



In Defense of Playboi Carti

“I don't rap, I write poems”

I have been waiting in the wings for my time to come. My time has come. The stage is mine and I must make the most of it.

Through sheer will (ethos + passion), I must convince you, my skeptical audience, of my claim; that Playboi Carti is to modern hip hop what Michelangelo is to the Sistine Chapel.

I must convince you that Playboi Carti is not only an artist, but a maker of worlds; new, fantastical liminal spaces, free of cultural limitations. Playboi carti is an iconoclast, he makes sonic images with the intent of destroying our ideas of these images. His music, often considered to be drawl, trivial, and even braindead, is more concerned with expressions of feeling than on literal meaning.

In this way, Playboi Carti is aligned with the teachings of philosophers like Derrida, who posit that words can never refer to

tangible reality. Words exist within their own word world, only referring to one another. Carti builds tangled word worlds, constructed from a mix of onomatopoeia, curse words, and slang. He deconstructs the basics of rap lyricism, in order to rebuild them in his own image, creating a symphonic galaxy that is uniquely his own: the carti-verse. His lyrics, auditorily layered and frenetic, are quite simple.

When taken out of context, they read as hood nursery rhymes:

*I'ma go fuck that bitch (Yeah), I'ma go thrash that bitch (Yeah)
Shawty gon' suck this dick (Yeah), shawty gon' suck this dick (Yeah)
That's a pull-up bitch (Yeah), don't make me pull up, bitch*

I smash that thot, then pull out, bitch, might push to Flacko shit

*Watch me pull up, take your chain, lil' bitch
I'm on Deebo lit (Yeah), I'm on 'migo lit (Yeah), I'm on kilo lit (Yeah)*

*I go psycho, bitch, watch me sock your bitch
Watch me thrash that bitch, then I pass that bitch*

There is a keen playfulness and irony conveyed through Carti's simplistic wordplay. He is Dr. Suesslike in his use of vivid word imagery, he chooses words that sound nice together, rather than words that mAKE sense together. It would not come as a surprise to me if we were to find out that Playboi Carti has some form of synaesthesia, as he seems to be very gifted when it comes to making

sounds capable of eliciting strong emotions of awe and euphoria in his listeners. If you don't believe me, google videos of playboi carti concerts.

The diversity of Playboi Carti's collaborators, everyone from Lana del Rey to Solange Knowles, speaks also to his strengths as a sonic chameleon. The through line between all of his affiliates and collaborators seems to be an affinity for using sound as a way to enter or explore the universe, thereby creating a new world of their own.

Sound, like other modes of perception, can be broken down into time. Music becomes a way of modifying time, our understanding of it. African and African diaspora musicians have always understood this, being conscious of rhythm is inherent to making sense out of life's mysteries and chaos abound. Carti has always understood this. He has access to a quasi-spiritual rhythmic connection, one that he shares with us. The world of a single carti song is one of a disembodied space and time, lyrics delivered in short bursts over murky beats, imitating the constant flow of signals and signs to our murky brains. Through simplicity and chaos, there is always transcendence. Through playboi carti's simplicity and chaos, there is transcendence. The almost magic ability of the universe to turn a singular mundane moment into an image of near-perfect clarity.

His chaos, our own fractured, disorganized lives and the culture we have produced as a result.

I'm way too high (yeah, what?) Whoa (blatt) whoa (yeah)
I'm way too high (yeah, whoa) whoa, whoa, whoa (what?)
I'm way too high (yeah, whoa) whoa, whoa, whoa (what?)
I'm way too high (yeah, yeah, huh?) Whoa, whoa, whoa (what?)
I'm way too high (what? What? What?)

Much like the thoughts in our heads as we struggle to concentrate and untangle complex, abstract, dreadful ideas, Cardi's lyrics have a stream of consciousness form. We are reading his diary or rather, he is reading it to us. As the popularity of reality tv and social media has shown us, we long to feel as if we have access to the "real life" of celebrities, his music takes full advantage of this phenomenon in a way that never stops contributing to the perfectly mysterious nature of his celebrity persona. We see the world through his eyes when he reads his diary to us. We don't understand him, we feel him. The truth is, feeling has always been the only method of understanding.

Playboi Cardi's celebrity persona is just as compelling as his music. Alongside ASAP Rocky, Cardi has been responsible for bringing designers like Rick Owens back into the public eye. I believe that fashion would not look the way it does in 2023 without the influence of Playboi Cardi, or more precisely, the way he seamlessly merged his own love of punk, goth, and horror aesthetics with the existing hip-hop and street style aesthetics of his fanbase and peers.

Using one's public persona as another symbol of one's artistic sensibilities is always the sign of a true visionary, or icon rather.

Other examples would include, off the top of my head, Lana del Rey, Nicki Minaj, and Azaelia Banks. Playboi Carti seems determined to stay true to his aesthetic sensibilities, as he continues to develop his sound. The release of his controversial 2020 album, *Whole Lotta Red*, marked a dramatic visual and sonic departure from the more raw punk leanings of *Die Lit*. It was not well received at first, as change so often is, but it proved to be the perfect organic result of Carti continuing to diversify and deepen the lore of his own persona. I would argue that his aesthetic and sonic shift represented the first shift towards a post mumble rap-hybrid genre.

In 2022, Carti teased the release of his own original clothing line *Narcissist*. His clothing line allows him to literally wear his influences on his sleeve and visually symbolize his alliance with the grotesque, underworld aesthetics he has always resonated with. The sound of chaos and mayhem, his vision of euphoric pleasure and dark introspection, it only grows louder.

In an interview with *Paper Magazine* on his new cut and sew clothing line *Narcissist*, Carti said

“I'm inspired by the world I live in, I'm inspired by the world that I created. This is the uniform for the world I created, that's the bottom line.”





His recent fashion choices, his keen understanding of what camp actually is, and his refusal to color inside the lines of a standard hip-hop artist persona, all of this has culminated in speculations surrounding his sexual identity.

His sexual preference matters very little to me, but I would agree with the speculators that Playboi Carti, the artist and the public persona, is queer. When I use the word queer, in any context, but especially in this context, I am referring to bell hooks' definition of queer:

“not as being about who you're having sex with (that can be a dimension of it); but 'queer' as being about the self that is at odds

with everything around it and that has to invent and create and find a place to speak and to thrive and to live.”

Carti has time and time again refused to let culture and society define him. Carti defines Carti and thus defines culture and society. His refusal to make music that critics and even sometimes his own fanbase, would find easy to understand, becomes his transcendent power. By using the existing fabrics of our dystopian nightmare reality and making them into something so distinctly his own, he creates for us a new malleable sonic and aesthetic landscape, one where feeling goes up against logic and reigns supreme every time. As it should.

 [Playboi Carti - R.I.P.](#)

 [Playboi Carti - Sky \[Official Video\]](#)

*Put my glasses on, I can't see these bitches (what? Slatt)
Put my glasses on, I can't see these bitches (yeah)
I'm in the twilight zone, nowhere near these niggas
I'm in the twilight zone, nowhere near these niggas
They can't understand me, I'm talkin' hieroglyphics (yeah)
They can't understand me, I'm talkin' hieroglyphics*

REFERENCES

Playboi Carti lyrics

Punk Monk (Whole Lotta Red)

RIP (Die Lit)

Sky (Whole Lotta Red)

M3tamorphosis (Whole Lotta Red)

bell hooks: are you still a slave? liberating the black female body

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rJk0hNROvzs>

shaad d'souza , Playboi Carti on his cut and sew fashion line "Narcissist"

<https://www.papermag.com/playboi-carti-narcissist-2658486116.html#rebelltitem13>