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### “Unapologetic” Language

Artists pour their hearts out in their music. They use high notes, long rifts, and growling. They manipulate their voices in the way that an author might manipulate figures of speech. The goal of both the artist and the author is to convey an understanding to their listeners. The first steps to an artist’s expression and the listeners understanding isn’t the pitch of their voice, it is their lyrics. The language people are exposed to can shape the way they view themselves, and the way they view others. Music is language. Music can make one feel more confident, more attractive, or even as if one is living a fantasy life. If someone going through a rough breakup listens to music where the artist discusses the many offenses of their significant other, the listener might begin to look at what was their relationship in a harsher light. Finally, it is a common notion that African Americans blasting rap can be considered targets for racial profiling. Language shapes our everyday lives, and music does the same. It weaves itself and its messages in and out of our consciousness.

Robyn ‘Rihanna’ Fenty is an international pop and R&B recording artist. She is from the island of Barbados, but immigrated to America after receiving a music deal with rap legend Jay-Z. Rihanna’s most recent album is titled only, *Unapologetic*. The title gives off a meaning that is simply understood by anyone that is exposed to pop culture, which very often contains news about Rihanna. It refers to her well documented break up with American R&B recording artist

Chris Brown. After collaborating on the hit, “Umbrella”, the two were the media’s favorite couple. Everything they did together was documented. This coverage includes when Chris allegedly beat Rihanna up. The reason why was never made clear to the public. Though the reason the incident occurred never surfaced, Rihanna’s civil suit against Chris, along with their make-up and subsequent break up, were all over social media and news outlets. Rihanna went through a dark period after this, which she expresses on her fourth album *Rated R*. Once this dark period was seemingly over, Rihanna still received a sizable amount of negative attention over the coverage of her multiple relationships with high profile rappers. It was as if she was not allowed any kind of closure. The common denominator throughout all of Rihanna’s ordeals was the amount of attention, criticism, and feedback she received from outsiders. *Unapologetic* seems so self-explanatory because Rihanna was just that, unapologetic, for all of this. She was telling the world that, no matter the amount of negative attention her trial and tribulations received, that she intended to continue to live her life any way she pleased.

Rihanna’s standout song on her album *Unapologetic*, is essentially two different songs. It is meant for the audience to enjoy as they drove around during the day or began their night. These were the songs meant to make the listeners feel good, and confident in themselves. The song “Love without Tragedy/Mother Mary”, shifts the tone of the album from dancing around the room to one of vulnerability. The title, again, seems to give off a sense of understanding before the actual listening occurs. Love and tragedy, are almost Shakespearean in their use. When Rihanna sings that “Cause together ain't promised forever.. As long as we got each other/ Die in the moment”, it alludes to *Romeo and Juliet*. They chose death in order to be together. The lines explore and explain the pain and tragedy that is love. “Living in the moment”, because often times love is fleeting. Rihanna uses “Die in the moment”, because that seems to be the only

way to keep the pain away and the love from escaping her. It is relatable because even if one has never been in a situation that involved painful love, they have been exposed to the idea in works like *Romeo and Juliette*.

The “Mother Mary” part of the song is almost like a prayer. After Rihanna delves into the pain that is love she changes the course of the song by calling out to “Mother Mary. She explains that she “wants a change” and is seeking her queendom in “Mister Jesus.” The humbleness that is necessary for any prayer is captured when Rihanna describes herself as just a girl “from the left side of an island”, who never thought she would be famous. If one believes in or relates to Christianity, this again, is another relatable concept. When pain or “tragedy” hits one at full force, it can bring them, literally and figuratively, to their knees. Literally, one would go to Christ in prayer, in the lowly position of being on one’s knees, with the mindset that Rihanna describes in the song. Even though the two songs are essentially completely different in content and sound, this is what makes the connection between the two. Love and pain, lead Rihanna to self and spiritual discovery through prayer.

Keith Gilyard wrote an essay detailing the use of language in order to help shape the world and its society. He speaks of the “standard” of writing, which he seems to view as almost oppressive in its systematic implementation. Gilyard presents the idea that allowing writers, young writers in particular, a certain freedom in their discourse will expand upon what is referred to as “the bubble”. The “bubble” uses such a standard to promote a single perspective. Single perspectives forced on a general public, will affect the way that this public sees itself and others. This goes back to language, and the way that it is a part of one’s life and daily influences. Giving writers, especially young writers, freedom allows them to add their stories to the perspective. This broadens the perspective and subsequently the “bubble”. Rihanna’s use of allusion to love

and tragedy, and then prayer may not necessarily expand the bubble in the way Gilyard imagines. It does however, successfully push barriers.

Society does not teach that when one's life and decisions are attacked, to be vulnerable in response. This is exactly what Rihanna does though. She speaks on her pain, her willingness to "die in the moment" in order to ward off the pain, and going to God as a mere vessel. The vulnerability in a rhetoric that reaches such a large audience, chips away at the notion of wall between one's self and the world. This is essentially what Rihanna is doing herself, breaking down the wall, regardless of criticism and her position of fame. She not only expresses her vulnerability, but she also introduces the audience to their own vulnerability. A vulnerability that she leaves with the audience to express and do with as they please. It is the allusion and this vulnerability going hand in hand that make the work successful and an example of good writing.

Breaking barriers is nothing new to Rihanna. She went from the battered, angry woman portrayed on *Rated R*, to voicing the first African American lead in a Disney 3-D picture. It is her writing, and her need to keep expanding upon and pushing its limits that makes her a champion in her field though. When considering that one's life is effected by the language that they hear, it should open the door for writers like Rihanna who use their platforms to battle all of the types of social inequality and social norms.

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