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Dissertation Abstract

## Cultural Remix: Polish Hip-Hop and the Sampling of Heritage

Asked about the nineteenth-century Romantic poet Adam Mickiewicz, the Polish rapper Doniu suggested, “If Mickiewicz was alive today, he’d be a good rhymer.” This dissertation examines the history, literary reception, and musical discourse that have positioned the legacy of Romanticism as a model for contemporary hip-hop musicians. It argues that Polish hip-hop’s appeals to the nation’s Romantic heritage serve as a means of negotiating and performing belonging both within the global genre and contemporary Polish culture. The conventions of hip-hop—rooted in sampling, intertextuality, decontextualizing the familiar, and privileging poetic prowess—create a music that is both a performance of reception and a lens through which to engage the nation’s cultural traditions. The national understanding of Polish Romanticism has always been the product of reading and negotiating meaning, and the performances analyzed in this study contribute to a rich tradition of interpretation. Though they speak to the past, these hip-hop artists are not confined by it. Rather, they “sample” history and tradition in a way that echoes the work done by Mickiewicz and his peers. Blending history and art, they cultivate a Polishness that preserves Romantic patriotic ideals of sacrifice and poetic service, while framing them within a global conversation of hip-hop artists speaking to and for marginalized communities.

This dissertation begins by considering how conventions of national and genre authenticity become mutually reinforcing as Polish hip-hop communities cultivate an artistic lineage that reaches back to the poets of the nineteenth century. Employing the career of Peja/Slums Attack as a case study, Chapter One argues that the group’s evolution from privileging appeals to American rappers to fashioning themselves as a contemporary incarnation of Poland’s Romantic poet-patriots exemplifies a localization of the genre that adapts rap conventions of speaking for oppressed communities to position Poland itself as the marginalized subject. The second chapter shifts focus to sampling as a formal and historical appeal to the past, exemplified in the rapper L.U.C.’s 2009 album *39/89 Zrozumieć Polskę (39/89 To Understand Poland)*. Composed of sampled archival audio against a live orchestra, the album illuminates the ways sampling represents the blending of document and narrative in the creation of memory—a dynamic the chapter argues infuses not just culture, but also political discussions of history. Chapter Three turns to rappers who perform texts written by Adam Mickiewicz, a choice analyzed as challenging Romantic and hip-hop ideas of authorship and originality, while also demonstrating how reading (via performance) might be understood as a marker of creative credibility. The final chapter examines Dorota Masłowska’s musical and literary play with the idea of authenticity and its tropes. Performing ironic appropriations of both hip-hop and Polish national conventions, Masłowska draws on the traditions preserved in the works of the other artists considered and in so doing, challenges them while also evincing their lasting power. In their diverse engagement with tradition, the artists considered highlight not only the persistence of Polish Romantic thought, but also the power of artists to “remix” the Romantic legacy to speak to the present.