

Violence in Futurist Poetry and Rap Lyricism;  
Catharsis, Censorship, and Art

by

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**Abstract**

Violence in art is a controversial topic which entices some people to argue for the censorship of art; they might be concerned for the effects of violence in art on young children or young adults, claiming that it can cause them to exhibit violent behavior themselves. The implications of censorship in art, however, can and, historically speaking, have often been detrimental to the very essence, quality, and execution of art, regardless of its genre or form. For this reason, the current research was conducted; thus to show the potential downsides of censorship and the benefits of uncensored art, violence in poetry specifically is demonstrated in action and analyzed: how is it communicated, what purpose (conscious or otherwise) it serves, how does it affect the mental state of the audience or the artists themselves, and how the concept of catharsis relates to violence in art and its censorship. All this comes to show the potential damage of censorship in art, and this is achieved by observing violence exhibit itself in Futurist poetry and Rap lyricism.

## **Introduction**

Violence is among the behavioral patterns that most mammals possess, including human beings. This type of human behavior is often viewed as a complete negative, while its positive aspects are being overlooked. For example, its ability to lift up the spirits of warriors often utilized in the ancient world could have been seen as a positive aspect: violent, aggressive imagery and/or wording could have set the mood for entire armies. In fact, research has shown that aggression can boost the mental strength of individuals, their readiness to fight for something, for example, for their homeland. This explains in some sense why violence can be seen in all art throughout the human past: it was a method of lifting the people's spirits thus decreasing the chances of the soldiers' morale dropping at a critical time. In the past, violence has probably not even been seen as a separate unique topic in art: for example, it was part of art that was created as a glorification of the victories and conquests of a given nation's rulers, monarch, or dictator.

In modern times, humanity has changed in terms of culture and civilization, and so have the ways that aggression and violence are expressed in the arts. Of course, violent imagery and violent descriptive language in art can still be used to advance a certain mood, specifically in terms of military purposes. Despite this, there are many individuals and organizations attempting to censor violence in art, most certainly with the best intentions in mind; and yet they are disregarding the fact that people harbor negative feelings regardless of being exposed to negativity: emotions – either negative or positive – are within human nature. And suppressing one's negative emotions can lead to grave consequences, once the individual is incapable of containing those negative emotions any longer. This could result in the person losing control and harming others or themselves.

This study argues that violence and aggression in art should not be censored because there are, in fact, a few positive aspects to it. For one thing, violent, aggressive imagery can help boost people's readiness to fight for something – it can be directed at a beneficial cause: violence is essentially energy, a type of force which can be redirected, repurposed, and used for a greater cause (Brooks, 1967). Another major reason for this is that art can be a crutch for those who harbor violent tendencies anyway, and thus need to express them instead of suppressing them (which can result in damage to anyone): the healthiest way of doing so is through art, which would not result in anyone being harmed. And with this in mind, this study attempts to show how violence is expressed through two major poetic movements – Futurism and Rap – how is violence communicated through these movements and what purpose does it carry; all to show how violence in art can be meaningful and mustn't be censored.

### Literature Review

Before the actual contents of Rap and Futurism is analyzed and their similarities are addressed, the origins of these movements must be considered and thus shown why each poetic work was chosen for analysis. The poetry of Futurism is a very unique and specific art movement in that it has a single creator – Filippo Tommaso Marinetti – a father-figure who essentially invented the movement of Futurism as well as the genre of Manifestos and put a beginning to these (Perloff, 1984). The history of art has shown that most genres and/or movements arise due to the works of two or multiple artists, but Filippo Marinetti managed to create a genre on his own; in fact, he created two distinct artistic movements by publishing his *Manifesto of Futurism*, one of them being the Futurist movement (including both Futurist poetry and Futurist artwork), and the other being the genre of manifestos.

It is for these reasons alone that the current study primarily refers to Marinetti's *Manifesto* and *Zang Tumb Tumb* for analysis purposes because of the major role that Marinetti played in the very creation and development of the movements thus making him the primary artist of concern in Futurist poetry. This study also takes into account subtle translation differences/problems that arise when translating Marinetti's works from the original Italian and into English. Also, another great and famous Futurist poet is discussed - Vladimir Mayakovski. Some of Mayakovski's early works are analyzed and addressed for demonstration purposes – to show that the trends that are discussed in this paper had spread all through the Futurist movement and even to its' carriers in other parts of the world such as Mayakovski who was once known as the famous Poet of the Revolution in the Soviet Union.

The movement of Rap, on the other hand and unlike Futurism, cannot be definitively credited to a single creator: no critic or historian can claim with confident certainty a specific name of an artist that established the entirety of in its complete form Rap. It is rather generally thought to have gradually morphed from blues and jazz music into the original versions of Rap and then to its current state, thus, it can be inferred that unlike Futurism and manifestos, Rap did not have a single creator or a single work that established the whole of Rap in its complete contemporary form, but there are rather multiple artists and their works which are generally considered to be the pioneers of the movement and the genres within Rap.

And since there is no one single artist or song that establishes it, a few artists have been chosen for discussion in this study: artists that are generally credited by critics and art historians as ones that established a tipping point in the genre's creation and/or development. Thus, even though some artists have impacted the industry and culture of hip-hop immensely, they are nonetheless not discussed in this paper. For example, Nas is undeniably among the rappers that have influenced the culture greatly; however, he has not contributed to the very creation of hip-hop or its presentation to the general global public. Such artists are not addressed in this paper because their work is not the major concern of the study.

The beginning of Rap is credited by many to Grandmaster Flash. It is said that the addition of the vocal element to the preliminary condition of Rap which was basically only the beat, belonged to him; however, this is a mere urban legend which has no direct evidence proving it – it is simply “rap legend” which ascribes the push of the vocal aspect further to Grandmaster Flash; it is believed by many that he was one to encourage his friends - the Furious Five - to follow his example of bringing in the vocal aspect (Salaam, 1995). And yet, even though it remains unproven, this ‘urban legend’ is the first trail of Rap's beginnings and thus

must be addressed. It is for this reason that *The Message* by Grandmaster Flash and The Furious Five are discussed, alongside with *Sucker M.C.'s* by Run-D.M.C. – another tipping point that established the spirit of Rap (Salaam, 1995). Rakim's, Tupac Shakur's, and Notorious B.I.G.'s works are also discussed as the pioneers of many complex stylistic aspects for which Rap is known for; Rakim's work will also be addressed as he is the one rapper often considered the most "pure" of all M.C.'s (Salaam, 1995). These artists are discussed in this work as ones that established breakthroughs in hip-hop. Eminem, on the other hand, is discussed in this research both for the artistic input of his work and, primarily, for being seen by many as a representative of the popularized version of the genre; because despite not being from the newest generations of rappers, he is still too commercialized to be considered one of the first rappers. And thus, Eminem's work is discussed in this research since he is perhaps the most recognizable of all Rap artists, his works are the most well-known and hence he, in many ways, represents the whole of Rap to the world.

So, regarding the two poetic movements, the literature is quite extensive. However, another aspect of these artistic movements that this study discusses is violence in and of itself within art, its communication through art: in this specific study, the communication of violence through Futurist and Rap poetry. Primarily, such communication can lead to a psychological phenomenon called catharsis that can result in the release of aggression by means of expressing it in art: this could be among the types of positive expression of violent behavioral patterns. Perhaps, one of the most developed forms of such beneficial expression of violence, i.e., such cathartic expressions of violence can be found in Antonin Artaud's concept of the Theater of Cruelty. Antonin Artaud, a French dramatist and theater director, invented a unique form of theater.

The Theater of Cruelty is “a primitive ceremonial experience intended to liberate the human subconscious and reveal man to himself”. Though, it is worth noting that it was not the subconscious that Artaud was aiming for but rather the unconscious - something more powerful within the human mind. The unconscious is what Freud called the most potent part of the human consciousness which he discussed. The subconscious, on the other hand, is more of a transitional stage between the human consciousness and the unconscious. Artaud’s approach deals with the unconscious in a way that creates such a unique marriage of the actors’ movements, sounds, scenery, and lighting that can result in the subversion of thought and logic thus shocking the audience’s mind into seeing the “baseness” of this world.

In his fundamental work *Theater and its Doubles*, Artaud develops clear patterns of reasoning within his unique philosophy. These patterns can be distinguished by a few of the keywords found in Artaud’s work. These words are as follows: cruel, cruelty, passion, instinct, instinctual, violent, and violence. These words, or rather the concepts that these words represent are not far off from each other; being all concepts of very forthcoming, energetic, and passionate nature, they bear a certain quintessential sameness of spirit. They all carry a certain quality of overbearing and overpowering energy, the kind of destructive potency that can damage its own creator, the creator being the person that possesses these emotions. Emotions that not only can, but most probably will be destructive, and thus they must be unleashed before this destruction occurs.

Such is the overall type of reasoning behind Artaud’s Theater of Cruelty. The word ‘cruelty’ is used in a very specific meaning in this context. Artaud sees art as a tool for forcibly and directly intensifying and re-creating the most thrilling and perhaps even dangerous possibilities of life in its full grandeur, and such is the implication behind Artaud’s usage of the



term 'cruelty'. So, the term itself has many layers in Artaud's work. It can mean the sole fact that the audience is forcibly thrown into this thrilling sensation which makes it 'cruel' (Brooks, 1998). It can also be understood in its most direct implication - the fact that most plays of Artaud's theater demonstrated rather cruel human behavioral patterns; cruel in their expression and ability to overtake the person. This entire line of thinking, however, seems to show that perhaps Artaud wanted to reject order as it is - the whole concept and phenomenon of order and incite chaos instead.

However, that is not entirely the case: despite the ideological importance of the concepts of cruelty, passion, instinct, aggression, and violence in Artaud's work, he strongly believed in his actors' rigorous training and he subjected those actors that entered his theater to harsh and strict discipline. Thus it could seem that there is a paradox in his philosophy when he wants to philosophically speaking reject order and yet installs it at the same time upon the actors in his theater. But that would not be fully representative of Artaud's approach. He compared the theater to the plague, stating that through such "cruel" illnesses (both the plague and the cruel, violent instincts shown during his plays) the audience would reach a certain sense of psychic "purification", that could itself result in an ability to rediscover the human capability to create order (Artaud, 1958).

From such a perspective, Artaud's notions of psychic purification can be understood as synonymous to the general concept of catharsis (Brooks, p. 174, & Brumat, 2017). For the purpose of such spiritual purification, the French director wanted his audience fully absorbed by the scenes on the stage; he wanted them to be actually physically affected by the scenes. And to achieve such a drastic effect on the audience, the play required bearing the power to affect. In

Artaud's philosophy, this power is seen as some of the most fundamental human impulses and instincts, violence and aggression being among those.

So, there is an undeniable possibility of benefit in allowing violent artistic movements to flourish. Of course, certain boundaries like age restrictions should apply. However, Artaud's philosophy of cathartic purification did find basis in his own theatrical experience as a director or Brooks' and Brumat's medical research. And while there has not been much active research in this field of psychology, the studies that have, in fact, been conducted, do justify such an approach of handling violent impulses.

### **Research Questions**

This paper aims to answer the following questions:

1. How is violence communicated through the poetic movements of Futurism and Rap?
2. What are the positive consequences of violence being communicated through Futurist poetry and Rap lyricism?
3. How does this communication of violence through these artistic movements relate to the censorship of art?

### **Methodology**

The background information given above in the Literature Review on the artists was necessary for this study to showcase why each representative of the respective movement was chosen for this research. But most of these works are not discussed with consideration of the backgrounds of the artists in the analysis per se, because this study adheres to the school of New Criticism, specifically the branch developed by Warren and Welleck in their *Theory of Literature*. The literary theory of New Criticism developed by Warren and Welleck suits this specific research especially well, because their school of thought paid enormous amount of attention to poetry and its understanding, its analysis, its communication, and perception: Warren and Welleck addressed poetry without biases of the past (like that of the Romantics who considered poetry the highest form of art) and rather approached poetry as an art-form like any other (Warren, & Welleck, 1948, pp. 7-8).

This makes their approach to analyzing the works of rappers and Futurists a highly functional one since it targets only the literary pieces per se and directs the reader to willfully ignore the historical conditions under which the works were created all the while aiming to discuss the works as art objects separate from their creators. Some works are, indeed, addressed with regards to the conditions of the authors (specifically, the ones created by Marshal Mathers) since the conditions are, sometimes, directly linked to one of the purposes of this study – to demonstrate the possibility to express aggressive emotions through art in a harmless way, as it is shown here through Brooks' research. However, most works will be taken and analyzed as the school of New Criticism suggests.

## **Research Findings and Analysis**

### Violence in Marinetti's Work: Early Futurism

Marinetti's most crucial and fundamental work is his *Manifesto of Futurism* (Perloff, 1984), the work itself consisting of an introduction and a conclusion of sorts, followed and preceded by the 11 main points, rules, or laws of Futurism respectively. These rules have an overall message of violence, aggression, danger, courage, revolt, speed, electricity, technology, war, a definite dislike and violent energy directed at the past with its symbols such as museums, libraries and morality (Marinetti, 1909). In stylistic terms, Marinetti does not seem to incorporate any classical tools like rhyming. But ironically, he does allow his writing to engage in metaphors or take the shape of quite quintessentially old (if not ancient) imagery: "At last Mythology and the mystic cult of the ideal have been left behind. We are going to be present at the birth of the centaur and we shall soon see the first angels fly!" (Marinetti, 1909).

In the above quoted sentence, Marinetti is utilizing the image of an angel and centaurs to help make his points but, paradoxically, the very same tools (the images of angels and/or centaurs) that he is using to make his points come from the past of human civilization and art – these are concepts littered with clichés, concepts born within ancient religions and old beliefs. And, to take it a step further, the language in and of itself that he is using to communicate his message (the Italian language of the original version of the *Manifesto per se*) or the symbols that express that language (the Latin letters) come from the past as well. And this could be considered the essential logical fallacy of Futurism – its technical impossibility to be executed as according to its basic principles. A counter-argument to this logical problem can be the last words of the *Manifesto*: "Your objections? All right! I know them! Of course! We know just what our

beautiful false intelligence affirms: 'We are only the sum and the prolongation of our ancestors,' it says. Perhaps! All right! What does it matter? But we will not listen! Take care not to repeat those infamous words! Instead, lift up your head!" (Marinetti, 1909). In this excerpt, Marinetti clearly demonstrates a full awareness of the above-mentioned logical fallacy present in his work – the sort of contradiction of speaking of propagating the demise of the old ways and yet using those old ways all at the same time.

He addresses this problem by asking the rhetorical question "What does it matter?" (Marinetti, 1909) pondering as to if that even matters with regards to his goal. Note, that rhetorical questions per se, which Marinetti is using here, are also part of the old ways of writing poetry which again reiterates the logical problem in the movement. So, this small excerpt, this single rhetorical question shows how Futurism, as in Marinetti's own design and his own words present in the *Manifesto* itself, is not supposed to be logical to begin with – its purpose is different. This purpose can be seen at the end of the *Manifesto* which closes with the following sentence, "Standing on the world's summit we launch once again our insolent challenge to the stars!" (Marinetti, 1909). This sentence can be perceived as a sign that Futurism, as per Marinetti's own intention and his own design, is supposed to be an "insolent challenge to the stars" and, because the *Manifesto* ends with these words, they can be seen as a conclusion of the whole *Manifesto* - its main message and hence the conclusion or the summary of the entire Futurist movement. Thus, to "challenge the stars" is the major meaning and purpose of the movement where "challenging the stars" can signify challenging the power of the past, in this case, perhaps not only the past, but also the conventions and the norms that come with the past. Hence, Futurism being filled with logical fallacies is not of Marinetti's concern since the intention behind the whole existence of the movement is to challenge the "stars" – to break the

past, the norms, and conventions. And, if logic is viewed as a convention and a norm or seen as a part of the past, it is possible that the logical fallacies could have been even created intentionally by Marinetti simply to deteriorate the norms and the past.

However, there still is some degree of logical coherence in his ideology and thought. For example, in the Futurist Manifesto, he says “Museums, cemeteries!” (Marinetti, 1909) thereby most certainly implying a certain equivalence between these two concepts: the sentence is structured in a way to hint through the comma that the second word can be considered as an explanation or rather a description of the first one, while the exclamation mark emphasizes the dramatism of the literary moment. And, in many ways, it does make sense – museums represent the past (Perloff, 1984), while the past, in philosophical terms, can be seen as something that is dead - be it a person, an animal, an empire, or an event. Moreover, the English language itself subliminally supports this assumption: it is grammatically incorrect to speak of a living person in the past tense in English, e.g. it is incorrect to say “He was a good man” if the person in question is sitting in the next room. Perhaps, it would be correct only if the implication is that the man is not “good” anymore but rather has turned into a murderer or a thief. However, if the person is still more or less “good” and still alive, it would be simply grammatically incorrect in the English language to use the past tense to speak of the person in question, because the general grammatical rule is to speak of the living in the present tense. And the English language is not alone; it is mostly not acceptable in many other languages to speak of the living in the past tense (for example, Armenian, Russian languages). This reluctance to speak of the living in the past tense can be interpreted as a sign of a superstitious fear of death: this shows how the collective unconsciousness of most nations or peoples (i.e. the carriers of these languages that refuse to speak of the living in the past tense) views the past as something dead, as is exemplified through

not speaking of living people in the past tense, because of the possible unconscious fear of death. And thus Marinetti's description of museums as cemeteries is justified in that a museum is essentially a monument to the past, which many see - or, at least, subconsciously perceive - as dead. So, certain aspects of Marinetti's ideology are logically coherent while others are not, which is in and of itself an incoherence hence creating yet another aspect in which the *Manifesto of Futurism* is trying to bring the demise of conventions, norms, and tradition as expressed through this concept of the past.

Another aspect of violent intent and desire to cancel the past in Marinetti's work is the grammatical choices that he makes in the very original Italian version of the manifesto - *Manifesto del Futurismo* (Marinetti, 1909). A stark example of such grammatical choices that could have been made purposefully by the poet - made with the intent of making more powerful of an impact - is Marinetti's usage of double negatives which is sometimes lost in translation. The seventh rule of the *Manifesto* in the original Italian version states (Marinetti, 1909): "Non v'è più bellezza se non nella lotta", translated as (tranl. by Joll) "Beauty exists only in struggle". And though the translation is very short, precise, and sound, it nonetheless loses a significant portion of it - the double negatives of "Non v'è" and "non nella lotta". This can, in fact, be seen as a very important aspect of the work because such double negatives occur quite often in Marinetti's work (Perloff, 1984) and thus can be seen as an intentional tool used by the poet to make an impact. The possible reason for this could be that negatives can often sound slightly aggressive, firm, and resilient - an effect that could suit the purpose of Marinetti's work. A sentence that evidently negates something can sound rather harsh and aggressive in that it suggests a blatant, sharp refusal which stresses even more so the fact of refusal and/or negation. A sentence with two negatives takes this impact/effect of stressing the sharp, blatant, resilient,



and even aggressive refusal even further thus making a double negative a very sharp and impactful tool for Marinetti's purpose of shocking the reader and demising the norms and conventions which are, in a way, the strengths of the past in Marinetti's ideology. So, as seen through the original version of the *Manifesto* written in Italian, the Poet of Speed (as Marinetti is sometimes called) wanted even the grammar in his *Manifesto of Futurism* to carry a message of sharpness, firmness, and aggression.

Moreover, a similar case can be noticed in Marinetti's word choices, phrases, description, and the occasional usage of the word "violence" itself. His word choice alone signifies certain aggressiveness, a violent thread of ideas, as is exemplified through this sentence (Marinetti, 1909): "A racing automobile with its bonnet adorned with great tubes like serpents with explosive breath ... a roaring motor car which seems to run on machine-gun fire, is more beautiful than the Victory of Samothrace." This portion is from the *Manifesto's* fourth rule. Here, the phrasings Marinetti uses clearly demonstrate his overall message even in details: it is important that the Poet of Speed has stressed the fact that the motorcar is "racing" at the moment so that then the image of serpents and the sound of the car's "explosive breath" would create a cohesive picture in the reader's mind – a picture of a violently moving car that makes violent sounds in the process and intimidates the spectator with its violent sounds and movements. Violence is the key to this sentence. Moreover, he uses the words 'violence' and 'violent' very often, comparatively to the size of a few-page pamphlet that the *Manifesto* is. He often describes important concepts as violent (Marinetti, 1909): "Poetry must be a violent assault on the forces of the unknown, to force them to bow before man". Poetry, being Marinetti's vocation (Perloff, 1984), was most certainly important to the Poet of Speed and thus it can be inferred that the assault being violent was seen by him as a positive aspect. He goes on later to say that (Marinetti,

1909) “art can only be violence, cruelty, injustice” which indicates a strong faith in the power of these three concepts named – violence, cruelty and injustice – violence being the concept that Marinetti names first – before the other two. Hence, as seen through Marinetti’s tendency to describe phenomena in a violent manner and the frequent, direct usage of the word “violence” itself – it can be inferred that this idea of violence is crucial in Marinetti’s Futurism. It can be said that the concept of violence is key to the work of the Poet of Speed in many ways (Perloff, 1984): he keeps putting violent images in the reader’s mind, directly using violent wording, and describing violent images, all of this done with probable direct intention. There is a clear desire on Marinetti’s part to make violence look appealing.

Another example of how Marinetti made his work a ‘carrier’ of violence and violent patterns is his work called *Zang Tumb Tumb* which was the first of his “words in liberty” – poems both visual and verbal in shape and in content. The three words – zang tumb tumb – are in truth just an emanation of sounds of a war fought with mechanized weaponry. If repeated time and time again, *Zang Tumb Tumb* can start to sound like artillery shelling and explosions (MOMA). The visual aspect of the work is also hectic and violent: the words spiral out of control, get entangled with one another and almost seem to try to reach the viewer, as if in attempt to strike him either literally or figuratively. And hence, it can be concluded that this work of Marinetti also demonstrates a direct intent of the author to imply a message of violence both in his own direct words and as seen in many subtle ways in which Marinetti tried to incorporate violence. And thus it can be concluded that violence is key to Marinetti’s work and to Futurism itself: it is the primal tool used by the Poet of Speed to bring about the demise of old norms, conventions, and traditions - the past.

### Violence in Mayakovski's Work: Later Futurism

Vladimir Mayakovski is one of the most well-known poets in modern Russia (Gorbachev, n.d.) who was also the Poet of the Revolution beloved by the Bolsheviks during the Soviet era. He is generally considered a Futurist poet and is perhaps one of the most notable faces of the movement; he and Marinetti can be said to have been contemporaries as they lived in approximately the same era. The Poet of Speed, despite being miles away, had a noticeable impact on Mayakovski. It can be noticed in both major aspects of his work and smaller stylistic choices. For one thing, Mayakovski has the exact same type of a logical fallacy within his work as Marinetti, with regards to their desire of bringing about the destruction of the past and yet still incorporating that past in their work and perhaps even doing this intentionally. In fact, this intentionality is all the more evident in Mayakovski's work.

For example, in the poem *A Cloud in Trousers*, he says "On everything before me, I stamp nihil" (Mayakovski, 1914) where the last word is Latin for "nothing". Here, Mayakovski is essentially saying that all art before him was nothing; but to express and emphasize the absurdity of his words and their practical impossibility he uses an ancient word from a dead language. Here, Mayakovski demonstrates the exact same logical fallacy as Marinetti and implies the exact same attitude towards it – showing the irrelevance of logic for his end-goal by highlighting this very fallacy.

Moreover, this purposeful absurdity is not the only similarity of Mayakovski's work to Marinetti: there is a noticeable amount of aggression and violence in his works directed at the world (Gorbachev, n.d., p.21). Most his stylistic choices take a very "aggressive tone" as the poem progresses: the words flow to a more aggressive mood and thus violent imagery starts to

dominate the narrative (Gorbachev, n.d., p. 12). This can also hint at a perhaps intentional attempt in Mayakovski's early work to emulate Marinetti's style and philosophy which signifies that the main theme of Futurism was the same all over the world.

Taking into account this line of aggressiveness and violence, and the evident similarity of overall development between these two great representatives of the movement – Marinetti and Mayakovski, it can be concluded that Futurism, as a movement, is littered with violence and aggression because two of its major faces – its creator himself included, take such a manner of creating art; thus the presence of violence in Futurism is evident and so is its intentionality: in both early Futurism invented by Marinetti and the later poets that operated within the movement, violence is communicated with the conscious intention of bringing down the 'old ways', conventions, and traditions.

### Violence in Early Rap

The very original form of Rap is considered the mere beat without any lyrical component; the latter is generally believed to have been introduced by Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five (who later on became one of the most significant old-school Rap groups) and their most influential work is *The Message* (Salaam, 1995, p. 307). The song was very successful and was praised by many because it was a “moving narrative which chronicled various tales of urban despair” (Salaam, 1995, p. 307).

Considering such a background of despair and struggle, the lyrics of the song are self-explanatory: “Don't push me 'cause I'm close to the edge/ I'm trying not to lose my head/ It's like a jungle sometimes/ It makes me wonder how I keep from goin' under” (Saddler, Glover, Glover, Wiggins, Williams, Morris, 1982). These lines carry a certain message of desperation with a hint of violence as expressed through these words: “don't push me 'cause I'm close to the edge/ I'm trying not to lose my head” where the implication is a clear threat to whoever the lines are addressed to. Moreover, even the name of the original rap group – The Furious Five – implies violence which draws the conclusion that, just like in Futurism, violence lies at the very foundations/beginnings of Rap.

Another group that influenced hip-hop greatly was Run-D.M.C. – the group that “changed the face of hip-hop” by turning it into its modern purest form – only beats and rhymes with their song *Sucker M.C.'s* that contained “no melodic hooks or catchy instrumental samples” (Salaam, 1995, p. 308). The song contained explicit bullying of potential rivals which would later on set the scene for the entire musical genre (1983): “You sucker MC's, you sad face clown/ You five dollar boy and I'm a million dollar man/ Youse a sucker MC, and you're my fan/ You

try to bite lines, but rhymes are mine”. And though these lines are not explicitly violent, they do nonetheless contain the quintessential spirit of aggressiveness and anger that lay at the very basics of hip-hop.

Thus, it can be concluded that the very cornerstone of rap is constituted of violence and anger, as exhibited through the works of the genre’s pioneers – Grandmaster Flash, Furious Five, and Run-D.M.C. Moreover, it can also be concluded that, in the early form of hip-hop, violence was communicated in Rap as an aspect of desperation due to social and economic circumstances, as seen through *The Message*.

### Violence in Rap: the Development

Among the most iconic and pure rappers representing hip-hop during the 80' and the 90's are artists like Rakim, Tupac, Biggie Smalls, Nas, N.W.A., Mobb Deep, etc. Most belong to the so-called Golden Age of Rap; however, in this study, only Rakim, Tupac, and Biggie are discussed from this era. These three were some of the most influential artists in Rap since they impacted many rappers that came after them (Salaam, 1995, & Shusterman, 1991). Rakim, who mostly worked alongside with Eric B., created numerous lyrical masterpieces, such as the *Lyrics of Fury* the very name of which implies explicit violence and so does the message (1988): "For those that envy a MC it can be/Hazardous to your health, so be friendly" implying a clear threat to those who are supposedly envious of him and yet the words are not very direct, which shows the first signs of Rakim's unique style which would later on evolve into a much deeper message in other artist's work (Salaam, 1995).

Similar contemplations are found in Tupac's work, as is seen through his song *Violent*, (which is essentially a commentary on urban injustices that took place during his life and race relations in America) where he says (1991) "If this is violence, then violent's what I gotta be" in reference to the mistreatment him, his friends, and many other black people received from the police all the while expressing a readiness to fight and equating such a readiness to a necessity to be violent at least to some degree (which is also shown to be not very desirable for the speaker through the words "then violent's what I gotta be" – implying that he has to be violent out of necessity rather than out of sheer desire of violence). The latter brings up a long-standing philosophical discussion of whether protecting oneself and fighting for what one believes in can be considered to be violent behavior, thus making the song a rather thought-provoking artistic piece.

Notorious B.I.G., on the other hand, was less compromising in his work and more direct with his readiness to admit to direct violent patterns, sometimes even exaggerating them: “I’m dipping up the block and I’m robbing bitches too/ up the herring bones and bamboos/ I wouldn’t give fuck if you’re pregnant/ Give me the baby rings and a #1 MOM pendant” and “Huh, word to mother, I’m dangerous/ Crazier than a bag of fucking angel dust” (1994). The first excerpt shows a deliberate attempt on the artist’s part to appear as heartless and ruthless as possible through showing his indifference to even pregnancy or motherhood (both generally respected and cherished concepts in most cultures) with the intent of making himself look his utmost dangerous, as clearly expressed through the second excerpt. So, from these iconic figures and their work it can be inferred that the previously mentioned violent foundations of hip-hop had crept their way into the Golden Age as well: violence is also being communicated out of necessity and/or despair but, as it is seen through Tupac’s *Violent*, the communication of violence is more conscious and intentional than it was during the earliest stages of Rap.



### Violence in Eminem's Work

Eminem - whose real name is Marshal Mathers - is perhaps the most well-known Rap artist of his generation (sometimes referred to as the Platinum Age), if not of the entire genre of hip-hop and, as such, is one of its major representatives to the world. The latter makes it crucial to discuss his work in the context of the general public's perception of Rap through Eminem's art. Mathers has many works that ultimately brought him both the title of one of the greatest rappers and the title of the most violent rapper (Blake, 2018). In fact, the majority of his works contain violent lyrics or imagery, but some do stand out in quantity, quality, and execution. Among them, is the song dedicated to his ex-wife, *Kim* where he directly fantasizes about killing her and demonstrates very clear violent patterns and which also rendered him a misogynist (2000): "Don't you get it, bitch?/ No one can hear you!/ Now shut the fuck up and get what's comin' to you!/ You were supposed to love me!/ Now bleed, bitch, bleed! Bleed, bitch, bleed! Bleed!" The song is per se a sheer demonstration of rage, aggression, hatred, and violence – very much in the spirit of the Futurists who, at times, literally praised and invoked violence. What sets this particular song apart from other hip-hop songs, and drives it closer to Futurism (and perhaps works like Tupac's *Violent*) is the amount of intentionality that Mathers put into it: when the song was written, a noticeable time had passed after his argument/conflict with his ex-wife, so the decision to pour pure aggression and violence in the song and onto the listener was most probably intentional on the artist's part. This makes *Kim* even closer to Futurism, because there is a certain desire to anger the conformist people listening to the song and thus deteriorate norms and conventions.

Another work of Eminem's littered with blatant violence (again, most probably intentional – with the aim of provoking a reaction) is *Kill You*, where he raps (2000) "Texas

Chainsaw, left his brains all/ Danglin' from his neck, while his head barely hangs on/ Blood, guts, guns, cuts/ Knives, lives, wives, nuns, sluts”: the casual description yet the gory and violent imagery of the first lines gradually morphs into a stream of consciousness of sorts where negative concepts associated with “brains dangling from necks’ create a unique chain of associations that goes from “blood, guts, guns” to three very different types of women, which perhaps could hint at the speaker’s underlying internal issues with women. Later on in the same song, Mathers says (2000) “Okay, I’m ready to go play/ I go the machete from O.J./ I’m ready to make everyone’s throat ache” thereby making a reference to O.J. Simpson’s trial who, allegedly, had killed his wife and her lover all the while implying that the process is like a game to him by saying that he is ready “to play”. There are very apparent and distinct patterns of violent intent and violent descriptions in this specific song, which are woven with a very peculiar unique thread of strange associations, stream of consciousness, irony, and puns that ultimately makes up one the most controversial hip-hop songs of all time. And, like the previous song discussed, the amount of intentionally expressed violence brings *Kill You* very close to Futurism, its purpose, and execution.

There are many more songs of the artist with similar content but one stands out. Among Mathers’ many hits, *My Name Is* takes a notable position with its lyrical aspect and the hinted social commentaries. For example, the song opens with (1999) “Hi kids! Do you like violence? (Yeah yeah yeah!)/ Wanna see me stick Nine inch Nails, through each one of my eyelids? (Uh-huh!) Wanna copy me and do exactly like I did? (Yeah yeah)”. These lines are dripping with sarcasm aimed at a hypocritical society: the artist implies an underlying cruelty to children, who are often said to be innocent in the Biblical sense of the word, but who, nonetheless, are supposedly demonstrating a curiosity towards violence in these lines and within the frames of

this song. Mathers' inclination to believe in such an interest in violence among children could be partially caused by the fact that he was often bullied himself at a young age by other children, with a few occasions causing severe physical trauma and one of them leaving him in a coma for ten days (Dansby, 2003); this implies literal experience of the artist with at least some children's inclination to violence and thus makes the previously quoted lines a sarcastic remark and an attempt to point out hypocrisy.

Thus it can be inferred from all the examples given above that two of the top rappers of all time (Eminem and Tupac) are almost synonymously understood by many as a symbol of violence, intentional one at that, which drives a distinct parallel between Futurism and Rap. And what takes this parallel even further is a line that Mathers says later on in the same song, when he raps (1999) "I don't give a fuck, God sent me to piss the world off!" The latter is a direct and, perhaps, vulgar euphemism for essentially expressing a desire to shake up the world which also signifies a direct intent of breaking a norm or a convention: a very similar intention of breaking norms and conventions as that of the Futurist poets which ultimately renders the two genres very close in spirit and their quintessential final goals.

Violence in Art through Futurism, Rap: Catharsis, Censorship

As research has thus far shown, there are clear similarities in the ways that violence is communicated through Futurist poetry and Rap lyrics. In Futurism, violence is used to invoke a reaction from the readers with the intent of destroying old stereotypes, norms, conventions, and so on. In Rap, violence was originally communicated due to desperation, the social and economic struggles of the artists. However, the later forms of Rap demonstrate patterns similar to Futurism: there is a clear intent to invoke a reaction and challenge something, challenge the past, just as Futurism does. Such is the design behind the art, the conscious purpose that the artists themselves had.

However, there are psychological implications to this: this type of art can have unintended therapeutic consequences for both the artist and his or her audience, such as what Artaud attempted to consciously invoke in his theater. “Artaud considers his Theater of Cruelty to be a saving grace, because once an individual understands the interactive connection between the material and spiritual worlds, he/she will be at peace with the destructive forces in his/her own psyche” (Brooks, p. 162). Artaud’s entire philosophy of this path towards peace is cemented around the idea of coming to terms with the destructive forces that exist within everyone; violent and aggressive tendencies can easily be considered such. The benefit of Artaud’s theater is that the viewer can relive all the violence and anxiety they had ever experienced and thus reach catharsis (Brumat, p 27).

This can largely be applied to Futurist poetry and Rap lyricism as well. Through pouring the anger onto a piece of paper or the microphone, the artist relives the anxiety and sets himself/herself free of it. And the same can apply to many of the readers or the listeners: by

reliving the emotions alongside with the artist, the audience can also let go of the negative emotions. Thus censoring Futurist poetry or Rap music could, in fact, cause the opposite of what those who demand censorship truly want: censoring Rap, for example, would limit the audience's ability to relive their anger and let go of it, which could potentially cause a buildup of aggression. The latter can burst out at a given point thus it would be best to express it in the healthiest way possible before this happens. Among such healthy ways of anger expression could be art, Futurism and Rap being prime examples.

### **Limitations and Avenues for Future Research**

The only major limitation for my research was the lack of extensive literature on the topic of violence: there is little psychological research even discussing violent/aggressive patterns in a neutral, trustworthy light; most research on the topic is very pre-determined to viewing it negatively. However, as the general public worldwide grows more educated and open-minded, perhaps researchers will start incorporating this aspect of human behavior more into their work and will be less judgmental towards it. This research paper could contribute to the changes in people's perceptions of the very concepts of violence and aggression, thus it could help reiterate the importance of all artistic genres and the potential negative consequences of art censorship.

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