

The Unforgiving Futility of Time - Explored with Poetry and Rap Songs

The poem and rap songs I have selected are all addressing the unforgiving futility of time. The two rap songs are, *Aquemini* by Outkast and *Respiration* by Black Star, (Mos Def, Talib Kweli and Common). The poem that I am analyzing is *A Dream Within a Dream* by Edgar Allan Poe. In all of these poems, time is depicted as an undiscerning and unforgiving force. The lyrics suggest ways of coming to terms with the mortality of life and love.

Analysis of *A Dream Within a Dream* by Edgar Allan Poe

In this poem, the passage of time is symbolized by pitiless waves and the impact of time is symbolized by the “surf-tormented shore”. The love and memories that the narrator laments for are symbolized by the sand that slips through hands.

There are two stanzas of this poem that are contrasted and connected simultaneously. This poem depicts the conflicting experiences of love, life and loss that occur simultaneously. There is grief for all of the moments that are washed away by time. The narrator explains how pain and loss are the price of loving and living. The magnitude of this pain is expanded by the fact that no force can grip onto what is slipping away. Time has no patience or compassion. It is is unrelenting.

In the beginning, the narrator is parting from a loved one or perhaps life itself. The memorable moments of love and life are symbolized by the “Grains of the golden sand”. There is a preciousness and an elusiveness to what is slipping away. The use of alliteration in “Grains of the golden sand” draws attention to to it.

An additional use of alliteration emphasises “all that we see or seem”. This line speaks to the conflicting notions of reality that one might experience. When the narrator refers to “all that we see”, this reflects a shared external reality. Conversely, “all that we seem” connects to an internal reality and that might not always align with a shared external reality. This conflict between internal and external realities also carries a sense of grief. When we have experiences, the moments are set into existence by a shared reality. When we lose a loved one, we are losing shared memories and shared realities. There is grief for all the moments that only remain internally.

The two stanzas are not the same length. However, they both use iambic rhythm, couplets and triplets in the rhyme scheme. This parallel pattern weaves the ideas together in the two stanzas. This creates a sense of alignment within the conflict.

In the second stanza, there is an image depicted that captures the challenge of being alive. The narrator stands “amid the roar” and attempts to grip onto the gold sand that is slipping away. This prepositional phrase provides spatial information, but we do not receive any temporal information. This indicates that there is no beginning, middle or end within this set of intersecting forces. The waves, shore and sand seem infinite. Within this infinite realm, there are layers of simultaneous events. There is the concurrent action of weeping as moments pass. These layers are also bound together with the description of “surf-tormented shore”. This collocation weaves together words that depict the infinitely unforgiving nature of time. All of the moments of life are intimately interconnected with pain, loss and ultimately death.

A Dream Within A Dream - Poem by Edgar Allan Poe

Take this kiss upon the brow!
And, in parting from you now,
Thus much let me avow-
You are not wrong, who deem
That my days have been a dream;
Yet if hope has flown away
In a night, or in a day,
In a vision, or in none,
Is it therefore the less gone?
All that we see or seem
Is but a dream within a dream.

I stand amid the roar
Of a surf-tormented shore,
And I hold within my hand
Grains of the golden sand-
How few! yet how they creep

Through my fingers to the deep,
While I weep- while I weep!
O God! can I not grasp
Them with a tighter clasp?
O God! can I not save
One from the pitiless wave?
Is all that we see or seem
But a dream within a dream?

Aquemini by Outkast

My mind warps and bends floats the wind count to ten
Meet the twin Andre Ben. welcome to the lion's den
Original skin many men comprehend
I extend myself so you go out and tell a friend
Sin all depends on what you believing in
Faith is what you make it that's the hardest shit since MC Ren
Alien can blend right on in wit' yo' kin
Look again 'cause I swear I spot one every now and then
It's happenin' again wish I could tell you when
Andre this is Andre y'all just gon' have to make amends

Aquemini

Chorus: Even the sun goes down heroes eventually die
Horoscopes often lie and sometimes "why"
Nothin' is for sure nothin' is for certain nothin' lasts forever
But until they close the curtain
It's him and I Aquemini
Now is the time to get on like Spike Lee said
Get on the bus go get your work

And keep your beeper chirpin' is a must
Is you on that dust or cornstarch
Familiar with that smack man
The music is like that green stuff
Provided to you by sack man
Pac man how in the fuck do you think we gon' do that man?
Ridin' round Old National on 18's without no gat man
I'm strapped man & ready to bust on any nigga like that man
Me and my nigga we roll together like Batman and Robin
We prayed together through hard times
And swung hard when it was fitting
But now we tappin' the brakes from all them corners
That we be bending in Volkswagens and Bonneviles
Chevrolets and Coupe De Villes
If you ain't got no rims nigga don't get no wood grain
Steering wheel for real you can go on chill out & still build
Let your paper stack instead of going into overkill
Pay ya fucking beeper bill bitch
Chorus: Even the sun goes down heroes eventually die
Horoscopes often lie and sometimes "why"
Nothin' is for sure nothin' is for certain nothin' lasts forever
But until they close the curtain
It's him and I Aquemini
Twice upon a time there was a boy who died twice
And lived happily ever after but that's another chapter
Live from home of the brave with dirty dollars
And beauty parlors & baby bottles and bowling ball Impalas
And street scholars that's majoring in culinary arts
You know how to work bread cheese and dough
From scratch but see the catch is you can get caught
Know what ya sellin' what ya bought so cut that big talk
Let's walk to the bridge now meet me halfway

Now you may see some children dead off in the pathway
It's them poor babies walkin' slowly to the candy lady
It's lookin' bad need some hope
Like the words maybe, if, or probably more than a hobby
When my turntables get wobbly they don't fall
I'm sorry y'all I often drift I'm talkin' gift
So when it comes you never look the horse inside it's grill
Of course you know I feel like the bearer of bad news
Don't want to be it but it's needed so what have you
Now question is every nigga with dreads for the cause?
Is every nigga with golds for the fall? Naw
So don't get caught in appearance
It's Outkast Aquemini another Black experience Okay
Chorus: Even the sun goes down heroes eventually die
Horoscopes often lie and sometimes "why"
Nothin' is for sure nothin' is for certain nothin' lasts forever
But until they close the curtain
It's him and I Aquemini
The name is Big Boi Daddy Fat Sax
The nigga that like them Cadillacs
I stay down with these streets
Cause these streets is where my folks at
Better know that some say we pro-black boy we professional
We missed a lot of church so the music is our confessional
Get off the testicles and the nut sacks
You bust a rhyme we bust back
Get get back for real niggas that's out here tryin' to spit facts
You hear that can't come near that maybe you need to quit
Because Aquemini is Aquarius and Gemini runnin' shit like this
Yea yea yea yea
My mind warps and bends floats the wind count to ten
Meet the twin Andre Ben. welcome to the lion's den

Original skin many men comprehend
I extend myself so you go out and tell a friend
Sin all depends on what you believing in
Faith is what you make it that's the hardest shit since MC Ren
Alien can blend right on in wit' yo' kin
Look again 'cause I swear I spot one every now and then
It's happenin' again wish I could tell you when
Andre this is Andre y'all just gon' have to make amends
Chorus: Even the sun goes down heroes eventually die
Horoscopes often lie and sometimes "why"
Nothin' is for sure nothin' is for certain nothin' lasts forever
But until they close the curtain
It's him and I Aquemini

Respiration Black Star- Mos Def, Talib Kweli and Common

The new moon rode high in the crown of the metropolis
Shining, like who on top of this?
People was tussling, arguing and bustling
Gangstas of Gotham hardcore hustling
I'm wrestling with words and ideas
My ears is pricked, seeking what will transmit
The scribes can apply to transcript, yo
This ain't no time where the usual is suitable
Tonight alive, let's describe the inscrutable
The indisputable, we New York the narcotic
Draped in metal and fiber optics
Where mercenaries is paid to trade hot stock tips
For profits, thirsty criminals take pockets
Hard knuckles on the second hands of working class watches
Skyscrapers is colossus, the cost of living is preposterous
Stay alive, you play or die, no options, no Batman and Robin

Can't tell between the cops and the robbers, they both partners, they all heartless
With no conscience, back streets stay darkened
Where unbeliever hearts stay hardened
My eagle talons stay sharpened, like city lights stay throbbing
You either make a way or stay sobbing
The shiny Apple is bruised but sweet and if you choose to eat
You could lose your teeth, many crews retreat
Nightly news repeat, who got shot down and locked down
Spotlight to savages, NASDAQ averages
My narrative rose to explain this existence
Amidst the harbor lights which remain in the distance
So much on my mind that I can't recline
Blastin holes in the night til she bled sunshine
Breathe in, inhale vapors from bright stars that shine
Breathe out, weed smoke retrace the skyline
Heard the bass ride out like an ancient mating call
I can't take it y'all, I can feel the city breathing
Chest heaving, against the flesh of the evening
Sigh before we die like the last train leaving
Breathin in deep city breaths, sittin on shitty steps
We stoop to new lows, hell froze the night the city slept
The beast crept through concrete jungles
Communicatin with one another
And ghetto birds where waters fall
From the hydrants to the gutters
The beast walk the beats, but the beats we be makin
You on the wrong side of the track, lookin visibly shaken
Taken them plungers, plungin to death that's painted by the numbers
With Krylon applied pressure, cats is playin God
By havin children by a lesser baby mother but fuck it
We played against each other like puppets, swearin you got pull
When the only pull you got is the wool over your eyes

Gettin knowledge in jail like a blessing in disguise
Look in the skies for God, what you see besides the smog
Is broken dreams flying away on the wings of the obscene
Thoughts that people put in the air
Places where you could get murdered over a glare
But everything is fair
It's a paradox we call reality
So keepin it real will make you casualty of abnormal normality
Killers Born Naturally like, Mickey and Mallory
Not knowing the ways'll get you capped like an NBA salary
Some cats be emceeing to illustrate what we be seeing
Hard to be a spiritual being when shit is shakin what you believe in
For trees to grow in Brooklyn, seeds need to be planted
I'm asking if y'all feel me and the crowd left me stranded
My blood pressure boiled and rose, cause New York niggas
Actin spoiled at shows, to the winners the spoils go
I take the L, transfer to the 2, head to the gates
New York life type trife the Roman Empire state
So much on my mind that I can't recline
Blastin holes in the night til she bled sunshine
Breathe in, inhale vapors from bright stars that shine
Breathe out, weed smoke retrace the skyline
Heard the bass ride out like an ancient mating call
I can't take it y'all, I can feel the city breathing
Chest heaving, against the flesh of the evening
Sigh before we die like the last train leaving
Yo, on The Amen, Corner I stood lookin at my former hood
Felt the spirit in the wind, knew my friend was gone for good
Threw dirt on the casket, the hurt, I couldn't mask it
Mixin down emotions, struggle I hadn't mastered
I choreograph seven steps to heaven
In hell, waiting to exhale and make the bread leaven

Veteran of a cold war It's Chica-I-go for
What I know or, what's known
So some days I take the bus home, just to touch home
From the crib I spend months gone
Sat by the window with a clutched dome listenin to shorties cuss long
Young girls with weak minds, but they bust strong
Tried to call, or at least beep the Lord, but didn't have a touch-tone
It's a dog-eat-dog world, you gotta mush on
Some of this land I must own
Outta the city, they want us gone
Tearin down the 'jects creatin plush homes
My circumstance is between Cabrini and Love Jones
Surrounded by hate, yet I love home
Ask my guy how he thought travellin the world sound
Found it hard to imagine he hadn't been past downtown
It's deep, I heard the city breathe in its sleep
A reality I touch, but for me it's hard to keep
Deep, I heard my man breathe in his sleep
A reality I touch, but for me it's hard to keep
So much on my mind that I can't recline
Blastin holes in the night til she bled sunshine
Breathe in, inhale vapors from bright stars that shine
Breathe out, weed smoke retrace the skyline
How the bass ride out like an ancient mating call
I can't take it y'all, I can feel the city breathing
Chest heaving, against the flesh of the evening
Kiss the eyes goodbye I'm on the last train leaving