

## **Mac Miller Forgot to Die**

An approach to Malcolm McCormick's discography which aims to show how the use of persona is made vital to the musical performance.

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## Abstract

The rise of global streaming services in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has changed the music industry and made the process of creating artist personae easier. When crafting a social avatar, the character is often idealised in the pursuit of notability and social relevancy and, furthermore, connected to the performer through the compulsion of authenticity. The thesis aims to show how this balancing act constitutes a driving force in producing a musical performance.

This thesis studies the relationship between the use of artist personae and the progression of the musical expression in Mac Miller's "Knock Knock" (2010), "Weekend" (2015), and "Good News" (2020). The analyses emphasise how lyrics, delivery, and non-vocal qualities affect the performer's self-presentation. Notably, each record utilises genre to manage the audience's expectations and insert a particular impression of the persona.

At the core of the discussion is the concept of performative biographism, which ties biographic information about the artist to their product. This threshold between fact and fiction creates a space where life and literature affect one another. The audience is intertwined in this process as their response to a performance establishes a dialogue between themselves and the performer. This thesis will then demonstrate how reviewers and fans become co-authors of the persona.

## Acknowledgements

Over the last year, this thesis has siphoned the better part of my time, energy, and mental capacity. Yet, for all its tribulations, it has been an engrossing project I would not have gone without. Each time it has tested my discipline, dedication, and competence, it has, in turn, entirely enraptured me. Thank you, Michael, for your guidance, knowledge, and faith and for giving me the opportunity to write about this subject. I would also like to share my regards to Malcolm for inspiring and entertaining me. To my friends and fellow students, I cherish our stimulating conversations and banal digressions. You have kept me sane. To Dag, I value your time spent reading and appraising my writing. Ann Elin, I appreciate your support and encouragement. Time spent with you has helped me cope and invigorated me. Thank you for listening to my tangents, for even when you did not understand, you cherished it all the same. And to Molly, our cat, thank you for your unrelenting craving for attention which has forced me to step away from the computer, breath, and realise that there is a world beyond Microsoft Word.

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Do I contradict myself?  
Very well then I contradict myself,  
(I am large, I contain multitudes.)

- Walt Whitman (Song of Myself, 51)

## 1. Introduction

Many musicians choose to perform under alter egos, whether as simple as Reginald Dwight changing his name to Elton John or a more advanced attempt at creating secondary characters, or personae, as David Bowie did in his side project as Ziggy Stardust. It is natural to develop a persona on stage, as the effort one puts into performing can create a façade that differs from one's personality in a relaxed and natural space. For this reason, even those who perform under their real name, like Johnny R. Cash, may find themselves split between their private and public selves. Cash, for instance, cultivated an outlaw image on stage despite never having served time in prison.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, when some musicians establish multiple, varied personae, one might wonder what remains as the unifying element between the different characters. For example, Prince R. Nelson famously used ten other names throughout his career: Prince, The Artist (Formerly Known as Prince), The Kid, Alexander Nevermind, Camille, Christopher Tracy, Jamie Starr, Joey Coco, Tora Tora, and <sup>2</sup>. The constant is usually the creator behind the personae, in this case, Nelson himself. But to what extent can the persona they create be representative of themselves? This question does not merely consider the practical reasons behind artist personae, but probes into the very psyche of their creator. Akin to the Ship of Theseus, we may question if a creator remains the same despite the changes made to their persona/e. And yet, at the same time, we might also wonder whether a persona can persist with the same identity when their creator is the one changing.

The process and reasoning behind how individuals present themselves in everyday life overlaps with how artists present themselves on the stage. Correspondingly, role theory and music performance theory share some of the same core terms, such as performance, performer, audience, and stage.<sup>3</sup> Since music is the artist's chosen mode of communication,

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<sup>1</sup> Cash has had a number of visits overnight in jail, which is a step toward authenticity. Furthermore, a member of Cash's band (or maybe a roadie) had actually been in that prison, at least that's the mythology.

<sup>2</sup> This unpronounceable symbol was later dubbed "Love Symbol #2".

<sup>3</sup> Whereas Goffman and Haarder uses these terms in more of a metaphorical sense, Bradley, Eckstein, Frith, Krims, and Novak all fit these terms specifically to musical performances.

how they present, express, and perform themselves should be conditional on their artistic aptitude. It may even be “instrumentally essential for the completion of the core task”.<sup>4</sup> In any case, it seems that the core act of dramatic realisation, of forging your image and thus others’ impression of it, has a natural connection to musical artistry. This thesis aims to demonstrate this relationship through Malcolm McCormick’s use of the artist persona Mac Miller. This could show that Mac Miller’s discography can be divided into three distinguishable periods where McCormick’s artistic style, musical expression, and biographic context have contributed to different configurations of Mac Miller. With an analysis of such categorisation, we can tell more about how the persona affects the audience and how they affect the persona.

Malcolm McCormick makes for an interesting subject as he has used multiple personae throughout his musical career, all of which are characterised by different personalities, roles, and musical styles. Some have been able to co-exist while others have been isolated. Seeing as McCormick ultimately decided to discontinue all but one persona, I believe that his discography can illuminate the process and purpose of creating artistic personae. I will be analysing three songs by Mac Miller, one from each of the periods I describe further on. First, “Knock Knock” on *K.I.D.S* (2010) is one of the breakout hits from Mac Miller’s debut. This track is typical party rap and makes a fine example of how McCormick presented himself at the start of his career. Meanwhile, “Weekend” on *GO:OD AM* (2015) marks a more vivid and gritty personality who conveys expressive lyrics while still making pleasurable beats. Ultimately, in “Good News” on *Circles* (2020), Mac Miller brandishes a cool, calm, and collected songwriter-variant of himself which places the rapper persona more firmly in touch with his emotions. Each track provides insight into a different stage in McCormick’s musical career and throughout his period as Mac Miller. These stages should be able to display the changes in skill, style, and acclaim present in both McCormick and his persona. Notably, all three songs have received platinum certification from the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA). This attests to their commercial success, which more importantly indicates their impact on the audience’s impression of Miller. Therefore, certification should make for natural progression marks in Mac Miller’s discography.<sup>5</sup> Finally, McCormick’s untimely death in 2018 provides the opportunity to regard Mac Miller’s entire discography as further

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<sup>4</sup> Performing music is itself a dramatic realization of rhythmic sounds and lyrics. Lemert & Branaman 1997: 99.

<sup>5</sup> Knock Knock (2011) went platinum in 2021. Weekend (2015) went platinum in March 2018. Good News went platinum later the same year (2020). Only two other of Mac Miller’s singles has gone platinum, “Donald Trump” (2011) in 2013 and “Self Care” (2018) in 2021. RIAA 2022.

developments are held to a minimum. Moreover, this creates a chance to ponder what remains of his final artist persona post-mortem and deliberate on whether Mac Miller can progress without Malcolm McCormick.

It is worth noting that McCormick reached prime fame in the late 2010s. This places him in an era of rap music separate from the 80s and 90s Bronx hip-hop revolution which has already seen much critical discussion.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, those born after 1984 find themselves in a “post-hip-hop generation” where politics, social practises, and aesthetic preferences establishes new associations to hip-hop.<sup>7</sup> Contemporary rap practises are significantly influenced by the rise of global streaming services. Subscription platforms like Spotify, Apple Music, and YouTube Music and open music distribution platforms like Soundcloud have changed the music industry drastically, making it easier for rappers to start their careers independently of record labels. This nurtures less homogenous sounds and styles, as niche artists have an easier time gaining relative success. This is evident in McCormick’s discography. Mac Miller shows influences from hip-hop, but his style usually aligns more with alternative-hip-hop tendencies, meaning that it often blurs different genres.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the rise of the internet has provided grounds for anyone to create anonymous social avatars, making it more commonplace for artists to use personae while at the same time making it easier for their audience to find biographic information about the artist. Artists can interact with their audience or other musicians through forums and social media platforms. Similarly, reviews of records and albums are more readily available.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, artists are freer to experiment with

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<sup>6</sup> In the anthology *That’s the Joint: the Hip-Hop Studies Reader* (2004), Murray Forman & Mark Anthony Neal covers an extensive range of hip-hop’s subjects. They introduced the term “hip-hop studies” and gathered some of the most profound scholars on the subject, including Tricia Rose and David Toop. Since then, the field has, as Forman & Neal claim, grown “consistently meticulous” with the addition of works like *Can’t Stop, Won’t Stop: a History of the Hip-Hop Generation* (2005) by Jeff Chang. Adam Bradley & Andrew DuBois are amongst those who have carried on the torch. In *The Anthology of Rap* (2010) they assess hip-hop’s history from 1978 to 2010 and highlight multiple facets of the movement by presenting a more diverse set of lyrics.

In newer works like the second edition of *That’s the Joint* (2011), Justin Williams’ *The Cambridge Companion to Hip-Hop* (2015), or Mitchell Ohriner’s *Flow: the Rhythmic Voice in Rap Music* (2019), they still primarily refer to hip-hop’s “founders” – like Notorious B.I.G., 2pac, Jay-Z, and Dr. Dre. Moreover, they seldom spend considerable time on artists beyond Eminem and Kanye West (who premiered in 1996 and 2004 respectively).

<sup>7</sup> Forman & Neal 2011: 4.

<sup>8</sup> AllMusic describes it as such: “Alternative Rap refers to hip-hop groups that refuse to conform to any of the traditional stereotypes of rap, such as gangsta, funk, bass, hardcore, and party rap. Instead, they blur genres, drawing equally from funk and pop/rock, as well as jazz, soul, reggae, and even folk.”

<https://www.allmusic.com/style/alternative-rap-ma0000012203>.

<sup>9</sup> For reference, behold the already curated list of auxiliary sources cited in this thesis. Websites like PopMatters.com, theFader.com, complex.com are some examples of online outlets that cover news in music culture. Previously print-only magazines like Pitchfork and Rolling Stone have also become available as open-sources online.



alternative personae and genres while being able to gauge reception at a large scale. More precisely, feedback on an artist's work and presentation of self is nearly unavoidable.<sup>10</sup> As rapping has become a greater global phenomenon, the rapper identity has also been able to develop beyond the geographical, masculine, and ethnic frame,<sup>11</sup> in many cases focusing more on what internal processes artists and their audiences have in common. This new era of rap has once again made R&B and hip-hop the most popular genre,<sup>12</sup> as such, it is pertinent that we begin critically considering how a new generation of rap artists express themselves.

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<sup>10</sup> Haarder 2014: 134.

<sup>11</sup> For rap identity, Krims heeds particular importance to the geographical base of local identity and to "ghettocentricity", the presentation of real life for black men living in bad neighbourhoods. 2000: 70, 124, 201.

<sup>12</sup> In this case I mean the most streamed music genre. In 2017 Nielsen Music (MRC Data) stated: "For the first time ever, R&B/Hip-Hop became the most dominant genre in the U.S., with nine of the Top 10 most-consumed songs coming from that genre, including breakthrough hits by new artists Migos, Post Malone and Cardi B" (<https://www.nielsen.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2019/04/2017-year-end-music-report-us.pdf>).

This also holds true in 2020: "The R&B/hip-hop genre represented 31.1 % of all on-demand song streams in 2020 (318.72 billion of 1.02 trillion) – the largest share of any genre. Rock is runner-up among genres in terms of on-demand streams (audio and video combined), with 15.6 % of the market (159.4 billion of 1.02 trillion)". (<https://www.billboard.com/articles/business/chart-beat/9508037/mrc-data-2020-recap>).

While this information mostly accounts for U.S. developments, Spotify, the world's most used streaming service, ranks pop/rap-artists at the top of their charts. This also includes artists that are categorised as both pop *and* rap artists. (<https://newsroom.spotify.com/2020-12-01/the-trends-that-shaped-streaming-in-2020/>).

The results vary from the streaming numbers in terms of the number of listeners per genre. International Federation of the Phonographic Industry's (IFPI) *Music Consumer Insight Report* from 2018 cites that most consumers listen to pop (64 %) and rock (57%), while 26 % listen to Hip-Hop/Rap/Trap ([https://www.ifpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/091018\\_Music-Consumer-Insight-Report-2018.pdf](https://www.ifpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/091018_Music-Consumer-Insight-Report-2018.pdf)).

## 2. Theoretical Background

By examining role theory, we can make assumptions as to why personae are created. For instance, social psychologist Erving Goffman's assessment of dramaturgy studies how a social character is performed, what makes the character believable and notable, and how the performer can separate between characters. When considering music performance theory, this can be connected directly to how artists use personae and how the persona becomes part of the musical performance. Associate professor of English, Julia Novak, reviews how the voice promotes emotions and sentiments through non-vocal qualities. While she does consider body language and facial expressions, the analyses here will primarily be based on the studio versions of the songs found on Spotify. This narrows the scope down from an absolute assessment of self-presentation in performance to how the self is expressed through voice and lyrics.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, Adam Bradley, music critic and professor of English, describes how the voice is used in *flow* and anchors the discussion musically and rhythmically to rap music. From there, Adam Krims, professor of music analysis, explains how the different genres of rap music present classifiable principles for self-presentation and how this context affects the audience's views on rap authenticity. Finally, socio-musicologist Simon Frith and professor of literature and culture Lars Eckstein's ideas on music discourse show how non-vocal qualities, vocal technique, and genre intersect to communicate a musical expression. In my discussion, I will argue that the audience's resulting impression of the artist's performed character corresponds to the performed musical expression.

### 2.1 The Performative Biography

The concept "performative biographism" (*performative biografisme*) helps illustrate how the artist and their persona/e are inextricably tied together. Literature researcher Jon Helt Haarder describes this perspective as "an attempt at interacting discursively with reality and the reader through the use of a discourse which traditionally has an empirical and direct root in it – the biographical."<sup>14</sup> In this type of literature, explicit and documentary biographic references

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<sup>13</sup> By focusing on lyrics and voice, we also focus on the aspects that the artist can control most. Facial expressions and body language are part of self-expression, but more subconsciously. Other details like the physical aspects of the stage serve as liabilities – e.g., indoors vs outdoors stage, how close the performer is to the audience, what equipment is used or is defective, special effects, and the opportunities for interaction between songs and off-stage.

<sup>14</sup> Haarder 2014: 6.

become a guarantee of the product's authenticity and societal relevancy. Moreover, Haarder insists that we experience biographic irreversibility and "inevitably read biographically should we have any biographic knowledge".<sup>15</sup> This means that such information influences our impression of the author and their work even when it is not presented explicitly in the main body of works. One can recognise a performative biography by its three main characteristics. First, in utilising real people and events in a fictional setting, the product operates at the threshold of art-reception (*kunstreception*) and world-reaction (*livsverdensreaktion*). Secondly, the use of real people and events causes discussions, or feedback loops (*kredsløb af energi*), which can be used in future literary works. Finally, the presentation of real people, self and others, is a performance that can make our impression of these people inconsistent with their impression of themselves.<sup>16</sup>

Notably, McCormick has stated that "everything that is done as Mac Miller is factual and based on factual information".<sup>17</sup> This prompts us to read Miller's discography as a performative biography. While this thesis emphasises the progression of Mac Miller, I will briefly highlight some parts of McCormick's life beside and behind this alter ego to provide context for the upcoming study. The purpose of separating the introduction of the persona and the artist's introduction is to establish an overview of Mac Miller for then to retroactively remark on how McCormick's own life and other professional ventures may have influenced Mac Miller. Mac Miller was the persona McCormick utilised over the most extended period, moreover, this character was the one credited on most of McCormick's records. Although Miller is a singular persona, the image of this character has altered over the decade it has been performed. Therefore, I choose to distinguish between three iterations of this persona and refer to each of them by my chosen monikers. While there are multiple resemblances between them, each configuration has its own style and characterisations.

### *Cheesy Mac (2009–2011)*

Mac Miller was first made active in 2009 with the release of two mixtapes, *The Jukebox: Prelude to Class Clown* and *The High Life*. As apparent by the titles, this character started as a naïve high school kid mainly concerned with the surface level desires of a teenager – graduating high school, and the simpler pleasures in life like drinking and partying. As such,

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<sup>15</sup> Haarder 2014: 139.

<sup>16</sup> Haarder 2014: 12, 201.

<sup>17</sup> Larry King 2017: 13:03–13:55.

he was affectionately – and derogatorily, dubbed “Easy Mac with the Cheesy Raps”.<sup>18</sup> He kept up the party rapper image going into the mixtapes *K.I.D.S.* (2010), *Best Day Ever* (March 2011), *I Love Life, Thank You* (October 2011), the EP *On and On and Beyond* (March 2011), and his first album *Blue Slide Park* (November 2011).<sup>19</sup> This period marks Miller’s breakthrough as “Donald Trump”, the single on *Best Day Ever*, became his first platinum certificate record.<sup>20</sup> Additionally, *Blue Slide Park* became the first independently distributed debut album to top the Billboard 200 in 16 years.<sup>21</sup>

#### *Heavy Mac (2012–2015)*

While it did neither sell as well nor chart as high as the previous album, the release of *Macadelic* only four months after *Blue Slide Park* would signal the first and most poignant change in Mac Miller’s stylistic identity. This period in Miller’s career is highlighted by the desire for, and pursuit of, a serious image. Correspondingly, there are tendencies for personal lyrics, weightier themes, and more fluid and experimental beats. Notably, the new collections had higher production value and featured sounds more reminiscent of hip-hop and jazz than the pop-rap elements of Miller’s earlier work. Miller’s second studio album, *Watching Movies with the Sound Off* (2013), expanded on his new direction and generally received more positive reviews. Subsequently, the independently released mixtape *Faces* (2014) portrayed this heavy version of Miller at its zenith. Here, the dismal report on drug abuse, depression, and death peaked in what was a unique album for Miller. *GO:OD AM* (2015) then appeared as a return to form and set a foundation for a more energetic and concise character who nonetheless dealt with the same topics. The poppier single, “Weekend”, featured singing by Miguel and gained Miller his second platinum certification from RIAA.<sup>22</sup>

#### *Romantic Mac (2016– )*

Throughout his three final albums, Miller explored new topics and showed a more introspective side of himself as the storytelling moved inwards. Moreover, in *The Divine*

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<sup>18</sup> Miller was referred to as “Cheesy Mac” in, for instance, a review by Rolling Stone. However, the naming convention will be further discussed in the analyses. Catucci 2013.

<sup>19</sup> In accordance with the ease of music distribution, McCormick’s records have been published in several ways. Mixtapes are free, independently distributed compilations of songs primarily used to promote an artist. For established artists, mixtapes are still useful in exploring new kinds of musical expressions between albums. Albums are produced professionally through a record label and are distributed for profit. Extended-Plays (EP) are like albums but are shorter at around half the length of a full album.

<sup>20</sup> «Knock Knock» was released a year earlier than “Donald Trump” and also achieved platinum certification, however “Knock Knock” did not achieve this until August 2021. RIAA 2022.

<sup>21</sup> Billboard, 2011.

<sup>22</sup> RIAA 2022.

*Feminine* (2016), he experimented with new vocal techniques and began singing more frequently from that point onwards. *The Divine Feminine* (2016) did not mark his first time rapping about love or alluding to one of his relationships, but this new iteration of Miller brings this previously minor theme to the forefront. This way, Miller enters a period of romance as a topic and as a driving force. He expands on this theme in the vigorous *Swimming* (2018) and the warm *Circles* (2020) but turns it more towards self-love and positivity. This is reflected in the two major hits from these albums, “Self Care” and “Good News”. The former is Miller’s top-selling record and swiftest platinum certification.<sup>23</sup> The latter is the first posthumous single released where Miller is the leading artist.

### *The Zero Persona*

Malcolm James McCormick was born on January 19, 1992, and grew up in the Point Breeze neighbourhood in Pittsburgh, PA. He was raised Jewish (from his mother’s side) while attending a catholic grade school. McCormick was a self-taught musician who could play guitar, bass, and drums at the age of six. McCormick began rapping in high school, and by the age of 15 it had become his main focus. In 2007, McCormick presented himself as “Easy Mac” on his first mixtape, “But My Mackin Ain’t Easy”. On the cover, you could see a white, fifteen-year-old boy with a snapback and a basketball jersey sucking on his underlip and throwing gang signs, all while sitting on a bed in what we can only assume is the untidy bedroom of he who would become Mac Miller.

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<sup>23</sup> “Self Care” was published July 13, 2018 and went from gold to 3x Multi-Platinum certification from January 22, 2019 to September 9, 2021. RIAA 2022.

Easy Mac appeared again on the duo-project *How High* (2008), where McCormick performed under the group name “The Ill Spoken” together with his friend Beedie (Brian Benjamin Greene).<sup>24</sup> Since then, he continued with his solo career as Mac Miller. As an artist, McCormick first gained attention while recording with Wiz Kalifa at the local recording studio, ID Labs. In 2010 he won in two categories at the Pittsburgh Hip Hop Awards – 21 & Under and Best Hip Hop Video for “Live Free”. The same year, McCormick graduated from Taylor Allderdice High School and signed with the independent label Rostrum Records. Rostrum would help him produce his next mixtapes and debut studio album, *Blue Slide Park* (2011). Eventually, McCormick would create the record label imprint, REMember Music, which mainly focused on Pittsburgh talent – including himself.

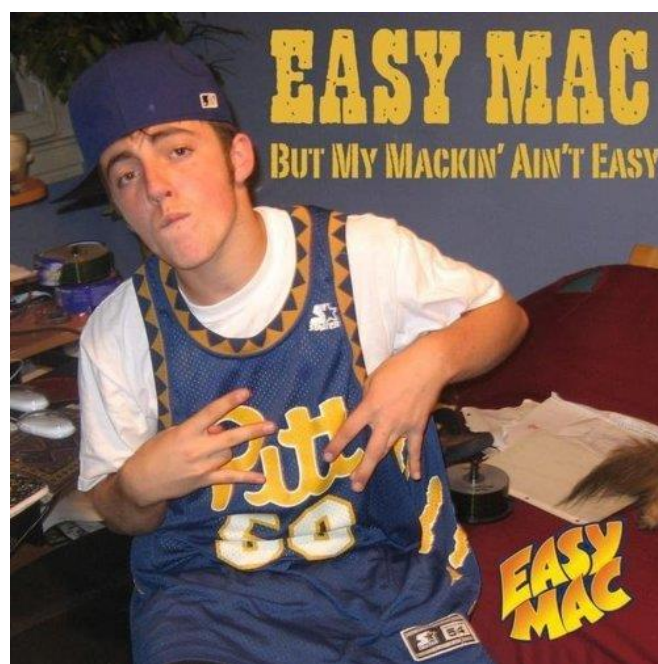


Fig. 1: cover art for Easy Mac's *But My Mackin' Ain't Easy* mixtape.

Following his success, McCormick noted an accompanying depression that primarily seemed to be connected to the public's image of Mac Miller.<sup>25</sup> Commenting on the poor reviews of *Blue Slide Park*, he claimed that “In a way, based on what I was rapping about in my early days, I kind of brought [scrutiny] on myself”,<sup>26</sup> yet “A lot of the reviews were more on me as a person, [...] that was even worse. You're 19, you're so excited to put out your first album, you put it out—and no one has any respect for you or for what you did.”<sup>27</sup> The *misrepresentation* of Malcolm in Miller furthermore lead him to remain in his house not to be asked ‘Oh, are you Mac Miller?’, which would make it so “[he] couldn't be [him]self” for the rest of the night.<sup>28</sup> McCormick's problems worsened once he started the Macadelic Tour in March 2012 where he mostly played colleges, “venues that did nothing to dispel the

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<sup>24</sup> Malcolm and Brian released the single “Paid Dues (the Reunion)” as a follow up in 2012. The song was released by The Ill Spoken, but the members were now listed as Beedie and Mac Miller. BeedieLand 2012.

<sup>25</sup> Larry King 2017: 06:10–07:50.

<sup>26</sup> Browne 2015.

<sup>27</sup> Ahmed 2013.

<sup>28</sup> Browne 2015.

perception that the young MC was nothing more than a ‘frat rapper’.”<sup>29</sup> McCormick admits that he had become addicted to lean (promethazine) during the tour and “was so fucked up all the time it was bad. My friends couldn’t even look at me the same. I was lost.”<sup>30</sup>

After *Macadelic*, McCormick started ventures with other, new personae. Some of them, like Larry Dollaz and Smoke Mo’ Purp, were only featured on a couple of tracks, yet others received entire collections. His most notable personae, excluding Mac Miller, were Larry Lovestein, Larry Fisherman, and Delusional Thomas. Through Rostrum Records, Lovestein released the jazz EP *You* (2012), and Fisherman produced two instrumental mixtapes, *Run on Sentences volume 1* (2013) & *2* (2015).<sup>31</sup> Thomas’ self-titled *Delusional Thomas* (2013) was released independently. As a producer, Fisherman’s role was to create the musical rhythm found in the musical background of the record. This distinguished him from Mac Miller, whose role as an artist was to establish a vocal rhythm through rap and song.<sup>32</sup> On *You*, McCormick acts as both artist and producer, as Lovestein is singing while the pretend live jazz band The Velvet Revival is playing the music. McCormick made stories for his characters and told how “Larry Lovestein represents free love and the beauty of that and the mystery of love and how love is an important part of life”. Meanwhile, Larry Fisherman “[...] was a professional fisherman, commercially. And then the sushi-business really took off. And he wasn’t getting the right fish for sushi, so he had to turn to make beats”.<sup>33</sup> From this, we can recognise Lovestein as a sentimentalist and Fisherman as a hard-working common person. Meanwhile, Thomas was meant to present “the evil voice inside your head”.<sup>34</sup> In 2016, Fisherman’s “!Go Fish!”, a trilogy of singles, marked the end of these separate ventures. From then on, McCormick’s focus returned entirely to Mac Miller.

After a breakdown in the summer of 2014, McCormick finally began seeking help after drunk dialling record producer Rick Rubin and asking him for help in getting sober.<sup>35</sup> Since *GO:OD AM* (2015), Malcolm maintained more control of his substance abuse, saying: “Let’s keep it

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<sup>29</sup> Ahmed 2013.

<sup>30</sup> Ahmed 2013.

<sup>31</sup> Larry Lovestein’s *You* (2012) and Larry Fisherman’s *Run on Sentences vol. 1* (2013) & *vol .2* (2015) were released through REMember Music.

<sup>32</sup> While external professionals sometimes help write the lyrics, I also attribute this deed to the artist persona as the lyrical content is nevertheless associated most with the performer.

<sup>33</sup> Descriptions of Larrys gathered from a bonus episode of “Mac Miller and the Most Dope Family” on MTV2. Altrock et.al 2013–2014.

<sup>34</sup> Millard 2013.

<sup>35</sup> Browne 2015.

real, I get super fucked up, still, all the time, that will never stop. But I'm just in control of my life, I am not fucked up right now. I'm chilling".<sup>36</sup> *GO:OD AM* also marked McCormick's first major-label album release after signing with Warner Records Inc. in 2014. This new cooperation led to higher budgets and higher production quality. However, McCormick's lingering mental health issues and addiction still created problems. McCormick had been dating journalist Nomi Leasure, his high-school sweetheart, for seven years when they broke up in 2016. For two years after that, he dated singer Ariana Grande. Following their breakup in May 2018, Grande stated, "I am not a babysitter or a mother, " referring to her relationship with McCormick.<sup>37</sup> Within a month of his breakup with Grande, McCormick was charged with two counts of driving while under the influence. For the next three months, McCormick lived isolated, and little was heard from him until he released *Swimming* (3. August 2018). On September 7, 2018, Malcolm McCormick died of an accidental drug overdose.<sup>38</sup> Two years later, Mac Miller released *Circles* (January 17. 2020).

Typically, the purpose of reading through the lens of performative biographism is to evaluate the portrait's moment (*potrættets moment*) – the moment when the assessment of multiple literary works with biographic facts can not only provide a clear image of the author but also reveal a progression in the author's life story.<sup>39</sup> This operates well on Malcolm McCormick as we, throughout Miller's discography, can observe specific overarching themes and motifs that connect the persona to its performer. Notably, each iteration of the persona has a different attitude towards substance abuse that seems to reflect McCormick's addiction and mental health issues. Moreover, we can tell from interviews with McCormick that feedback in reviews, and even general impressions, appear to have influenced Miller. This suggests a threshold between McCormick's real self and his persona that affects their development. Therefore, we should study the author's presentation of self in the discography's moment – the moment where the assessment of the artist's self-presentation over multiple performances can show how these facts are provided, in which ways they stipulate an image of the performer, and how they can reveal a progression in the persona. But how exactly is a self performed?

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<sup>36</sup> Fader 2016: 08:08–08:25.

<sup>37</sup> Puckett 2018.

<sup>38</sup> Unbeknownst to McCormick, his dealer had sold him drugs laced with Fentanyl which caused the overdose. McEvoy 2021.

<sup>39</sup> Haarder 2014: 197.



## 2.2 Presentation of Self

In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman outlines certain dramaturgical principles for advancing a particular conception of oneself to others. Two of these – performance and impression management, are highly relevant for framing Mac Miller’s identity. Physically, there is little to no difference between Miller and McCormick, but Goffman separates between persona (role) and performer in terms of identity. So, when McCormick claims that Mac Miller is factual, Goffman contradicts and states that:

The self, then, as a performed character, is not an organic thing that has a specific location, whose fundamental fate is to be born, to mature, and to die; it is a dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented, and the characteristic issue, the crucial concern, is whether it will be credited or discredited.<sup>40</sup>

The performed role is an “admitted illusion” and image, and nothing real can happen to it – apart from others’ impression of it changing.<sup>41</sup> In other words, when presenting oneself, nothing is inherently true; there are only impressions of what seems, and what does not seem, authentic.

The performer exercises some liberty when inscribing “facts” to their persona and can convey details that would otherwise go unnoticed – this process is known as dramatic realisation. These details are often tied to biographic information, which for Miller include: age – teenager, sex – male, sexuality – heterosexual, and ethnicity – white and Jewish. While most of this is physically noticeable, the artist also stands relatively free to establish their personality and values through how they express themselves and on which topics they discuss. Goffman notes that performers tend to idealise their persona, presenting themselves as better in terms of both morals and merit than their subjective opinion of themselves.<sup>42</sup> Idealization provides a concept for what the performer wants to improve, whether based on practicable skills or adapted ideology. For instance, when Miller says, “I like my rhymes witty”, he claims humour and craftsmanship.<sup>43</sup> Notably, idealisation also designates how the audience, or rather the consumer base, may influence a performer’s presentation of self, as it is beneficial for the creator to consider and cater to societal values and expectations when realising their image. The performer is thus torn between idealisation, to seek societal

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<sup>40</sup> Goffman 1959: 252–253.

<sup>41</sup> Goffman 1959: 254–255.

<sup>42</sup> Lemert & Branaman 1997: 101.

<sup>43</sup> «Knock Knock»: 01:27.

relevancy and notability, and maintaining authenticity, to be believed. This is especially applicable to musicians, as the nature of their occupation stands to profit greatly from successful idealisation while they at the same time are constantly under review by both fans and critics.

Since what matters is not how the individual identifies themselves but rather how others identify them, a part of the productive progression of image is the effective management of impressions.<sup>44</sup> Goffman explains that, although we are aware that a role is being performed, we assume that the performer has “a single continuing personal identity, beyond that performance [... which] is compatible and consistent with the role in question”.<sup>45</sup> The artist must therefore be wary of misrepresenting themselves as role distance, the expressed separateness between performer and persona, can damage the reputation of the persona and the performer alike.<sup>46</sup> For this balance between the authentic and the ideal, Goffman suggests what is perhaps the most noteworthy aspect of idealisation:

The presentation of oneself as living up to ideal standards, actually makes the person better from the outside in [... as] the very obligation and profitability of appearing always in a steady moral light, of being a socialized character, forces one to be the sort of person who is practiced in the ways of the stage.<sup>47</sup>

This means that when there is distance between persona and performer, between desired ideal and actual status, the performer is inclined to progress towards the ideal to maintain authenticity – whether through practising their skills to achieve the merit they assert or by aligning their expression to match the ideology they suggest. So, Miller must be actionable when he claims humour and craftsmanship. Similarly, the performer's pursuit of improvement in any field is naturally attuned in the persona when it is achieved, as it then is “fact” ready to be realised. This connects the progression of the impression of an artist's persona to the progression of artistry, a link which I emphasise in the following analyses.

## 2.3 Musical Expression

Seeing as the persona cannot grow but is constantly replaced by newer, updated versions of itself, we must consider the scene in which they arrive. As noted, music is the artist's chosen

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<sup>44</sup> Lemert & Branaman 1997: lii.

<sup>45</sup> Lemert & Branaman 1997: l.

<sup>46</sup> Lemert & Branaman 1997: li.

<sup>47</sup> Goffman 1959: 41, 101.

form of communication, as such, the perceived growth of the persona is contingent on how music is performed. In the following analyses, I emphasise musical production, vocal technique, and the delivery of lyrical content to study how Malcolm McCormick presents Mac Miller on that record. Certain core terms warrant deliberation before moving on to the analyses, after which I will discuss the persona's role in a musical performance.

### *Rap*

Haarder maintains that when personae are made, they are created in “specific contexts with particular terms for success that usually relate to how authenticity is performed in that context.”<sup>48</sup> For Mac Miller, this context is rap music. This is not the same as hip-hop – which is tied to the social and cultural, Afro-American tradition which flourished in the 1970s Bronx.<sup>49</sup> Rather, rap music is an umbrella term for all music that uses rap as a vocal technique. Rapping is situated somewhere between speaking and singing, as the pitch is less melodious and more fluctuating than song and yet more metrical and cadenced than speech. This is achieved by consciously adjusting the pitch, intonation, pacing, and accentual stress found in everyday speech to create an overtly rhythmic pattern. For an example, consider Kanye West's lines on “Spaceship”.

Let's go back, back to the Gap  
Look at my check—wasn't no scratch  
So if I stole – wasn't my fault  
Yeah, I stole—never got caught<sup>50</sup>

West stresses the final words in each line bringing attention to the rhyme between “back” and “Gap” and “fault” and “caught”. The pauses at the middle and end of the last three lines enhance this pattern. Moreover, each bulk contains four syllables except the first and seventh, which have three syllables and, as such, frame the middle lines.

### *Genre*

Within rap music, there are genres that “carry within them their own regimes of authenticity and representation” and are used to create a style and identity.<sup>51</sup> Krims present the outlines of

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<sup>48</sup> Haarder 2014: 134.

<sup>49</sup> Schweppenhäuser 2014: 127.

<sup>50</sup> 00:41–00:49.

<sup>51</sup> Krims 2000: 88, 91.

a genre system as follows: “(1) the style of the musical tracks; (2) the style of MCing (or “flow”); and (3) the topics commonly dealt with (i.e., the semantic aspects of the lyrics)”.<sup>52</sup> As these genres are guidelines, one can rarely ascribe a singular genre to an entire artist or even an album. Still, the overarching style usually aligns with one more than the others. Individual songs, however, can be defined in their relation to the rest of the discography.<sup>53</sup> For instance, “Spaceship” can be described as *reality rap* as West narrates his time spent working at the Gap and the injustices that occurred during that time. What genres are relevant for the analyses and how they are outlined will be discussed as they appear.

### *Flow & Beat*

Flow is the rhythm and rhyme of the words in rap. Bradley relays that “the syllables, pauses, pronunciation, wit, energy of our performance and tempo all determine the parameters of what is a ‘good’ flow or not”.<sup>54</sup> These qualities can be gathered in rhyme (syllables, pauses, pronunciation), wordplay (wit, vocabulary), and expression (energy and tempo),<sup>55</sup> and make for the primary indication of a rapper’s technical skill. Besides adding to the vocal rhythm, rhyme also creates a structural foundation for the lyrics and associates different ideas with larger concepts. Furthermore, figurative language allows the artist to infuse the verses with signs and connotations that opens a range of associations and creates vivid imagery. The addition of wit and wordplay also provides a flicker of ingenuity that elevates the lyrics from purely mathematical, rhythmic decisions to creative, original expressions. In West’s lines, “scratch” is used as a slang term for money. At the same time, the phrase “no scratch” means “no harm done”. As such, the choice of word ties the lines together by justifying his reason for stealing – he was not being paid appropriately, and the difference does not affect the business considerably.

Conversely, the rhythm of the musical accompaniment is primarily recognised as *beat*. Bradley defines the relationship between the lyrical and musical rhythm in rap music as a dual-rhythmic relationship.<sup>56</sup> In general, the skilful interplay of the two rhythms should make for a surprising, yet smooth and always enjoyable listening experience. In “Spaceship”, this is achieved as the beat lends force to the flow by inputting weight when weak syllables are

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<sup>52</sup> Krims 2000: 55.

<sup>53</sup> Krims 2000: 87.

<sup>54</sup> Bradley 2009: 47.

<sup>55</sup> Bradley 2009: 53–54, 96–97.

<sup>56</sup> Bradley 2009: 7.

expressed. This is apparent through the kickdrums that appear on the first words in each bulk. Moreover, a regular pattern in the beat allows the flow to move more freely, enabling it to adapt irregular patterns for then to align back with the beat at a later moment. West utilises this to continually alter his flow by, for example, adding or reducing melodicity.

### *Non-vocal qualities*

Although Novak does not speak exclusively about rapping, she discusses elements that more broadly regard the qualities of the voice and the act of making the written audible. In terms of expression, she considers the “verbal and non-verbal sounds, facial expressions, and other levels of communication [...] for which no representation whatsoever exists in the written text”.<sup>57</sup> Here, Novak emphasises rhythm, pitch, volume, articulation, and timbre - we recognise some of these aspects amongst the ones Bradley uses to define good flow. Pitch is the height of the sound, and volume denotes the amount of sound. Articulation refers to how sounds are connected in either *staccato*, with breaks between sounds, or *legato*, without breaks. Timbre is the set of overtones that grade a voice from and to; tense/lax, rough/smooth, breathy, vibrato/plain, and nasal/oral.<sup>58</sup> In “Spaceship”, West omits using complete sentences and instead inserts a shorter bulk of words to create a condensed rhythmic pattern. Nonetheless, his staccato articulation places enough weight on the words to establish the quick associations between them.

Notably, Novak utilises *experimental meaning potential*, which is semiotician Theo van Leeuwen’s idea “that signifiers have a meaning potential deriving from what it is we *do* when we produce them”.<sup>59</sup> Based on the artist’s manner of expression, the audience can then denote certain emotions that indicate the artist’s attitude towards the lyrical subject. The potential meaning is narrowed down the more qualities one studies.<sup>60</sup> This means that an artist’s non-verbal qualities could be considered a part of dramatic realisation, as they expressively provide information about the performer’s emotions, personality, and values. Returning to the line “yeah, I stole”, West’s switch to falling intonation breaks with his declarative confidence

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<sup>57</sup> Novak 2011: 43, 73.

<sup>58</sup> van Leeuwen 1999: 130.

<sup>59</sup> Kress & van Leeuwen 2001: 10.

<sup>60</sup> Since Mac Miller has existed since 2009 an analytical examination of his albums and the other personae’s appearances will provide enough familiarity with McCormick’s voice to compare the parameters of his voice to itself, rather than one’s own.

of the previous rising intonation. Considering the final word of the previous line, this indicates that he does feel some culpability after all.

### *Progression*

The complete progression of the musical performance is to be understood in two aspects. One part is the progression of the persona, as observed in how productively the artist asserts a performed self and in how effectively they manage the impression of the character so it may be deemed authentic. The second part is the progression of artistry which, for a rapper, is examined in their mastery of the vocal practice of rapping and the skilful craftsmanship of the lyrics. This does not necessarily relate to the complexity of rhymes or the remarkableness of the delivery. Instead, a successful performance occurs where the lyrical construction of the persona is shaped by the delivery and sustained in the musical atmosphere to present a self that aligns with the impression held by the artist and which is accepted by the audience. Thus, artistic skill should here be understood as musical aptness.

### 3. Analysis

As stated, I am basing the analyses on the studio versions of the songs that are available on Spotify. Additionally, I will be utilising my transcriptions which include numbering and timestamps. Each review follows the same structure: background information, generic conventions, presentation of self, and impact. Reviews are used as a reference point for the audience's impression of the musical performances. Moreover, additional evidence will be provided to ensure a just discussion. While there are overlapping and overarching elements in Miller's musical expression and self-presentation over the years, I predominantly focus on the traits that are unique to that period and iteration. Similarly, while genres can blend, I focus on the ones most representative of Miller's contemporary style.

### 3.1 Knock Knock

Kickin' Incredibly Dope Shit, or *K.I.D.S.*, marks McCormick's fourth published music collection and first release through a record label, the independent Rostrum Records. Moreover, "Knock Knock" was released as a single ahead of this mixtape, making it the earliest content available on Mac Miller's Spotify profile. Most of the songs on the mixtape are simple and narrate acts such as listening to music and driving ("Get Em Up" and "Ride Around"), smoking weed and being drunk ("Outside" and "The Spins"), or skipping school ("Senior Skip Day") and riding the "Paper Route". The song at hand does not stray away from the norm and delivers on being a catchy and fun celebration ditty.

#### 3.1.1 Party Rap

"Knock Knock" is most akin to what Krims calls party rap and is:

[...] designed for moving a crowd, making them dance, or perhaps creating or continuing a "groove" and a mood. [...] This explains not only the tendency towards faster beats, but also the tendency in the genre that musical-track rhythms be foregrounded and compelling, and that pitch combinations be relatively consonant.<sup>61</sup>

Correspondingly, "Knock Knock" starts with a somewhat slowed down version of Linda Scott's vocalisations and the drumbeat from "I've Told Every Little Star" (1961). This immediately emphasises the beat that clocks in at a moderate 110 beats per minute (BPM).<sup>62</sup> Soon after, Mac Miller makes his appearance, humming alongside Scott, safely inserting himself over the sampled beat. To complete his introduction, he says, "This is gonna feel real good, aight? / Most Dope / Everybody please put a thumb in the air" before additional drums and bass kick in.

1      One, two, three, four  
        Some crazy-ass kids gonna knock up on your door, so  
        – Let 'em in – let 'em in – let 'em in (hey)  
        One, two, three, four  
5      Some crazy-ass kids gonna knock up on your door, so  
        – Let 'em in – let 'em in – let 'em in (hey)<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Krims 2000: 55–56.

<sup>62</sup> While vocalization might otherwise be part of the vocal rather than the musical rhythm, it is here looped throughout the entirety of the song in a regular pattern, making it part of the musical accompaniment.

<sup>63</sup> 00:17–00:35.



The main song starts with a short, repeated chorus which accentuates a few things. First off, Miller emphasises the rhythm of the beat by vocally marking out the pattern in the first line, further foregrounding the musical rhythm. Secondly, the thumping sound is added in the lyrical breaks ahead of each “let ‘em in”. This mimics someone physically knocking on a door and creates evenness between lyrics and music in both content and rhythm. This interplay between flow and beat produces an entertaining dual-rhythmic relationship. Furthermore, by repeating the simple lines, it makes sure that the chorus is predictable, which makes it easier for potential listeners to memorise and join in singing.<sup>64</sup> The “crazy-ass kids” referred to in these lines are being addressed as “them”, in contrast to an “us”. This refers to the audience, separate from the performer himself, thus providing them with ownership of the chorus. Similarly, the “hey” at the end of each repetition is not uttered by Miller but rather originates from a crowd, simulating a live experience. Finally, by placing this chorus before any verse, as well as ending the song on the chorus, Miller enhances the notion that this is a song primarily for the listeners.

There is no storyline in the lyrics, and nothing changes from start to finish, instead, the thematic point of return is the pursuit of money and fame. Throughout the two main verses, we see Miller taking up more space and declaring his presence in both the use of “I” and “my” and his multiple playful boasts. In rap music, the act of celebrating oneself or dissing others is called signifying and combines “braggadocio and narrative into a kind of autobiography of greatness”.<sup>65</sup> This is an accepted form of exaggeration that may prevent excessive merit idealisation from damaging authenticity. Nevertheless, Miller portrays a tendency to deflate most of the signifying in the lyrics. For instance, while he first claims, “I feel like a million bucks”, he continues “, but my money don’t really feel like I do”.<sup>66</sup> Moreover, two lines after, he states, “But now I’m out, and money what I’m ‘bout / tryna get so much that I can’t keep count”. This way, Miller modestly declares that he is happy despite a lack of wealth while remaining optimistic about his future. In another instance of idealisation, he asserts sexual superciliousness by saying, “shh, shut up, bitch, and ride this dick”, only to retrace his steps in the very next line where he claims, “I’m just playing”.<sup>67</sup> Miller wobbles back and forth between staking a claim and appearing amiable. He only seems

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<sup>64</sup> This concurs with Krims idea on ideal flow in party rap. 2000: 56–57.

<sup>65</sup> Bradley 2009: 170, 180.

<sup>66</sup> 00:34–00:39.

<sup>67</sup> 01:38–01:42.

confident when declaring trivial statements such as “all them pretty little girls come and flock with me / yeah, I rock the beat.”<sup>68</sup> This constant agreeableness prevents conflict and, in turn, counteracts Miller from appearing either remarkable or self-aware. Moreover, this static becomes part of why Miller’s persona does not progress throughout the performance.

The aspect of Miller’s silliness is further evident in his punning wordplay. He describes his new shoes as providing him with cushion like a whoopie cushion and creates a simile between his smile and the imprint on an Eat’n Park Cookie.<sup>69</sup> Here, the juvenility of Miller’s language is disarming and helps tie the style of the record together, as childishness is a reoccurring theme in the chorus and verses here, as well as in the rest of the album – even in the title, *K.I.D.S.* In terms of similes and metaphors, he relies heavily on kenning, a method of inserting a single word or phrase in place for a larger concept.<sup>70</sup> In “Knock Knock”, this is done mainly by using proper names to compare or contrast other people with Miller himself. Miller stays up all night like Johnny Carson, a previous host of the Tonight Show. He is also “in deeper than the water Michael Phelps was in”,<sup>71</sup> insinuating the controversial news of Phelps, the Olympic swimmer, smoking marijuana. Additionally, he states, “Milli Vanilli but this is really how it goes”,<sup>72</sup> referring to the news of German-French hip-hop duo Milli Vanilli lip-syncing during their live performances. While Miller’s allusions can be entertaining, they fall somewhat short. His comparison to Carson is delivered like any other statement and could signal that Miller is either fooling around or creating music in the late hours. And in the case of Phelps, Miller is not exerting anything other than a disproportionate habit of smoking marijuana – something he already asserts fine throughout the rest of the song. Finally, Miller contrasts Milli Vanilli’s scandal with his own performances, underscoring his authenticity while dissing the hip-hop duo. While this contrast is beneficial for Miller, the scandal took place 20 years before the release of “Knock Knock”, and Milli Vanilli had similarly not published a record since 1991.<sup>73</sup> Likewise, Carson stopped hosting The Tonight Show in 1992. While these people may be notable, they leave Miller in a timeless state. Only the news of Phelps smoking from a bong in 2009 seems to hold contemporary relevance.

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<sup>68</sup> 01:07–01:10.

<sup>69</sup> 00:48–00:52.

<sup>70</sup> Bradley 2009: 107.

<sup>71</sup> 01:55–01:58.

<sup>72</sup> 01:34–01:38.

<sup>73</sup> The hip-hop duo had been working on a comeback album to be released in 1998, *Back and In Attack*. However, one member of the duo, Rob Pilatus, died of an accidental overdose earlier that year, leading to the release being cancelled.

For rhyme schemes, Miller keeps it simple. He begins the first verse with alternating lines using slant rhymes to connect “bucks” and “buzz, “do” and “school”. Following this, he uses couplets throughout the entirety of the verse, inserting the occasional multisyllabic and split rhyme, such as in the connection of “just a Honda” to “anaconda”. In the second verse, Miller introduces internal rhymes like “and I like my rhymes **witty**, all my dimes **pretty** /if you got weed, you can come and fly **with me**”. He furthermore starts using assonance more deliberately. Consider lines 38–39: “Don’t forget it when I’m wreckin’ the etiquette for the hell of it / smellin’ it when the L is lit, I’m flyer than a pelican”.<sup>74</sup> Here, Miller repeats the /ε/-sound, even morphing some other pronunciations to maintain the pattern while delivering more internal and split multisyllabic rhymes. In contrast to the first verse, Miller establishes and changes vocal rhythm multiple times. Part of the alteration in flow comes naturally in how stress is placed differently in the internal rhymes than the end rhymes, but other modifications arrive from deliberate changeups. When uttering “shh” in line 35, the beat stops as if obeying the lyrical imperative. This *cæsura*, or break, creates a void that can split the rhythms before and after it, but here, the *cæsura* substitutes exactly one stressed syllable and one beat from the musical accompaniment, sustaining the overall arrangement. Still, to make up for the lost syllable, Miller increases his tempo after the break to get the flow up to pace. In lines 38–39, Miller is correspondingly rapping at his fastest in “Knock Knock”. He articulates roughly 6.6 syllables per second for five seconds, in contrast to the 3.6 syllables per second from the whoopie/cookie line from the first verse. Here, Miller uses enjambment as he expresses multiple sentences across different lines without interruption. The most notable change in flow – besides the anticipated variation of the chorus – occurs in the bridge that substitutes for a third verse. In the five lines, Miller overlaps his flow with the rhythm of the beat as he raps in tandem with Scott’s vocalisation – once again utilising enjambment. Moreover, he increases and decreases his pitch in accordance with Scott to further enhance the mimicry. Still, the content of the bridge remains semantically unremarkable as Miller rehashes his marijuana habit, dismisses any interest in traditional labour, and restates that he “feels great”.

Despite the lack of meaningful lyrical content, little change in tonality, simple and slant rhymes, and soft signifying, Mac Miller has seemingly still managed to achieve the aim of his

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<sup>74</sup> 01:45–01:50.

song – to have it “feel real good”. This transpires perhaps as much despite the noted shortcomings as it does because of them. As stated, Miller emphasises beat as seen in the opening of the song and the frequent choruses. Correspondingly, the voice is then used primarily for flow in keeping with the song’s rhythmic priority. The contrast of “let ‘em in” and the sound of thumps, the changeups in flow through rhyme and tempo in the second verse, and the parallelisation of flow and beat in the bridge are the moments where “Knock Knock” shines, as these are the instances where Miller creatively utilises the dual-rhythmic relationship. Musicologist and composer Lawrence Kramer notes how this triggers “songfulness”. He defines this as “a fusion of vocal and musical utterance judged to be both pleasurable and suitable independent of verbal content”.<sup>75</sup> In this case, the audience may overlook lyrical content and theme altogether if the rhythms are enjoyable enough in and of themselves. As such, “Knock Knock” is more concerned with being pleasurable rather than being advanced, original, or semantically meaningful. This again aligns with the party rap system of being optimistic and dance-oriented, making it accessible to the public outside purely hip-hop audiences.<sup>76</sup> Miller’s pursuit of an easily enjoyable hit is warranted, yet as follows, the non-commitment of his lyrics carries over to the resulting perception of Miller himself being superficial.

### 3.1.2 Cheesy Mac

At the time of production, McCormick was turning 18 years old and had just graduated high school. Correspondingly, much of the information ascribed to Miller in “Knock Knock” supports the conception of the character being a high school kid. Not only does Miller mention his recent high school experience,<sup>77</sup> but the immaturity of the lyrics reflects the reality of an American youth. This is mirrored throughout the entirety of the album, as Miller raps about “Kool Aid & Frozen Pizza” and mentions that he “just graduated high school”.<sup>78</sup> In “Knock Knock”, he similarly notes that he is “white boy awesome” and asserts his heterosexuality, but he forgoes mentioning his Jewish ethnicity and Pittsburgh origin as he habitually does.<sup>79</sup> His choice of words also correlates with his youthful identity as we hear

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<sup>75</sup> Kramer 2002: 53.

<sup>76</sup> Krims 2000: 55–56.

<sup>77</sup> «People was amazed I was still in high school» 00:40–00:43.

<sup>78</sup> «The Spins», 2010.

<sup>79</sup> On “*K.I.D.S.*” Miller mentions his ethnicity on “Kickin’ Incredibly Dope Shit (intro)” and “Don’t Mind If I do”. Pittsburgh is mentioned “Paper Route” and “Kool Aid & Frozen Pizza”. These references are also common on the albums going forward, especially on *On and On and Beyond* (2011), *Best Day Ever* (2011) and *Blue Slide Park* (2011).

him using abbreviations such as “aight” and slang such as “kicks” (shoes) and “finna” (going to). In terms of personality, Miller mainly suggests that he is cheerful and playful.<sup>80</sup> While the latter is supported in the wordplay, the former is primarily provided in the voice. Miller’s voice is somewhat high pitched and up-tempo which suggests excitement. This impression is strengthened in his clear articulation, which tends to end with rising intonation and corresponds to self-assurance. Miller does not alter his non-verbal qualities significantly over the course of the song. This makes it difficult to compare his attitude in “Knock Knock” to his base level. The same affective signalling is present on the other tracks on the mixtape, with “All I Want is You” and “Poppy” being slight exceptions.<sup>81</sup> However, the difference in tone becomes more perceptible when later compared to “Weekend” and “Good News”. The stagnancy in lyrics and delivery limits the character development. Besides, his signifying is neither brash nor self-conscious enough to offer an astute impression of the person behind the character. Miller becomes secondary during the verses, where songfulness is the priority, and during the chorus, where the audience is offered ample authority. His goal of having fun and being relatable for high schoolers is a simple thing to realise. So, while lyrical content, wordplay, and voice do establish the impression of a cheerful, easy-going high schooler, his character is negligible as he presents no true ideal to reach towards.

A relic of Mac Miller’s early discography is his insistence on creating signatures, several of which are apparent here. During the chorus, Miller refers to “some crazy-ass kids”, something he does continually on the album, only then referring to “just some motherfuckin’ kids”. This has become a staple for *K.I.D.S.* and could also give the audience a sense of belonging as the in-group is continuously mentioned in the lyrics. Moreover, in the introduction, Miller requests that the listeners “please put a thumb in the air”. This gesture is repeated across multiple tracks, realised in music videos, and presented on early Mac Miller merchandise. While straightforward, the recognisability of this symbol manifests like a common denominator for Mac Miller fans which, together with other signatures, enriches the sense of belonging.<sup>82</sup> Moreover, even the inclusion of introductions on nine of the 15 songs improves

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<sup>80</sup> «I feel Like a million bucks», “keep a smile like an Eat’n Park cookie / everything good”, “finna have a party”, “I feel great”. He also states: “I like my rhymes witty”.

<sup>81</sup> On «All I Want is You”, Miller contemplates the possibility of remaining in love while pursuing a career in music, and on “Poppy”, he reminisces on spending time with his grandfather while he was still alive. To reflect these themes of love and death, Miller lowers his pitch, volume, and tempo somewhat to create a more somber mood.

<sup>82</sup> The ad-lib “aha!” was also popular during Miller’s early discography. This was uttered across many tracks, often during the introduction or the outro. This does not appear on “Knock Knock”.

Miller's authenticity.<sup>83</sup> This helps establish Mac Miller as a persona that exists outside the lyrics, especially when he speaks, forgoing dual-rhythmic relationships and songfulness. A final signature is also evident in the introduction, as Miller claims "Most Dope", an allusion to his crew and the lifestyle they lead. The team appeared on MTV2's reality show "Mac Miller and the Most Dope Family" which ran for two seasons from 2013 to 2014. The show portrayed the member's everyday life in Los Angeles while Miller was working on *Watching Movies with the Sound Off*. Analogously, this show marks perhaps the clearest example of what Haarder calls the threshold-aesthetic in performative biographism, as the fictional character Mac Miller received his own *reality show*.

This threshold between fact and fiction is amplified in Miller's seamless overlap with McCormick during this period. By matching the persona's details with McCormick's own identity, mannerisms, and appearance, McCormick is forging a solid and, more importantly, obvious connection between his selves. However, it is worth mentioning that McCormick does express some distance between himself and Mac Miller. On "Donald Trump", he claims, "ma'fuckers think they know me, but they never met the kid"<sup>84</sup>, and on "Frick Park Market", he states, «Don't call me Malcolm if you didn't fuckin' know me then».<sup>85</sup> This does not suggest that McCormick rejects his character but rather shows that there is a constant, unavoidable distance between performed self and the self one experiences subjectively. While Mac Miller is intended to be "factual", it cannot represent McCormick's true self. The decision to use a stage name for his primary act could indicate an attempt at accentuating this distance.<sup>86</sup> Moreover, the convention of *any* alter ego may have helped McCormick assume the role of "rapper" and allowed him to overemphasise the part of his identity that communicated his idea of what a rapper was. This could explain his stereotypical, "cheesy" presentation of self. As both selves are united in the "I" of the lyrics when the text is performed out loud, the audience clutches a limited opportunity to interpret the portrayed

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<sup>83</sup> Not counting the introduction or interlude, although these too provide evidence of a presence outside lyrics, if so even just in the production of the music.

<sup>84</sup> 01:22–01:25.

<sup>85</sup> 02:05–02:09.

<sup>86</sup> While "Mac" can be easily derived from his given name, the origin of "Miller" is somewhat unclear. It could be related to Malcom's brother, Miller McCormick – potentially alluding to family values. Moreover, Miller is a common Jewish name and could be an ethnic marker. Mildred Miller was coincidentally the name of Beedie's grandmother, McCormick's partner in "The Ill Spoken". Mildred Miller was an accomplished opera singer, and the University of Pittsburgh awards an annual music scholarship in her name. This way, the connection to Miller could be intended to signify accomplishment and hometown pride. Finally, it is suggested that McCormick admired that "Larry Fisherman" was unpretentious and did not suggest an excellent producer, thus subverting expectations. Perhaps being Mac (the) Miller bared a similar naming convention.

character. Accordingly, seeing as this oversimplified version of an imitative rapper is all the audience knew, neither Malcolm McCormick nor Mac Miller were more than “Easy Mac with the cheesy raps”.<sup>87</sup>

### 3.1.3 Cheesy Mac’s Clout

As the beat plays an integral part in defining the genre of the song and in creating songfulness, both of which affect the final artistic expression, it is worth noting that an artist’s involvement in the production of a record can influence how well their performed character is realised. Should McCormick participate in the production by playing instruments or engineering the musical accompaniment, he could assure greater unity between lyrics, flow, and beat. While McCormick does increase his contribution in Miller’s later iterations, he’s currently only credited as co-producer on two tracks: “Boom Bap Rap” from *I Love Life, Thank You* (October 2011) and “Up All Night” from *Blue Slide Park* (November 2011). *K.I.D.S.* is especially striking in its sheer volume of samples, as 9 of 14 songs contain sampling.<sup>88</sup> Furthermore, *K.I.D.S.* takes much influence from the Larry Clark movie *Kids* (1995), imitating the font of the movie’s cover and sampling quotes from the film throughout the tracklist. In the very first song, Miller alters an ending quote from the movie, saying, “Music is what I love / take that away from me and I really got nothing”, changing the obsessive object of the film from sex to music.<sup>89</sup> Both products revolve around “a day in the life” of high school kids, focusing on juvenile shenanigans, partying, and sex, yet where the movie's plot is at times dire and consequential, Miller’s records are altogether amiable and merry.

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<sup>87</sup> Rolling Stone applied this moniker to him in their review of *Watching Movies with the Sound Off*, but Miller seems to be the one that initialized it on “Red Dot Music” from the same album.

<sup>88</sup> “Nikes On my Feet” samples Nas’ “The World is Ours” in the chorus. Empire of the Sun’s beat from “Half Mast” is used throughout “The Spins”. “Traffic in the Sky” borrows from Taku Iwasaki’s “Gymnopedie?” and was not cleared for release. “Don’t Mind If I Do” uses the chorus from Owl City’s “Fireflies”. “Good Evening” contains a sped-up version of Drake’s “A Night Off”. On “Ride Around”, Miller raps over DJ DMD’s “25 Lighters”. As mentioned, “Knock Knock” samples Linda Scott’s “I’ve Told Every Little Star”. The beat in “Kool Aid & Frozen Pizza” comes from “Hip 2 Da Game” by La Finesse. And finally, Pete Rock & C. L. Smooth’s “In the House” is featured on “Poppy”. \*Not considering the introduction and the Intermission and counting “Traffic in the Sky”.

<sup>89</sup> In the movie *KIDS*, the main character Telly originally says “That’s just it – fucking is what I love. Take that away from me and I really got nothing”. Other quotes from the movie are found at the end of “Senior Skip Day” and on “Mad Flava, Heavy Flow (Interlude)”.

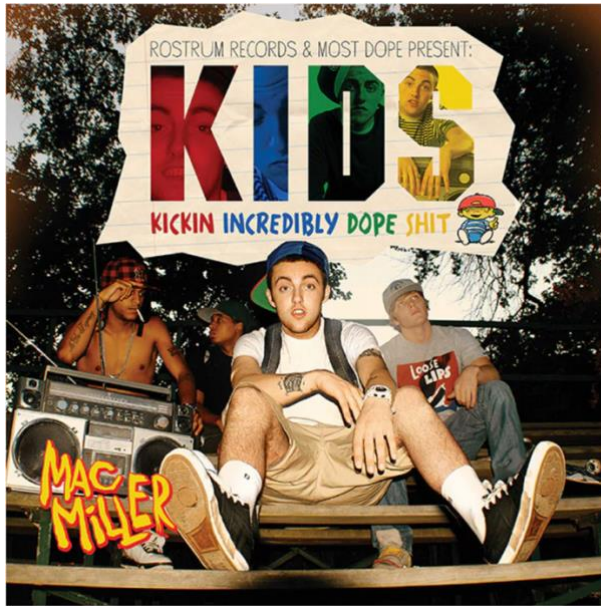


Fig. 2: cover art for Mac Miller's K.I.D.S. mixtape.

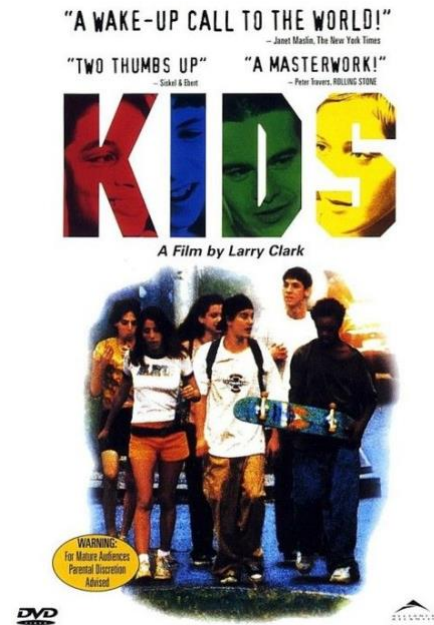


Fig. 3: cover art for Lewis Clark's Kids movie.

Note the «two thumbs up» -review.

The inclusion of external sources in *K.I.D.S.* does add a nostalgic and wholesome rose-tint to “Knock Knock”. Similarly, it is fair to assume that McCormick shared an affinity for these select older movies, songs, and talk show hosts. However, the more McCormick adds from external influences, the less of Mac Miller is present in the music. Most of the beats on the album are sampled, and Miller’s vocal technique remains static. Moreover, the lyrical content predominantly describes the trope of the American high schooler that is common elsewhere in popular media and, as such, is routine and unoriginal, irrespective of whether it accurately represents McCormick. Thus, the performance of “Knock Knock” lacks original expression – although this is not uncommon for young artists “still searching for their voices”.<sup>90</sup>

Consequently, the affinity someone might feel towards a specific *K.I.D.S.* track might as well be directed to its original source. If the main content of the lyrics is the rhythmic rhymes for use in flow, then Miller is irrelevant to the enjoyment of the song as he could arguably be exchanged with someone who shared McCormick’s artistic prowess. In turn, the song’s success seems to have been struck independently of its association with Cheesy Mac.

Notably, as of March 2022, “The Spins” has amassed more streams than “Knock Knock”, gaining over 170 million of its nearly 213 million units over one year due to its newfound

<sup>90</sup> Krims 2000: 140.



publicity on the social media platform TikTok.<sup>91</sup> This comes to highlight two things. Firstly, it tells of songfulness' timeless quality, as it creates accessibility beyond the primary hip-hop audience and makes the record less susceptible to trends in, and bias towards, genre. Accordingly, "The Spins" has no lyrical content that anchors it in time and space and therefore does not go out of date – it is simply enjoyable. Again, this is credited to songfulness rather than Cheesy Mac, especially as this track is sampled from "Half Mast" by Empire of the Sun. Secondly, it highlights how chance plays a part in success. Had Miller's presence been more remarkable in 2010, perhaps "the Spins" could have prospered earlier due to McCormick's self-presentation rather than flourishing a decade down the line due to a viral social media fluke? Comparatively, "Donald Trump" (2011) regained popularity due to its association with Donald Trump's presidential campaign and service (2015-2020). Again, external factors seem imperative to Miller's success, indicating that neither McCormick's performance nor Cheesy Mac's image is made essential to the performance of either "The Spins", "Donald Trump", or even "Knock Knock" – which did not go platinum until 2021, after Miller's prime period of influence and the rerelease of *K.I.D.S.* in 2020.

While *K.I.D.S.* was not widely received, it had garnered much momentum for Mac Miller. The following full album, *Blue Slide Park* (2011), became the first independently distributed album to top the Billboard 200 chart since 1995.<sup>92</sup> This popularity marked the culmination of his self-presentation so far as *Blue Slide Park* significantly influenced McCormick's career and the impression of Miller. Seeing as this album continued the trend of party rap, there are only marginal differences from *K.I.D.S.*. Most notable is the fact that Miller began to signify effectively. This launched a series of records where he either claimed to have achieved his dream or quested for further success, even to "take over the world".<sup>93</sup> This indicates a long-term ideal of honing his skill and influence and a desire to be more than Cheesy Mac. Despite the commercial success, Miller's early work faced scathing reviews. The most infamous example is Pitchfork's rating of *Blue Slide Park* at a 1 out of 10, where they stated:

He lusts after fame, money, and women, and he smokes weed and parties [...], he's mostly just a crushingly bland, more intolerable version of Wiz Khalifa without the chops, desire, or pocketbook for enjoyable singles. Unless you buy into Miller's

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<sup>91</sup> These numbers were gathered from Spotify (14.03.22). On Reddit, "Goodmourning412" posted a screenshot from Spotify "a year ago", noting the song's rising popularity.

[https://www.reddit.com/r/MacMiller/comments/ldny9f/the\\_spins\\_on\\_mac's\\_popular\\_spotify\\_tracks\\_right/](https://www.reddit.com/r/MacMiller/comments/ldny9f/the_spins_on_mac's_popular_spotify_tracks_right/).

<sup>92</sup> Billboard, 2011.

<sup>93</sup> "Donald Trump" 2011: 00:46–01:21.

persona-- and why would you?-- Blue Slide Park offers you nothing that you can't find done more much artfully by, say, Curren\$y.<sup>94</sup>

Reviewer Anthony Fantano agrees, noting that Miller's lyricism, flow, and persona have not matured since his earlier material.<sup>95</sup> He continues:

It felt kinda pointless in that Mac Miller wasn't really saying anything a lot of the time, he was just kinda dropping mediocre punchlines left and right. [...] Nothing's changed, he's still the same guy [...] but I don't care. I would rather Mac Miller change, and then make an interesting album, than not change, and just keep making the same album over, and over, and over again.<sup>96</sup>

For now, Miller had done what he claimed he would do – for both persona and music he executed believable and entertaining, yet uninspired performances. To some degree, this is attributed to songfulness, which made “Knock Knock” pleasurable while also projecting “meaning loss as the outcome of a relative indifference to meaning”.<sup>97</sup> Correspondingly, Miller's lyrical presentation of self was made trivial in the ears of the beholders. Note that, as argued, the persona was unremarkable in and of itself, so the impression of Cheesy Mac as bland should not be ascribed to the songfulness. Rather, songfulness arrives as a silver lining, pardoning and concealing Miller's self-imposed plainness. This *sacrifice of self* could explain how Cheesy Mac received harsh reviews while some songs achieved gold and platinum certification. Joke Hermes presents the *fallacy of meaningfulness* and explains that most people prefer a product that lacks meaningfulness and is “easy to put down”.<sup>98</sup> Correspondingly “Knock Knock” is successful as a standalone party rap track, but when critics review an entire album they are more concerned with the complete impression of the performances. While Cheesy Mac eventually began aspiring to some greatness, it was McCormick's disappointment with his first significant reviews that roused him to change.<sup>99</sup> “[Blue Slide Park] made Mac Miller, and then the rest of the time [McCormick] spent making Mac Miller who he wanted Mac Miller to be”.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Sargent 2011.

<sup>95</sup> Theneedledrop 2011: 02:24–02:30.

<sup>96</sup> Fantano rated *Blue Slide Park* 5 out of 10. Theneedledrop 2011: 06:34–06:42, 04:25–04:40.

<sup>97</sup> Kramer 2002: 64.

<sup>98</sup> While she focused on magazines, her findings suggest that most prefer popular cultural goods that can be put down easily more generally. Therefore, I would argue that the same psychology can be applied to popular music. Hermes 1995.

<sup>99</sup> Recall McCormick's response to the *Blue Slide Park* reviews. Ahmed 2013. Browne 2015.

<sup>100</sup> Quote from Josh Berg, Miller's engineer throughout this period. Rindner, 2021.

## 3.2 Weekend

McCormick went into *Blue Slide Park* wanting a top-charting album, but his following label release, *Watching Movies with the Sound Off* (WMWTSO), was primarily about McCormick's journey.<sup>101</sup> Pitchfork called it a “quantum leap in artistry” since *Blue Slide Park*.<sup>102</sup> This new, self-serious version of Miller provided more introspection in his lyrics and brought up the role distance, the expressed separateness between performer and persona, multiple times. For instance, this was topical on the mixtapes *Macadelic* and *Faces* in the tracks “Thoughts from a Balcony” and “Friends”.<sup>103</sup> However, it was an even greater topic on WMWTSO.<sup>104</sup> McCormick conveys that: “i just don't believe i am an actual person. i'm actually just an idea to everybody. We don't actually exist as people to anybody, we exist thru the ideas that we give to the world [sic]”.<sup>105</sup> With this in mind, this period sees Miller embracing the performative aspect of his self-representation and has him attempt a stabilisation of the public image of Mac Miller with his subjective impression of self. The major-label release *GO:OD AM* (2015) improved on most aspects and was more expressive than *Macadelic*, more methodical than WMWTSO, and musically more in tune than *Faces* – budding a “brand new” Mac Miller.<sup>106</sup> The introductory track “Doors” ends with a woman telling Miller “, Good morning, baby”, waking him up from the dream narrative that has been in place till now. For Cheesy Mac, this could mean realising that *he*, not McCormick, had achieved the dream of being rich and famous, and for Heavy Mac, it could signal to leave the drug-addled wonderland in which he had found himself starting with *Macadelic* (2012).<sup>107</sup>

### 3.2.1 Reality Rap

*GO:OD AM* has Miller detail his depression, addiction, loss of identity, and self-destruction – effectively “undertaking the project of realism”, as Krims describes it.<sup>108</sup> In terms of beat, reality rap applies “[d]ense combinations of musical layers”.<sup>109</sup> On *Faces*, this layering is often experimental to the point of being dissonant, reflecting McCormick's disorderly life.

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<sup>101</sup> Ramirez 2013.

<sup>102</sup> Pitchfork rated WMWTSO a 7.0. Jenkins 2013.

<sup>103</sup> “Well, I don't think you lookin' far beyond the surface”. 2012: 02:03.

“My conscience so weak, I need to split it up in seven parts”. 2014: 01:14.

<sup>104</sup> To name a few, identity and self-fragmentation is brought up on “I'm Not Real”, “S.D.S” (Somebody do Something), “Objects in the Mirror”, “Red Dot Music”, and “Watching Movies”.

<sup>105</sup> Mac Miller 2013 (annotation).

<sup>106</sup> On «Ascension» Miller narrates how “Miss Conception” challenged him to ascend and be a brand new man.

<sup>107</sup> In an annotation for “Doors”, McCormick explains “At a certain point, I was like “I don't wanna do this. I'd rather be a – something else.” 2015a.

<sup>108</sup> Krims 2000: 70.

<sup>109</sup> Krims 2000: 73, 75.

This realism is enhanced as McCormick now became more ingrained in the making of the records. Miller produced both “Avian” and “Suplexes Inside of Complexes & Duplexes” on WMWTSO, while Larry Fisherman produced or co-produced over half of the tracks on *Faces*. *GO:OD AM*, on the other hand, is produced professionally and remains rich and original without being cluttered.<sup>110</sup> For flow, reality rap brings tendencies of faster cadences and more elaborate rhyme patterns. Yet, in contrast to Cheesy Mac’s focus on timeless songfulness, a higher tempo adds to the reality rapper’s often aggressive and confrontational attitude. At the same time, the rhyme patterns accentuate semantics rather than pure rhythms.

Initially, this had been a rough transition, as Miller was unsuccessful in appearing thought-provoking. Regarding *Macadelic*, Fantano commented that his existential questions (e.g., “what the fuck is time?”<sup>111</sup>) lacked depth and that Miller’s presented struggles were “not fuelled by a tragedy” and seemed “shallow and self-imposed”.<sup>112</sup> Since then, several lyrics have been written in reaction to specific events that affected McCormick. For instance, immediately after attending the funeral of a friend, Reuben Emi Mitrani, he wrote the song “REMEMBER” on WMWTSO<sup>113</sup> – this would also provide the namesake of his label imprint. Similarly, “Grand Finale” on *Faces* was written with Miller anticipating his death, reflecting the “troubling sense that Mac is tiptoeing down a well-lit path toward self-destruction and that he either feels too helpless or else too enrapt to change course”.<sup>114</sup> Besides, on “Perfect Circle / Godspeed” from this album, he inserts a voice call of his brother wishing him well. In a moment of acute self-awareness and nearly prophetic accuracy, Miller follows, stating: “It won’t be long until they watchin’ me crash” and “I need to wake up / Before one mornin’ I don’t wake up”.<sup>115</sup>

While much of Heavy Mac’s discography is melancholy or destructive, “Weekend” presents some of the same broad appeal that “Knock Knock” garnered. “Weekend”, released as a single to promote the album, features the prominent singer Miguel, and is seemingly produced as a tribute to the weekend and its corresponding parties. Still, the focus on and detailing of

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<sup>110</sup> McCormick has collaborated with the production facility, ID Labs on each release since *K.I.D.S.*. The professional guidance from producers Big Jerm and E. Dan on *GO:OD AM* has presumably secured more cohesion than McCormick (Fisherman) could provide with his limited experience.

<sup>111</sup> «Thought from a Balcony” 2012: 01:02.

<sup>112</sup> Dead End Hip Hop, 2012: 02:44.

<sup>113</sup> Billboard 2013: 07:00–07:40.

<sup>114</sup> McCormick explained the track in an interview with Highsnobiety- 2014: 00:18–01:11. Quote from Jenkins 2014.

<sup>115</sup> 05:20–05:50.

Miller’s lyrical reality nonetheless frames this record in the reality rap genre. This record again starts with an introduction, but this time he does not utter anything more than repeated “yeah, yeah” -s while the beat settles in with sparse and simple percussion. In the background, a hallowing /əh/-vocalisation can be heard replicating a blowing wind fading in and out again. This sound is later used in tandem with the flow to create a unified flowing rhythm. In contrast to “Knock Knock”, Miller starts with a verse rather than the chorus, which angles the expression towards semantic content and storytelling.

Each verse has three primary rhyme schemes that develop in sets of four lines.

- 1 I got a little bit of money fillin’ my pockets, | roll around like I run this shit  
 I got a system filled up with toxins, | I’ve been broken-hearted, now it’s fuck that bitch  
 Getting high to deal with my problems, | fucking bitches, getting drunk as shit  
 But these bitches getting obnoxious, | they nuttin’ to me though, I love this shit
- 5 Go long days, longer nights, talk too much, the wrong advice, all the lights and call my  
life, doctor doctor, will you help me? Get me healthy, keep it low, this where hell be<sup>116</sup>

The first set utilises cæsura around the midparts of each line while enjambment connects each line with the next one. The breaks here create a staccato pattern in the articulation as the sounds of the words preceding and following the break are pronounced explicitly. Staccato makes the listener more aware of the explicated words and gives them particular emphasis. Thus, the spacing around the statement in line four suggests that “fuckin’ bitches” is not a practical solution to his broken heart, as said “bitches” are primarily obnoxious and insignificant. From there, the second pattern picks up in tempo while inserting more internal rhymes. Here, Miller contrasts with *legato* and makes the words flow seamlessly into another. This emphasises similar sounds and underscores the increasing frequency of the assonant /o/- and /a/-sounds in line 5 and /ə/- and /i:/-sounds in line 6. As marked, line 6 moreover provides an example of how Miller inserts changeups to rhyme schemes within individual lines.

The verses are mainly supported by a regular interval of strings as well as an arrangement of drums, kicks, snares, and claps that start scarce but increase in frequency. The added measure of the beat mirrors the increasing confidence and vitality we hear in the lyrics by creating a sense of increased tempo. Besides, the powerful bass drums add to the atmospheric heaviness

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<sup>116</sup> 00:30–00:55.

of the record. Miguel joins in and sings alongside Miller's rapping during the final pattern, making the flow increasingly melodious while also arriving as a welcome contrast to Miller's otherwise monotone voice. Moreover, the fluidity of the legato and frequency of backbeats from the second scheme continues to rise until Miller declares, "Lord, I need me a break". Here, flow and beat again interact by creating a rhythmic break, as requested. While the song remains at 120BPM, the drumbeats now arrive at double speed, further enhancing the perceived tempo and resulting songfulness. Following, the beat returns to its original sparse musical rhythm in the next verse. McCormick explains that the rhythmic structure is in this way intended to simulate "going through stress during the week and getting to the weekend to let it go".<sup>117</sup>

In the chorus, Miller and Miguel proclaim, "But I'll be good by the weekend [...] everything will be good by the weekend", repeating an agreeable and straightforward message that the audience can learn quickly. This is expanded upon in a post-chorus that calls on a collective performance with the repeated lines "We going out tonight, yeah, we going out tonight". The overarching rhyme process is repeated with the second verse and chorus, making the frequent, progressive changeups in flow predictable enough not to create disorder. The second time around, the post-chorus acts as the outro for the song. Here, Miguel describes the status of his relationship with a partner according to each weekday as the beat loops back to the start. Miguel's miniature verse mirrors the lyrical progression found in the rest of the song. He becomes more infatuated with his partner, only to grow tired and ultimately seek a new thrill. Before the song abruptly ends, he affirms that "Fridays are always the start of the time of my life, alright / When I get faded you hate it, but baby it's gon' be alright". Miguel's solo performance in the outro, which ultimately is only accompanied by a guitar, provides a sobering ending to "Weekend"'s highs and lows. Conclusively, this continual contrast between sombre verses and thrilling choruses directs "Weekend", as they facilitate a setting where Miller is free to pursue both semantic meaningfulness and songfulness. This way, the musical accompaniment becomes part of the presentation of self and encourages the persona's progression.

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<sup>117</sup> Mac Miller (annotation) 2015b.

### 3.2.2 *Heavy Mac*

Despite featuring Miguel, Miller leaves little space for others in the lyrics as he continuously supplies with his actions and feelings. The first post-chorus chant constitutes the sole invitation for the audience to participate. While the repetitive and simple chorus also allows the listeners to join in, it is only repeated once. In contrast to Cheesy Mac, there is little in the way of identifiers for Miller in this song – the only thing he lets slip is his heterosexuality. This tendency is shared across Heavy Mac’s records, as he seldom references his biographical information and has mostly discontinued using signatures. Instead, what we get to know about the character comes from his approach to the lyrical content, which shows a progression as Miller goes from hiding his emotions to being forthright. This allows the listeners to get to know him as he gradually reveals more of himself. This seems to be one of the main intentions as Miller strategically inserts the most semantically significant lines at times where articulation, tempo, and low songfulness offer them additional sanction. Moreover, the lyrics and delivery follow the same lows and highs of a week as the beat, with the verses reflecting a meek and contemplative Mac Miller. At the same time, the chorus, and the run-up to them, portrays an arrogant and frivolous side to the character.

Miller starts coyly, stating, “I got a little money fillin’ my pockets, roll around like I run this shit”. His use of simile underplays his success and chastens his confidence as he tells how he merely acts *like* he is in charge. From then on, he garners enough bravado to claim, “ain’t shit you can tell me now, fuck this rap shit, bitch, I’m selling out / ooh shit, with my new bitch, you jealous now, smokin’ weed at the crib watching Belly now”.<sup>118</sup> This pattern progresses along with the first verse as Miller builds self-confidence through narrating how he gets high, “fucks bitches”, and gets “drunk as shit” to deal with his problems.<sup>119</sup> Meanwhile, the second verse has him facing insomnia and unburdening his demons.<sup>120</sup> While he is relatively open about his feelings in the second verse, Miller is quite discrete at the beginning. Nevertheless, his expression hints at his impediment throughout. This way, Miller reveals his purgatory over the course of “Weekend” and provides the audience with a different impression of his persona from start to finish, ultimately leaving us with the tormented Heavy Mac. One example of this is already noted in line four, where Miller stresses the futility of his sexual encounters, meanwhile, other instances appear secreted in the legato. Line six has Miller

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<sup>118</sup> 00:55–01:03.

<sup>119</sup> 00:39–00:44.

<sup>120</sup> 01:52–01:54.

asking a doctor for help in staying sober, and later, he and Miguel deliver the line, “you feeling the feeling, I’m chilling, just living, I’m burning away”.<sup>121</sup> Here, the last statement marks an unanticipated end to the catalogue of otherwise positive assertions. Besides, Miller’s voice fades out during the line, suggesting that he is reluctant to admit his implied burnout or downfall. Likewise, he sometimes boasts in the second verse, implying that he cannot let go of his façade. Miller’s comparison of himself to God sticks out as it inscribes Miller with greatness and, more importantly, suggests omnipotence over his musical expression. The line “She ain’t God as I” rings true because Miller created “her” in the writing and realised her in the delivery.<sup>122</sup>

Miller used to boast about topics like fame, fortune, sex, and drugs – all of which are made problematic or presented as insincere on “Weekend”. Others don’t know him, he has sold out, sex has become a mean rather than a goal, and he begs to stay sober. Even staying up all night (Johnny Carson) has become an involuntary and taxing habit. As such, this iteration of the persona seems to seek a settlement with Miller, sorting out his priorities and defining success for himself. This goes for Cheesy Mac, who lived frivolously and stood for nothing, and for Heavy Mac himself, who has burned out in his stride for greatness. Miller uses the hangover of the weekend, the first chorus, to contemplate his situation and questions his reasons to live – “is it money, fame or neither?”.<sup>123</sup> This time, his existential questions show more relevancy and depth than the infantile “What the fuck is time?”. A later line, “[...] wondering, well, / wonderin’ how I got this high, fell asleep and forgot to die”,<sup>124</sup> roams metaphorical and literal at the same time. Miller effectively questions how he achieved fame and success while also trying to grasp his continued survival. McCormick, and in turn Miller, have lived on despite the reckless drug abuse, and they have somehow remained despite coming to terms with death, or even intending to die, on “Grand Finale”. Miller’s false start on the line highlights the deliberation of this statement. Meanwhile, Miguel’s absence from the main part of the verses emphasises Miller’s solitude in confronting his depression.

Finally, in the conclusion of the second verse, Miller concedes that “These bitches don’t know me, this shit is so lonely until she gets naked / - don’t even know what the day is”. The

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<sup>121</sup> 01:08–01:12.

<sup>122</sup> 02:11. The Miller-God comparison is seen throughout the Heavy Mac period on tracks like “The Star Room”, “100 Grandkids”, and even Delusional Thomas’ “Libido”.

<sup>123</sup> 01:54–01:59.

<sup>124</sup> 02:18–02:23.



first line prompts the same role distance as apparent elsewhere in Heavy Mac’s records. Moreover, the admission that follows trivialises the concept of a weekend, as it can take place whenever, while at the same time never arriving. This is reflected in Miguel’s outro, where he claims Fridays as the start of his life, only for the weekend never to start since the song ends a second later. When considering Miller’s state of mind and noticing how his voice stays calm and monotone throughout the song – unaffected by the highs of the chorus – Miller’s weekly cycle hints more at a continual apathy. The total loss of vivacity in flow, beat, lyrics, and tempo that occur as an aftermath of the chorus-weekend furthermore deepens the notion of Miller’s fatigue. Correspondingly, the song’s abrupt ending after the second post-chorus could indicate Miller’s incapability of feigning excitement for yet another weekend.<sup>125</sup>

### 3.2.3 *Heavy Mac as the Conduit*

As suggested in the introduction, Heavy Mac was formed more or less due to the poor reviews arising from *Blue Slide Park* and Cheesy Mac’s image. McCormick acknowledges:

Party on Fifth Ave’—great song, I guess. It’s fun. But when I listen to that song and those verses, I hear nothing. I don’t say anything. [...] That music [on *Blue Slide Park*] is great, but I can’t stand by it as much as what I make now. [...] I’m rebuilding a whole other type of music.<sup>126</sup>

Miller’s process of rebuilding himself goes together with what Haarder calls autoreception. This term encompasses “the artist’s reception of their own work, authorship, or impressions as author” gained after publication.<sup>127</sup> This self-evaluation maintains a continual dialogue between performer and audience, as reviewers provide McCormick with feedback that is then in some way incorporated in Miller’s future performances. As such, McCormick is subjected to the feedback loops derived from his own performances.

Whereas Cheesy Mac had cursorily mentioned role distance on previous tracks like “Donald Trump” and “Frick Park Market”, Heavy Mac made an effort to expand on this topic as one of the major themes going forward from the mixtape *Macadelic* (2012). For instance, in “Thoughts from a Balcony”, Miller likens himself to a ghost and a typo,<sup>128</sup> mirroring his self-

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<sup>125</sup> Notably, the music video for “Weekend” transitions into a final chorus repetition. By ending on a high note, figuratively speaking, it also leaves a more hopeful impression on the audience. Mac Miller (Weekend music video) 2016.

<sup>126</sup> Ahmed, 2013.

<sup>127</sup> Iversen 2010: 48, in Haarder, 2014: 139.

<sup>128</sup> 01:30–01:43.

fragmentation as noted above. Moreover, he disparages his previous work, commenting that “Donald Trump” was “a fuckin’ hit, but I just call it luck”,<sup>129</sup> recognising his prior lack of sway and expressive control. Still, his drastic turn into Heavy Mac introduced another issue – the perceived misrepresentation. Role distance is harmless when the persona is openly fictive, but when the audience assumes the character as authentic, as is the case with Mac Miller, inconsistencies in the performance can lessen the impression of both performer and persona.<sup>130</sup> This is something we can note from Fantano’s review of *Macadelic*. For him, Miller’s newfound attempt at being vulnerable came across as disingenuous. This could indicate that Heavy Mac’s proposed depth of character strayed too far from McCormick’s actual level of cognisance. Again, we should note that his true profundity is irrelevant and that only the general impression of it matters. Furthermore, on “Red Dot Music” from WMWTSO, Miller has battle rapper Loaded Lux declare: “I liked you better when you was Easy Mac with the cheesy raps. Who the fuck is Mac Miller?”.<sup>131</sup> This way, Miller recognises his epithet and his misrepresentation. This statement is similarly found in the reception to Heavy Mac. This highlights that changes to an artist’s style can easily misrepresent the persona – especially when the audience has no earlier impression to match the new expression. One of Fantano’s co-reviewers claims: “I don’t listen to Mac Miller for deep lyrics. Yes, he tried to go that route, but that’s not what I enjoy him for, that’s not what I put this mixtape on for”.<sup>132</sup> This shows how the impression of the persona depends not only on what the audience considers authentic but, more crucially, on what the audience is willing to consider *at all*.

Eight months after *Macadelic*, McCormick released the jazz EP *You* (2012) where he sang about love under the name of Larry Lovestein, even bringing with him an imagined live jazz band, “The Velvet Revival”. Soon after, McCormick premiered Larry Fisherman, a producer alias who collaborated with other artists and released his own instrumental mixtapes, *Run On Sentences* (2013/2015). McCormick stated that:

You brand yourself and have to stick to one brand, which I fucking hate. Like, human beings are more complex than just one simple brand [...] I don’t want to limit myself

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<sup>129</sup> 01:54–01:58.

<sup>130</sup> Lemert & Branaman 1997: li.

<sup>131</sup> 04:47–06:07.

<sup>132</sup> Dead End Hip Hop 2012: 18:10–18:20.

to not doing anything, whether it's the grittiest of the gritty or the cleanest of pop. I want to try and be able to be great at all of those.<sup>133</sup>

Thus, his secondary personae can be seen as means to express multiple, at times contradictory, identities. The range of McCormick's self was highlighted on the horrorcore mixtape *Delusional Thomas* (2013), where Thomas, following the genre, would rap about murder and sadism in a dark and exaggerated fashion. These characters displayed quite different characteristics and musical expressions compared to Mac Miller. Moreover, they were openly fictive.

Goffman exerts that “each individual [...] will have several selves” and that the individual can sustain their dormant roles by scheduling “where and what the individual is to be when”.<sup>134</sup> McCormick then remedies his split identities by segregating his personae and audience accordingly. Mac Miller is one of only two of McCormick's personae present on Spotify – the second being Larry Lovestein & The Velvet Revival. Fisherman, on the other hand, has been present on multiple official releases.<sup>135</sup> Yet, he too is isolated from the others by the very nature of his role as a producer rather than a performer. Meanwhile, McCormick's lesser characters were scattered on different, at times obscure, websites,<sup>136</sup> together with most of McCormick's music.<sup>137</sup> Furthermore, Frith explains that “the voice, in short, may or may not be a key to someone's identity, but it is certainly a key to the ways in which we change identities, pretend to be something we're not, deceive people, lie”.<sup>138</sup> As such, rhyme, wordplay, and expression may also indicate how McCormick presents himself and moves between personae. This is unmistakable in Thomas, whose voice is distorted with a notably higher pitch than Miller, making the separation of the two characters in “The Star Room” quite perceptible. Similarly, Lovestein's voice has a breathier timbre than Miller's. By separating his personae, McCormick reduces misrepresentation as there is neither an assumption nor a desire for authenticity in the secondary personae. This offers freedom of

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<sup>133</sup> Millard, 2013.

<sup>134</sup> Lemert & Branaman 1997: 36.

<sup>135</sup> As Larry Fisherman, McCormick helped produce *Stolen Youth* (2013) for Vince Staples, *Z* (April 2014) for SZA, and *These Days...* (June 2014) for Ab-Soul.

<sup>136</sup> A notable example being “oldjewish.com” where listeners could, for the first time, get access to the 2014 mixtape *Faces* in exchange for making and sending McCormick a virtual sandwich. The website is now offline, presumably due to lack of flash support.

<sup>137</sup> It seems that McCormick produced enough tracks for about 31 albums and over hundreds of singles, but, due to the sporadic tendencies of these releases and leaks, I am certain more tracks have escaped me. Most of his discography can be accessed on the websites Soundcloud and DatPiff.

<sup>138</sup> Frith 1996: 197.

expression, enabling McCormick to work towards different ideals and present contradictory values without compromising Mac Miller.<sup>139</sup> For example, Larry Lovestein performed jazz music, sang most of the time, and shared a message of love. This is wildly different from Heavy Mac, who at the same time was making hip-hop music and rapping about death and addiction.

Nevertheless, both Lovestein and Heavy Mac differed from Cheesy Mac, whose reputation had established certain expectations of Miller. As a protective measure to retain authenticity during his transformation, Miller exercised “tact regarding tact” by responding to the audience’s expectations while modifying his performance.<sup>140</sup> On the following label released albums *Watching Movies with the Sound Off* and *GO:OD AM* we then see a mix of lyrically minded and rhythmically minded records. By starting WMWTSO with a different character on “The Star Room”, McCormick contrasts the character the audience knew, Cheesy Mac, with a character that showed what Miller could be, Delusional Thomas, thus signalling the start of a new era.<sup>141</sup> Moreover, this marked the first sign of collaboration between the different personae. From then on, the secondary personae saw less use, all the while Mac Miller’s discography integrated more influences from them. Heavy Mac became vulnerable and incorporated more jazz sounds like Lovestein had. At the same time, he was unafraid of expressing himself directly and critically like Thomas. In addition, McCormick’s experience with producing as Fisherman had also helped him self-select tracks that provided unity between lyrics and rhythm.<sup>142</sup> It then appears that McCormick employed secondary personae with the intention of improving Mac Miller towards an ideal without compromising the authenticity, and thereby the reputation, of his primary artistic identity in the process. Correspondingly, the release of *Macadelic* and *Faces* as mixtapes rather than fully-fledged albums could signal that McCormick, or the record labels, were aware that his audience would not accept his abrupt change of style and his severe fixation with self-destruction.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Lemert and Branaman 1997: 111–112.

<sup>140</sup> Goffman 1959: 234.

<sup>141</sup> McCormick comments on this choice in a track-by-track interview with Billboard on *Watching Movies with the Sound Off*. Billboard 2013: 01:00–01:43.

<sup>142</sup> “Miller said he recorded 400 songs for [WMWTSO], and sometimes you couldn’t help but wonder about the selection process (“Objects in the Mirror”?) but on *GO:OD AM*, he’s learned to self-edit”. Montague, 2015.

<sup>143</sup> At the time, neither mixtape was readily available for the general audience. Consequently, both collections became cult classics for the fandom. Eventually, both saw commercial release. *Macadelic* was released six years later on May 4, 2018 (before McCormick’s death) and *Faces* was released seven years after the fact in 2021. Another reason for the delayed commercial releases was the copyright issues with some of the samples from movies.

Since delving deeper into drug abuse from *Macadelic* till *Faces*, *GO:OD AM* finally confronted its consequences, rather than passively accepting them. In some ways, this would begin the conclusion of Heavy Mac. Notably, while promoting this album, McCormick presented what he saw as the measure of success for Mac Miller: “being able to touch and affect people in a positive way. Have music that lasts for a long time, have a long career. Just being able to be influential in a positive way”.<sup>144</sup> So, despite the attention to life’s gritty details, Miller included tracks like “Gees” and “When in Rome”, which mainly dealt with “money and bitches” and in that way were more like the simplicity of Cheesy Mac. Yet this time, these tracks were the exception rather than the rule and served as “comic relief” to balance out the heavy nature of the main material.<sup>145</sup> This way, Heavy Mac started to lighten up while also sharing a message. As Pitchfork puts it, “Mac has enough of his sense of humor intact to keep the album from playing like a D.A.R.E. campaign on wax”.<sup>146</sup> This balancing act is also found self-contained in songs like “100 Grandkids”<sup>147</sup> and more applicably in “Weekend”. Consequently, while Heavy Mac does emphasise himself and shows vulnerability, his listeners can enjoy “Weekend” purely for its songfulness. We must not assume that the pursuit of dual-purpose, of being pleasurable and meaningful at the same time, must result in a zero-sum game. When the symbolism is not remarked upon, it does not prevent the audience from enjoying the rhythms. Instead, in the cases where the symbolism is noticed, the subversion of expectations could arguably result in the active listeners gaining a disproportionately better impression of the product than if it had not pursued that dual-purpose. This idea is supported by Bradley, who likewise claims that:

On the page, and even more, in the performance, the lines gain an effortless, almost offhanded eloquence that liberates the listener to enjoy the line in sound alone. Looking behind the rhyme takes none of that pleasure away. What it does instead is add a measure of respect to the craft of fitting rhymes to beat.<sup>148</sup>

Thus, a core difference from Cheesy Mac to Heavy Mac is that this time, since Miller had begun improving in other aspects, he did not need to rely on songfulness. Fantano commends that Miller has “evolved quite a bit from his young, silly pop-rapper phase” and no longer

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<sup>144</sup> Larry King, 2017: 05:38–05:57.

<sup>145</sup> Billboard 2013: 09:35.

<sup>146</sup> Montague, 2015.

<sup>147</sup> Miller appears optimistic and playful in the first half, only to become arrogant in the second half. Change is moreover reflected in the non-vocal qualities, as Miller lowers his pitch, and the beat, as it disbands crisp treble in favour of echoing bass.

<sup>148</sup> Bradley 2009: 63.

seems like a stereotype.<sup>149</sup> Furthermore, he notes how McCormick brings the different personae together on *GO:OD AM* and that his music now “not only feels personal and feels like himself but also has pop appeal and is artistic as well”.<sup>150</sup> Miller is at “the top of his game” and “is doing a better job at explaining himself lyrically and giving his own walk of life a bit more depth”.<sup>151</sup> While this album also had Mac Miller face some hard truths, it set the presence of a more passionate and lively character than what had been the case over the last years. Fittingly, Pitchfork named *GO:OD AM* a “victory lap of sorts, a homecoming”.<sup>152</sup>

The Heavy Mac period portrayed a progressive but challenging journey for McCormick’s artistry. While Cheesy Mac had placed restrictions on Miller, each time a secondary persona successfully performed a different kind of style and expression, the overall impression of Miller inched towards a new normal. In the same way that *Blue Slide Park* marked the culmination of Cheesy Mac, segregated mixtapes like *You*, *Delusional Thomas* and *Faces* presented the far reaches of Miller’s artistry and proved his capacity to perform different expressions and styles. Consequently, *GO:OD AM* was evidence of Miller’s “capacity to perform any routine”.<sup>153</sup> Finally, with “Weekend” replacing “Donald Trump” as Miller’s most popular song,<sup>154</sup> it seemed that a lasting change of direction could manifest for the audience’s impression of Miller.

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<sup>149</sup> Theneedledrop, 2015: 00:58–01:11.

<sup>150</sup> Theneedledrop, 2015: 01:25, 09:23–09:55.

<sup>151</sup> Theneedledrop, 2015: 02:42–02:53, 05:36–05:46.

<sup>152</sup> Pitchfork rated *GO:OD AM* at 7.3. Montague 2015.

<sup>153</sup> Goffman explains that “audiences accept the individual’s particular performance as evidence of his capacity to perform the routine and even as evidence of his capacity to perform any routine [...] with each performance the legitimacy of these units will tend to be tested anew and their permanent reputation put at stake”. 1959: 156.

<sup>154</sup> «Weekend» is still one of Miller’s most listened to song on Spotify (405 million), second only to “Self Care” (427 million). Comparatively, “Donald Trump” takes third place with 309 million streams with “Good News” following at 301 million plays. “Weekend” is more than four times as popular as the next most listened to track from *GO:OD AM*, “100 Grandkids” (404 million to 85,5 million listens on Spotify). Moreover, “Weekend”-’s popularity cannot be attributed to external factors to the same extent as “Donald Trump”-’s popularity can. Gathered 18.03.22.

### 3.3 Good News

Five months after *GO:OD AM*, Larry Fisherman released *Run on Sentences vol. 2* and the “!Go Fish!” singles trilogy. From then onwards, McCormick would no longer utilise any secondary personae, nor would he release any mixtapes or EPs besides the label released Mac Miller albums. Nonetheless, the assimilation of Lovestein, Fisherman, and Thomas was evident in Miller’s later collections. *The Divine Feminine* (2016) was significantly influenced by Lovestein, as jazz rap became the primary genre and love the main subject. He remarks that the album is “not necessarily about [women]” but rather is an exploration of “the story of love and the emotion of love”.<sup>155</sup> *The Divine Feminine* remains his most concise album at only ten songs, making the thematic union much more succinct than, for example, *Faces*’ 24 track journey. Furthermore, this album is significant in its avoidance of drug addiction as a theme<sup>156</sup> and as McCormick claims it as “really the first album I’ve ever made with a happy ending”.<sup>157</sup> Hence, it seemed that Miller had taken McCormick’s desires for him to heart.

Miller continued to surprise in the dual body of work *Swimming* (2018) and *Circles* (2020) which turned the romantic angle from love of the feminine to self-love, optimism, and nostalgia. Moreover, McCormick gradually sang more on his albums, and by *Circles* (2020), “Blue World” and “Hands” were the only tracks without it. *Swimming* became Mac Miller’s first platinum certificate album and marked his first Grammy nomination, which was for Best Rap Album in 2019. “Swimming in Circles” was also Grammy-nominated in “Best Boxed or Limited Edition Package” in 2022.<sup>158</sup> Moreover, “Good News” is the first single from *Circles*, making it the first record Miller released posthumously.<sup>159</sup>

#### 3.3.1 Bohemian Rap

Krims explains that the jazz/bohemian style is often deemed more abstract and verbally complex than other rap genres.<sup>160</sup> As if echoing Goffman, Krims suggests that while other rap

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<sup>155</sup> Michael O’Connor 2021: 01:12:40–01:13:00. Norris 2016.

<sup>156</sup> Miller has previously used love and drugs as stand-ins for another, so it’s inclusion is plausible although not fundamental. Miller has stated that he wanted to explore something new.

<sup>157</sup> Norris 2016. While releases like *K.I.D.S.* typically were cheerful, even it ended with “Face in the Crowd” where Miller senses insignificance in being “Just another face in the crowd”. While this sentiment may not hold much weight coming from Cheesy Mac, it is nevertheless more emotive than, say, “Knock Knock”.

<sup>158</sup> “Swimming in Circles” lost to George Harrison’s “All Things Must Pass: 50th Anniversary Edition”. Curiously, the rerelease of *K.I.D.S.* also provided the 2011 single “Knock Knock” with a platinum certificate.

<sup>159</sup> A posthumous Miller had already appeared as a feature on the tracks “Time” by Free Nationals (2019), “That’s Life” by 88-Keys (2019), “Day Before” by Yung Thug (2020), “Come On Baby” by Cookin Soul (2021), and “I Believed It” by dvsn (2021).

<sup>160</sup> Krims 2000: 69.

artists may be as meritorious, the genre's reputation persuades the audience to deconstruct the lyrics and production more than they would for party rappers or even reality rappers.<sup>161</sup> Despite its name, the genre contains a great assortment of musical styles other than jazz, which is why I emphasise the “bohemian” part in this analysis. While *The Divine Feminine*, and to some extent *GO:OD AM*, do assume the swing and polyrhythmic aspects of jazz, *Swimming* and *Circles* lean more on the eclectic side of the genre. For instance, the most recognisable elements of “Good News” would be the tranquil, trickling guitar chords, keyboard figures, and bass grooves that run continuously through the beat. Still, the influence from jazz is apparent in the flow's often syncopated rhythms and in the deliberate modification to pitch and timbre. In this new style, Miller begins to sing more often and adds an overtone of breathiness to his tone which associates with intimacy.<sup>162</sup> He furthermore seems to place himself closer to the microphone, creating life-like reverb, which adds authenticity and intimacy. The bohemian aspect of this singing comes in its informal, at times, eclectic flow. Besides *Live From Space* (2013), Miller had next to no real experience with song.<sup>163</sup> Nevertheless, this lack of formal skill fits with the genre at hand and enhances the genuineness of the performance.

Miller made both “Swimming” and “Circles” together with producer and composer Jon Brion. Brion stated that he made Miller produce most of the sounds himself so as not to disturb his natural production.<sup>164</sup> In the case of “Good News”, Miller places the verse before the chorus, as he had done on “Weekend”. But this time, the verses were furthermore written ahead of the chorus, suggesting a further importance of the lyrical content.<sup>165</sup> In contrast to much of his previous work, Miller now forgoes even an introduction but still leaves the beat some time to settle in before he begins rapping.

1        I spent the whole day in my head  
           Do a little spring cleanin'  
           I'm always too busy dreamin'  
           Well, maybe I should wake up instead

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid..

<sup>162</sup> van Leeuwen 1999, 130-132.

<sup>163</sup> *Live From Space* is a collection of more melodic versions of Miller's songs that were performed live while he toured with the group The Internet.

<sup>164</sup> Mac Miller 2020a (Circles interview): 05:25–05:55, 06:48–08:30.

<sup>165</sup> Mac Miller 2020a (Circles Interview): 02:00–02:04.



5      A lot of things I regret, but I just say I forget  
        Why can't it just be easy?  
        Why does everybody need me to stay?<sup>166</sup>

Each line is made concise and poignant as Miller pauses between them. Moreover, Miller places much weight on the stressed syllables – especially when they rhyme – and drags out the pronunciation of words like “head” in a manner that gives nearly each word significance. The tempo of the flow and beat contrast each other, with the former being leisurely at 2.38 syllables per second while the latter is at a lively 174 BPM.<sup>167</sup> Thereby, the brisk, light notes from the beat create an optimistic, light-hearted atmosphere where Miller’s smooth flow comes across as poised and encouraging.

The first verse features simple rhymes, beginning with an enclosed end rhyme from lines 2–4 and continuing with couplets to line 7. In lines three and four, we see the continued conceit of dreaming and waking up from “Weekend”, yet this time it is associated with the act of daydreaming as indicated by the first line. Following this, Miller uses quatrains with four-and-four lines using the same end rhyme scheme. This pattern is altered in the third quatrain where every other line is rhymeless. He continues with his melodious expression in the chorus as his intonation falls during the lines “good news, good news, good news / that’s all they want to hear”.<sup>168</sup> The chorus only appears twice, not that the audience has an easy time predicting and joining in on the chorus either way, as it is neither as simple nor repetitive as those in “Knock Knock” or “Weekend”. Miller adds the twang back in his voice by the second verse and goes back to the same paced and paused flow of lines as the first verse. Additionally, he supplements his timbre with some rustic tones, making his delivery more imploring than earlier. This complements the line “well, so tired of being so tired”,<sup>169</sup> as the sentiment is reflected in his voice. By now, the beat integrates additional layers of guitar, drums, and keyboard that seem to improvise different licks, creating a more varied musical background.

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<sup>166</sup> 00:26–00:52.

<sup>167</sup> Tempo of flow gathered from the first verse of “Good News”. Previously, I noted “Knock Knock” at 4.57 syllables per second and 109 BPM. Meanwhile, the first verse of “Weekend” is at 4.55 and 120 BPM.

<sup>168</sup> 01:43–01:48.

<sup>169</sup> 02:16–02:20.

In contrast to Miller's previous records, his rap flow is mostly the same throughout "Good News". Instead, the increasing melodicism is what constitutes his changeups. The delivery of the lines remains somewhat eclectic as the length of the written lines does not present the time spent uttering them. So, while Miller's use of breaks makes it apparent whether he will rap or sing, the manner of expression remains unpredictable and amusing. In the final verse, Miller is singing entirely and enhances his previous effects. His voice is almost hoarse, he drags out most of the words, and his changes in intonation are executed quicker. Here, Miller explains that "there's a whole lot more for me waitin' on the other side" and admits that "I know maybe I'm too late, I could make it there some other time".<sup>170</sup> This other side could be heaven, sobriety, or accepting the other side of his self – either the audience's impression of Miller or McCormick's own impression of his persona. In any case, he embraces this adjustment and hopes to discover that "it ain't that bad". After his outro, there is still nearly a minute of music playing. Step by step, the sounds are discontinued, finally departing with ten seconds of silence. Thus, "Good News" sees a progression in vocal technique, vocal texture, and beat that takes its time, sets a frame for Miller's expression, and affords closure.

### 3.3.2 *Romantic Mac*

As singing began to displace vocal rap, Miller sometimes instructs a songwriter role, meaning that rapping is no longer the clear measure of McCormick's artistic capabilities.

Correspondingly, he forgoes songfulness to maintain focus on the lyrical semantics. Miller still integrates rhymes that establish pleasurable patterns, especially in the second verse, but he omits witty wordplay and complicated schemes so that his message is not lost in the expression. At the same time, he provides even fewer details on surface-level facts. On *Circles*, he only refers to his partner by "she" once, usually opting to leave the significant other a genderless "you" and forgoing his sexuality.<sup>171</sup> The lyrics are entirely focused on internal action and offer a more detailed image of Miller's psyche.

The atmosphere set by the dual-rhythmic relationship in "Good News" offers a perspective quite different from Heavy Mac's reality rap. Most notably, Miller's singing makes for a (mostly) new musical expression where he finds the occasion to alter his non-vocal qualities more than previously. Cheesy Mac and Heavy Mac are both characterised by relatively

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<sup>170</sup> 03:20–03:40.

<sup>171</sup> "Surf" is the exception with one mention of a "she". Miller does mention gender on *Swimming* but does so less frequently than in his previous collections.

monotone voices, the former continuously sounding excited and the latter exhibiting a residing despondence. Since the potency of pitch and volume depends on the range and deviancy from their base levels, Miller's previous styles had not allowed for a variety of emotions<sup>172</sup> – the wider the range, the more energy is let out, and the stronger is the emotional imprint on the listener.<sup>173</sup> While Romantic Mac is most expressive while singing, he also modifies his non-vocal qualities more actively on the later rap records. For instance, on “Jet Fuel” from *Swimming*, he adds layers of amplified vocal configurations that collide with his otherwise ordinary delivery, thereby indicating Miller's attitude towards the lyrics. Meanwhile, in “Good News”, he adopts his vocal overtones throughout the song, making his voice gradually rougher, giving the impression that he grows tired. The fluctuation between tense and lax timbre and changing intonation is especially noticeable in the final verse where they signal conviction and contentment. Furthermore, in the lines below, Miller alters between singing (16/18) and rapping (17/19), giving each line a distinct feel.

16 Well, maybe I'll lay down for a little  
Instead of always tryin' to figure everything out  
And all I do is say sorry  
19 Half the time I don't even know what I'm sayin' it about<sup>174</sup>

Like “The Star Room”, it is as if Miller changes persona in these lines, as the soft, melodious legato singing contrasts the sharper staccato rapping. This helps present a scuffle in Miller's mind, with one part being calm and apologetic while the other remains anxious and confrontational. This is reflected more broadly in *Swimming* as the bouncier, more extravagant mix of hip-hop and jazz rap, while *Circles* is the soothing, reflective, and emotional bohemian album.

Krims describes how bohemian rap often contrasts other rap genres' negative nature and has a didactic function wherein they aspire to provide knowledge.<sup>175</sup> Consequently, Romantic Mac no longer wishes to portray how rough his life is, like Heavy Mac had done, but instead wants to emphasise how good it could be and study how to achieve it. As Miller emphasises himself in “Good News”, it is evident that he does not intend to lecture his listeners. Instead, he

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<sup>172</sup> Poyatos 1993, 178, in Novak 2011: 124.

<sup>173</sup> van Leeuwen 1999: 106.

<sup>174</sup> 01:20–01:43.

<sup>175</sup> Krims 2000: 68.

exclaims: “I wish that I could just get out my goddamn way”.<sup>176</sup> Once more, he is ratifying a settlement, but this time it is with his current, rather than former, self. The chorus elucidates the central conflict of the record - the dependence on “good news”.

20     Good news, good news, good news  
       That’s all they want to hear  
       No, they don’t like me when I’m down  
       But when I’m flyin’, oh  
       It makes ‘em so uncomfortable  
25     So different, what’s the difference?<sup>177</sup>

The “they” he refers to could be either friends and family, fans and critics, or a mix of both. The choice of the word “uncomfortable” makes the distinction difficult, as those near McCormick would be worried about his mental health and addiction, while the absent audience had previously noted an aversion to Miller’s introspective lyrics.<sup>178</sup> He questions what difference his positive statements make if they are not representative of his emotions. This is relevant for dramatic realisation, as the positive idealisation storied in Romantic Mac makes no difference unless McCormick takes confirmative action. In a metaphor, he mentions that his persona has been his priority as he’s “runnin’ out of gas” and hopes to “make it back from work”,<sup>179</sup> alluding to his artistic career and performance as Mac Miller. This suggests that he has placed too much effort into realising his public image and garnered too little time for self-actualisation. Still, as denoted in the third verse, he remains hopeful of making it to the other side of his predicament.

Miller continues, stating:

32     I’m no liar, but  
       Sometimes the truth don’t sound like the truth  
       Maybe ‘cause it ain’t  
35     I just love the way it sound when I say it

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<sup>176</sup> 01:11–01:14.

<sup>177</sup> 01:43–02:03.

<sup>178</sup> Recall the comment: “that’s not what I enjoy him for”. Dead End Hip Hop 2012: 18:10–18:20. Additionally, McCormick had previously stated that he felt a need to make “bangers” (songful chart-toppers) until *The Divine Feminine*. Norris 2016.

<sup>179</sup> 02:09–02:15.

It's what I do

If you know me, it ain't anything new<sup>180</sup>

This reaffirms the matter of the conflict as Miller admits to fabricating “good news”. Moreover, Miller emphasises himself, stating, “I’m no liar”. McCormick may not personally be a liar, but he narrates his compulsion as a performer – as the artist Miller – to have the sound of what he’s saying be more significant than its substance. Subsequently, for the first time in “Good News”, Miller refers to a “you”, probing at the listener’s prospect of knowing him. While he previously decreed that the audience “never met the kid” on “Donald Trump” and that “these bitches don’t know me” on “Weekend”, Miller now suggests a real correlation between the audience’s impression of him and his impression of self. Analogously, in “Hurt Feelings”, Miller states, “I’m always saying I won’t change but / I ain’t the same”,<sup>181</sup> referring to his *Blue Slide Park* days where Cheesy Mac regarded consistency as authenticity. However, his journey through Heavy Mac has included many variations, showcasing that dynamic change offers a more accurate, vivid presentation of the self. He continues on “Hurt Feelings”, ending with the lines, “I’ve been going through it, you just go around it / But it’s really not that different when you think about it”.<sup>182</sup> This returns to the question he posed in “Good News”: what’s the difference? If Miller has been a factual presentation of self, as McCormick has claimed, then his discography should be an accurate presentation of who McCormick is. Regardless of what McCormick experienced over his last eleven years and how the general audience perceived Mac Miller during that period, the result has nevertheless been the Romantic Mac present on *Circles*.

### 3.3.3 Romantic Mac’s Rosy Retrospection

Haarder explains that “the author’s perspective is the aesthetic view on own suffering” where the implementation of life’s difficulties in writing can create artistic and social capital.<sup>183</sup> Thus, moral idealisation can be a beneficial undertaking for a performer should they cater to societal values and expectations when realising their image. This could be relevant in the case of Romantic Mac. Drug abuse and addiction had so far been a common theme in Miller’s discography, but Romantic Mac gradually adopted the impression that he was overcoming his addiction. In “Come Back to Earth” on *Swimming* (2018), Miller rapped about starting to

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<sup>180</sup> 02:27–02:43.

<sup>181</sup> 00:22–00:26.

<sup>182</sup> 03:08–03:15.

<sup>183</sup> Haarder 2014: 137.

swim when he previously had been drowning. He also stated that he was treating himself right on “Self Care”. Hypothetically, this new image could have been an attempt at adopting a more politically correct attitude which also overlapped with a positive trend of promoting mental health awareness. Should Miller be deemed heartfelt, vulnerable, and relatable, this stance could potentially provide him with greater societal relevancy, increasing his popularity and broadening his target audience. McCormick’s death by overdose is inconsistent with Romantic Mac’s self-improvement sentiment and could therefore suggest a deliberate idealisation of Miller’s values. Goffman restates that as performers, they are “concerned not with the moral issue of realising these standards, but with the amoral issue of engineering a convincing impression that these standards are being realised”.<sup>184</sup> As noted, Miller even comments on this artistic pull from truth to appeal in “Good News”.

Eminem, one of Marshall Mather’s personae, provides an example of what happens when this jumbling of truth and lie, fact and fiction, thickens. For Mathers, Communication and Media Studies researcher Katja Lee notes that:

His life has become ‘the Eminem show’ [...] the album’s capacity to manufacture and simulate a representation of his life [...] now supersedes a real life. However, the performances are not ‘personae’ in the sense that they operate as masks that cover or hide a real subjectivity beneath. They are masking not a real Eminem but the absence of a real Eminem. This is not to claim that Eminem lacks a real selfhood, only that it is not possible to represent real selfhoods or access them through the simulations offered.<sup>185</sup>

Her assessment echoes Goffman’s idea that “a correctly staged and performed character leads the audience to impute a self to a performed character”<sup>186</sup> – regardless of the irrepressibly fictional aspect of it. Connectedly, in “Come Back to Earth”, Miller says, “and what I don’t tell you / I prolly never even tell myself”.<sup>187</sup> As Lee stresses, the confession from the “I” comes from the artist persona, Miller. This way, the lines become a statement of how Miller does not exist outside of his musical expression and contact with the listener. Nevertheless, misrepresentation is not necessarily an issue in the portrayal of Romantic Mac. Should the “I” be interpreted from the writer’s perspective, McCormick, it could imply that McCormick’s

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<sup>184</sup> Goffman 1959: 251.

<sup>185</sup> Lee 2008: 361–362.

<sup>186</sup> Goffman 1959: 252.

<sup>187</sup> 01:04–01:12.

knowledge of himself no longer goes beyond that which can also be ascribed to Miller. As such, as a performative biography, the absence of a real Mac Miller is resolved with the biographical presence of a real Malcolm McCormick. Accordingly, McCormick aims to identify with his persona and strive for his suggested ideal.<sup>188</sup> Goffman cites philosopher George Santayana's notion that:

[...] our deliberate character is more truly ourself than is the flux of our involuntary dreams. [...] if this style is native to us and our art is vital, the more it transmutes its model the deeper and truer art it will be. [...] Self-knowledge, like any art or science, renders its subject-matter in a new medium, the medium of ideas.<sup>189</sup>

In Miller's later tracks, sobriety is never the situation but always the ideal. Seeing as reviewers acknowledge Miller's projected *desire* for self-improvement<sup>190</sup> we can assume that the audience accepts and believes McCormick's sentiment. This way, McCormick's overdose does not contradict Miller's romanticism but instead tells of the severity of drug addiction. Even if he could not reach his idealisation, Miller's sentiment gains strength from its opposition to the dire reality McCormick found himself in.

In the same vein, the swift certification of "Good News" and its high rating on the Billboard Hot 100<sup>191</sup> could plausibly be attributed to the song's posthumous context piquing the audience's interest. Still, "Good News" posthumous release was presumably mostly interesting for existing fans – especially as the track was primarily lyrically focused. "Self Care", however, garnered broader appeal. This record was released as a single ahead of *Swimming*, which in turn was released a month before McCormick's passing. As such, this song arrived when McCormick's death was a broader cultural phenomenon, especially as the news of his breakup with Grande and his DUI charges were still fresh. As with "Good News", the contradiction of his lyrical claim of self-care to the actual drug overdose became relevant in the mental health movement and amplified this morbid curiosity.<sup>192</sup> Nevertheless, the

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<sup>188</sup> This is evident elsewhere in "Come Back to Earth", the "neighbours like strangers that could be friends" could be Miller and McCormick. Moreover, the "way out of his head" could be to stop daydreaming and start realising. Together, acceptance Miller and actionability could help McCormick "come back to earth".

<sup>189</sup> Santayana 1922: 133-134.

<sup>190</sup> While Pitchfork rates *Swimming* at 7.5, Fantano rated it at 3. As of March 2022, his review of *Swimming* is his second most disliked video on YouTube (9 000 likes (15%) and 53 000 dislikes (85%)). This shows how Fantano's appraisal does not reflect the general audience's opinion on the album. Notably, Fantano does not diminish Mac Miller's character or authenticity on the album, but rather finds the musical production to be sporadic and McCormick's singing to be lackluster. Rytlewski 2018. Theneedledrop 2018.

<sup>191</sup> "Good News" peaked at the 17 position, Miller's best position as the main artist. "Self Care" placed at 33. Billboard n.d..

<sup>192</sup> Abrar 2021. Berman 2020.

impact of “Self Care”, in terms of sales and longevity,<sup>193</sup> can be attributed to it being another successful dual-purpose performance.<sup>194</sup> As such, social relevancy may have sparked influence, but artistic merit provided retention. Hence, McCormick’s death resulted in an insurgence of sustained listeners for Miller’s entire discography, not just “Self Care” or “Good News”.<sup>195</sup>

In either case, the external factors are this time related to Malcolm McCormick rather than chance or other celebrities. This signals a growth in Miller’s notability and social relevancy that can be accounted for in the extent of the response to McCormick’s death.<sup>196</sup> From there, the expressive vocal technique and meditative lyrics featured in *Swimming* and *Circles* enriched the underlying sentimentality. This painted a picture of Mac Miller and Malcolm McCormick as the hopeful yet struggling Romantic Mac. Thus, Miller’s struggles were, and *appeared to be*, fuelled by real “tragedy”. Accordingly, Fantano positions that:

[Miller has] undergone one of the most unlikely transitions in rap over the past decade. [...] No matter what your abilities are artistically, a lot of the appeal is gonna come down to how you present it. And I think [*Circles*] is a key example of that. It’s very sad to know that Mac will not be progressing past this point. But I’m not sure fans could have asked for a better musical send-off.<sup>197</sup>

Pitchfork concurs and claims *Circles* as “the culmination of a career spent improving [...] an act of self-reformation”.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Three years after its release, «Self Care» achieved 3x platinum certification. RIAA 2022.

<sup>194</sup> “Self Care” is split in two parts where the first is songful throughout, while the other is calmer and heavier. The first part maintains the message “Self care. I’m treating me right / Hell yeah, we gonna be alright” (01:21–01:35) which allows the audience to join in, share, and relate to the positive message while listening to a pleasurable song.

<sup>195</sup> Seven collections posthumously hit the Billboard 200. Moreover, *Best Day Ever* (2011) and *Macadelic* (2012) breached the top 200 for the first time in 2018. This surge could also explain why most of Miller’s tracks were certified after September 2018. Notably, “Weekend” naturally achieved platinum in March 2018, before any of the notable events took place. Billboard (n.d.). Jeffries (n.d.). RIAA 2022.

<sup>196</sup> There are many articles on Miller’s scandals (breakup and DUI). Moreover, many artists and journalists wrote dedications to him after his death. Weatherby 2018.

<sup>197</sup> Fantano rated *Circles* an 8. Theneedledrop 2020: 00:22–00:26, 07:37–08:02.

<sup>198</sup> Pitchfork rated *Circles* a 7.4. Pearce 2020.



## 4. Discussion

As cautioned, each iteration of Mac Miller does not entirely replace the previous one. Instead, certain aspects are revised. Like Cheesy Mac, the later configurations included samples in some of their records, yet these were less protruding and often obscure.<sup>199</sup> Moreover, “Everybody”, Romantic Mac’s cover of Arthur Lee’s “Everybody’s Gotta Live”, does not exploit the original work in the same way Cheesy Mac’s samples does. While the lyrics have barely changed, Miller’s new expressive style offers a wistful twist to his rendition. Additionally, the beat reproduces the style otherwise found on *Circles*, ensuring cohesion. Furthermore, while songfulness was Cheesy Mac’s forte, he too attempted intimacy and gravity on tracks like “Poppy” and “Missed Calls”. Likewise, while they did not rely on songfulness, Heavy and Romantic Mac also created hits like “Loud” and “Hurt Feelings”. The same lyrical devices have also been used across periods. For example, before *GO:OD AM*, Heavy Mac frequently used kenning to signify notability. Similarly, the same topics have been addressed in different iterations to reflect new attitudes towards it. Romantic Mac faced the same struggles with addiction and mental health as Heavy Mac, but they treated them differently.<sup>200</sup> This is perceptible in the divergent takes on legacy in “100 Grandkids” from *GO:OD AM*, which was boastful, and “Hand Me Downs” from *Circles*, which was gentle. This suggests that the result of the performance is contingent on the approach to it. In turn, the style of artistic expression becomes the product of a purposefully fashioned persona.<sup>201</sup>

This ties into the theme of identity and self which matures throughout the discography. In the material, Cheesy Mac shows some off-handed awareness of his role distance in certain lyrics but maintains little control of his impression. He appears authentic yet unremarkable, as Miller merely enforced undeniable surface-level facts rather than suggesting deeper mental processes. The only act of idealisation was in rap merit, which was made trite in the routine of signifying. In contrast, McCormick wanted to assert a different kind of authenticity in Heavy Mac, one that he felt aligned more with his subjective sense of self. The desire imbued in Heavy Mac to be something more than Cheesy Mac manifested as idealisation, yet the

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<sup>199</sup> For instance, “Cut the Check” from *GO:OD AM* samples Coldplay’s famous “Viva La Vida” (2008), but only uses the last 20 seconds of its outro when the main song has ended. Moreover “Blue World” from *Circles* uses the same introduction found in The Four Freshmen’s “Blue World” from 1955.

<sup>200</sup> *The Divine Feminine* (2016) is a notable exception to this development, as Miller here mostly avoids both themes.

<sup>201</sup> Krims 2000: 138.

distance between the two again caused a sense of misrepresentation – now from the audience’s perspective. The use of secondary personae allowed McCormick to exaggerate the reaches of his identity. The new skills, styles, and values he developed were, in turn, integrated into his primary persona. This stabilised Mac Miller, as McCormick and the audience’s impression of the character began to coalesce. In turn, Romantic Mac could forgo advocating his authenticity and instead address his ideal – honestly and vividly. The final impression of Mac Miller at the time of McCormick’s death is then a competent and candid configuration of the persona. To some extent, this is due to McCormick’s real-life addiction, mental health breakdown, break-ups, and DUI charges attesting to *real tragedy*, which imparted the performance with artistic and social capital. Still, another share must be attributed to Miller proving his capacity for varied artistic expressions on *GO:OD AM* and expressively portraying his struggles on *Circles*. This suggests that the progression of Mac Miller took place not only as an innate reflection of McCormick’s actual developments but also as a conscious staging of his persona.

#### 4.1 The Communicative Process

As Haarder detailed, personae are made in “specific contexts with particular terms for success that usually relate to how authenticity is performed in that context.”<sup>202</sup> Seeing as artists primarily present themselves in musical performances, we can imagine music as a vessel for communication between performer and audience. Frith discusses how music can be organised socially in three distinct discursive practices: art music discourse, folk music discourse, and commercial music discourse.<sup>203</sup> Art music is intended to present the artist as musically talented. Here the performer remains impersonal so that the performance may speak for itself. Art performers connect to their audience through the values and ideas shared in their pieces and require that their audience engages in interpretation and analysis to understand the lyrical content. Meanwhile, the folk artist uses personal and relatable experiences in their lyrics to create common ground between performer and audience beyond even the musical performance. The folk discourse values authentic artists who seek opportunities to perform with the audience in a shared experience. Lastly, the commercial artist is made out to be a unique commodity to create fandoms. The commercial discourse revolves around the

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<sup>202</sup> Haarder 2014: 134.

<sup>203</sup> Frith 1996: 36–42.

accessibility of music and attempts to create songs that are widely enjoyable and can suspend the listeners from the minutia of everyday life.

To some extent, Frith's discourses seem to overlap with Krim's genres.<sup>204</sup> For instance, party rappers should focus semantically on celebration, attempt to "move the crowd", and provide the audience with opportunities to sing along.<sup>205</sup> In this context, the excitable Cheesy Mac, whose primary focus is songfulness, effectively achieves the commercial ethos. Still, we can tell that there are folk music traits here – sing-alongs create a communal performance experience, and Cheesy Mac, as a high school kid making music for high school kids, has much common ground with his audience. Hence, while genre frames the style of expression, the discourse indicates how an artist organises their manner of expression to face the audience, relate to them, and present an ideal – art discourse values respectability, folk discourse desires personal relatability and social relevancy, and commercial discourse seeks notability.

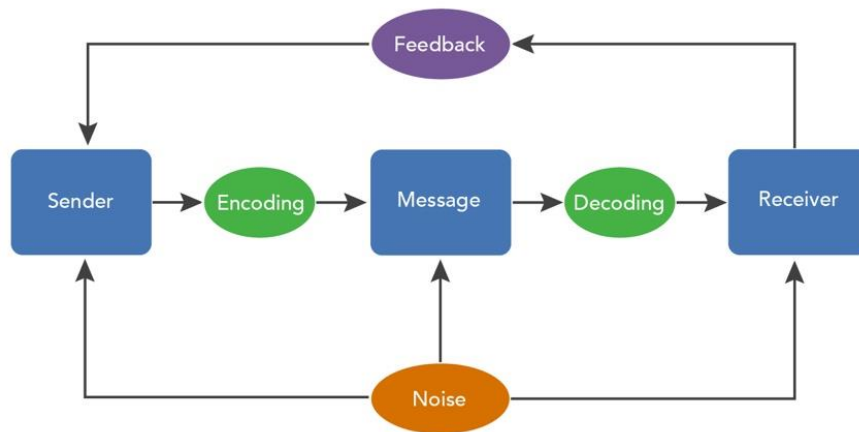
Eckstein adds to this discussion by explaining how each performance is a communicative process. In listening to a song, the audience may observe cognitive, social, and physical aspects which shape their response to the music.<sup>206</sup> First, the artist encodes their performance with formal elements that can be recognised, such as sound organisation and lyrical content. Then, the audience takes notice of the genre and context that embeds the frame for the performance. And finally, the audience's understanding of the song prompts a physical reaction. For instance, knowledge of bohemian rap induces the audience to deconstruct the lyrics, making the symbolism more apparent and emphasising the artist's values. In turn, this induces the audience to regard authenticity through art ideals that, if the performance is effective, could make the audience revere them. As such, the performer should alter their expression by changing vocal techniques and using eclectic rhyme patterns to enforce this style. This shows how the artist can incite the audience to respond to the performance in a specific way, which can affect their conceptualisation of the persona.

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<sup>204</sup> Krim tells how some see jazz rap as "art music". 2000: 66.

<sup>205</sup> Krim 2000: 55–57.

<sup>206</sup> Eckstein 2010: 74.



*Fig. 2: the communication process.*

I have expanded the process that Frith and Eckstein suggest and arranged it to the model above.<sup>207</sup> Here, communication is broken down into three primary parts. Essentially, the sender is the artist, in this case Malcolm McCormick, the message is the song – i.e., “Knock Knock”, “Weekend”, or “Good News”, and the receiver is the audience. However, as I have argued, the artist sends two messages simultaneously. One is the musical expression, and the other is the presentation of persona (self). As the medium is music, both messages are decoded in the same situation at the same time – during the musical performance.

#### *4.1.1 Encoding*

For the musical expression, the encoding process includes the aspects of producing rap music that relate to the choice of topic and style of flow and beat. Wordplay and figurative language establish surprising and amusing connotations between words and concepts and bid an original approach to the topic and the art of rhyming. In turn, the delivery of such lines is aided by non-vocal qualities, particularly pitch and articulation. Pitch efforts stress on syllables and patterns the rhyme scheme. Moreover, through the application of staccato and legato, the artist highlights certain words or sounds, underscoring the rhymes, as well as assonance and consonance. Finally, the dual-rhythmic relationship between flow and beat creates entertaining synergy and establishes a measure of rap excellence. Respectively, the process of encoding the persona relies on many of the same tools, as dramatic realisation is only recognised in the performance. Thus, genre becomes an essential frame to consider when

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<sup>207</sup> Originally, Shannon & Weavers’ model was used for radio communication and only included sender, channel, and receiver. Since then, it has been expanded upon and fitted for human communication as a continual, circular process. While it is a simple model, it serves its purpose as a foundation for discussing communication. Furthermore, its rigidity is dealt with in the following discussion. 1949.

evaluating any performed character as the style of flow, beat, and lyrical content is conclusive to how one asserts authenticity symbolically.<sup>208</sup> This was particularly evident in Lovestein and Thomas, as they used genre to experiment with new beats (jazz/alternative), different vocal techniques (song/pitch distortion), and novel topics (love/death). Notably, each iteration of Miller used wordplay in their own way to create abstract associations between different concepts. In addition, similes and metaphors could highlight their ideals. More directly, the experimental meaning potential of non-vocal qualities offered the performer expressive range and revealed their attitude towards particular subjects and their mindset in general. Lastly, the dual rhythms, flow and beat, intermingle to multiply these effects while unity between the musical atmosphere and the delivery of the lyrics creates thematic cohesion.

By examining Mac Miller through this encoding lens, we can denote how Cheesy Mac primarily pursued commercial success through notability. This is most apparent in his insistence upon branding himself with signatures to create an in-group fandom. In terms of wordplay, this iteration relied the most on kenning to portray himself as diligent (working all night like Carson), real (a contrast to Milli Vanilli), and fun (the phrase “in deep water” applied to Phelp’s marijuana scandal). This way, the qualities associated with more notable persons were translated to Miller. For original expressions, he was more concerned with inserting references and exhibiting punning wit. Finally, the use of recognisable samples and focus on songfulness was intended to result in widely popular records. Cheesy Mac similarly practised folk discourse, as the enforcement of surface-level facts, youthful language, and prioritisation of chorus created relatability and participation. Still, his idea of legitimacy was closely related to appearing as an authentic rapper. Correspondingly, he included much signifying and conversed on standard topics like fame, wealth, and partying. Thus, Cheesy Mac appeared relatable without pursuing social relevancy.

On the other hand, Heavy Mac pursued authenticity as a thinking, feeling human being. This is noticeable in the thematisation of identity and role distance. Respectively, he prioritised verses, used simile to disarm himself (“*like* I run this shit”), extended the metaphors into complex conceits (dreaming and waking), and asked existential questions (“what keeps me breathing”). This way, he chased artistic success through respectability. Moreover, this was applied to his musical expression as he used original beats that complimented the flow (the

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<sup>208</sup> Krims 2000: 48.

highs and lows of “Weekend”), had more frequent changeups in flow, and utilised more advanced rhymes and different techniques. The balancing act of rhythms and tempo in “Weekend” similarly highlights a harmonisation of art ideals and commercial principles as he produces meaningful content and songfulness. The utilisation of artist features like Miguel also contributes to the popularity and reach of the track.

Finally, Romantic Mac changed his vocal technique by adding melodicy through intonation and engaging a full emotional scale by configuring his timbre. The experimental meaning potential combined with abstract metaphors (“truth”, “work”, and “the other side”) made “Good News” ripe for interpretation. Moreover, the lack of signifying and abandonment of fixed facts removes pretence and ensures that “authenticity is produced by the text rather than for the text”.<sup>209</sup> This is supported by how the action moves inwards to emphasise the lyrics. His use of figurative language nevertheless remained colloquial and relatable so that listeners could empathise (“spring cleaning”, “dealing cards”, “running out of gas”). Accordingly, this iteration of Miller also situates itself in art and folk discourse, but is this time pursuing idealisation and sincerity.

#### *4.1.2 Decoding*

After the musical expression and persona have been encoded, it is up to the audience to decode the performance. This highlights that the resulting persona is ultimately “a product of the performance and not the cause of it”.<sup>210</sup> In terms of interpreting the musical expression, we return to Eckstein’s cognitive, social, and physical aspects. Cognitively, the audience intuitively grasps the record’s formal elements. Knowledge of language becomes essential, not only in recognising individual words, but in interpreting wordplay and figurative language, and comprehending them as they arrive consecutively. Similarly, the potential meaning of the performer’s non-verbal qualities is instinctively construed through the individual listener’s understanding of their own voice.<sup>211</sup> This represents an instance of noise – an element separate from the encoding that may influence the decoding – as the resulting impression of the performer’s emotions and attitude could vary based on the listener’s

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<sup>209</sup> Haarder 2014: 264.

<sup>210</sup> Goffman 1959: 252.

<sup>211</sup> Since Mac Miller has existed since 2009, an analytical examination of his albums and the other personae’s appearances will provide enough familiarity with McCormick’s voice to compare the parameters of his voice to itself, rather than one’s own. Ihde, 2007: 185–186.

background or current mood and context.<sup>212</sup> This is particularly relevant in the case of digital recordings where there exists a mutual absence of live performer and live audience – which is essential for “Good News”. Here, Miller’s use of metaphors tolerates multiple interpretations and remains somewhat vague, allowing the audience to insert a subjective understanding based on individual inclinations. Furthermore, the decoding of the persona is cognitively tied to biographic irreversibility. Once more, the listener is predisposed to consider their biographic knowledge of the artist when undertaking their work. As such, McCormick’s addiction, mental health issues, breakdown, and break-ups are naturally inferred in Miller’s discography through his use of metaphors, references, and non-verbal qualities. This occurs even when it is explicitly stated as not being relevant. For instance, McCormick comments: “it’s crazy to me that people are like [*The Divine Feminine*] is about [Ariana Grande] [...] how quickly do you think I can make an album?”.<sup>213</sup>

Socially, the listener may anticipate the musical style, structure, and rhythm from the first seconds of the record. This can happen even when the listener has never heard the song before, which is evident in “Knock Knock”. Here, Miller includes a prelude to the beat, promises pleasure in the introduction, and then engages a communal chorus within the first 20 seconds – setting the tone for the rest of the performance. These expectations are often set by the audience’s familiarity with the genre, which instils certain expectations to how Miller could and should conduct himself. For instance, a party rapper should be optimistic, lyrically celebratory, and musically pleasant – which Cheesy Mac is. Seeing as he fits the commonalities of the genre, he attests to the expectations of his musical expression. In turn, Cheesy Mac is successfully made authentic to that style.<sup>214</sup> The audience’s previous experiences with the artist enhance these social expectations and increase the performer’s notability should they sustain compelling performances. This can also cultivate noise if the performer fails to meet expectations, either through an inadequate expression or by intentionally changing styles. This is evident in Heavy Mac’s early attempt at reality rap that conflicted with the existing impression of Cheesy Mac. While the audience was not prevented from decoding the new musical expression, this foundation had manifested prejudice against

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<sup>212</sup> Note that this is more so the case with a single hearing, as the potential meaning is narrowed down in the conscious and continual observation of multiple performances. van Leeuwen 1999: 10.

<sup>213</sup> Michael O’Connor 2021: 01:12:40–01:13:00. *The Divine Feminine* was released 16. September 2016, their relationship was confirmed the same month on Grande’s Instagram. “Cinderella” is the only track from *The Divine Feminine* that refers to Miller’s then partner. Grande confirmed this in a tweet. She is also featured on “My Favorite Part”, so we can assume that it is about her. Puckett, 2018.

<sup>214</sup> Krims 2000: 91–92.

it. Therefore, the management of impressions is beneficial to prevent misrepresentation. This is evident in McCormick's isolation of the secondary personae Larry Lovestein, Larry Fisherman, and Delusional Thomas. Additionally, the choice of genre became a part of the performance, as McCormick assumed a style to adapt Mac Miller's expression based on the staples of the specific genre and the audience's assumptions towards it.<sup>215</sup>

Physically, the dual-rhythmic relationship in the musical expression is integral to deciding the audience's response. In "Good News", the light and ambient beat provides clarity to the voice and thus emphasises lyrical content. In turn, the audience is enticed to partake in active listening. By utilising the bohemian rap genre that anticipates valuable deconstruction of the lyrics, Miller is offering the semantics higher priority and increasing the likelihood of this response. In contrast, the dual-rhythmic relationship in "Weekend" proposes contradicting responses. The placid beat and staccato delivery in the verses requires deliberation, yet the build-up of the musical accompaniment and increasing melodicity of the flow rouses dance. This songfulness can create noise as its pleasure has the potential of making the listener devalue both lyrical content and persona. However, rather than cancelling another out, this dual-purpose creates different responses that allow multiple ways of enjoying the musical performance. Furthermore, the physical response becomes imperative to establishing the connection between performer and audience. For "Weekend", if Miller convinces the audience to dance while at the same time providing symbolic lyrics, he is convincing them that he is enjoyable *and* respectable. Similarly, he appears friendly and lighthearted when he includes the audience in the lyrics and invites them to join in on the chorus of "Knock Knock". On "Good News", he is then attributed as introspective and honest in his address to the listening "you".

#### *4.1.3 Feedback*

From the suggested model, we can tell how the musical expression and the presentation of self occur simultaneously, and, more importantly, how these performances affect the decoding of one another. The resulting impressions can be examined in the response of the general audience and the reviewers, with earlier experiences and impressions of the artist being used as a foundation. Over time, one should then be able to narrow down the persona's characteristics by considering these aspects in multiple performances over several years.

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<sup>215</sup> Krims 2000: 91–92.



Moreover, through autoreception, the performer gathers the response as feedback and uses it to evaluate their previous performance. This way, the audience's impression of the performance influences future executions, and thus a feedback loop is formed. Here, the persona's characteristics are not only honed but are also configured in a dialogue between performer and audience.

For Mac Miller, the most significant instance of feedback arrived with the reviews of *Blue Slide Park* and *Macadelic*. Notably, the Pitchfork review of *Blue Slide Park* focused more on Miller's bland persona than it did the otherwise unremarkable "no-stakes" album. On *Macadelic*, Miller then took a risk and attempted a brand-new genre and persona. Later, Fantano's issue with *Macadelic* encompassed the poor delivery of the lyrical content that resulted in Miller appearing "delusional".<sup>216</sup> Since then, McCormick experimented with different styles of personae and musical expressions to stabilise his image. This progression shows how feedback loops establish a discussion between performer and audience of what the persona could and should be. As the reviews of *GO:OD AM* were affirmative and pleased with the outcome of both musical expression and persona, McCormick's idea of Miller and the audience's impression of the persona was finally coalescing.

As the reviews became supportive, the feedback appeared to be less substantial. One explanation is that the critics no longer requested adjustments from Miller. Moreover, McCormick himself seemed more at peace with his persona. The three "Go Fish!" tracks (2016) heralded the last appearance of Larry Fisherman or any other secondary personae. Presumably, this is due to McCormick's musical, lyrical, and vocal skill at this point being refined enough to support modification of Miller's self-presentation. Additionally, "Dang!", the single from *The Divine Feminine* (2016), marked the last time McCormick annotated his tracks on Genius's website or clarified his tracks in interviews. This suggests that he no longer deemed it necessary to explain his artistry or prove his worth. Romantic Mac was more involved in the production, featured a wider emotional range, carried an optimistic demeanour, and altered his musical expression to be bohemian. Yet, these alterations appeared to derive from internal motivation rather than external compulsion. The feedback loop continues, but it relies more on McCormick. This is reflected in McCormick stating his personal aim for Mac Miller: "being able to touch and affect people in a positive way. Have

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<sup>216</sup> Dead End Hip Hop 2012: 08:50, 16:18.

music that lasts for a long time, have a long career. Just being able to be influential in a positive way”.<sup>217</sup> Here, he seized control of Miller’s artistic ideal from the audience, and on “Good News”, he exemplified his new direction honestly and intricately. In any case, McCormick multiplied his influence over the presentation of Miller throughout his discography and leveraged his progression of artistry to progress his persona.

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<sup>217</sup> Larry King, 2017: 05:38–05:57.

## 5. Finale

### 5.1 The Ghost of Mac

As of September 7, 2018, the feedback loop dissolved. Yet, the presence of a Mac Miller continued after Malcolm McCormick's death and created a ghost. Of course, there is nothing supernatural about Miller's posthumous releases. *Circles* (2020) was fully realised alongside *Swimming* (2018) from 2016 to 2018.<sup>218</sup> Moreover, the late official release of *Faces* (2014) in 2021 can likely be understood as an attempt by Warner Records Inc. at keeping Mac Miller relevant by promoting old and unheard music.<sup>219</sup> What Haarder then means by ghost is the spirit of remembrance that lingers in the public where it mutates and haunts its creator.<sup>220</sup> In contrast to Mac Miller, the ghost of the persona is more idealised than authentic. But this idealisation is not on behalf of the artist but of the audience. The end to autoreception, of feedback loops, creates a mutual absence where the musical performances are interpreted more through the listeners rather than the performer.<sup>221</sup> In the shadow of McCormick, the ghost of Mac begins to mutate. This process is assisted through Romantic Mac's abstract language and negligence of facts, making it easier for the audience to insert themselves as the "I" of the performance. In effect, each listener sustains a subjective and unconscious association with Miller's lyrics, and in turn, the persona itself. When McCormick opposed the general impression of his persona as "cheesy", he rewrote it. Romantic Mac, however, is endlessly rewritable by the hand of the audience. Therefore, I call him Romantic Mac, not only due to the topics of love, self-love, and self-improvement but due to the indefinite romanticism Miller now is subjected to.

Haarder illuminates that:

Any individual author is to some degree master of their own impression, as it is primarily formed by the author's texts. [...] On the other hand, no author is the sole author of their impression. Partly, the impression of the author is public and so, in principle, all are co-authors [...].<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> Mac Miller (Making of *Swimming & Circles*), 2020b.

<sup>219</sup> This endeavour is furthermore seen in the physical rerelease of *K.I.D.S* (2010) on cassette in 2020 which contained two previously unreleased bonus tracks. Similarly, *Macadelic* (2012) was rereleased on vinyl in March 2022.

<sup>220</sup> Haarder 2014: 145.

<sup>221</sup> Ihde, 2007: 185–186

<sup>222</sup> Haarder, 2014: 30.

This suggests that the remaining impression of Miller idles in the hands of his fans and critics. This is apparent in some of the various posthumous songs that feature Miller. Notably, McCormick had recorded his performance on Yung Thug's track "Day Before" the day before he died.<sup>223</sup> In Miller's verse, he first delivers some metaphors on sleeping, swimming, and mental health<sup>224</sup> in harmony with Romantic Mac. But then, he turns to dully speak on wealth, lust, and realness like Cheesy Mac had done. Miller neither helped write nor produce the track, meaning that his presentation was mainly decided by Yung Thug and the external producers. Although the absence of McCormick does not encourage co-authors to control Miller, the lack of dialogue and the want of a "continuing personal identity" means that his image can no longer be moderated. Even if the presentation of Miller on "Day Before" would be representative of an intended fourth iteration of the persona, the frame of the discography and the image of Romantic Mac have already been committed. Hence, the inadequacy of McCormick's involvement makes for an erroneous performance that is prevented from contradicting Miller's reputation.<sup>225</sup> The end of McCormick's musical expression led to the discontinuation of the progression of Miller. What we are left with now are merely inconsistent glimmers of a ghost.

## 5.2 Conclusion

My objective has been to elucidate the discography's moment to show a correlation between musical expression and the presentation of self in the musical performance. Goffman's study on dramaturgy tells how individuals perform a persona (role) and assert facts about themselves in the process of dramatic realisation. By idealising oneself, one acquires notability and admiration which are beneficial to establishing a positive impression of the persona. Through the concept of performative biographism, Haarder connects the presentation of self to literature. Here biographical facts about the author are inevitably interpreted in their work due to biographic irreversibility. Besides, the use of real persons and events motions a threshold between fact and fiction that incorporates aesthetic and social capital in the literature and creates realism and social relevancy. However, the values one asserts must not stray too far from reality as role distance can result in misrepresentation, which harms the reputation. Hence, idealisation requires that the performer achieves meritorious or moral

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<sup>223</sup> Gallagher 2021.

<sup>224</sup> 00:52–00:58.

<sup>225</sup> Lemert & Branaman 1997: lxxv.

growth to appear authentic. Bradley, Novak, and Krims situate the process of dramatic realisation in the writing, producing, and delivery of rap music. Here, the lyrics provide a basis for meaning and symbolic authenticity, which is framed in the vocal delivery and sustained in the atmosphere of the musical accompaniment. As such, the performance of a persona takes place simultaneous with the musical expression during the musical performance, and the impression of one acquiesces per the other.

All these facts and idealisations rely on the audience's interpretation of the record and impression of the persona. Therefore, the audience are co-authors, as how others comprehend the persona is more significant than how the performer experiences it subjectively. The performer's autoreception signals a feedback loop as they – via the audience's response – attempt to reconcile the configuration of the persona. Frith and Eckstein emphasise this development as a communicative process where the performer can shape their artistry to implement cognitive and social signs in their musical expression to stimulate specific responses from the audience. Here, genres, which style the writing, production, and delivery, are crucial to denoting desirable expectations of what constitutes authenticity in the musical performance. In this communicative process, the persona is framed in how well the performer realises its intended qualities and to which extent the audience acknowledges them. One part objective and one part subjective. One part creator and one part audience. Consequently, the performer's artistic skill and the musical aptness is vital to how effectively the persona is presented

Malcolm McCormick's performances as Mac Miller demonstrated how these two elements interact. In "Knock Knock", Miller's presence was diminished due to dull signifying, low emotional range, and unremarkable rhymes. However, his use of a catchy sample, repetitive choruses, and focus on songfulness made the track pleasurable irrespective of his persona. Here, Miller essentially sacrificed his persona to ensure a songful and enjoyable record. Then, on "Weekend", songfulness altered between the verses and the chorus to support a dual-purpose. Here, Miller established a thoughtful, morose persona during the verses while the choruses maintained the same excited, songful, and collective properties as "Knock Knock". This way, the beat was utilised to colour the persona rather than excuse it, as the tempo and rhythm reflected the ups and downs of Miller's mental state. For "Good News", Miller

switched vocal techniques between rapping and singing to support a full vocal range.<sup>226</sup> Befittingly, the soft beat became an atmospheric backdrop to the narrative. Moreover, despite the complete lack of biographic facts, his use of metaphors and non-vocal qualities offered a strong impression of who, or more purposely *how*, Miller was.

It appears that McCormick used his personae to explore his own identity. As such, each performance became a documentation of his findings as each track provides insight into a different stage of his musical career.<sup>227</sup> These stages display deliberate changes in style and improvements in expressive skill, which, in turn, cultivated critical acclaim for both the musical expression and the persona. As McCormick developed and became a more significant part of the musical expression, he also seemed to have an easier time managing his impression. This is especially evident in his use of secondary personae between *Blue Slide Park* (2011) and *The Divine Feminine* (2016). After Heavy Mac's unsuccessful debut on *Macadelic*, new, separate personae were employed to facilitate stylistic growth without hampering McCormick's central artistic identity. The secondary personae were then incorporated into Mac Miller when their maximum utility was achieved and when McCormick could ensure that their function would productively supplement his performances. Thus, the progression between these tracks elucidates the discography's moment, as the progression of Miller is perceptibly related to McCormick's progression in artistry. This influenced the success of his records. For instance, audiences were initially drawn to "Knock Knock" and "Weekend" due to the notability of other artists – in this case, Linda Scott's catchy rhythms and Miguel's renown and melodicism. However, as Miller accrued artistic prowess, his records became notable in and of themselves. As such, the dual-purpose and capacity of "Weekend" ensured that it retained continued popularity. Similarly, "The Spins", "Donald Trump", "Self Care", and "Good News" were all impacted by external factors. However, as Miller became more lyrically coherent, vocally expressive, and idealised, McCormick was made more prominent. This biographic link between performer and persona through the discography then lead to McCormick himself becoming the predominant factor for his music's regard.

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<sup>226</sup> Emotional range is not necessarily restricted in rap, however, Miller has a tendency of increasing his range when he sings. This is in part due to the informal, untrained quality of his singing enriching his expression as compared to his smooth, yet often monotone, rapping.

<sup>227</sup> Haarder 2014: 135.

McCormick's developments can be viewed in the context of a new music discourse online. For instance, McCormick's celebrity is, to some extent, attributed to the dominance of journalistic media, which rendered McCormick's biographic information accessible. Similarly, the prevalence of reviews and responses boosted the pressure on McCormick to manage his impression. Still, the surge of open music distribution platforms made it easier for McCormick to act out his alternate personae and styles without compromising Miller. This provided him with the experience and expectations necessary to stabilise his image. How McCormick chose to inscribe Mac Miller with facts also reflects his rise as an internet phenomenon. Initially, Miller had stalwartly enforced biographic information in his lyrics to be more relatable to the local youth. Yet his notability eventually outgrew Pittsburgh and became international. By removing geography, age, sex, sexuality, and ethnicity from his lyrics, he appealed to a broader audience by not limiting their self-insertion. Similarly, his presentation on the mental health issues related to his addiction, rather than the substance abuse itself, made for content more topical worldwide. This affected both the living relevancy of McCormick and the final impression of Miller.

Barring intense posthumous release of unissued material, the death of McCormick sealed the discography and ceased the performance of Miller. This meant an end to his artistic progression and the progression of Miller. Yet, while alive, McCormick "crystallized his soul into an idea" that was characterised by *Swimming and Circles*' earnest and heartfelt style – Romantic Mac.<sup>228</sup> While the looping of feedback was suspended, the feedback continues to feed into itself. Miller cannot progress, but the idea of who he was continues to morph as boundless co-authors spur ever so slight notions of whom he could, would, and should have been. Now, this thesis too has become part of the zeitgeist. In my analyses, I ascribe Mac Miller with qualities that I perceive about him, aware that I am affected by my own impression of who Malcolm McCormick might have been. Yet, I am unable to elude this process.<sup>229</sup> Should you later come to think about Miller and McCormick, you may recall my study, mutate on my impression, and create further ghosts of them. So, while I claim that Mac Miller has forgotten to die, as he was "supposed to", I cannot blame him. The discourse disallows him his release, for he will never truly be dead until the impression of him escapes our collective memory.

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<sup>228</sup> Santayana 1922: 133-134.

<sup>229</sup> Nonetheless, I endeavored an honest effort.

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## Appendices

Core from Genius.com, aligned as seen fit.

### Knock Knock

- [Intro]  
Bum, ba bum  
This is gonna feel real good, a'ight?  
Most Dope  
X Everybody please put a thumb in the air (Hey, hey)
- [Chorus]  
One, two, three, four  
Some crazy-ass kids gonna knock up on your door, so  
Let 'em in, let 'em in, let 'em in (Hey)  
One, two, three, four  
5 Some crazy-ass kids gonna knock up on your door, so  
Let 'em in, let 'em in, let 'em in (Hey)
- [Verse 1]  
I feel like a million bucks  
But my money don't really feel like I do  
And from the ground, I built my own damn buzz  
10 People was amazed I was still in high school  
But now I'm out, and money what I'm 'bout  
Tryna get so much that I can't keep count  
New kicks give me cushion like whoopie  
Keep a smile like an Eat'n Park cookie  
15 Everything good, I'm white boy awesome  
Up all night, Johnny Carson  
I ain't got a Benz, no, just a Honda  
But tryna get my money like an Anaconda  
Real, real long, cross the country  
20 Smoke joints in the whip, no cop can bust me  
Drive into the stage, they applaud and scream  
All them pretty little girls come and flock with me  
Yeah, I rock the beat
- [Chorus]  
One, two, three, four  
25 Some crazy-ass kids gonna knock up on your door, so  
Let 'em in, let 'em in, let 'em in (Hey)  
One, two, three, four  
Some crazy-ass kids gonna knock up on your door, so  
Let 'em in, let 'em in, let 'em in (Hey)
- [Verse 2]  
30 And I like my rhymes witty, all my dimes pretty  
If you got weed, you can come fly with me  
I don't take pity on them silly little hoes  
Milli Vanilli but this is really how it goes

35 Mouth my words, don't say shit  
Shh, shut up, bitch, and ride this dick  
I'm just playing, let's have a ball  
All we need is some weed, hoes and alcohol, hey  
Don't forget it when I'm wreckin' the etiquette for the hell of it  
Smellin' it when the L is lit, I'm flyer than a pelican  
40 Young fresh, but I'm so damn intelligent  
Girls givin' brains 'cause I'm acting like a gentleman  
In deeper than the water Michael Phelps was in  
Finna have a party, baby, you can tell your friends  
We the type, lookin' right, still settin' trends  
45 Fuck a job, I'ma get these dead presidents

[Chorus]

One, two, three, four  
Some crazy-ass kids gonna knock up on your door, so  
Let 'em in, let 'em in, let 'em in (Hey)  
One, two, three, four  
50 Some crazy-ass kids gonna knock up on your door, so  
Let 'em in, let 'em in, let 'em in (Hey)

[Bridge]

Not a day, goes by when I ain't gettin' high  
They wonder why don't I go get myself a job  
So I can make, them bucks, but I don't give a fuck  
55 No, I feel great  
Bitch, I feel great

[Chorus]

One, two, three, four  
Some crazy-ass kids gonna knock up on your door, so  
Let 'em in, let 'em in, let 'em in (Hey)  
60 One, two, three, four  
Some crazy-ass kids gonna knock up on your door, so  
Let 'em in, let 'em in, let 'em in (Hey)

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## Weekend

[Intro: Mac Miller]

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah

Uh, uh, (Uh, uh)

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah

X Yo, now

[Verse 1: Mac Miller]

I got a little bit of money fillin' my pockets, roll around like I run this shit

I got a system filled up with toxins, I've been broken-hearted, now it's fuck that bitch

Getting high to deal with my problems, fucking bitches, getting drunk as shit

But these bitches getting obnoxious, they nuttin' to me though, I love this shit

5 Go long days, longer nights, talk too much, the wrong advice, all the lights

And call my life, doctor, doctor, will you help me? Get me healthy, keep it low, this where hell be

Ain't shit you can tell me now, fuck this rap shit, bitch, I'm sellin' out

Ooh shit, with my new bitch, you jealous now, smokin' weed at the crib watching Belly now (Alright)

All the pain that they causin' like, fuck it, we ballin', now everythin' straight

10 You feeling the feeling, I'm chilling, just living, I'm burning away

Conversations we having, I'm getting too static, too much on my plate

Lord, I need me a break

[Chorus: Miguel & Mac Miller]

But I'll be good by the weekend (Alright) (Yeah)

I'll be good by the weekend (Yeah)

15 Everything good by the weekend (Alright) (Yeah)

Everything will be good by the weekend (By the weekend)

[Post-Chorus: Mac Miller]

We going out tonight, yeah, we going out tonight, like fuck it

We going out tonight, yeah, we going out tonight, fuck it

We going out tonight, yeah, we going out tonight (It's a weekend)

20 We going out tonight, yeah, we going out tonight (It's a weekend)

[Verse 2: Mac Miller]

I been having trouble sleeping, battling these demons  
Wondering what's the thing that keeps me breathing: is it money, fame or neither?  
I been thinking about the places that I frequent, all the people that I see  
I'm just out here livin' decent, what do it mean to be a G? Yeah (Alright)  
25 And all the time we fall behind, bitches in the concubine, I call her mine, crazy  
She ain't God as I, I make water wine, pausin' time, it's common, they often hate me  
Never will I walk in line, I cross the T's and dot the I's, wondering, well  
Wonderin' how I got this high, fell asleep and forgot to die, Goddamn  
I'm poppin' them downers and drinkin' them powders, faded  
30 Get it over the counter, I'm stuck on the browser, like, how did I make it?  
These bitches don't know me, this shit is so lonely until she get naked  
Don't even know what the day is

[Chorus: Miguel & Mac Miller]

But I'll be good by the weekend (Alright) (Yeah)  
I'll be good by the weekend (Yeah)  
35 Everything good by the weekend (Alright) (Yeah)  
Everything will be good by the weekend (By the weekend)

[Outro: Miguel]

Mondays I think of you, but I ain't tripping on it  
Tuesdays I'm hittin', gotta get my hands up on ya  
Wednesdays I'm lit wit'chu, you know you're staying over  
40 Thursdays I'm sick of you, I got to get rid of you  
'Cause Fridays are always the start of the time of my life, alright  
When I get faded you hate it, but, baby it's gon' be alright

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"Weekend" [lyrics]. <https://genius.com/Mac-miller-weekend-lyrics>.

## Good News

[Verse 1]

I spent the whole day in my head  
Do a little spring cleanin'  
I'm always too busy dreamin'  
Well, maybe I should wake up instead  
5 A lot of things I regret, but I just say I forget  
Why can't it just be easy?  
Why does everybody need me to stay?  
Oh, I hate the feelin'  
When you're high, but you're underneath the ceilin'  
10 Got the cards in my hand, I hate dealin', yeah  
Get everything I need, then I'm gone, but it ain't stealin'  
Can I get a break?  
I wish that I could just get out my goddamn way  
What is there to say?  
15 There ain't a better time than today  
Well, maybe I'll lay down for a little, yeah  
Instead of always tryin' to figure everything out  
And all I do is say sorry  
Half the time I don't even know what I'm sayin' it about

[Chorus]

20 Good news, good news, good news  
That's all they wanna hear  
No, they don't like it when I'm down  
But when I'm flyin', oh  
It make 'em so uncomfortable  
25 So different, what's the difference?

[Verse 2]

When it ain't that bad  
It could always be worse  
I'm runnin' out of gas, hardly anything left  
Hope I make it home from work  
30 Well, so tired of bein' so tired  
Why I gotta build somethin' beautiful just to go set it on fire?  
I'm no liar, but  
Sometimes the truth don't sound like the truth

Maybe 'cause it ain't  
35 I just love the way it sound when I say it, yeah  
It's what I do  
If you know me, it ain't anything new  
Wake up to the moon, haven't seen the sun in a while  
But I heard that the sky's still blue, yeah  
40 I heard they don't talk about me too much no more  
And that's the problem with a closed door

[Chorus]  
Good news, good news, good news  
That's all they wanna hear  
No, they don't like it when I'm down  
45 But when I'm flyin', oh  
It make 'em so uncomfortable  
So different, what's the difference?

[Verse 3]  
There's a whole lot more for me waitin' on the other side  
I'm always wonderin' if it feel like summer  
50 I know maybe I'm too late, I could make it there some other time  
I'll finally discover  
That there's a whole lot more for me waitin'  
That there's a whole lot more for me waitin'  
I know maybe I'm too late, I could make it there some other time  
55 Then I'll finally discover  
That it ain't that bad, ain't so bad  
Well, it ain't that bad, mm  
At least it don't gotta be no more

[Outro]  
No more, no more, no more, no more  
60 No more, no more, no more, no more  
Hey, hey  
Mm, hey, mm, mm, mm