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## An Appraisal of Cult Symbols in the Selected Songs of American Pop Artists

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### Abstract

*Recent studies on pop music have focused on gender, racial, cultural, social and historical issues. However, little has buttressed cult symbols and ethics which are constantly proliferating pop music in America. This paper deploys qualitative research approach to investigate the representation of cult symbols in Ciccone, Perry and Grande's selected songs as axioms of the poetics of otherness, which is one of the strands of postcolonial theory. Thus, this research is guided by postcolonial theory which attempts to examine the marginality of cult and its symbols prevalent in pop culture. The research argues that cult symbols permeate the selected songs with emphasis on cult identity along the terrains of social recognition, hinges on the ambience of pop music in America. The study aligns to postcolonial critical lens, which recognizes the stereotype of cult, its representation and its ethos as catalyst of redefining cult within the scope of pop music and argued that cult membership includes all race, class and gender. Ciccone, Perry and Grande's Selected songs. Ultimately the paper concludes that the victims in these songs are trapped in the challenges of cult. Their responses pillory the discrimination on cult and emphasize the poetics imbedded in these songs as literary aesthetics. As such it is imperative that literature plays a significant role in creating a platform for mutual coexistence and sustainability of fair representation.*

**Keywords:** Cult, Postcolonial Theory, Aesthetics, Pop Music, Symbols

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### Introduction

This paper explores Pop Music as a representation of cult practices in contemporary American society by assessing how American pop artists; Ariana Grande, Katy Perry and Madonna Ciccone appropriate cult ethics, gestures, symbols and language into their songs: *Sweetener* (2018), *Thank U Next* (2019), *Prism*

(2013), *Witness* (2017), *Rebel Heart* (2015). The study evaluates the selected songs on the premise of cult and these albums are rich and examine the attribute of cult ethics as it relates to pop music; for every piece of art is adequate for interpretation, considering that the style and thematic concern possess the poetics essential for literary analysis. This



study argues that the selected songs or pop performances replicate cult practices prevalent in America and the songs selected for this presentation have the poetic density to investigate cult ethics in American pop music. Furthermore, it is difficult to foreground this research on a specific cult because the hybridization of cult has incorporated the various symbols and also the synchronic and diachronic process in which music is produced, hinders a logical identification of a specific cult. Hence, it is pertinent to address the generic concept of cult and how it affects pop music in America. Consequently, Pop Music reflects cult ethics, hieroglyphs, symbols and metaphors which are relevant to literary discourse, given that, the lyrical contents of the songs provide poetic diction that are interwoven with cult references.

Furthermore, the works of white female artistes have been chosen for this study to support the view that American cults involve all races and genders and women involvement is essential in buttressing the significance of female participation in cult. Furthermore, America is a postcolonial society and it is crucial to address the thematic concern of cult on the premise of otherness, to highlight the issues of marginality. Cult is footed heavily in music as a means of expression and as such the presence of cult in secular music lies heavily on postmodernism because it collapses the strict hierarchy between high and low art and "has also been eroded by such genres as film which has managed to chalk up an impressive array of masterpieces

while appealing to almost everyone." (Eagleton, 2005:52) To Storey, post modernism infringes on the strands of modernism (Storey, 2009).

Hence, the repertoires of classical arts are now borrowed, mixed or mashed up into popular culture. Lending voice to this view, Liman (2017:41) posits that "Postmodernism has since inaugurated the death of imagination, creativity and originality through polarization of the technique pastiche, parody and collage which is gaining momentum in literary and artistic representation." Postmodernism therefore, encourages blending of cultures, ideas and songs that are not necessarily patterned as the original but created as new sensibilities. (Strinati 2004:221) This mishmash creates a new representation of sects that were marginalized as well as forms the bedrock of a new identity through popular music with which to contest the inferiority labelled against cult practices. In this regard, Liman (2017:41) further contends that, "For no culture is superior or inferior to another. All cultures are in other words placed on equal footing." On this note, the contests between cultures are based on prejudice and nourished with sentiments rather than logic and this threatens the coexistence of people with varying norms and beliefs.

Historically, the Middle East is the cradle of cult and it stem from the latin words; "colere" and "cultus" meaning "worship" and "veneration". The concepts of worship and veneration are linked to cult because of its rituals and sacred norms.



Newcombe (2014:1) suggests that, "there is no universally agreed definition of the word "cult"; it is only used as a self-description and does not refer to any particular belief system." Most often, cult is referred to as moral panic, Omori (2013) posits that, "moral panic refers to a social phenomenon in which a particular issue or group is perceived as a threat to the moral fabric of society, often leading to a disproportionate or exaggerated response by authorities, media and public opinion." Also, the various responses by authorities, media and public opinion have shaped the forms and varieties of cult and its practices over the years. In this manner, cults are categorized into four groups: Satanic cult: occult, black-magic cult (voodoo), Political Cult: racist, terrorist cult, destructive cult, Doms day cult, Religious Cult: eastern cult, new age cult, Social Cult: commercial cult, multi-marketing cult, mass transformational cult, family cult, cults of personality etc. (Lalich, J & Tobias, M 2016) and this has fostered the transmission of cult material in the digital space. This development encourages cult symbols in Pop music and can be seen as literary, as it absorbs the expression and poetics relevant to literary discourse and has similarities in its form and content as poetry. It is inevitable to look at song as literature because it bears the emotion, lyrics and diction that embody socio-political issues that interest literary studies. In this regard, Dylan an American song writer created new poetic expressions in American song tradition in which he was awarded for Nobel Prize in Literature in 2016.

The resurgence of empirical facts on religious doctrines in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, gave rise to the appraisal of satanic perception. Critical works of Giosue' Garducci's "Hymn to Satan" and Blake's illustration for *Paradise Lost* (1888) reshaped the narrative of satanic doctrines. For instance, in the *marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Blake presented Satan as a messiah, the morning star. In like manner, Blavatsky ascribed Satan as a commendable insurgent, offering human's wisdom. Crowley (1913) in "a hymn to Lucifer" elaborated the significance of the devil as the provider of soul and a model against dogmatic practices. Similarly, Crowley gave precedence to satanic symbols and imagery as gateways to the aesthetics of ritual ceremony.

The adaptations of subliminal themes and symbols in art and entertainment have bolstered the integration of cult practices in secular. For instance, in the Egyptian mythology, Osiris the god of knowledge and sovereignty known for its one eye, symbolically attributed to the "all seeing eye" is famously used by the occult; Freemason, Rosicrucian and Illuminati. In the same manner, adopted in paintings of Leonardo da Vinci and Michael Angelo, some of these symbols can be seen in Lourve, Museum in France, the Temple church in London and the movie trilogy, *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Chronicles of the Witch*, *Percy Jackson* and *Last Witch Hunter*. Similarly, the representation of cult pervade the American tradition, the freemasons have commonly projected cult images and in like manner the "illuminati".



Interestingly, both occult have mutual occult symbols, for instance; the Baphomet symbol, a god fertility and creativity represented with a goat head and a human body. This symbol can be traceable in the Zodiac sign for the month of December 21 to early January. Other notable symbols include; Skull and bones, Pyramid, blade, chalice and horn etc. (Lauricella, 2012)

### **Review of Critical works on Katy Perry's *Dark Horse*, Ariana Grande's *God is a Woman* and Madonna's *Illuminati***

Katy Perry's *Dark Horse*, Ariana Grande's *God is a Woman* and Madonna's *Illuminati* has primarily focused on sexuality, gender and power and representation. Pennington (2016) describes Katy Perry's *Dark Horse*, as a contest against male dominance, as she deploys orientalism, a strand of postcolonial theory; "it uncovers a framing of Egypt as a mute object designed for consumption as well as a narrative that portrays men of color as a threat to Perry's liberated, western, female pharaoh" (1). Vosmann (2019) gives a vivid symmetry between popular music and ancient mythology, "some proportions of film industry, pop music and hip-hop genre are intertwined with the reception of ancient Egypt. Especially the visual presentation of this form of Egyptomania is observed and it shows the connection to already existing examples of popular culture"

The representation of the female gender by the artiste cushioned a

sublime magical essence, for women are seen as second fiddle, from postcolonial lens, the artiste reversed the gender roles, as an attempt to question the stereotypes. Haidari states the harmful effect of discarding foreign cultures (2019, 3)." Jafar (2021), "it is about sex and how she claims the chemistry will be so incredible that the guy is going to think she is god and in a way of connotative, Ariana Grande campaigned for a struggle for gender equality and she showed off women's energy and independence. Bourne explains that "the song by Ariana Grande *God is a woman* demonstrate how the feminist theory is exhibited today after many eras of battling equality. Grande's song rejects the notion of men dominant in religion (cult) and sexuality; by empowering women to fight for equality ... it places women in a position above men" (2). Thus, they are seen as gods empowered to reign among men and procreate. Despite the illustrious emphasis on gender, it also provides a subliminal cult symbol that presents the woman as a mysterious edifice. Madonna is also described as an icon that epitomize postmodernism. (Secarden, Canavan and McCamley 2002, 2020).

### **Methodology**

This research adopts qualitative research. Therefore, "the purpose of qualitative research is to describe and interpret issues or phenomenon systematically from the point of view of the individual or population being studied and to generate new concept and theories. The choice of methodology is directed by questions





being raised.” (Viswambharan and Priya , 2016) Also, “...to clear the artistic feature and purport in the overall work of which language serves as the medium.” (Abrams and Harpham, 176)

Hence, this research hinges upon a close reading of the primary texts in order to achieve the set objectives. Postcolonial theory is a veritable tool in evaluating this study, owing to the idea that cult practices are regarded as “abnormal practices” contrary to the socially accepted practices. Thus, postcolonial theory examines the binary of self/order, normal/abnormal, colonizer/colonized. It is on the basis of normal/abnormal that this study hinges upon. Therefore, this research draws from secondary sources ranging from books to journals and web materials to establish and investigate the concept of representation of cult in pop music in the selected songs using postcolonial theory, also laying emphasis on diction, symbols, metaphors and imagery as representation of cult practices in pop music.

### **Postcolonial Discourse as Theoretical framework**

This thesis adopts Postcolonial Discourse as Theoretical Framework to explore the extent of stereotype on cults. Particularly, it focuses on how they are often deprived of social identity most times portrayed in literary texts as esoteric and bearing characteristics with sacrileges; rituals, hieroglyphs and symbols. Postcolonialism has its root in the 1950s and early 1960s, it is deeply indebted to anticolonial thought from

south Asia and Africa. For Ashcroft (1989) the use of language is an effective tool for dominating the oppressed by installing imperial educational institution that provide universal truth, identities, standards and representation of things. Hybridity tends to be a focal scope for pop music, as most music in America blend one unique style to the other. In the same light, contemporary American singers have adopted this mish mash technique to canvas cult symbols. For instance, most heavy metal songs have been characterized with cult symbols.

Said describes the term postcolonialism in his work titled *Orientalism* (1978) while Spivak (1985), Fanon (1952), Bhabha (1994), Kwame (1991), Ashcroft (1989), Achebe (1958) and others promulgate the theory. Whereas, Sauvy (1952) Coined the term “The third world” which captures places like south America, Africa and the Orientals that are colonies of superior countries. In this light, postcolonial publication became rampant, key critics like Césaire (1969), Fanon, and Achebe provide renowned write back against colonial subjugation which are prominent literary texts today.

Postcolonialism as a literary theory addresses marginalization, repression and exclusivity. Succinctly, Raji (1999:231) explains that Postcolonialism is, “a counter hegemonic discourse” in this, the colonized find expression through enunciation by questioning boundaries of colonial dominance and consequently finding a voice to reexamine the misconstrued identity





placed on the colonized. More so, Shohat (1995:173) opines that “each filmic or academic utterances which must be analysed not only in terms of who represents but also in terms of who is being represented for what purpose, at what historical moment, for which location, using which strategies and in what tone of address” is a product of individual perception since, representation affects the way individuals are viewed either positively or negatively.

In addition, Bhabha describes hybridity as the process the colonial governing authority undertakes to translate the identity of the colonized (other) within a universal framework but then fails producing something familiar but paves way for ambivalence and what is regarded as “in betweenness” that is a person who stands in between two cultures (Habib, 2005). In the views of Abdulmageid (2020:21), “these unfairly recognized identities put social pressure on different social groups (cult practices) and it affects their development.” This inhibits socialization and development of the subaltern group. The concept, “othering” coined by Spivak, is a process in which imperial discourse create its “others” and it is premeditated under the binary of self/other, saint/sin, white/black, angels/demons, convent/cult, open/secret. Another assumption of post colonialism is “Globalization”, individual lives and local communities are influenced by economic and cultural patterns that revolve world-wide in effect, the world becomes a village.

More also, cultural domination is another principle of post colonialism and it is similar to “cultural colonization” or “cultural hegemony”. The colonized are made to assimilate the culture of the colonizer and express their thoughts in the language of the imperialist. Another tenet similar to this is dislocation which is the displacement of the colonized, as a result of colonial experiences and it could be the transportation of natives from one country to another as slaves. (Ashcroft et al 2007)

### **Cult Identity in Grande’s “God is a Woman” and “7Rings”**

Grande’s “God is a Woman” in the album titled *Sweetener* (2018), is a contemporary pop song that is saturated with cult symbols and metaphysical involvement that position the woman at the apex creation and elucidate the deliberate controversies that surround cult and gender in the song. Bryan (2018) argues that, “probably won’t put to bed any controversial theological debate, but it sure made a lot of people believe in something tonight” and this is because the artist sees herself as a god. Hence, the use of metaphor in the title, “God is a Woman” explains that the human race came through a woman and that she has ascertained a god like status as described in these words, “and I will strike down upon thee with great vengeance and furious anger; to those who attempt to poison and destroy my sisters and you will know my name is the lord when I lay my vengeance upon you.” The above implies the use of Biblical allusion, as the artiste enunciate her bravery and



pledges to protect the “sisters” (cult) against marginalization (of cult) in America. In addendum, the artist queries the identity of God and the structure of how things came to existence. By so doing, she demonstrates that all humans came through a woman and expects the loyalty of her subject, thus promising him riches and blessing once he submits to her:

I tell you all the things that you  
should know

So baby, take my hand, save  
your soul

We can make it last, take it  
slow...

And boy if you confess you  
might get blessed

See if you deserve what comes  
next

I’m tellin you the way I like it,  
how I want it (“God is a  
Woman”).

The above suggests the artist’s affluence and authority over her lover, similar to the religious perspective; an individual is wealthy by supernatural providence. In this regard, the victim is brainwashed to belief in cult. To Chichester (2018), “she stands in a temple, in the light of a candle, in an all-female depiction of Michelangelo’s the creation of Adam, her prone body replacing the deity whose fingers reach to touch a barely covered eve.” The description by Chichester suggests that the artiste is

a goddess reaching down to her subject, as she demonstrates her influence. In this regard, the diction is poised to query universality of religious beliefs. To Chichester (2018), “It is easy for me to become entranced when listening. I too, want to feel that strength and awe that comes with being a worshipped woman.” The effective use of mesmerizing words further demonstrates the aesthetic capacity of cult realms, heavily imbued with symbols and metaphors as used in the lyrics. To this end Grande, successfully uses the woman and cult as single entity and connecting the woman to the metaphysical by raising the reader’s psyche towards her ideology.

Also, in another album titled *Thank U Next* (2019), Grande’s “7Ring” reveals the symbol of seven and its significant to rings. The song provides evidence of cult undertone and the importance of togetherness in cult groups. The emphasis on seven as used in the title draws meaning to perfection, completeness, totality and power and it is replicated in myth, religious bodies and secular. Blane (2019) explains the symbol of seven in cult:

Is considered sacred not only by all the cultured nations of antiquity and the east but was held in the greatest reference even by the later nation of the West...the Egyptian had seven original and higher gods, the Phoenicians seven kabiris; the Persians, seven sacred horses of mithra; the parsees, seven angels opposed by



seven demons and seven  
celestial abodes paralleled by  
seven lower regions...hence  
in nearly all the religious  
systems (including cult) we  
find seven heavens.

In the same manner, the artist's  
deliberate usage of seven rings is to  
draw controversies to cult. However, a  
ring is a symbol of friendship, love,  
covenant and fraternity, therefore  
seven identical rings portray a  
stronger bond between friends.  
Equally, Ricouer (1967) posits that:

It is in fact, because evil is  
supreme, the crucial  
experience of the sacred (ring)  
That the threat of the  
dissolution of the bond  
between man and the sacred  
makes us most intensely aware  
of man's dependence on the  
powers of the sacred (1967:6).

Ricouer argues that the insatiable  
thirst for fame and power are  
essential attraction for joining cult  
and the gratification of these desires  
are tied to the follower's dependence  
on the cult. For instance; the artist  
bought 7 rings to her compatriot as  
emblems of fellowship and in return  
is expected that they remain loyal.  
Also, seven is a symbolic number in  
the cult, it is associated with  
protection, wisdom and spiritual  
revelation, the artist and her friends  
are bound with similar diamond as a  
symbol of fraternity. The following  
lines give an insight to the artist's  
adventure with her friends:

Wearing a ring, but ain't gon' be  
no "Mrs"

Bought matching diamonds for  
six of my bitches

I'd rather spoil all my friends  
with my riches

Think retail therapy my new  
addiction

Who ever said money can't  
solve problems

Must not have had enough  
money to solve 'em ("7Rings").

Grande's ideology of material  
acquisition as gateway to success and  
freedom expatiates her obsession  
towards gratification and power. She  
provided replica rings to her friends  
as a symbol of commitment and  
loyalty. To Tolkien (2006), "a man that  
wishes to exert "power" must have  
subordinates, other than himself. But  
then he depends on them." By this, the  
artiste's luxurious lifestyle is  
interpolated into her friends, as she  
heavily relies on their friendship and  
at the same time, they depend on her.

### **Cult representation in Perry's "Dark Horse" and "Power"**

Similar to Grande, Perry's "Dark  
Horse" in the album called *Prism*  
(2013), demonstrates her goddess  
status as her worshippers are  
compelled to worship her alone:

Cause I, I'm capable of  
anything



Of anything and everything

Make me your Aphrodite

Make me your one and only

But don't make me your  
enemy ("Dark Horse").

In the first three lines, the artist illustrated her prowess by alluding to the Greek goddess of sexuality, love, beauty, fertility who was generous to those who worshipped her. The words "one and only" indicated that the artiste wants total commitment from her worshippers, from the lines above "make me your one and only", she instructed her friends to make her the only point of reference, because the fame and glory they seek can only be gotten from her. In addition, rhetorical questions are used in the song to prepare the minds of her listeners toward the thematic concern of sorcery, "so you wanna play with magic?" The word magic suggests that the artist subscribes to sacred rituals, sorcery and divination which are practices of cult. The artiste warns the initiate of the repercussion of betrayal, by describing the prowess of karma:

Uh she is a beast,

I call her karma (comeback),

She eats your heart out like  
Jeffrey Dahmer (woo),

be careful, try not to lead her  
on."

The description of "karma" suggests that the initiate cannot retreat from the journey and karma is compared to Jeffrey Dahmer also called Milwaukee Monster who murdered seventeen men and boys between 1978 and 1991. The beast is a metaphor for cult and the initiate is forewarned of the dangers of unfaithfulness and the likely tragedy that comes after betrayal, the description of "she eats your heart out" explains the torturous experience of unfaithful cult members. While Perry's song "Power" in *Witness* (2017) shows the vulnerability of the cultist since she had to sever family ties to embrace cult, as she described below:

But you took control of a  
vulnerable soul

Yeah, I am my mother's  
daughter

And there are so many things I  
love about her

But I have to break the cycle  
("Power").

Here, the "cycle" suggests the usual family status of love, communication and relationship, the artiste has to sever herself from family if she wants to achieve her dreams. This is strongly reflected in the next line, "So I can sit first at the dinner table". The image of "dinner table" in this line illustrates the powerful seat at the higher table first. If she wants to be among the few elites, she has to sever her relationship with her mother. In another light, the dinner table which happens in the night is a



symbolic representation of cult meetings, as they assemble for a course. The reference to “goddess” in the next line, is similar to *Dark Horse* in the previous song, this affirms that she is now powerful and likened to a deity:

Cause I’m the goddess and  
you know it

I’m don with you siphoning  
my power

The lines above exposes the awareness of the artiste towards her exploitation and the excerpt “hell hath no fury like a woman” is an allusion to the famous English playwright, William Congreve in 1697, that explains the degree of the rage to that of a scorned woman. The use of simile here, explains the utter betrayal experienced and how she was able to handle the situation.

### **Cult Exclusivity and Representation in Ciccone’s “Borrowed Time”, “Illuminati” “Addicted” and “Messiah”**

The aim of illuminati is to ensure one language, one economy and one political voice, Novus (2011:84) succinctly explains:

Humanity should emphasize what unites it rather than what divides it. A new world order with a single world language and a single economy where there are no boundaries and no barriers best symbolizes this new state of being. Star trek provides a vision of such a future world. Star trek

envisages a one world meritocracy where greed, money, nationalism, celebrity, monarchy have all been eliminated.

While cult group remains contentious in the society, it appears to be central in Novus explanation as a lending voice to the oppressed. However, the burgeoning of illuminati in America among youth, is credited to the few, hence those with abilities are disenfranchised from acquiring skills. Ciccone’s “Borrowed Time” in *Rebel Heart* (2015) carefully prioritizes reconciliation and love as remedy for the endless war in the society. The song aptly opens up with rhetorical questions that criticize the instituted binary that exist in America:

Do we need to start a war?

Do we need to take a side?  
 (“Borrowed Time”)

In this context, the artiste stresses the ephemerality of life and the hostility among cultural divide, class, sexuality, religion (cult), which has led to countless social happenings in the community for instance, exclusivity and denigration upon the minority group. The deliberate emphasis on the marginalized group is to reveal the divide between the dominant and minority group. The emphasis on “death” is buttressed in “borrowed time,” the thematic concern celebrates love over hate and the realization that “tomorrow” is not certain for anyone, that is, what is certain is the moments spent on earth. In addition, the predominant use of



"The All Seeing Eye" an imagery synonymous to illuminati's prowess of all knowing (omnipresent), and all enlightened and described by the artistes as truth and light:

Riding on the golden calf

The all Seeing Eye is watching tonight

That's what it is

Truth and light ("Illuminati")

The allusion to "golden calf" buttresses the story of the Israelite who disobeying the instruction of Moses, by convincing Aaron to make a golden calf through the ornaments gathered for worship. This idea of worship and adoration is re-echoed by the artiste as she gives a clear depiction of a "rider", one with power and knowledge, this rider is the "all seeing eye" that can see everything hidden which is in reference to the popular cult sigil. Andreas (2014) explains that:

This symbol features a human eye incorporated into a triangle or some other shape. A common description on web pages related to illuminati is that the eye is described to symbolize the eyes of Lucifer who is believed to be able to see everything happening in the world. The symbol can be found in many different places. For example, on the back of the American one dollar bill or in the shape of hand signs.

The "all seeing eye" as used in the lyrics, is regarded as the eye of lucifer and it is incorporated into American dollar bill, billboards, entertainment and gesticulation today. So also, related to the Egyptian myth known as the "Eye of Horus" Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings Trilogy* (1954) the character Sauron is referred to as "the great eye" that watches all of middle earth, this representation is critical to the perception of pop artistes and cult in America. However, these symbols cannot be hidden as the artiste affirmed in the song:

Nothing to hide

Secrets inside

It's like everybody in this party  
shinning like illuminati

It's the enlightenment that  
started it all

The comparison of illuminati to "everybody" at the party is a metonymy that espouses the representation of cult members in the party and likewise the imagery "shinning" demonstrates affluence and the reputation of illuminati. The imagery employed in this lyric demystifies the struggles of cult members in the public and the deterring factors nibbling their identity. Despite the harrowing effect of marginalization, the artiste advocates for love, this is what makes humanity. Similarly, "Addicted" exemplifies the artiste's dependence on her lover as she professes her devotion to him. The diction used reveals a close relationship existing





between the tripartite – (cult-artiste-initiate). On this premise, words such as, “spell, “dark”, “Poisonous touch” and “hell” are registers synonymous to cult practice, which clarifies the artist fraternization with the sacred brotherhood. For instance:

I’m under your spell

Pulled me in, took me down  
with your poisonous touch

You brought me to hell

Watch me burn with a fever  
that I love so much (“Addicted”)

The artiste submits that she is under a superior force that controls her thoughts and decisions. O’Reilly (1986) reiterates that, “in cult, leaders want members to internalize their beliefs so that members become loyal, deployable agents who will act on cult’s behalf, even if it means breaking the laws or dying.” The artist admits that she is under the control of her lover, who introduced her to drugs and this is commonly seen among American cult. In the same vein, “Messiah” is a metaphor that describes the artist as a “redeemer” of the cult. It is also a Biblical allusion that personifies the “Messianic” journey. The song is richly detailed in symbols and literary poetics. The artiste refers to herself as “I am” a Biblical injunction of the name of God. She is seen as an abstract being, as buttressed in the lines below:

I am the promise that you  
cannot keep

reap what you sow, find what  
you seek

I am the sorceress down in the  
deep

I am the earth under your feet  
(“Messiah”)

The literary device Chremamorphism in the first line above, describes the artiste as an abstract entity that can’t be contained or trapped. Her deployment of Biblical allusion in the second line explains the principles of sacrifice and reward and its relevance in the cult realm. Furthermore, assuming the place of a “sorceress” which is a metaphor that demystifies the artiste’s charm and ability to foretell the future. The reference to “deep” is an imagery that connotes darkness surrounding a place that represents the underworld. However, the description of messiah in the song reveals that he is bright like the sun, hovering round his throne. The artist relationship with cult is threatened by the pressures from social conventions as she fears that after all the adventures and successes, she might reach an end, though she acknowledges the satisfaction despite the looming tragedy. This is similar to Christopher Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* (1592), “he that loves pleasure must for pleasure falls.” The protagonist traded his soul in exchange for twenty-four years of magical ability to do whatever he pleases; this certainly led to disastrous end.





## Conclusion

This paper contributes to literature, by evaluating the selected songs on cult themes that highlight the obvious challenges of exclusivity and marginalization experienced by cult in America. It deploys postcolonialism on the selected songs and examines how American pop artistes appropriate the rhetoric of cult ethics in their literary works to delineate the experience of cult in America. Also, the paper contends that the nefarious depiction of cult in the society is inextricably linked with otherness that all things should be fairly represented. As such it is imperative that literature plays a significant role in creating a platform for mutual coexistence and sustainability of fair representation. The study concludes that pop music (literature) remains a workable channel for negotiating identity of cults across the globe and vista to other cult outside America and their representation patterns.

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