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Walk On Water: Eminem's Relationship with Doubt

Hip Hop (/features/?category=Hip+Hop)

In the backdrop of Eminem's latest single, "Walk On Water," there's the sound that writers are all too familiar with. Sounds of ripped up paper that cuts like a knife through confidence. Divorcing itself from a notebook of thoughts that are deemed not good enough. There are the pressures of giving your thoughts into another person's hand and not having control of the outcome. As writers, we all go through periods of inner-conflict where the sentences just aren't right. The words just don't marry themselves with the vision you planned. It's expected in the process of putting something out in the world. But even the "rap god" has these difficulties? Eminem, one of the known wordsmiths in hip-hop history, in conquering addictions is fighting with something different. Something inevitable - doubt.

"Walk On Water" has a different tone than previous Eminem first singles. Usually, there would be this carefree, satire-like feel to them. 2002's "Without Me" and 2004's "Just Lose It" had playful beats as fans waited to hear which pop figure would incur Eminem's wrath. This varied from figures like Moby to Michael Jackson. Eminem has faced a certain type of doubt before - in the form of a four-year bout with writer's block (<https://www.cinemablend.com/pop/Eminem-Worries-Over-Writers-Block-28140.html>). Sometimes, writer's block has to run it's course.

2009's Relapse very much felt like someone learning to walk again. In going by his alter-ego's, it was three parts Slim Shady, one part Marshall Mathers. Songs like "Beautiful" gave you the personal side on an album that was dominated more by Slim Shady. It was something that had run it's course. The characters in the play that was Marshall Mathers' career didn't have the same impact.

2010's Recovery marked a new introspective hunger from Eminem. The album marked a different approach as he worked with different producers like Just Blaze and Boi-1da. Inside Recovery, there was structure - a target. "Not Afraid" marked the real recovery point from a man who had channeled fighting through self-doubt and doubt of others. Songs that ear marked self-examination mapped a road where Eminem could go. This continued with songs like "Kings Never Die" and "Phenomenal". This theme continued and manifested into something of a redemption story. He became B-Rabbit walking away victorious with his fist raised at the end of 8 Mile.

What do you mean the same rapper that made it a comeback? Well, in "The Coffin," can't reinvent himself? Who was also the best selling artist of the 2000's that saw his Marshall Mathers LP sell 32 million copies? When do you start to resent looking at trophies from past greatness? When does that same greatness shine so bright that it overshadows anything after it? Suddenly, as rap has grown, there's a new generation that may not be as familiar with his legacy. As songs like "Survival" packed a particular punch, in music, there's a stop watch on the set of triumphs.

Eminem imitates his artistic mortality with "Walk On Water." When there was chatter from some about Jay-Z not being able to release another great album, he released *4:44*, a very introspective and current body of work. Although always forthcoming in his music, Jay-Z was able to do it in a way where it felt like we were learning something new about a family member. Eminem contemplates where to go on the very last song of MMLP2, "Evil Twin."

So, who's left? Lady Gaga? Mess with the Bieber?

I ain't fuckin' with either Jessica neither: Simpson or Alba

When happens when there are no more enemies to fight? No more adversaries for the controversial hero to stare down? What does The Joker do when Batman goes away? Even the jabs seemed dated. On "Berserk," Eminem says,

"So, baby, make just like K-Fed
And let yourself go, let yourself go"

When was the last time Kevin Federline was in an actual headline?

On "Headlights," Eminem apologizes to his mother who incurred a lot of his vitriol in his previous albums. On "Going Through Changes," he comes clean about his relationship with his ex-wife Kim. With the maturity in recent years, it seemed like he was tying up loose ends. As fans, we've grown up with him and had a front row seat to him exercising his demons. Where do we go from here?

In a newer era where Eminem himself considers his place in hip-hop being frustrated with the conquest mumble rap (<http://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/hip-hop/8031293/eminem-rick-rubin-mumble-rap-broken-record-podcasts>) there's a new generation of fans that might not be as familiar with the early days of when Slim Shady lookalikes invaded Times Square on the 2000 MTV Music Awards. The old days were "shock lyrics" made Eminem a covered commodity and public enemy to parents across the country don't have the same effect. Some of Eminem's most recent work like "Rap God" and recent freestyles feel like he's trying to prove that he can still rap. The exceptional story teller with songs such as "Brain Damage" is now using his lyrical prowess to conceal the lack of a concept. It's like an old quarterback who can't quite throw the deep ball like he used it and does not adapt to make shorter throws.

The last place to go was to be completely vulnerable. "Walk On Water" is an artist looking at the trophies of championships past and wondering if he can get back to the title game. When your a legend, everybody is gunning for you, but there comes a point where the game will force you out if you don't adapt. We aren't sure what *Revival* is going to be in it's entirety, but the challenge here will be if Eminem can reinvent himself. One of the most humbling things is time. Can Eminem change and adapt his style with them? At what point does being an anomaly accidentally paint you into a corner?

Eminem (/features/?tag=Eminem), Beyoncé (/features/?tag=Beyonc%C3%A9)

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