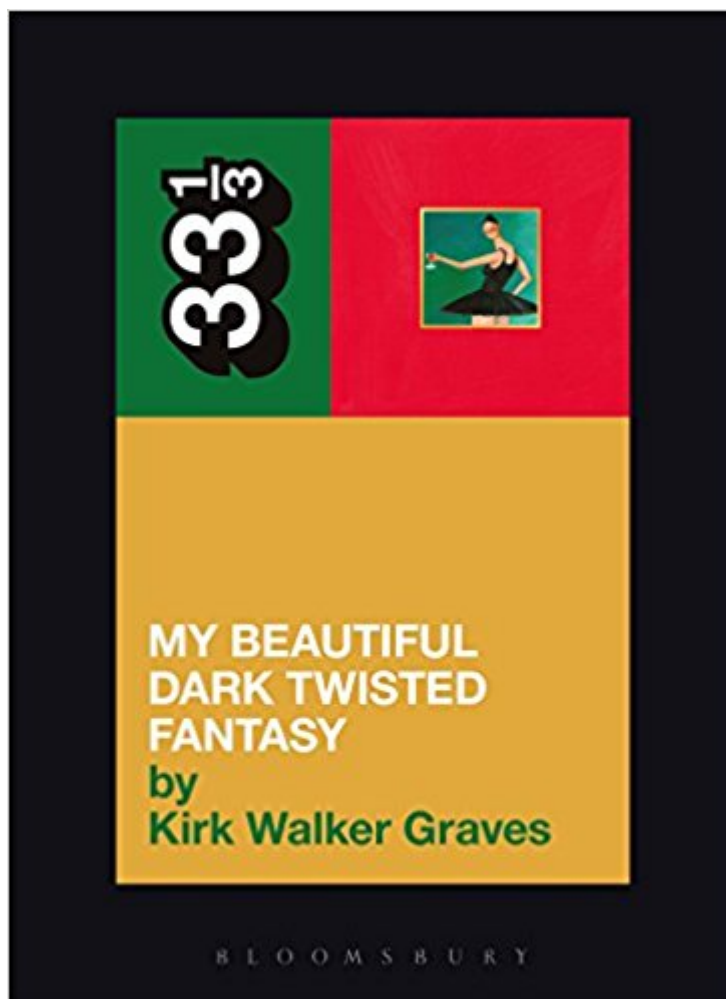


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Kanye West's My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy (33 1/3)



Synopsis

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, Kanye West created the most compelling body of pop music by an American artist during the period. Having risen from obscurity as a precocious producer through the ranks of Jay Z's Roc-A-Fella records, by the time he released *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy* (MBDTF) in late 2010, West had evolved into a master collagist, an alchemist capable of transfiguring semi-obscure soul samples and indelible beats into a brash and vulnerable new art form. A look at the arc of his career, from the heady chipmunk soul exuberance of *The College Dropout* (2004) to the operatic narcissism of MBDTF, tells us about the march of pop music into the digital age and, by extension, the contradictions that define our cultural epoch. In a cloud-based and on-demand culture - a place of increasing virtualization, loneliness, and hyper-connectivity - West straddles this critical moment as what David Samuels of *The Atlantic* calls "the first true genius of the iPhone era, the Mozart of contemporary American music." In the land of taking a selfie, honing a personal brand, and publicly melting down online, Kanye West is the undisputed king. Swallowing the chaos wrought by his public persona and digesting it as a grandiose allegory of self-redemption, Kanye sublimates his narcissism to paint masterpiece after masterpiece on MBDTF, a 69-minute hymn to egotistical excess. Sampling and ventriloquizing the pop music past to tell the story of its future - very much a tale of our culture's wish for unfettered digital ubiquity - MBDTF is the album of its time, an aesthetic self-acquittal and spiritual autobiography of our era's most dynamic artist.

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Customer Reviews

“In Graves’ book, he not only breaks down each track on the record, but he also effectively lays out the context of the album’s release, explaining why Kanye is deserving of an investigative book like this one (and hopefully soon, others), and what about Mr. West makes him the biggest and most off-putting rock star on the planet.” — Dan Buyanovsky, Revolt TV

“Kanye West is the millennial generation incarnate, or at least that’s what Kirk Walker Graves would have us all think. Throughout the 150 or so pages of this book, Graves unpacks the enigma that is Kanye West’s personality and art. This book isn’t so much about the musical qualities of *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy* as it is about how Kanye’s ego and public persona can be used to explain modern 20-somethings. Graves finds meaning in West’s music that I never would have picked out on my own. His fandom is clear, but he never steps into hyperbole in his praise of the music. Though, at times, it feels like his discussion of this album can get a bit too academic, I appreciate the thought that he has put into his analysis of Kanye’s work. This book is some serious next-level music criticism — I never realized how much Kanye’s Gucci line meant to my life before this guy told me about it.” — SLUG, *SLUG* Magazine

“West may be divisive enough to not win over his detractors, but Graves’ mix of fanboy marvel and critical detachment is persuasive enough to convince even detractors to give *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy* a close listen. At the end of its 132 pages, Graves makes a convincing argument that this four-year-old deserves a spot in the 33 1/3 series. But perhaps more important, he does something that great criticism should do: he makes you want to listen to the album.” — Sean McCarthy, PopMatters

“Kanye West’s fifth album is only a few years old, but that didn’t stop Kirk Walker Graves from writing a book proclaiming it an instant classic that perfectly captures the spirit of its era. Graves unpacks the cultural meaning and significance of West’s famous ego and chaotic public persona, and examines the music both in the context of the rapper’s brilliant body of work, and how it fits into the social media era.” — “14 Books From 2014 Every Music Lover Needs To Read”, BuzzFeed

“Listed on NYLON’s ‘Best Music Books to Read This Summer’” — NYLON

Kirk Walker Graves is a writer from Tennessee at work on his first novel. A graduate of Princeton University, he lives with his wife and son in Nashville.

Generally every bad review of a 33 1/3 book starts out with a sentiment along the lines of "this is

very different work than the other books in the 33 1/3 series" - a point which probably proves that readers shouldn't expect a singular thing from a 33 1/3 title, a claim I think few reasonable readers of the series would dispute. All that to say, this is a very different work than the other books in the 33 1/3 series. Kirk Walker Graves does an amazing job of pulling apart the motivations and inspirations on each track, drawing parallels to similar works in popular culture, and even (very capably) practicing some light pop psychology on the album's creator throughout; as well as his fans and critics. End to end, the album should please any Kanye fan (or 33 1/3 fan) capable of setting aside expectations or preconceived bias before reading. Which, I'm sure Walker would agree, is a big ask when talking about Kanye.

Interesting thoughts, but hoping for more of a behind-the-scenes look at making the album, like others in the series.

Amazing perspective! This was such an exciting read. The content shows thoughtful insight and draws incredible connections within the world of the album. With fascinating perspective, Graves writes with an effortlessly engaging style and top-notch literary merit. Wonderfully entertaining and insightful.

Our culture is already bored with meta-commentary about the potential effects of the digital revolution. It's here, it's everywhere, it's the water flowing over the gills of the millennial and nourishing an isolated global community of social mavens, prepared to Google-as-a-verb the meaning of the word "maven" at a moment's notice from a smartphone, tablet, netbook, and eyeglasses. It is no surprise, then, that possibly the most influential musician of the 21st century personifies and embraces the identity-crafting realm of the real-time and connected. It's important that any book about this musician understands the world we live in. Kirk Walker Graves, author of the 33 1/3 entry for Kanye West's album "My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy", assumed the burden of dissecting the eponymous album for this very reason. Why focus an intellectual analysis on an album only four years old, nearly devoid of historical context? The author sends the message that MBDTF is the first album that wraps its tendrils directly into the psyche of a society that treats socializing as preparation for personal celebrity, desiring all things immediately not just due to impatience, but because soon now will be irrelevant. Much like the album and our pop culture, the

importance of Graves's analysis cannot be understated, or delayed. Graves shows a level of enthusiasm for his work comparable to a toddler with a leaf blower in a realm of endless cotton candy. The book begins by giving one of the best explanations of Kanye, the artist and the human, that I have yet read. It helps the reader place him within the digital culture now pervading the world that I previously mentioned. At times, Graves's ardor lends the book a zest for cultural context that informs the reader of even the most implacable song-sample or lyrical choice. There is a clear appreciation for sociological and anthropological meaning here as well; the many aspects of Kanye and the individual works within *MBDTF* are frequently described in terms of America's love-hate response to His ego and ambitions. If you've ever felt there's a fiendishly clever quality to the production of pop-friendly or nearly-pop-friendly songs like "All of the Lights" or "Runaway", Graves is more than happy to validate you. In most cases, I found myself a convert. That is not to say that this issue of the *33 1/3* series is without its faults. It feels that on occasion, Graves digs too deep to strike oil on analyses; it's important that you agree with Graves on the conclusion that Kanye is intractably intertwined with the music he produces, or else all the talk of Kanye's narcissism and aplomb in the text can become frustratingly psychoanalytical. However, to Graves's credit, he generally avoids jargon and thesaurus-bombs in favor of flowery and just-short-of-excessive description, leaving it accessible to most learners interested in all the hoopla about Mr. West. "My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy" (the book) is a superb look at how our society is feeding the Kanye machine, producing great works of maximalist conglomeration (as well as *Yeezus*, which even the author admits lacked the initial vitality of *MBDTF*). When Graves then opens up the machine to give the readers a look at the parts, he proves his credentials. In homage to his imagery-thick writing style, I offer my personal interpretation of his thesis, for you to decide whether or not to read his book: Kanye is a pop-culture amalgam, accumulating the discarded love and scorn of the public eye, screaming from the mountaintop of public consciousness, Wi-Fi enabled, spotlights overhead, clutching a fistful of forgotten hooks and blistering verse, daring the cameras to look away. He is a one-man 24-hour news cycle channeling the ferocity of a boundless ego, repressed by men in suits in corner offices and sitting at talk-show desks. He's producer, pariah, artist, child, deity, caricature and soon-to-be-king of pop all in one, and *MBDTF* is the promise.

Beautifully written, I cannot express enough how well this book was written. It drew me in with every

word of every line. Kirk Walker Graves gave me an uninhibited look into the thought and power of Kanye West's love for himself. It gave me a new look into every track on My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy; the depth he dives to with each and every track on the album show he is both a critic of the music and a Kanye West fan himself. I am not sure why a lot of the other reviews are stuck on the "5-Dollars" Graves uses; there is such a thing as a dictionary and a thesaurus, I wish people would stop complaining about his vast vocabulary and focus on the writing and context.

Amazing read, I love how the whole thing is dedicated to just one album. Plus if you love Kanye, then you'll love this book.

Previously read in *Utero* and *Donuts* from the same series. Both were excellent reads, the latter being highly emotional. They informed the reader of the genesis, process and aftermath of the album tracks and the album as a whole. That's what I thought this series was about: the work and the art. I wanted liner notes that border beauty, like what *Donuts* was about. But maybe I have the wrong idea of what this book series is about. It's obvious that the words from this book came from a genuinely good place: an excellent writer who is a Kanye fan. And that's what this book is: a track-by-track pop-culture analysis from the perspective of a fan, rather than an unbiased explanation of the creation of the art and the impact it has on "pop culture." Since *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy* fused into my life and became a soundtrack to heartaches and euphorias and stuff in between, I wanted to know more about this album on a technical level: what were the studio sessions like? What did Pete Rock, the RZA and Q-Tip contribute? What kind of cathartic experience did Kanye have when the piano keys, Pete Rock drum loop and Rick James "Look at You!" sample came together, if any? etc. These are pretty specific questions, but questions worth investigating. I think it's incredibly difficult to write anything about Kanye that most fans don't already know. And I thought this book would be different. It's not. Overall, with the exception of a few minor errors and too many pop-culture associations, it's a good read for the Kanye consumer. Not so much for the true listeners of *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy*. I didn't really get anything out of it that hasn't already been printed on glossy, or matte finished, covered magazines.

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