usage in hip-hop lyrics and the optimistic and pessimistic attitudes toward it. The optimistic attitude suggests that, through the vernacular language, the artists express the true representations of cultural conditions, while the pessimistic attitude sees the themes as the promotion of misogyny, violence, and ignorance. The influence on poetry will be analyzed through the references to pop culture and to the cliché of hip-hop relating to mainly freedom, sex and money.

In the second chapter, the thesis will analyze the poetry of the two poets in respect to the characterization of rhyme. The characterization is mainly the description of rhyme throughout time; seeing rhyme as simplistic doggerel or a complex poetic device. In the next chapter, the use of end rhymes will be described within the frame of the characterization, the use of the pairing sounds, and repetition generating a rhythm evocative of hip-hop music.

The analysis of the themes and the formal features of the poetic work will prove the necessity of hip hop as a serious art form influencing and developing today’s perceptions of the identity of African Americans and the form of black literature.