

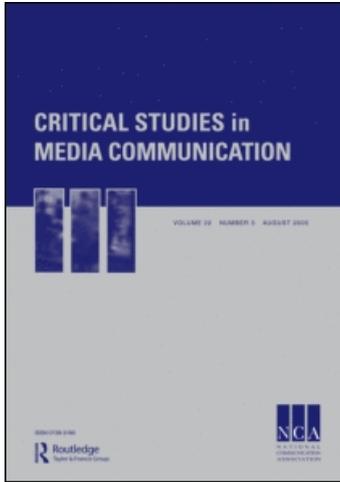
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“I Used to Love Him”: Exploring the Miseducation About Black Love and Sex

Ebony A. Utley

This paper analyzes the rhetorical function of the tropes of love and sex in the quintessential break up song, “I Used to Love Him,” from Lauryn Hill’s multi-platinum 1998 album, The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill. Through a textual analysis that emphasizes the recurrent tropes of synecdoche and metaphor, I argue that, despite the song’s seemingly liberating and empowering message, its conception of love is rooted in movements towards new forms of domination as opposed to self-actualization. This critical examination of a black love relationship within hip hop’s myriad mediated representations of loveless black sex contributes to the resurgent interest in discourses on love.

Keywords: Lauryn Hill; Love; Hip hop; African Americans; Conceptual metaphor

Really, like, love right now, is just like, confusion. (Male student from *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill*)¹

Love is difficult to define. Love theorists Robert J. Sternberg and Susan Grajek (1984) concur that “love can be among the most intense of human emotions, and is certainly one of the most sought after. People have been known to lie, cheat, steal, and even kill in its name, yet no one knows quite what it is” (p. 312). Despite mediated representations of the intensity with which individuals pursue love, Joshua Gunn (2008) argues that rhetoricians have been reluctant to theorize it because “love is already the assumed dynamic underwriting persuasion,” and “because of the stupidity it necessarily entails” (p. 133). Gunn admits that sentimental discussions

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about love's role in persuasion through identification as well as invitational rhetoric "risk being thought of as . . . trite and cheesy" (p. 134).

I argue that despite what Gunn calls the "kitchy" and un-rigorous reputation that writing about love may have, we cannot know what role love plays in persuasion until we know how love is defined. In order to begin to understand what love is, we must explore the tropes that circumscribe love especially in popular discourse where those tropes are most common. It is time to risk being thought of as trite and cheesy in order to begin to understand what role love plays in individuals' lives. Everyone talks about love because everyone needs love. As Sternberg and Grajek (1984) have alluded, at some point, many of us will pursue love with a dogged determinism unparalleled by other life pursuits. For African Americans, the traditional ambiguities surrounding the definition and pursuit of love are further impoverished by a popular cultural environment that over-emphasizes the production and consumption of black sex.

This paper responds to Gunn's call for more rhetorical studies on love by acknowledging that we cannot theorize love until we understand how people define love and distinguish it from sex. Additionally, this paper fills the lacuna of critical engagements about black love by analyzing "I Used to Love Him" from Lauryn Hill's five time Grammy Award-winning multi-platinum album *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill*. Released on August 25, 1998, *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill* debuted at number one on the Billboard 200 and the Top R&B Albums charts. Selling over 400,000 copies, at the time it was "the biggest debut week for a female artist in the SoundScan era" (Samuels, 1998, ¶ 3). At least 15 million copies of the album were eventually sold (Cleage, 2002, p. 90). Its producer, writer, arranger, and principal performer, Lauryn Hill, amassed international popularity with an album that explored her personal miseducation about love.

Rolling Stone journalist Greg Kot (1999) describes Hill's deeply personal album:

Its fourteen tracks . . . flow like autobiography, a young woman's journey from innocence to disillusionment and, finally, to the inner peace afforded by self-knowledge. Heartless lovers and soulless artists are obstacles encountered along the way; the presence of God in everyday life and the joy of home and children are signposts. Waiting at the end of Hill's road was a commercial jackpot. (p. 43)

It was a jackpot centered on what Patricia Hill Collins (2004) calls the rebellious act of demanding respect from those who "stigmatize Black women as unworthy of love" (p. 250). bell hooks (2001) also praises Hill for exploring "love and relationships with grace, honesty and respect" (p. 169).

Despite the album's seemingly liberating and empowering messages about love relationships, this paper contributes to the resurgent interest in discourses on love through a textual analysis that argues the recurring tropes within "I Used to Love Him" are rooted in tropes of movement towards new forms of domination and forced submission as opposed to self-actualization.

After broadly considering how mediations of black love may be impeded by pervasive representations of black sex within hip hop culture, I provide an overview of how metaphor functions as a trope, survey the tropes within the album, justify

a particular focus on *Miseducation's* track number nine, "I Used to Love Him," and offer an analysis that identifies and discusses what the prominent tropes within "I Used to Love Him" reveal about African American love relationships.

Where is the Love?

"Sex sells" has long been the advertiser's flippant mantra. Delving into the intimate details of how sex serves capitalism reveals a complex relationship between sex and love. Sex sells because its saturation in many Western societies reminds consumers that they inhabit a void that the consumption of sex should fill. The quest for sex constrains sex discourse within a realm of commodification that distracts individuals from the reality that sex has been avulsed from pleasure and love, and subsumed by capitalism (Ellison, 1996; Foucault, 1990). Perceiving sex as work and sex as a product diminishes the potential for a (re)union between sex and the erotic.

The erotic is a deep, intimate, joyful connection within and among human beings. As a mode of communication, the erotic is a sensual capacity to feel deeply with others. The potential for love lies in the erotic. Black feminist Audre Lorde (1984) endows the erotic with the ability to "give us the energy to pursue genuine change within our world" (p. 59). According to Christian ethicist Marvin Ellison (1996), this potential is clearly recognized by those who view the erotic "as powerful and dangerous requiring strong externally imposed controls" (p. 6). Historically, erotophobia (fear of the erotic) has obscured the erotic by overemphasizing sex acts without feeling. One of the most egregious attempts to control the erotic emerged during slavery when black bodies were forced to participate in complex sexual economies that conflated sex, labor, and wealth.

Capitalizing on racialized and reductionist stereotypes of the black brutes' inherent sexual prowess, and black wenches' innate lasciviousness, slave owners justified breeding as a form of sex work that reproduced labor and wealth for the plantation. Although the slave system has been eradicated, the continued commodification of black sex without love within hip hop culture is historicized by the stereotypes of African Americans as hypersexual libertines. Cultural critic Eric Watts (2002) argues that the pursuit of CREAM (Cash Rules Everything Around Me) within some hip hop has the potential to generate sexual arousal/pleasure. He concludes that potential is ultimately compromised by the white supremacist patriarchal culture that established the foundation for the perception of black bodies as (routes to) capital.

Despite the tension inherent in a white supremacist patriarchal culture that consumes black bodies (hooks, 1992), African American women and men continue to capitalize on their "corporeal resources" as a form of "play-labor" (Kelley, 1997, p. 45) via pornography and the mediated proliferation of the pimp. In her essay on black sexualities and hip hop pornography, Mireille Miller-Young (2008) describes black females "seeking access, recognition, mobility, independence, and sexual pleasure" via an adult video industry that could also be said to exploit, ghettoize, and objectify them (p. 279). Black men who depict themselves as pimps, according to Eithne Quinn (2000) and hooks (2001), praise an ability to commodify female sexuality

that salvages masculine self-esteem by establishing reputation and recognition. Many black youth are caught in quagmires of representation where their appeals to the erotic are rooted in the same stereotypes that historically curtailed black access to the erotic. Couple this with pornographic depictions of desire that, in obeisance to capital gain, divorce sex from intimacy and pleasure and it is no wonder that prominent mediations of love represent black bodies as commodities.

Love and gendered relationship studies grounded in Eurocentric experiences continue to minimize the complexities of love for African Americans (Bell, Bouie, & Baldwin, 1990; Lawrence-Webb, Littlefield, & Okundaye, 2004). Sternberg (1986), for example, defines love in terms of intimacy, passion, and decision/commitment—the three points of his triangular theory of love:

- (a) intimacy, which encompasses the feelings of closeness, connectedness, and bondedness one experiences in loving relationships; (b) passion, which encompasses the drives that lead to romance, physical attraction, and sexual consummation; and (c) decision/commitment, which encompasses, in the short term, the decision that one loves another, and in the long term, the commitment to maintain that love. (p. 119)

But what happens when the bondedness essential to intimacy is compromised by a history of slavery where black bodies were mere bartering chips? What happens to love when mediated depictions of passion among black individuals divorce sex and love in anti-erotic pornographic depictions of desire? How does one define commitment when the economic, political, and social opportunities denied to black people limit their chances of success (Collins, 2004, pp. 258–259)? Do the triangular conditions for love become nugatory for black people? This rhetorical analysis of “I Used to Love Him” from *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill* examines one artist’s response to the African American struggle to depict black love amidst the profitable production of black sex. Paying careful attention to the tropes used to describe love in this popular song will help to reveal how love is commonly viewed in terms of concepts that contribute to complex and often contradictory perceptions about love.

Conceptual Metaphors: Tropes of Perspective

In his essay, “Four Master Tropes,” Kenneth Burke (1969) characterizes metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony as four tropes that lead to “the discovery and description of ‘the truth’” (p. 503). He argues that tropes’ emphases on perspective, reduction, representation, and dialectic “shade into one another” to create meaning. While my emphasis is on the function of metaphors as tropes of perspective, my argument is premised on the justification that “I Used to Love Him” is a synecdoche—a representative anecdote—for the album as a whole as well as Hill’s understanding of love.

Metaphors provide perspective because, as Burke notes, they are “device[s] for seeing something in terms of something else” (1969, p. 503). Careful attention to a text’s metaphors can reveal how human experiences are categorized. Conceptual metaphor theorist George Lakoff (1987) purports that categories are essential to “our

thought, perception, action, and speech. Every time we see something as a *kind* of thing . . . we are categorizing” (p. 5). Metaphors enhance comprehension by presupposing an interaction between two categories. In *Metaphors We Live By*, Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980) describe the essence of metaphor as “understanding and experiencing one thing in terms of another” by emphasizing certain aspects of the thing compared and deemphasizing others (p. 5). When the thing compared is an abstract entity like emotions, relationships, an activity, or a state of being, Lakoff (1993) argues that humans construct conceptual metaphors that correspond to lived experiences.

For example, Lakoff’s staple conceptual metaphor mapping LOVE IS A JOURNEY is an event structure metaphor that describes long term purposeful activities as journeys. The perpetuation of metaphors such as—this relationship isn’t going anywhere, this relationship is a dead-end street, look how far we’ve come, and we have to go our separate ways—are premised on the physical experience of having to move to a destination to achieve a desired goal. Lakoff (1993) gives the following examples. “If you want a drink of water, you’ve got to go to the water fountain. If you want to be in the sunshine, you have to move to where the sunshine is” (p. 240). Conceptual metaphors are an integral part of how humans make meaning; their effectiveness is contingent upon establishing relationships between word and thought, and evading the tendency to dissect a metaphor into its elemental parts—subject (tenor) and its filter or lens (vehicle) through which the subject is being compared (Douglass, 2000).

Critical attention to these conceptual metaphors discloses how metaphors help individuals “draw inferences, set goals, make commitments, and execute plans” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 158). By extension, a masterful metaphor can obscure other metaphors and preclude thinking in certain ways. Several metaphor studies have considered how master metaphors of diabolism and force have led to war (Ivie, 1982, 1987; Carpenter, 1990; Mackey-Kallis & Hahn, 1994). Other metaphor studies range from explications of the root metaphors at the core of conflict (Farrell & Goodnight, 1981; Smith & Eisenberg, 1987) to discussions of the relationship among a rhetor’s use of metaphor, invention, and ethos (Jamieson, 1980; Gross 2004) to consideration of which archetypal or conceptual metaphors resonate most powerfully with audiences (Osborn & Ehninger, 1962; Osborn 1967, 1977; McMillan & Cheney, 1996).

Despite the insight garnered from metaphor analysis about various worldviews, Douglass (2000) and McGlone (2007) have both critiqued conceptual metaphor studies for making unsubstantiated claims about how humans process metaphors. Their assessment is based on the lack of interaction studies that query how individuals construct and interpret metaphors. This analysis responds to McGlone’s call for evidence of conceptual mapping by exploring how the love metaphors in “I Used to Love Him” provide evidence of the resources black Americans have for discussing an abstract entity such as love. Even though I am not addressing how the metaphors were formed in Hill’s mind or received by her audiences, I argue that linking her conceptual metaphors to African American mediated experiences with sex

and love reconstructs a particular and familiar view of the black love experience that demands interrogation.

The Miseducation

Tropes of love are the centerpiece of the album title inspired by Carter G. Woodson's (1933) *The Mis-education of the Negro*. Woodson's treatise recounts how restricted access to comprehensive education about African American history and accomplishments has led African Americans to accept an inferior social position. Sixty-five years later, Hill's *Miseducation* describes how unfettered access to mediated and marketed images of black sex has led her, as an African American woman, to accept an inferior role in her relationships. In her research on female rap artists, Gwendolyn Pough (2004) writes that the title makes a political statement about Hill's miseducation and commitment to "unlearning all the trust and the love that previously sustained many of her relationships" (p. 107).

In addition to the title, Hill's liberation from her miseducation continues in the album's visual tropes. From the front to back cover of the liner notes, the images of Hill move from a glamorous representation to a less winsome reality. The cover depicts an engraving of a mature-looking Hill in a wooden school desk. Her characteristic dreadlocks are perfectly sculpted as she gazes off in the distance. This flawless image is interrupted as Hill draws attention to her imperfections as she literally looks closely at herself in the six pictures within the liner notes. She is primping pensively in a public (school) restroom. The importance of self-reflection is emphasized by the mirror which is prominently featured in each shot. Hill muses on her reflection in the mirrors. She examines her eyeliner, adorns herself with earrings, and adjusts her headscarf. When she is finished, the final shot depicts her entire body, but she is not ready to be fully seen. Again she gazes into the distance and squats, cutting her physical height in half. This shrinking coupled with the transcribed lyrics from the album reflect Hill's transparent maturation process as she learns what she must unlearn, and shrinks away from a self that has been constructed by mediated images.

The album's visual tropes conclude with a depiction of an unkempt Hill on the back cover. With her makeup off and her uncovered hair disheveled, Hill rejects the miseducation that encouraged her to produce perfect representations of herself. The unadorned Hill leans forward and, although she continues to diminish her size, the smaller Hill represents the process of unlearning and the potential for growth.² For the first time, she looks directly into the camera. She is ready to be seen without her accoutrements. She is starting over next to a piano in front of a chalkboard in a classroom. By the conclusion of the album, she is prepared to be seen as a woman ready to learn on her own terms via her natural talent for music.

The miseducation metaphors in the title and liner notes are further explored in the album's six interludes—conversations with students about love. The album begins with the sound of school bells and a male instructor taking roll. He receives no response when he calls Hill's name several times. Her rebellious rejection of the

miseducation that occurs in school is foreshadowed by the graffiti-styled cover of her image etched in a school desk. Defiling school property with the image that institutional forms of discourse have given her of herself is an important transgression that presages the album's content. Class continues despite Hill's absence.

Instead of lecturing the students about love, the instructor guides their conversation with probing questions. The students generally conclude that television and music contribute to their lack of knowledge about love. Pough (2004) argues that the students' personal narratives about love "paint a startling picture of just how much young people do not know about life and love and how some of that ignorance is passed down through the music and culture" (p. 108). Despite their immaturity on matters of the heart, the emphasis on the students' personal experiences with love symbolizes the self-reflection that is consistent with the album and its packaging. Self-reflection challenges miseducation by encouraging the self to begin to think about itself outside of mediated representations. The students clearly do not have all of the answers, but they are on their way to finding their own education. Hill's lyrical presence among and between the children's conversations presents an alternative representation of love that helps them to find their own voices similar to the way that she has found hers and hopes her listeners will find theirs.

In conjunction with the title, liner notes, and interludes, the progression of the album's tracks metonymically represent a shift from miseducation about love towards advocating black other and self love. The first 10 tracks represent conflict—with others and within herself. "Lost Ones," "Superstar," "Final Hour," and "Forgive them Father" admonish those lost souls whose myopic worldviews rendered them incapable of love and compassion. "Ex-Factor," "When It Hurts So Bad," and "I Used to Love Him" describe quintessential heterosexual relationship drama ranging from unrequited love to emotionally abusive relationships. "To Zion," and "Doo Wop (That Thing)" describe internal conflicts within women who must learn how to love themselves amidst competing advice from those closest to them. "To Zion," a metaphor for utopia, is especially moving in its focus on Hill's decision to have her first child in the midst of a budding career. The shift in the album's second half is marked by the quintessential ode to lovers, "Nothing Even Matters." In "Every Ghetto, Every City," and "Everything is Everything" Hill reminisces about her love for her community. In the final official track "The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill," Hill describes how God's love helped her to love herself.

Hill's tropes within "I Used to Love Him" construct a tension-filled narrative about a relationship with a young man whose negative influence is replaced by a divine lover. She describes moving away from her miseducation about love and moving towards true love.³ Furthermore, the five minute and thirty-nine second track is often perceived as a celebratory song of empowerment written and arranged by Hill and performed by Hill and Mary J. Blige—the Queen of Rhythm and Blues.

To audiences familiar with their personal stories, Hill and Blige are sister friends who understand the pain of love. It is rumored that *Miseducation* was inspired by Hill's own dysfunctional love relationship with a married, Wyclef Jean, the front man

for The Fugees trio of which Hill and Prakazrel Michel were a part (Farley, 1999; Hinds, 2001; Touré 2006). In an interview with *Essence*, Hill described an anonymous relationship that may have been with Jean:

I'm a lot hurt and I'm a lot disappointed. Half of these niggas that I meet, they don't know about relationships. And when they hurt you, they don't know it. Or if they do know, they don't really give a f— because they've been so bruised, battered and scarred themselves. (Young, 1998, ¶ 8)

A source close to Hill said she never healed from her broken heart (Morgan, 2006, p. 158).

Blige's fans knew how much she used to love lead singer K-Ci from the R&B group Jodeci despite their very public and abusive relationship. Blige's struggles with drug addiction were also very public. The presence of these two women singing the same story as a single protagonist affirms the recurring experiences of black women who must also disassociate themselves and their love from an unhealthy relationship.

Hill describes this tenuous relationship with a young man in the first verse. In the first third of the second verse, Blige narrates how the pain of the relationship intensifies. The women alternately sing the remainder of the song. The exchange evokes the power inherent in women helping each other find healing. Not only do Hill and Blige support each other but the camaraderie and shared experience suggest that they support their audiences as well.

Their impassioned duet has the potential to move listeners from suffering to redemption. When Hill and Blige employ several runs by elongating their vowels, their improvisation extends the time of the song beyond the bounds of the bars and measures of the score, and makes the music literally come alive for the listeners thereby increasing the window of opportunity for female listeners to join them in their new state-location. The most emotive lines are in the third verse when Hill and Blige testify to the joy they felt in abandoning the young man and indulging in true love with their Creator. In this extremely woman-identified song, they depict themselves as survivors of oppressive love. I argue, however, that the song's movement and force conceptual metaphors perpetuate patriarchal relationships that compromise black love.

Tropes of Perspective

Movement Metaphors

Movement and dominating forces comprise the two core tropes at work within "I Used to Love Him." The prominent movement trope is LOVE IS A JOURNEY (Lakoff, Epenson, & Schwartz, 1991, pp. 36–37). Since definitions of love are often fleeting, love is habitually described as a journey—a familiar event grounded in the everyday experience of moving through space and time to arrive at a preferred destination (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, pp. 85, 118).

The track's opening line indicates the arrival at a preferred destination when the background signers croon, "Now I don't/I used to love him/Now I don't/Now

I don't." The initial use and repetition of "now" acknowledges the journey of the love from the past to a present moment and makes room for movement into an undetermined future. The initial two verses of the narrative traverse time by reflecting on the past tumultuous relationship with a young man. The repeated chorus of "I used to love him but now I don't" moves the narrative from that tumultuous past into a present state where they no longer love him. No matter how unpleasant the past, the chorus increases our anticipation for a resolution. Not only are the lyrics about love understood in terms of motion metaphors, but the sonic components of "I Used to Love Him" can also be understood in terms of motion metaphors.

Mark L. Johnson and Steven Larson (2003) assert that the musical landscape metaphor corresponds with the experience of moving "our bodies through a spatial landscape . . . from a starting point through a series of intermediate steps to a destination" (p. 71). What musical travelers hear is based on where they are along the journey of the musical landscape. For a majority of the track, "I Used to Love Him" listeners hear a bass line as the only instrumentation with the exception of a few seconds at the end of each bar when the drums and keyboard accompany the bass and propel the music forward. Hill and Blige's descriptions of the past as well as the present "now" accompany the persistent and invariable bass line as guides along the unhurried progression of the "I Used to Love Him" journey.

Inherent in the LOVE IS A JOURNEY trope is the idea that love journeys require two travelers. Even though there is no masculine voice in the song, the pulsating bass metaphorically represents a masculine presence. Its lower register compliments the female singers' higher vocal registers. Not only are Hill and Blige supporting each other as travelers along their love journeys, but listeners are invited to share their journey as music travelers. The love/music journey is further familiarized by an oohing chorus of harmonizing background vocalist companions who remind audiences that an innumerable number of people have been and will continue to embark upon love journeys that extend behind and before us in time.

The beginning of the first verse initiates the love journey. Hill sings, "As I look at what I've done/The type of life that I've lived/How many things I pray the father will forgive/One situation involved a young man." Instead of blaming the young man or sharing culpability for the inappropriate relationship, Hill assumes complete responsibility for her indiscretions. Accepting responsibility is a theme that also persists in the chorus. "I used to love him but now I don't" implies that Hill and Blige did not fall in love. Instead of using the conceptual metaphor of love as a container into which they haplessly fell (Glucksberg & McGlone, 1999, p. 1545), choosing a love journey represents the acceptance of personal choices made along the way.

As the narrator of her love journey, Hill chooses to distance herself from the young man. Describing him with the formal designator "young man" increases the distance between them, minimizes the intensity of their relationship, and increases the ambiguity surrounding their relationship. It is unclear whether they were sexual partners. It is further unclear whether they were in a committed relationship. This distance created by her formal language coupled with the ambiguous way that she describes the relationship makes it easier for Hill to move away from him and

towards the Father's forgiveness. Hill's desire to move closer to the Father is further embodied in her metaphorical representation of God. Comparing God to a parent creates a daughter–father intimacy that lessens the distance between a contrite human and an omnipotent albeit unseen deity.

In verse two, Hill and Blige depict themselves as travelers on a love road of “passion and pain.” They assume responsibility for choosing this road, yet they convey their anxiety upon having to make a further choice at the crossroad. In a very emotional moment in the song, Hill and Blige alternate singing the following impassioned lines: “Torn and confused wasted and used/Reached the crossroad which path would I choose/Stuck and frustrated I waited, debated/For something to happen that just wasn't fated.” They describe themselves as torn, confused, wasted, used, stuck, and frustrated at the crossroad. The profound aggravation heard in their voices when they encounter immobility conveys the significance of continuing the journey. Individuals facing a crossroad are forced to make a choice between the blurred boundaries of oppositional dichotomies such as dark and light, past and present, evil and good, and wrong and right. Hill and Blige signify on these various intersections when they describe their sin intersecting with their repentance. They acknowledge their culpability in trying to maintain an ill-fated relationship and express a desire for redemption via the tropes *DESPAIR IS DARKNESS AND HOPE IS LIGHT* (Lakoff et al., 1991, pp. 512, 190).

By the conclusion of the second verse, the travelers have emerged from the darkness of their love journey into “the sweet dawn.” The hope embodied in the dawn has a religious significance. According to Rogerson and McKay's (1977) biblical exegesis of the Psalms, the dawn is “synonymous with the vision of God's beauty . . . entry into his presence, or into a communion with him that will last as long as life endures” (p. 123). The “I used to love him but now I don't” chorus builds up to the inevitability of the metaphorical dawn.

Ironically, after two verses committed to a progressive journey away from pain and towards the Father's forgiveness, Hill and Blige stand still at the metaphorical crossroad all night until the dawn arrives. Albeit rendered temporarily immobile, they had not reached a dead end. At the crossroad, they are surrounded by choices—continue on the current path, return from whence they came, abandon the road of passion and pain for two unknown potentially salvific alternatives—yet they return to the familiar. The celebratory reference to the dawn implies that the darkness is sufficiently behind them, but there has been no marked change in the character of the protagonists; they are still passive, dependent, and, as we shall see, subject to forces of nature. In verse three they describe their reunion with the Father who saved and showed the true meaning of love, but this reunion marks a return to the place where they were before the situation with the young man not to a future place of healing.

Evidence that the future place of healing may be compromised is found in a description of a present encounter with the young man and a sonic shift. Near the end of the third verse Hill and Blige describe seeing the young man: “I see him sometimes and the look in his eye/Is one of a man who's lost treasures untold/But my heart is gold see I took back my soul/And totally let my Creator control.” It is not

unusual for exes to maintain amicable relationships; nor is it a rarity to encounter an ex sometimes. It is, however, noteworthy that this female-empowering breakup song mentions the ex at all, considering that the women's healing is predicated on completely severing ties with the young man. Furthermore, the women objectify themselves by describing themselves as the young man's missing material possessions.

Sonically, during these lines, the persistent bass that was marking progress from past to the present is silent for the first time in the song because Hill and Blige are not making progress in that moment. Instead, they are allowing the young man to effect their emotions again. Interestingly, the masculine presence resumes when the bass reenters on "Creator." The bass is not just the song's masculine presence; it metaphorically represents the Father/Creator as a masculine presence. The Father/Creator falls silent, i.e. stalls his presence and guidance when Hill and Blige's focus temporarily shifts back to the young man.

The chorus and concluding verse of the song seem to propel the travelers toward a resolution but the movement into a new future is consistently compromised. The conjunction but in the chorus implies a disruption and a change of direction, e.g. moving forward then turning around. And implies a continuation. "And now I don't" would represent memory, continuity, and progress towards a healing place as opposed to a retreat to an insecure place that led to the initial suffering. Additionally, besides the temporary absence of the bass, there are no major musical innovations in the song. There is no notable bridge. There are no notable shifts in key or introduction of new instruments. The predictable repetition confirms for musical travelers that the music already heard and the music to come are the same. Johnson and Larson (2003) argue that music like this "make[s] us feel like we're experiencing the same time over again" (p. 73). I argue that the lack of musical innovation in the song between descriptions of the past and the present "now" compromise the potential for a different future. The music, coupled with the tenuous final reference to the young man and the disruptive chorus, belies the empowering breakup message and confirms that despite privileging movement tropes, by the conclusion of the song, Hill and Blige are not moving progressively forward as much as they are engaging a dialectical motion forwards and backwards along a familiar continuum.

Force Metaphors

The movement metaphors within "I Used to Love Him," suggest that the protagonists have not yet fully moved from darkness into the sweet dawn that they describe. Their movements are further curtailed by the song's dominating psychological and physical force tropes. The song's metaphors for love and heartbreak follow the mapping PSYCHOLOGICAL FORCES ARE PHYSICAL FORCES (Lakoff et al., 1991, p. 45). The dominating psychological force tropes for love are a heart-stealing thief in the night and love as a drug.

The psychologically manipulative contours of the relationship emerge in the first verse when Hill sings "He stole my heart like a thief in the night/Dulled my senses blurred my sight." Her stolen heart is a metonym for her emotions and desires.

Metaphorically, when the young man steals her heart under the cover of darkness, he surreptitiously destabilizes her emotional epicenter. In the absence of her heart, Hill becomes dependent on the young man for her emotional stability. This state of dependency is rendered undesirable when Hill references her dulled senses and blurred sight, both of which are symptoms of an unhealthy addiction.

In her solo verse, Blige furthers the addiction theme by portraying herself as a fiend addicted to love. It is not unusual to compare love to a drug. Similar chemical changes take place in the brain in the presence and absence of love and drugs (Liebowitz, 1983; Peele & Brodsky, 1976). However, instead of depicting themselves on a high for intimacy, passion, and commitment, Hill and Blige describe an unhealthy love addiction that leaves them torn, confused, wasted, and used. All of those adjectives are physical metaphors for the psychological trauma of heartbreak. Psychological harm is further compared with physical injury when Hill sings, "misled I bled till the poison was gone." Her hurt physically leaves the body as blood. The choice of blood as the toxin that she must detox refers to the loss of life. Hill and Blige metaphorically convey the contours of a dysfunctional relationship in "I Used to Love Him" where they are subject to the whims of psychologically dominating forces. The domination continues in their use of natural metaphors that represent dominating physical forces.

In verse one, Hill describes the young man as the ocean and herself as the sand. In "The Evolution of the Archetypal Sea in Rhetoric and Poetic," Michael Osborn (1977) discusses how the metaphorical "dangerous and threatening" properties of large bodies of water have been sustained in popular imagination. Indeed, the ocean is a meandering, expansive, dynamic, tumultuous, powerful, and occasionally violent life force. The sand is a barrier that limits the ocean and redirects the wind, but erosion is inevitable as the ocean beats the sand into submission. As the ocean ebbs and flows it sometimes wrenches and other times gently carries pieces of the sand away with it. The ocean and wind shape the sand. This natural metaphor of domination and submission is chosen to describe the relationship. The sea, according to Osborn (1977) also represents a patriarchal sense of freedom: "Men came to find in the ocean a large scale, concrete projection of what they felt in grander moments to be their own depth, immensity, mystery, and permanence" (p. 357). Faithful to the time tested metaphor, the song's ocean is a masculine-identified vastly unconquerable, unpredictable force that exists in tension with the feminine-identified sand.

Lest audiences assume that unloving the young man actively rejects all forms of masculine domination, attention must be paid to the final verse where Hill and Blige describe the divine protection and love they receive from their Father/Creator to whom they relinquished total control over their lives. Supposedly this divine love, "greater than planets and deeper than oceans," supersedes the superficial love for the young man, but the all encompassing nature of this oceanic love seems suspiciously like exchanging one dominating force for another.

The song begins and ends with oceanic metaphors for love. Because the ocean's essential characteristics remain unchanged in each metaphor, it is unclear how the same ocean is oppressive as a young man and liberating as the Creator. If the

Creator's love is "deeper than any oceans" Hill and Blige still desire the masculine and all-encompassing properties of the ocean. Perhaps, now that they are deeper in the water, they are in more danger than they were before. As daughters dominated by a patriarchal Father God, Hill and Blige remain susceptible to masculine oppression. Furthermore, the Creator metaphor equates the divine with the aforementioned unpredictable, uncontrollable, ubiquitous power of nature. The Creator becomes synonymous with nature and masculinity as dominating forces. The Creator's protection and salvation does not have to be dominating, but Hill's metaphors appear invested in patriarchal intimacy.

Discussion of Meanings

"I Used to Love Him," appears to be an empowering breakup song, but its tropes reveal regressive movements and the persistence of oppressive patriarchal dominating forces. The vocalists depict their relationship with the divine as "a dominant-submissive, subject-object encounter" (hooks, 1989, p. 131) by highlighting their desire for redemptive suffering, downplaying self-affirmation and healing, and hiding the redemptive potential of the Creator.

Redemptive suffering is the belief that not only is suffering justified but it also should be coveted as part of a spiritual maturation process. Redemptive suffering has its roots in the Christian tradition of Jesus Christ's ultimate sacrifice of his life in order to bring salvation to humankind. Many black Christian women emulate this surrogacy when they perceive suffering as something that brings them closer to God (Douglas 1994). Professor, writer, and minister, Renita Weems (2004) historicizes black Christian women's relationship to redemptive suffering.

The reasons Black churchwomen cling to the notion of suffering as a way to please God and give them proximity to the divine may date back to Christian antiquity when church fathers vilified women as temptresses to evil, or at the least, "weak vessels." It was a short step from there to suggesting that women might redeem themselves through suffering and self-sacrifice. (p. 162)

By taking full responsibility for the relationship with the young man and the punishment that comes along with the relationship, Hill and Blige portray themselves as deserving of punishment. The two women suppress their desires for love in terms of mutual intimacy, passion, and commitment in exchange for the oceanic love of a divine Father/Creator. Despite the contrasting role the divine plays in the heterosexual courtship reflected in "I Used to Love Him," Hill and Blige do not figure the Creator in a way that teaches them how to forgive themselves.

In addition to inadvertently perpetuating patriarchy through redemptive suffering, the song also downplays self-affirmation and healing. By the end, Hill and Blige have not moved into a new future. They return to the "safe space" of the Creator, the same tenuous position that led them to embark upon their journey of passion and pain. The chorus, "I used to love him but now I don't" implies their pain has not been

replaced with anything. An emphasis on self love would demand an interpretation along the lines of “I used to love him and now I love *me*.” Self love would require Hill and Blige to seek healing for their hurt selves after the relationship with the young man. Listeners, however, are left with no indication that Hill and Blige’s next heterosexual courtship will not reaffirm the same notions of personal responsibility without personal forgiveness, the awesomeness of an oceanic love, and enduring bleeding (suffering) until the pain is gone.

Despite the emphasis on movement there is no movement away from constraining forces or towards a healthy embrace of the desire for love in terms of mutual intimacy, passion, or commitment. In light of the tropes of redemptive suffering and domination within the song, Hill and Blige have not healed sufficiently enough to maintain a relationship based on “a combination of trust, commitment, care, respect, knowledge, and responsibility” whether the lover is a foolish young man or the Creator (hooks, 2000, p. 54). Hill and Blige are physically and psychologically incapacitated by love. Instead of taking the time to heal, they pass the stolen heart to another masculine-identified being without articulating why they trust Him.

Equally important to what the tropes highlight and downplay in “I Used to Love Him” is the perspective that the tropes conceal. Specifically, the tropes hide the redemptive potential of a Mother or Androgynous/Creator as opposed to a Father/Creator. Power is so completely male identified in the text that it leaves no room for a nurturing figure to comfort the women, perhaps without punishment or suffering. The tropes encourage the embrace of passion and pain as welcome experiences along life’s journeys. The tropes hide the potential for pleasure to be not only possible but permissible and preferable within intimate relationships based on reciprocity and mutuality.

Concluding with Self Love

In the wake of the monumental success of *Miseducation*, Hill had it all—a multi-platinum innovative album that she had produced, written, and arranged herself, five Grammy’s, a *Time* magazine cover, a significant other, healthy children, and a budding acting career. She was the woman other women wanted to be. Then Hill all but disappeared from the public view reappearing sporadically as a potentially unstable religious zealot (Cleave, 2002; Ewing 2007; Morgan, 2006). Many adoring fans feared that the Lauryn Hill they had grown to admire was a façade created to sell records, but listening carefully to the album reveals a woman whose movements were constrained by her submission to the domination of oppressive forces.

Miseducation’s emphasis on relationships precludes the commodification of sex as an illicit activity, but the tropes in “I Used to Love Him” imply that Hill has not escaped her miseducation about patriarchy and its impact on love relationships. If we

substitute Carter G. Woodson's (2000) masculine language with feminine language, his infamous quote from *The Mis-education of the Negro* would ironically read, "If you make a woman feel that she is inferior, you do not have to compel her to accept an inferior status, for she will seek it herself" (p. 84).

Despite the seeming progressiveness of the album as a whole and this track in particular, Hill's discourse remains positioned within the realm of the pornographic. The characters Hill and Blige depict within the song deny the erotic within themselves by not loving themselves. They fail to appeal to their "deepest and nonrational knowledge" (Lorde, 1984, p. 53) when they return down the familiar path at the crossroad, describe themselves as objectified material possessions, and depict their savior as a masculine, dominating Creator. Lorde (1984) describes the dangers of divorcing the spiritual from the erotic:

... we have attempted to separate the spiritual and the erotic, thereby reducing the spiritual to a world of flattened affect, a world of the ascetic who aspires to feel nothing. But nothing is farther from the truth. For the ascetic position is one of the highest fear, the gravest immobility. The severe abstinence of the ascetic becomes the ruling obsession, and it is one not of self-discipline but of self-abnegation. (p. 56)

For Lorde, sex is not the sin. Loving is not the sin. Constraining both sex and love within a patriarchal paradigm that denies the essential pleasures, passions, and satisfactions of the self is the real peccancy.

In a time when hip hop's (omni)present pornographic depictions of dominating love relationships saturate our mediated sense of blackness, a significant population of young women and men are at risk for being miseducated about love. The increasing reports of intimate partner violence among youth are concrete examples of the general confusion about love in our society. Unfortunately, "I Used to Love Him" is a self-sacrificing love song that contributes to this miseducation. Although Hill and Blige's tropes of love appear like wholesome idyllic representations because they successfully evade stereotypes about black sex and relationship violence, their song perpetuates stagnant, patriarchal, dominant-submissive ascetic patterns that discourage women from recognizing the power of the erotic within themselves. Specifically, the tropes of love within "I Used to Love Him" reveal a worldview of immobility and domination within the context of love relationships.

Unless we want to witness more young women choosing to accept abuse as love, the political economy of the culture industry must place a higher value on love. Highlighting how Hill's seemingly positive tropes of love perpetuate patriarchy demonstrates one way that media can disseminate the conditions for inappropriate, dominating, and dangerous love relationships. Identifying these disadvantageous consequences and advocating for self love as an alternative provides an opportunity to move audiences beyond oppressively problematic relationships and reeducate them about the liberatory erotic potential of true love.

Notes

- [1] This quote emerges from the dialogue between the male teacher and a male student at the end of the track directly preceding “I Used to Love Him.”
- [2] It is most likely that there are no full body shots of Hill because she was pregnant with her second child during the photo shoots. On “To Zion” she raps about her decision to keep her first child despite advice to terminate the pregnancy and save her career. Hill’s desire to escape her miseducation is further mirrored in this balancing of her desire for children with her desire for a career.
- [3] For the purposes of this study, the divine refers to a Christianity-based Supreme Being invoked by Hill as Father or Creator.

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