

WE NEED FOOD:

Structures of Intensification and Clarification in MF DOOM's "Beef Rapp"



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“1) He doesn't try to be anyone but himself unapologetically. He references times in his life which were hard, fun, sad, annoying, confusing, and everything in between. His subject matter is not meant to appeal to anyone, he literally makes music that is close to his soul and his being. If you like it, cool, if you don't, he ain't gonna bat an eye, just keep being himself.

2) DOOM manages to mix an impressive mixture of humor and realism into his raps. With his witty way of describing events and thoughts in the form of stories and metaphors, he manages to take simple ideas and make them complex, deeper than the surface, unique, flavorful, cultural, incisive, and all while rhyming with complex and yet symmetrical rhyme schemes that are actual poetry organized into bars and stanzas, not just words or verses.

3) He is a realist. He accepts his flaws, his thoughts, his actions and their consequences, and then paints a picture using his experiences as inspiration in order to create a picture that shows you how to avoid the pitfalls he has made and seen others make. On top of this, he blatantly observes and speaks about the twisted way that this world is, in full realization that both the industry and the world as a whole is a guise, something trying to defeat him and his soul, but does not give in. He clearly displays his alcoholic and substance use tendencies in his music and seems to relate them in many cases to the inner pain he feels towards the world around him and himself. And yet, he does not bring this out aggressively or in a negative way, but as a source of inspiration for his beautiful music.

4) DOOM's music is unique. [...]mpressively so. To the point where his lines are so creative and yet not used by many rappers out of a combination of respect and lack of knowledge of his existence. While real lyricists and MC's only ever reference his work with the utmost praise (such as Mos Def and Nas).

5) DOOM speaks more about his own experiences and less about the place he comes from. While this is a very simple concept, I think it separates him from many modern MC's. He separates himself from the world around him and seems to have the deep realization that his words, views, thoughts and even experiences are only for him to see. This fuels his uniqueness and passion. It also impressively does not result in the growth or inflation of his ego[...]. Rather, it seems to make DOOM look down on himself harder than anyone else. You can hear it in his tone and voice if you listen very closely. He clearly deals with an eternal sadness, even if at a low level, DOOM suffers depression, and yet uses it so beautifully.

6) He doesn't push records often, but when he does they are always timeless and beautiful. They bring just about nothing of what you have heard before because of his complete lack of care for appeal to anyone and his extreme respect for the art and expression of self.

7) The mask. DOOM's mask is a symbol. In a world where many rappers seek eternal fame, money,[...]and everything else evil in this world, MF covers his face. He does not want to be seen and even references his ugliness in many of his songs. He doesn't care about the appeal, he doesn't care about glory, he just is. His mask not only establishes this, but it also represents his main social and political ideals that clearly state we are all slaves and trapped and controlled, even if it does not seem that way. “

-YouTube user “Kyle Broussard”

Comment on “MF DOOM - Rhymes Like Dimes [HD]”

2018

INTRODUCTION

MF DOOM is the pseudonym of British-American rapper-producer Daniel Dumile. Dumile was born in 1971, and began a rapping career in the late 80's with the group KMD (Kausing Much Damage), under the pseudonym Zev Love X. KMD released one album, *Mr. Hood*, in 1991, and recorded another, *Bl_ck B_st_rds*, in 1993. Unfortunately, in that year, KMD's arc abruptly ended with the untimely death of 19-year-old group member DJ Subroc. Subroc, originally known as Dingilizwe Dumile, was Daniel's brother. Despite the loss of his brother, Zev Love X soldiered on with the production work on *Bl_ck B_st_rds*, completing the album by himself. Unexpectedly, Elektra Records cancelled the release of *Bl_ck B_st_rds* (which was finally released only in 2001)¹.

The loss of his brother, and the dissolution of KMD and cancellation of *Bl_ck B_st_rds*, sent Daniel Dumile into a period of hardship, during which he stopped performing altogether². Sometime in 1997 or 98, Dumile began appearing again at open mic's in Manhattan, incognito, with pantyhose over his face. These initial experiments in anonymous performance would give birth to the figure and approach of MF DOOM. The character of the supervillainous masked MC, MetalFace DOOM, was first introduced by a guest appearance on another artist's mixtape, and then a few singles released by Fondle 'Em Records, but was properly "unveiled" and fleshed-out only with the release of *Operation: Doomsday*, a full-length LP, in 1999³. *Operation: Doomsday*

¹ The saga of *Bl_ck B_st_rds* is authoritatively recounted in Brian Coleman's exhaustive article "Check The Technique: KMD's 'Black Bastards' and the birth of MF Doom." Cuepoint, Medium.com, Published Jan 30, 2015, <https://medium.com/cuepoint/check-the-technique-kmds-black-bastards-and-the-birth-of-mf-doom-1849f4c0a6f4>

² According to Hua Hsu's article "The Mask of Sorrow," Dumile was "damn near homeless, walking the streets of Manhattan, sleeping on benches," for at least part of the period 1994-97. *The Wire*, March 2005, pp. 44-49.

³ *Operation: Doomsday's* original 1999 release credits MF.DOOM as its producer and Daniel Dumile as an executive producer. Going forward, all DOOM projects would give the artist's name as DOOM, MF DOOM, or some variation thereof, including for producer and executive producer credits. Even the 2001 & 2008 re-releases of *Operation: Doomsday* have expunged the Daniel Dumile moniker from the credits, and list the executive producer as MF.DOOM. Accordingly, throughout this paper I will refer to the creator of "Beef Rapp" as MF DOOM (styled, according to DOOM's wishes, in all caps: "just remember ALL CAPS when you spell the man name," from "All Caps" on the album *Madvillainy*). It seems to be the common practice in academic papers to name rap artists by their legal names. However, I believe that it

set up the MF DOOM character as a masked villain, in opposition to the prevailing rap ethos of his time, and includes the track “Doomsday” which can be understood as a postmortem for the persona of Daniel Dumile. From that time forward, DOOM guarded his privacy and anonymity, made all public appearances wearing his trademark mask, and refused to make his personal life the identifiable subject of his lyrics. The record also unveiled DOOM’s trademark lyrical style: differing from the more literal narrative style and more stylized rhythmic text-setting of Zev Love X, DOOM raps in “quick half-sentences that grab the mind’s eye before dissipating into the air; vapour hanging light over the beat,”⁴ and packs his lines with even more complex internal rhymes.

Although in the years after *Operation: Doomsday* he released several albums, until 2004, all of them were either under other pseudonyms, or in collaboration with other artists (including the album many would consider his magnum opus, *Madvillainy*, a co-production with DJ/producer MadLib⁵). The next solo release as MF DOOM would only arrive five years after *Operation: Doomsday*, with the 2004 release of *MM..FOOD*. *MM..FOOD* comprises 15 tracks; all but three are self-produced, and all featuring DOOM as emcee. A loose theme of food and eating holds the album together. The opening track is the 4:40 “Beef Rapp.”

OVERALL STRUCTURE OF “BEEF RAPP”

The first sound on “Beef Rapp” is not a note, chord, beat or any other musical sound. Instead it is a dialogue between three male-voiced characters, discussing how hungry they are and the need of one of them to go “munch up a little something”⁶. The sound-quality of the dialogue immediately strikes the ear with the frequency-loss and compression typical of a VHS

constitutes erasure of DOOM’s painstaking persona-creation, which is a critical aspect of his artistry, to refer to him in these contexts (as does e.g. Adams in his “On the Metrical Techniques of Flow in Rap Music”) as Daniel Dumile, a persona DOOM went to great lengths to subsume and keep hidden.

⁴ Adam Davidson, “In Memoriam: MF DOOM, The Closest Companion I Never Met,” Atwood Magazine, February 18, 2021, <https://atwoodmagazine.com/mfdm-mf-doom-tribute-2021/>

⁵ Otis Jackson, Jr. (b. 1973). On the subject of *Madvillainy* as DOOM’s magnum opus, see the Davidson article just cited, or Dylan Green, “Every MF DOOM Album, Ranked,” DJBOOTH, Maven, January 9, 2019, <https://djbooth.net/features/2017-11-29-mf-doom-albums-ranked>

⁶ This sample comes from the 1982 hip-hop film *Wild Style*, directed by Charlie Ahearn. The sourcing of DOOM’s samples is indebted to whosampled.com. This sample was identified by contributor “tato718.”

tape. This sets the stage for the entire first section: the first minute and forty-five seconds of the track is an audio collage, consisting of a series of sampled “skits” from various movies, TV shows and other media⁷. Starting at 0’18”, underneath the ongoing assemblage of verbal skit-samples, DOOM introduces a backing beat. This backing beat consists of an orchestral sample drawn from Johnny Douglas’ score to the *Spider-Man* episode “Cannon of Doom,”⁸ and a “creeping” drum beat produced by DOOM himself. The orchestral sample is based on this bassline, heard either on an organ or in low strings:



This bassline repeats eight times, with increasingly dissonant parallel harmonies being stacked above. The second voice creates a parallel tritone (an interval which will prove to be structurally significant). This series of repeats sounds exactly as it does on the original “Cannon of Doom” soundtrack, in which it also repeats eight times before proceeding to the “crashing chords” heard next.

At approximately 1’11”, this backbeat “dissolves” into the crashing chords: from this point, both dialogue sample and music are coming from the same source, i.e., the audio of

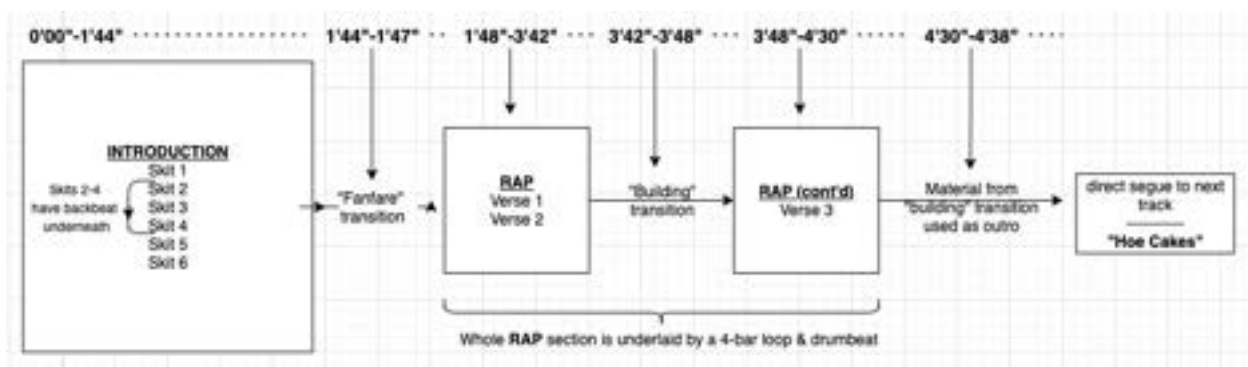
⁷ The “hip-hop skit” is a well-established form in rap albums, ever since De La Soul’s *3 Feet High and Rising* (1989). A brief, though opinionated, discussion of skits’ use over time can be found in Evan Rytlewski, “Phasing out the skit: How hip-hop outgrew one of its most frustrating traditions,” AV Club, G/O Media, Inc., February 17, 2012, <https://music.avclub.com/phasing-out-the-skit-how-hip-hop-outgrew-one-of-its-mo-1798229914>. However, the general approach was for rap groups to write and perform/record their own skits. The audio-collage technique of lifting extended dialogues from pre-existing media is a less-common approach to the concept. Although a history of the sample-skit is not within the scope of this research, the author suspects that the volume & complexity, as well as the allusive richness, of DOOM’s audio-collages (particularly this one beginning “Beef Rapp”) situate him as an outlier-innovator in this form.

⁸ “Cannon of Doom” first aired January 2, 1982, and was part of the 1981-82 series of *Spider-Man*, produced by Marvel Productions & Toei Animation, and distributed by New World Television. The composer is generally known professionally as Johnny Douglas, although in the credits of this series he is credited as John Douglas. The antagonist of this episode, Dr. Doom, was a primary inspiration for the villainous MF DOOM persona. The source of these samples was identified by whosampled.com contributor “goukidraven.”

“Canon of Doom.” During the opening orchestral chords of this dialogue, the drums drop their previous 4/4 tempo and temporarily track in unison with Johnny Greenwood’s orchestral chords from the opening of this scene (six snare hits with six chords). The drums then drop away entirely, and from here until the beginning of the rap section, the only musical content is the backing track to this scene, as it originally sounded in the cartoon itself (a wind chorale texture of planing major harmonies). This scene, with a few notable edits (discussed in footnote 10), is allowed to play for 35 seconds, until at 1’46”, a two-note “bass fanfare” (E - B \flat , another prominent tritone) and a series of five snare-hits in a 16th-note rhythm heralds the beginning of the rap section.

The rap section is underlaid by a backing loop, consisting of four bars of 4/4 time. The melodic material of the loop is further orchestral material from Johnny Greenwood’s “Canon of Doom” score. In addition, there are an MF DOOM-generated drum loop and bass part. Aside from a two-bar interlude after verse two, this four-bar loop repeats constantly (although with slight alterations and variations) through the whole rap.

The basic structure of the entire track is shown here:



The loop under the verses is notated here:

The image shows a musical score for a loop, divided into two systems. The first system includes four staves: Trumpets & Strings, Flute & Xylophone, Drums, and Bass. The tempo is marked as 'e.g. 138' and '♩ = 92'. The Drums staff includes notation for 'Closed H.H.', 'Open H.H.', 'B.D.', and 'Snare'. The second system includes four staves: Tpt./St., Fl. & X., D., and B. The notation is in 4/4 time and features a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes.

The upper two voices are actually sounding roughly a quartertone higher than written here. There is a resulting harmonic ambiguity, regarding whether the upper voices (drawn from the Douglas sample) are in the same key as DOOM's bass-line (which implies E \flat minor or E \flat phrygian). The author has notated the bitonal situation in this transcription because the dissonance is noteworthy and contributes to the mood of the loop. If understood as a tritone relationship (A to E \flat), this "structural tritone" may be considered an echo of the parallel-tritone planed harmonies that were heard at 0'29".

In keeping with DOOM's usual style, this rap features no "hooks" or choruses: the remaining two minutes and fifty-two seconds of the track are essentially a non-stop flow from DOOM. The structural recurrence of a short sample, "Food! We need food!," from "Cannon of Doom," divides the flow into three verses, although these verses are of irregular length: 16 bars in verse one, 27 bars in verse two, and 16 bars again in verse three. A two-bar "building

gesture” taken from Douglas’ score (but modified by DOOM) separates verse two from verse three. In keeping with the structural prominence of tritones, this building gesture is simply an upward stacking of the tritone A (with a B ♭ appoggiatura) - E ♭ through three octaves.

After the end of verse three, the last 2 bars of the loop are repeated, with an extra piano D-major jazz harmony added to the final bar, after which the building gesture recurs and finally dissolves into another short dialogue sample from the same cartoon episode, (“Wait! Bring him to me!”), at which point the track immediately segues into the second track on the album (“Hoe Cakes”).

ANALYSIS OF BEEF RAPP: STRUCTURES AND EFFECTS

A Two-Part Form

The first question confronting the analyst is, in what way are the two large sections of *Beef Rapp* connected? First, there is a thematic connection. Two primary verbal themes are present, a theme of food, and a theme of monsters/villains, which are implicit or explicit throughout Skits 1-6⁹, and which form the main imagery of DOOM’s flow as well. The handling of these themes contributes to a large-scale structure of clarification and intensification throughout the track, to be discussed later. The Introduction, while it does have structuring elements, primarily has the character of a rhapsodic exploration of these two themes; this is true of both the sound-world, in which events “pop in” from nowhere and interpenetrate each other,

⁹ Numbering of these skits is taken from <https://genius.com/Mf-doom-beef-rapp-lyrics>. The skits are as follows:

Skit 1: 0’00”-0’18”, from *Wild Style* (1982);

Skit 2: 0’18”-0’34”, mainly from *Bowery at Midnight* (1942 - ID’d by whosampled.com contributor “mideastNYC”), but with interjections from *The Early Bird Dood It!* (1942 - “Bread and butter!,” ID’d by genius.com contributor “MobarakBS2003”), and *Godzilla vs. King Ghidorah* (1991 - “Ah! Food at last!,” ID’d by genius.com contributor “100000Doorknobs”);

Skit 3: 0’35”-0’48”, mainly from *Logan’s Run* (1976, ID’d by whosampled.com contributor “robotrebelx”), with interjections from unknown sources;

Skit 4: 0’48”-1’02”, mostly unknown, but featuring a repeat of the *The Early Bird Dood It!* sample from Skit 2; “-I’ll save you! -Thank you!” from the 1974 episode “Sticky Finances” from *The Adventures of Letterman*; and “Would you like a snack?” from the 1971 Frank Zappa album *200 Motels*;

Skit 5: 1’08”-1’13”, from “Cannon of Doom”;

Skit 6: 1’13”-1’44”, from “Cannon of Doom.”

and the actual verbal content, which is loosely connected and seems to make no clear linear story.

An unstructured, rhapsodic introduction preceding a more structured section is a widespread global form, and in this sense, “Beef Rapp” is homologous to (just to name two examples) the Indian classical alap-gat progression, or the form of prelude & fugue from Western classical music.

This ambiguous character of the Introduction is undercut in Skit 6, where the sound is simplified down to a single source, and where the dialogue can be understood as an extended linear narrative:

DR. DOOM: Enough! You talk of the people's rights. The people have only those rights which I choose to give them. And that is for their own good, believe me.

BORIS: I do, Doom.

DR. DOOM: They disappoint me, they must work faster

BORIS: But the prisoner--

DR. DOOM: Ah yes, the young traitor who has tried to turn my people against me. Watch him. I have special plans for that one.¹⁰

The two large sections are also joined by a unity of source material. The following elements are taken from the 1982 *Spider-Man* cartoon episode “Cannon of Doom”: the melodic material underlying Skits 2-4; the entirety of Skits 5 and 6, including the backing material; the melodic material of the loop underlying DOOM’s rap; and the “Food! We need food!,” “Wait! Bring him to me!,” and “With but a--” interjections. A listener does not need to know the provenance of this material for it to have a unifying effect, since both the musical language used

¹⁰ This dialogue has been heavily edited by DOOM. Instances where Doctor Doom names his interlocutor (Boris) have been excised. The word “Doctor” has been removed from Boris’ speech, rendering the villain’s name as “Doom” rather than “Doctor Doom.” A line of Boris’ has been removed after “I do, [Doctor] Doom.” A lengthy line from Doctor Doom has been excised after “They must work faster.” The name of the prisoner, Johann, has been excised from Boris’ line. In the final line, “watch him carefully, Boris,” has been shortened to “watch him.” The original audio of this scene can be heard in context here: <https://youtu.be/k0lZwGcOB14>. This scene takes place from 01:58-02:49.

by composer Douglas, as well as the EQ & compression effects of the sampling process (which is most likely taken from a VHS tape), serve as unifying auditory characteristics.

DOOM also sutures the two sections together with the use of short spans of silence (in fact there is a symmetric structure of sonic cross-pollination between the two sections, to be discussed later). The effect of the loop “dropping out” for a single beat is employed by DOOM as a form of accent during his flow: words that are rapped over an empty beat stand out with greater clarity and are perceived as accented. DOOM makes this typical production gesture a unifying element by introducing an unusual “silence glitch” in the middle of Skit 6. At 1’34”, for a fraction of a second, the track goes completely silent. (There is a slight echo of Dr. Doom’s last-spoken word, “faster,” after the glitch¹¹). Although it occurs only once during the Introduction (as opposed to eight empty beats distributed throughout the rap), this occurrence constitutes a “seed,” a motivic introduction of a sound-thing that will blossom later, in the Rap section.

A final unifying element between the Introduction and the Rap is a homology between their abstract structures, which will be discussed later in this analysis.

Characteristics of Loop & Flow: The Rap

The musical material taken from Douglas’ “Cannon of Doom” score makes for a very distinctive loop under MF DOOM’s three verses. The melody is sinister and driving. The tempo, c. $J=92$, is more deliberate than frenetic. The mood is bombastic and dramatic, creating an “epic” feel for the supervillain character who is backed up by this material.

The melody centers around the pitch A, with an implied scale of either A-phrygian or D-natural-minor. (Compared to a concert A at 440hz, the A on the track is approximately a quartertone sharp.) DOOM’s bassline fixates on E \flat , implying a scale of E \flat phrygian. The

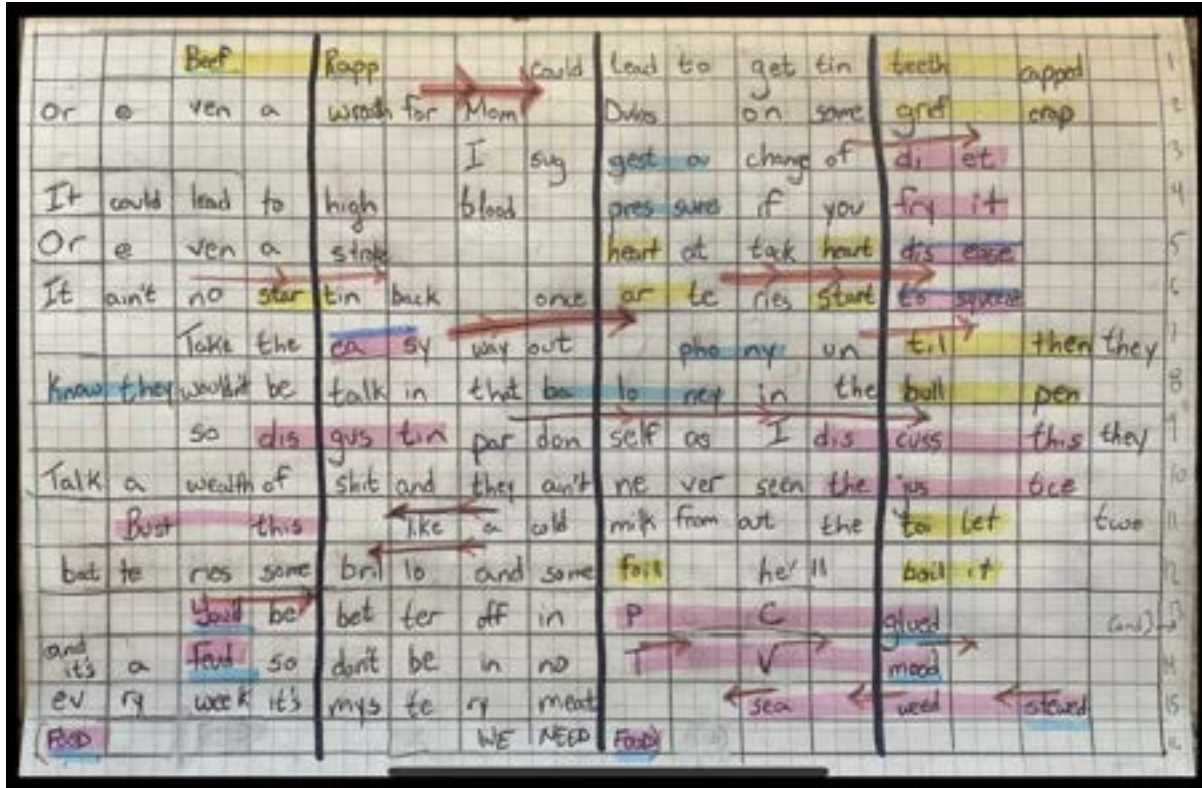
¹¹ DOOM has here excised the word “Boris” from the original “Cannon of Doom” audio. If DOOM did the editing of these samples on tape, possibly the physical results of excising this word inspired or occasioned the presence of this “silence glitch.” -Author’s speculation.

dissonant relationship between the bass and the upper material contributes an off-kilter, dark harmonic energy to the loop¹².

DOOM's rapped rhythms bear a complex relationship to the underlying beat, often falling "in the cracks" of the 16th-note divisions. Following the insights of Ohriner¹³, I believe it makes most sense to view DOOM as essentially functioning within a cardinality-16 structure (four 16th-notes per beat), with particular syllables or words anticipating or lagging behind the beat. Below is a chart showing one possible cardinality-16 quantization of Verse 1. Red arrows indicate regions where DOOM is noticeably departing from the 16th-note scaffolding. Right-pointing arrows represent lagging behind the written position; left-pointing arrows represent anticipating the beat. Of 16 bars, at least nine display substantial departure from the square rhythmic scaffolding.

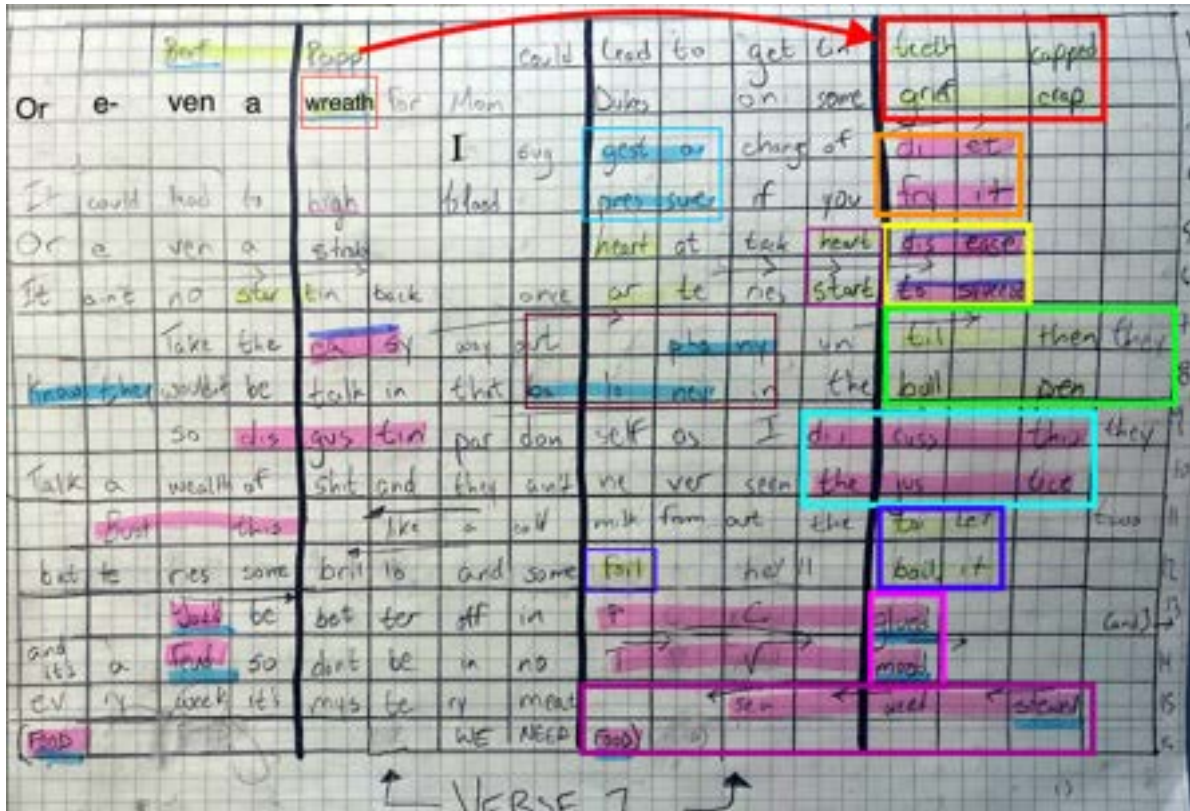
¹² The harmonic implications of the bass line and melody parts could be a topic of much discussion. The primary melody note for the orchestral loop, I have notated A. In fact this pitch on the track is approximately a quarter-tone sharp of concert A. The bass line strongly implies an E-flat phrygian modality. This important structural interval (A-half-sharp to E-flat), is dissonant and ambiguous, whether heard as a detuned-fifth (where the upper voices are heard as being in the key of the bass), or as an intentional dissonance (bitonal situation).

¹³ Mitchell S. Ohriner, "Lyric, Rhythm, and Non-alignment in the Second Verse of Kendrick Lamar's 'Momma'," *MTO: a journal of the Society for Music Theory* 25.1 (May 2019), <https://mtosmt.org/issues/mto.19.25.1/mto.19.25.1.ohriner.html>. : "by increasing the cardinality of the metric space, arbitrary precision is possible. The question is 'What is the metric structure the emcee presents in performance?' While we might not have a definitive answer to this question in every case, the discourse of emcees like Rakim makes cardinality-16 structures especially likely. Furthermore, with quantizations of arbitrary precision, we can no longer speak of emcee's delivery as 'ahead of' or 'behind' the beat."



DOOM's "slippery" or "floating" approach to the rhythm imbues him with an easygoing, laid-back affect. The combination of the deliberate & driving loop and the laid-back rapping creates an impression of a mastermind sitting back comfortably to watch his schemes unfold. One can picture the supervillain leaning back, confident, as his armies march against his foes.

DOOM's rhymes are densely-packed and complex, which is typical of his style. If in the first two couplets he makes any "rhyme-rhythmic promise," (i.e. the structure he establishes first), it is of a paired end-rhyme in beat 4, with the possibility of a bonus internal rhyme. In other words, we are led to expect this:

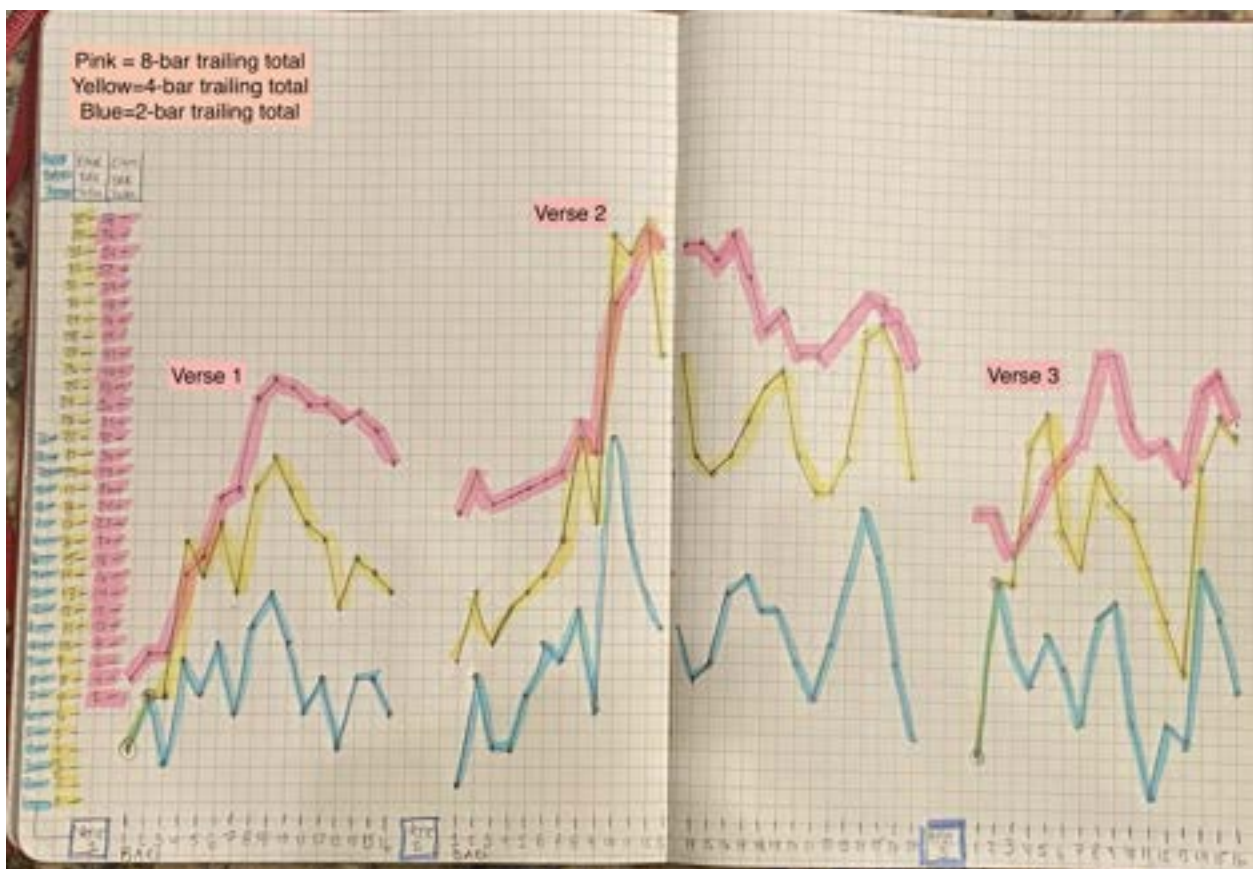


So, therefore all this..



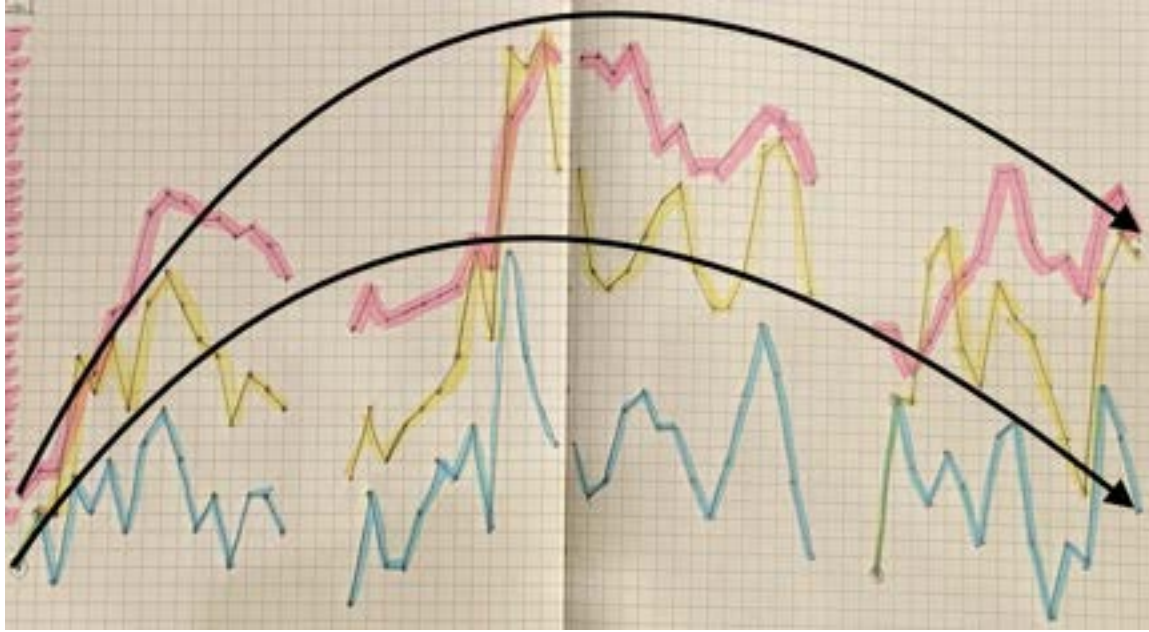
...is “bonus material,” is aesthetic flourish¹⁴. The density and metric “size” of these rhyme-structures swarms toward the end of the verse: the complexification of rhyme is also a technique of structural building.

One rudimentary way of tracking these structures is by counting rhymed syllables. A simple “trailing total” can be calculated to get a rough picture of the rhyme-density of a metrical span of arbitrary size. The following graph maps three trailing rhyme-syllable totals: 2-bar, 4-bar, and 8-bar.



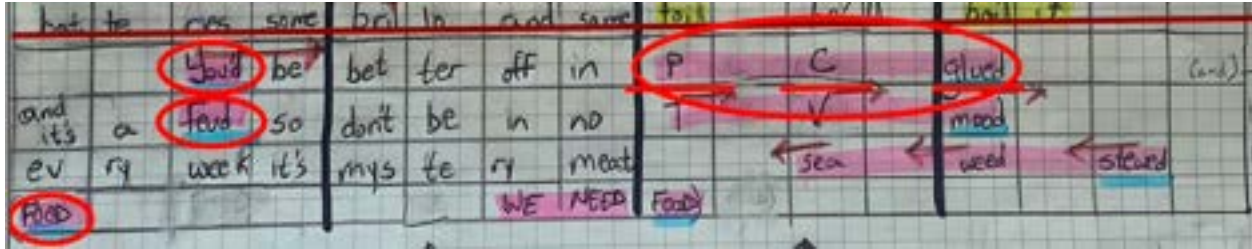
The rhyme structure peaks with a flurry of lyrical virtuosity in mid-verse-2. The perception of this rhyme density arc gives the Rap an overall structure like this:

¹⁴ Similarly annotated and color-coded maps for Verses 2 and 3 can be found in an Appendix at the end of this paper.



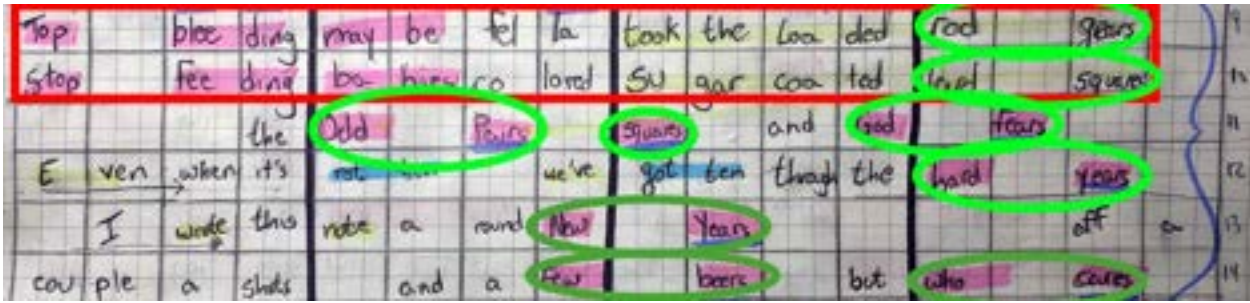
However, sheer density of rhymed syllables is not the only measure of rhyme-rhythmic intensity. The same number of rhymed syllables will represent a greater structural high-point if they are joined in a long skein of the same rhyme, than if they are merely the sum of multiple two-repetition rhymes. For the sake of this analysis, the author has considered rhyme structures with complex internal matching and more than two repeats to constitute structural rhyme complexes. There are four such structural complexes in the rap. They are as follows.

In Verse 1:



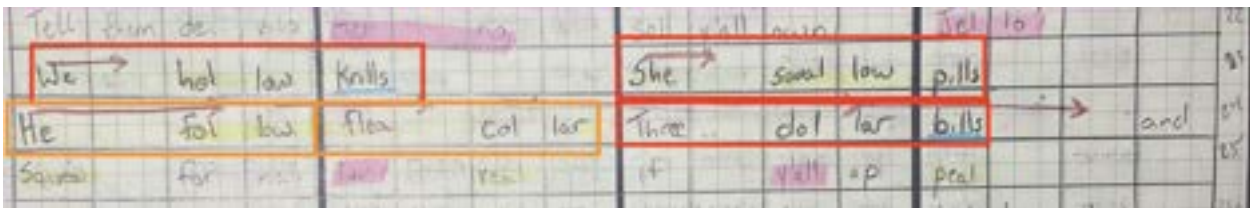
A three-syllable rhyme spreads over four bars. This rhyme is constructed to match the structural “we need food” sample which serves as the rap’s refrain. In addition to “PC glued,” “TV mood,” “seaweed stewed” and “we need food,” we have three internal short rhymes: “you’d,” “feud,” and “food!”. Thus, a total of 15 rhymed syllables in this complex.

In verse 2:



These six bars are an astounding feat of virtuosity. Notice that in the first two bars, 22 out of 26 syllables are rhymed. We will not count these toward our total for this complex, though, since only the end-rhyme carries on into subsequent bars. Of the rhyme complex built on “rod gears,” there is “lard squares,” “odd pairs,” “God fears,”¹⁵ and “hard years.” DOOM keeps the end rhyme, continuing the series, but swaps out the first syllable, to get “New Years,” “few beers,” and “who cares.” There is also the short, internal “squares.” Thus this six-bar complex contains 17 rhymed syllables (not counting internal rhymes that don’t contribute to the structural complex).

Later in verse 2, DOOM presents this complex:



DOOM’s internal symmetry here is again astounding. Not only is every single syllable of these two bars rhymed, (based on a four-syllable rhyme unit, with three repeats and two partial repeats of the base-rhyme), but DOOM accomplishes this within a grammatically parallel pronoun-verb-object structure. There are 18 rhymed syllables in these two bars.

But the largest structural rhyme-complex occurs in Verse 3:

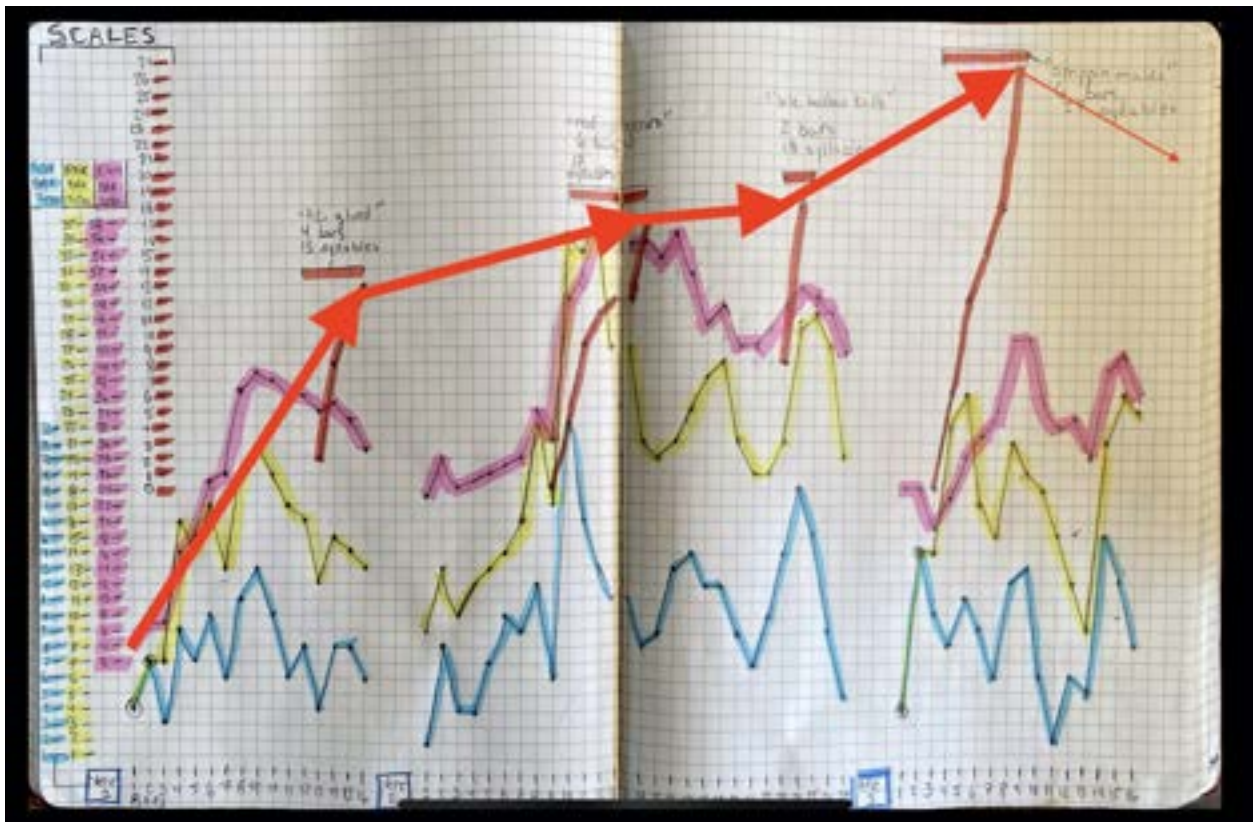
¹⁵ “God-fearers” ?

Yuck
 Out a work yark
 they chip their nails
 Let a lone the pre or ders that counted off
 this one goes out to all my peo ples
 dip pin jal chip pin tail and sip pin ale

is they rhy mers or
 since they shot down
 DOOM
 ship pin male
 Chip n Dale
 tipp in scaly
 ship pin sales
 skip pin ban
 sip pin ale

This three-syllable rhyme is stretched over six bars and brooks nine repeats, for a total of 27 syllables in this complex.

If representations of the magnitude of structural complexes are added to the earlier graph of simple rhyme density, a new form emerges:



Thus, a more complicated picture of rhyme intensity emerges, one in which sheer rhyme-density peaks midway through the rap, but structural complexity of rhymes continues to grow until mid-way through verse 3.

Semantic Gestures: DOOM and the Poetics of Ambiguity

Another attribute that comes to the fore in Verse 3 is linear storytelling. Verses 1 and 2 have traded in a rapid-fire lyrical style, in which suggestive ideas are thrown out and then quickly moved on from, and in which short, open-ended sentences must be freighted with a listener's interpretation. DOOM deals in abundant metonymy and ellipsis: he leaves it to his listeners to connect what is not overtly connected, to fill in the blanks.

Writing a retrospective after DOOM's death for Pitchfork magazine, Ruiz writes, "The narratives in his songs betray this technique, often sounding disjointed and sometimes difficult to follow. But from a bird's eye view, his vision always comes into focus, like an art house film that dazzles yet requires repeat viewings to fully appreciate its complexity."¹⁶

In Verse 1, DOOM rolls out a pun-metaphor that clarifies the loose-floating themes of food and villainy from the Intro into a slightly narrower theme for the Rap section: the subject of "beef," as in a grudge between two people. DOOM asserts that such beefs can end up in violence, and then suggests "a change of diet"--perhaps a recommendation to the listener to consume something more nutritious than the usual mud-slinging "beef raps" of many rappers:

Beef Rapp could lead to lead to gettin' teeth capped
Or even a wreath for Mom Dukes on some grief crap.
I suggest a change of diet.
It could lead to high blood pressure if you fry it,

¹⁶ Matthew Ismael Ruiz, "10 Songs That Show Why MF DOOM Was the Ultimate Rapper's Rapper," *Pitchfork*, January 4, 2021. Although Ruiz's list of 10 songs are not ranked / numbered, "Beef Rapp" is listed sixth in the order of his article. Ruiz summarizes the album and track as follows: "An album full of food songs that aren't necessarily about food, MM.. Food uses an anagram of the artist's name to focus his scatterbrain tendencies into a loose concept. Opening track 'Beef Rapp' is the template from which MM.. Food was built, opening with no less than six different audio clips sampled from VHS tapes, no hook to speak of, and verses that veer from dismissing petty rap beefs to riffing on red meat's reputation. But it's the final verse that narrows in on his real beef: rappers more concerned with selling sex than being the best."

Or even a stroke, heart attack, heart disease.
It ain't no startin' back, once arteries start to squeeze.

Even extracting the meaning that the author has enumerated above requires some degree of detective work. One has to assume the metaphorical meaning of "diet" in order to tie these six lines into a cohesive statement. As the verse progresses, DOOM will move further toward a kaleidoscopic style, in which lines offer quickly-shifting images and references that are left to the listener to connect. Consider these three lines from the end of Verse 1 previously mentioned for their rhyme structure:

He'd be better off in P.C. glued,
And it's a feud, so don't be in no T.V. mood.
Every week it's mystery meat, seaweed stewed.

Who is "he"? What is it to be "in P.C. glued"? What is a "T.V. mood"? And what do these things have to do with a weekly serving of mystery meat and stewed seaweed? Thanks to their elusiveness, it is certainly possible to impose on these lines an interpretation that puts them in a narrative "straight line" with the earlier pun/metaphor/message, but that task is left to the listener rather than explicitly completed by DOOM.

The rhyme complexes identified in Verse 2 further demonstrate the multivalent and slippery nature of DOOM's lyrical style:

Top bleeding, maybe fella took the loaded rod gears.
Stop feeding babies colored, sugar-coated lard squares.
The odd pairs, squares, and God-fears:
Even when it's rotten, we've gotten through the hard years.
I wrote this note around New Years,
Off a couple of shots and a few beers, but who cares?

Is the opening image of a victim of violence related to what comes after? Is "the odd pairs, squares, and God-fear[er]s," a list of people, or types of people? What is the "it" in "it's rotten"? (A food item?)¹⁷. Later in Verse 2:

¹⁷ A rudimentary list of DOOM's puns and allusive gestures in the lyric, at least those incorporating the food theme and the monster/villain theme, can be found here:

We hollow krills, she swallow pills,
He follow flea-collar three dollar bills

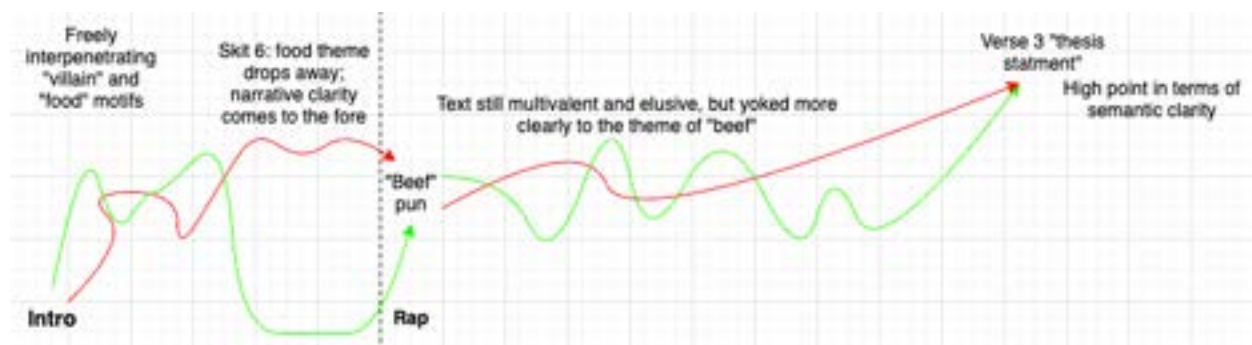
Even the knowledge that “krills” is slang for rocks of crack cocaine doesn’t do much to clarify this line, who it’s about, or what its different statements have to do with each other. And what’s a “flea-collar three dollar bill”?

Given the strong aesthetic of ellipsis and seeming non-sequitur established in the style of Verses 1 and 2, the following passage from Verse 3 stands as a surprising oasis of clarity, in which DOOM presents a single continuous thought in a relatively narrative, linear manner:

To all rappers: shut up
With your shuttin’ up, and keep a shirt on, at least a button-up
Yuck! Is they rhymer or strippin males,
Out-of-work jerks since they shut down Chippendales?
They chip their nails. DOOM--tippin’ scales,
Let alone the pre-orders that’s counted off shippin’ sales.

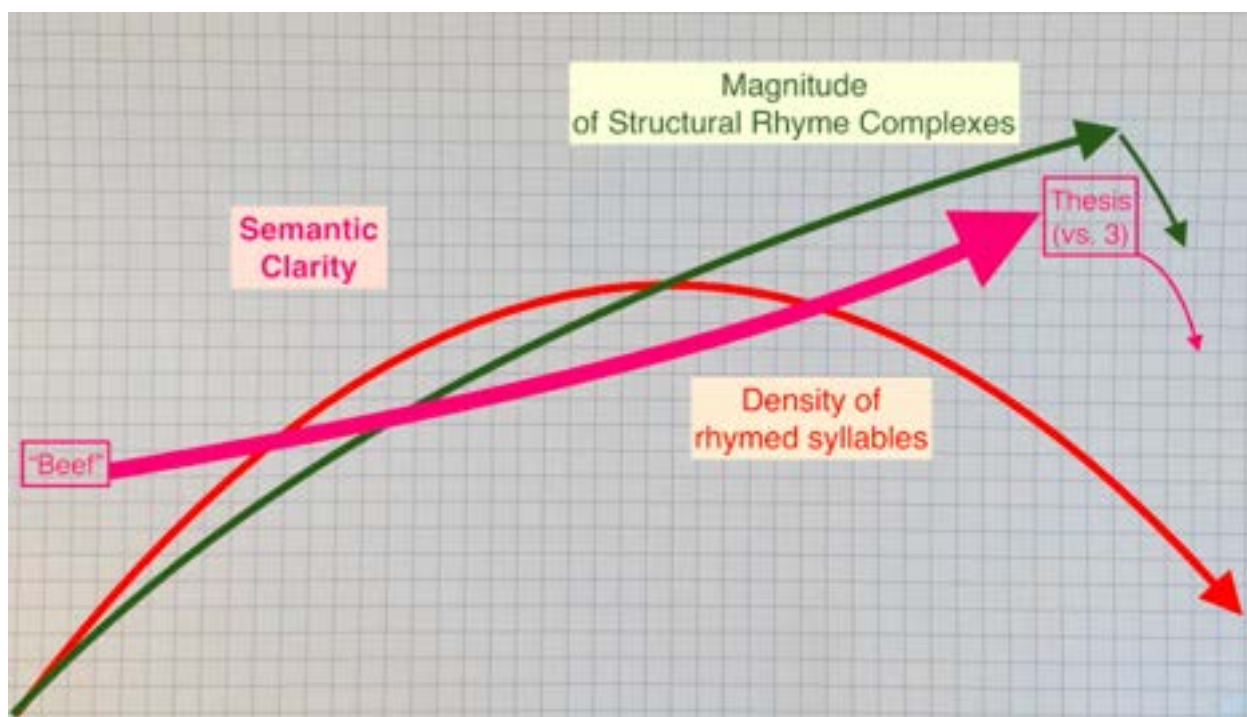
Thus, the Rap is marked by two clarifying events: the introduction of the “beef” metaphor in Verse 1, a general theme within which all the wordplay of Verses 1 and 2 will be dancing; and this “thesis statement” in Verse 3, which is distinctively easier to parse than anything that has come before.

Thus, if it were possible to quantify “narrative/semantic clarity,” a very rough map of the song might look like:



Abstract Structures: Parallelism Between Intro and Rap

Thus, in the Rap, there are two attributes which trend upward with a peak in the middle of Verse 3: that of semantic linearity, and that of structural rhyme-complex magnitude. A third structural attribute, that of sheer rhyme density, peaks in mid-Verse 2 and then falls away. Thus, in an extremely oversimplified conception, the abstract structure of the Rap can be said to look like this:

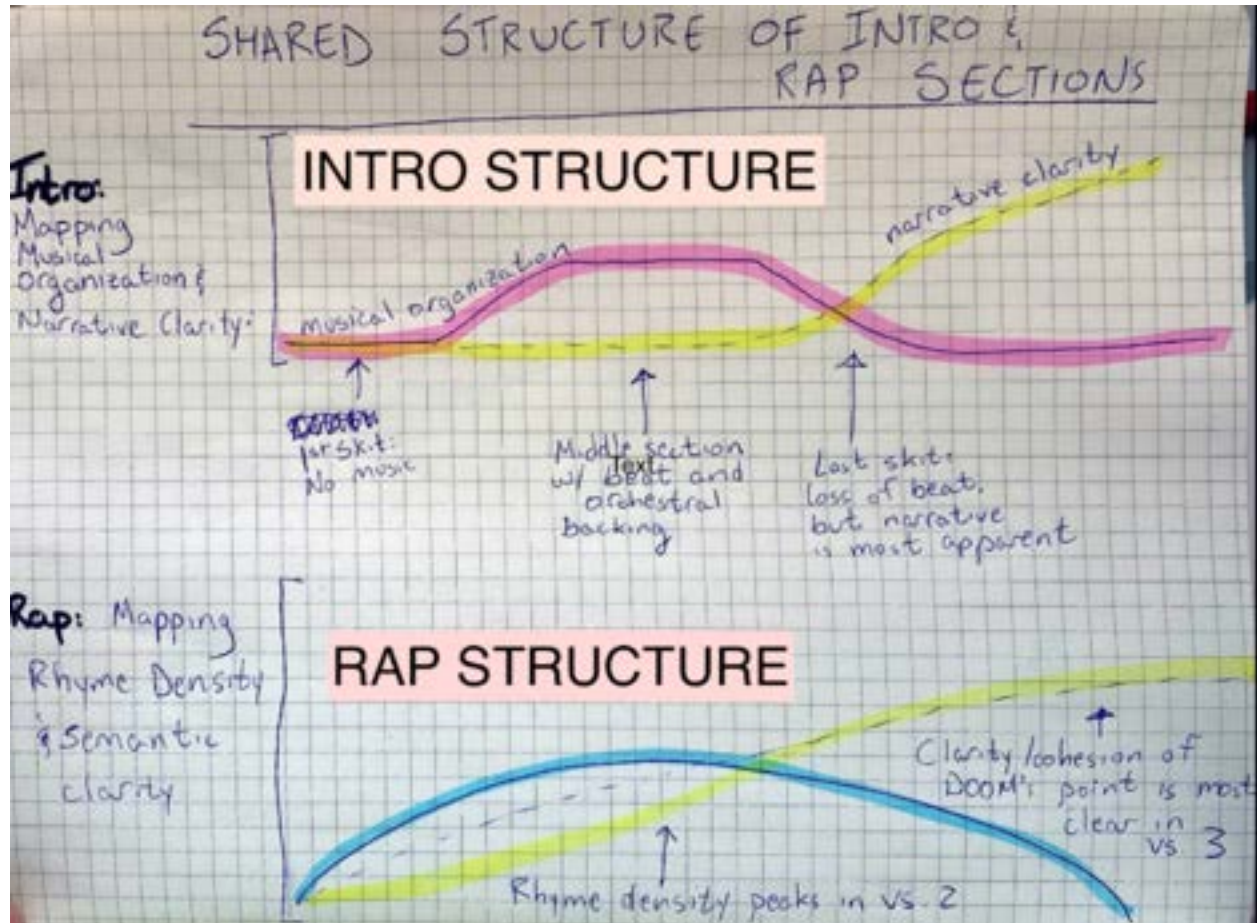


It can be argued that the uptick in semantic clarity and the downturn in sheer rhyme density can be seen as causally connected: DOOM achieves his most high-density rhyming by virtue of his freedom to rap in half-formed thoughts, to replace lining everything out semantically with a dense, kaleidoscopic verbal texture. In order to state a longer, clearer idea, DOOM must trade in some of the freedom that allows his greatest rhyme-density.

Likewise, the Intro has a section of maximum structural density in the middle third: during Skits 2-4, the intercutting and overlapping of audio from different samples reaches a virtuosic peak, while the backbeat adds a layer of sonic complexity to this portion. The backbeat drops

away and the “sample density” clears down to one long, rather narratively clear sample: the dialogue between Dr. Doom and Boris from 1’13”-1’45”.

Thus, both sections share a similar abstract structure: a peak of density in one structural element in the middle “clears away” to make room for another attribute, that of narrative or semantic clarity, to come to the fore.



Structures of Cross-Seeding Between Intro and Rap

DOOM also introduces elements in each section which “cross-pollinate” into the other section. A few such elements are listed below:

- (1) When Bela Lugosi’s voice begins Skit 2, his delivery sounds in time with the backbeat. This is almost a “false beginning” of the rap: it sounds like Lugosi is, in fact, rapping over DOOM’s loop and beat. (In addition to what the character may

be saying in-universe, he can be understood as expressing DOOM's promise for the present album: "here you will find food for your body, as well as comfort for your troubled mind"; in other words, the listener will find musical nourishment in the tracks to follow). It is worth noting that this "backbeat" behind Skits 2-4 is similar in construction to the loop underlying the rap: both feature orchestral melodic & harmonic material by Johnny Douglas, with drum beats by DOOM.

(2) As discussed above, DOOM uses beats of silence in the rap as a method of accenting certain words and syllables. The structurally-used sonic element of the rap is presaged by a "silence glitch" at 1:34, which is heard not as a structural element but as a mere gesture, or "ornament."

(3) Conversely, the distinctive electronically-altered voice of the cartoon Dr. Doom¹⁸, which is undoubtedly a "structural element" in the Intro, is cross-seeded into the rap with one short appearance. At 3'10", Dr. Doom is heard to say "with butter." This clever sampling makes us understand the food word "butter," although in context, Dr. Doom is actually saying "with but a [wave of my hand]."

(2) and (3) above are thus mirror-images of each other, in which a major structural sonic element from each section appears as a brief "echo" or "ornament" in the other section.

CONCLUSIONS

In this track, DOOM presents a structurally-unified two-part form. The two major sections display a satisfying symmetry, thanks to their shared abstract structure, and their cross-pollination of sound-elements.

DOOM's lyrical style shows his duly-recognized rich power for creative rhyming, and the ability to write in alluring, allusive, and elliptical ways to engage the listener's attention in interpretation while presenting a more-or-less integrated lyrical concept.

¹⁸ Voiced by Ralph James.

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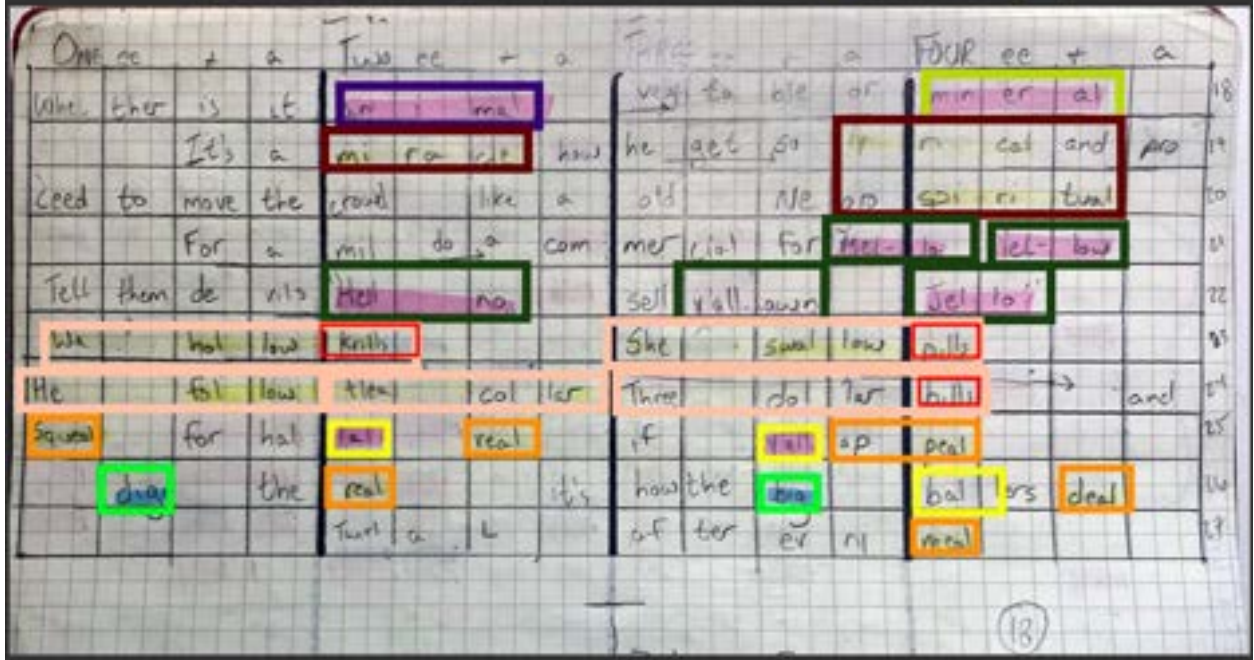
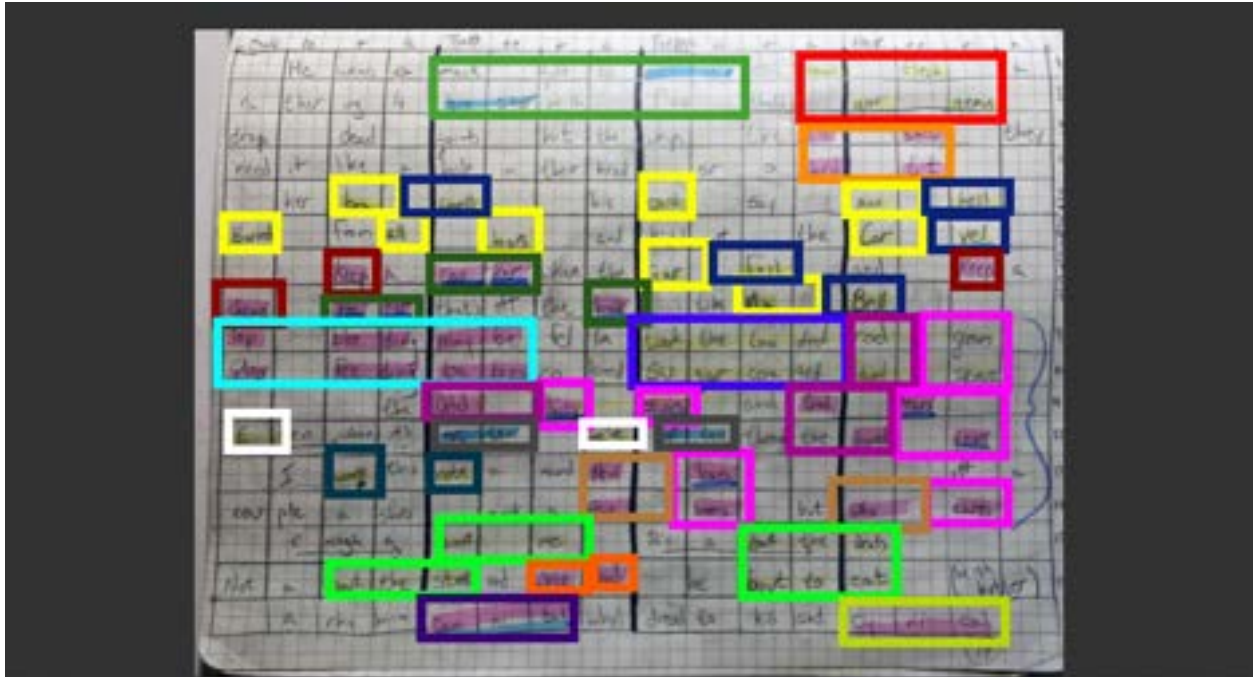
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TITLE PAGE ART BY CHRISTINA ESSER. BASED ON JASON JAGEL’S ORIGINAL ALBUM ART “Part of a Complete Breakfast”

APPENDIX: RHYME COLOR-CODING OF VERSES 2 AND 3

Verse 2



Verse 3

	ONE ee + a	TWO ee e + a	THREE ee + a	4 ee + a	
		What up	to all	rap pers	shut up with your
1					
2	shut tin up and	Keep a shirt on	to	lost a	but tin up
3	Yuck		is the rhy mers	or	shy pin mls
4	Out a	stark	since they shut	down	chip n Dale
5	they	chip their nails	DOOM		tip in scale
6	Let a	long the pre or	ders that coun	od off	shy pin sales
7		this one goes	are to all my	peo ples	shy pin bowl
8		dip pin	at	whip pin tail	and sip pin ale
9		light the	choo be	til it glow	like a ru by
10	AF for	which they	wid we find	a vil lain	like
11	He's	in the	66	on some old	But dha
12		or er	prof	drank	shir but what a
13		pick	try and ask	why	ours be bet ler
14	could be	the	ir on	mask	by
15	Your	what	grow	by the	dude on the
16	Note		(we need	food	