

AKΦ

THE ALPHA KAPPA PHI REVIEW

ANNUAL JOURNAL OF UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH
IN THE HUMANITIES

VOLUME XII
SPRING 2026

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PREFACE

An institution puts forth a mission statement to capture its primary purpose, center of attention, and dedication. Lindsey Wilson University shows the depth of its love for education and the student body with its statement, “Every Student, Every Day.” The *Alpha Kappa Phi Review* is an extension of this mindset, with an interest in the work of all students at Lindsey Wilson University.

This volume contains a broad range of student essays. These essays span a wide variety of topics and academic disciplines, including detailed analyses of works by major authors and solutions for pressing societal concerns that have major implications on our world today. All of the essays that appear in the *Alpha Kappa Phi Review* have gone through a rigorous peer-review selection and revision process resulting in the inclusion of only works that achieve the highest excellence. All of the essays rely on secondary research and/or extensive textual evidence to support their analyses and claims.

The *Review* has sought to include a wide variety of writing from Lindsey Wilson’s student body with this grouping, encompassing the work of second-year students to graduating seniors across six different majors and three academic schools at LWU. This volume includes nine student essays on a variety of topics from imperialism to literary and political analysis to the significance of children’s media such as *Bluey*. The reader will find the essays organized thematically, not alphabetically, into three categories.

Our journal this year centers on the celebration of critical thinking and literary analysis in an era and political climate that has deviated from this core tenet of the liberal arts. The 2026 Journal begins with Madeline Hardwick’s discussion of the power of resisting through connection in Martin Sherman’s play *Bent*, about the persecution of gay men as pink triangles during the Holocaust. She is followed by Lilly Streeval’s analysis of Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*, in which she grapples with Heathcliff’s troubled classification as a Byronic hero given his racialized characterization.

The next two essays, still celebrating the importance of critical thinking in our current landscape, turn to complex current issues related to justice and truth. Cadence Groce discusses how the current United States justice system is inherently patriarchal, and how feminist critical theory can envision necessary reforms making the system fairer and more equitable. Alannah Bowman then examines the implications of truth, marketing, and the importance of critically interpreting both Russian and Ukrainian social media marketing strategies surrounding the war in Ukraine.

Continuing this theme of critical thinking and analysis, Yesh Singayao presents a New Left synthesis of the dual histories of Christian and socialist thought in Western European from the 17th century to the 20th in order to better understand current perceptions of both in modern Europe. Also analyzing Christianity in the West, Ada Gass discusses the miracles in the Gospel of Mark, highlighting the importance of thinking about the historical and cultural contexts of the text, especially when it comes to the role and representation of women.

The final three essays celebrate and culminate our volume dedicated to critical thinking with three capstone projects from graduating English majors. Chloe Taylor starts off this collection

with her examination of the role of children’s literature in creating citizens, analyzing *Peter Rabbit* and *Bluey* as influential media tools molding children into the norms of a given society. Second, Megan Whitson employs Critical Race Theory to understand how Appalachian identity has been shaped by notions of “white trash” as an intersectional raced and classed identity, as evidenced in Pulitzer-Prize winning novel *Demon Copperhead* and bestseller *The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek*. Finally, Morgan Bryant also employs Critical Race Theory to consider how American identity more broadly evolves through foundational genres like the American autobiography into a harmful and violent ideological nightmare, as seen in James Weldon Johnson’s *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* and Bret Easton Ellis’s *American Psycho*.

The *Alpha Kappa Phi Review* is devoted to publishing the best student scholarly work that Lindsey Wilson University has to offer. We believe the broad range of topics and arguments within this volume showcase the excellent writing and research skills of Lindsey Wilson’s student body and demonstrate a proud commitment to the pursuit of intellectual curiosity and inquiry.

—Morgan Bryant and Megan Whitson, Editors-in-Chief
April 2026



The editorial board would like to thank the following English and History faculty members for serving as Faculty Reviewers for this volume:

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Each submission to the *Alpha Kappa Phi Review* undergoes an extensive review process in which it is anonymously evaluated by both student editors and faculty.

We are grateful to Dr. Paul Thifault for founding and establishing the *Alpha Kappa Phi Review* in 2015, then the sole undergraduate research journal at Lindsey Wilson University. We are also grateful to Dr. Tip Shanklin for publishing the second volume. Finally, the last ten volumes of the *Review* would not have been possible without the mentorship of Dr. Karolyn Steffens.



Critical essays in the Humanities, broadly defined as the fields of English, History, Women's and Gender Studies, Philosophy, Theology, Theatre, Film, Political Science, and Art, are welcomed and encouraged from current or recently graduated Lindsey Wilson University students.

For more information, please contact Dr. Karolyn Steffens, Associate Professor of English and Faculty Editor: steffensk@lindsey.edu.

Resisting Through Connection: The Power of Love in *Bent* and Contemporary Society

Madeline Hardwick

Martin Sherman, a gay-Jewish playwright living in New York, positively impacted public perception of homosexuals on the eve of the 1980s AIDS epidemic, through the live performances of his play *Bent*. Sherman highlights the persecution and resistance of queer individuals in Nazi Germany by exposing the destructive power of societal hierarchy and oppression that led to their imprisonment in concentration camps, categorized as pink triangles. Sherman shed light on the forgotten history of the pink triangles and situated the audience in an uncomfortable and morally challenging realm, forcing empathy and understanding for a group that was often silenced, both during the Holocaust and in the late 1970s. Following the play's premiere in 1979, gay men were often crucified and blamed for the spread of AIDS throughout the 1980s, with *Bent* serving as a glimmer of dignity, humanity, and endurance in the midst of the trauma and darkness of the 20th century for queer individuals. Through an analysis of Sherman's work, this essay explores how *Bent* serves as a bridge between past oppression and contemporary politics. I argue that Sherman's depiction of love's persistence in the face of extermination continues to resonate as a form of resistance and a demand for societal empathy. The unique intimacy of live theatre forces the audience to come face to face with the oppression and abuse that is so often silenced. Ultimately, by forcing audiences to feel love for the characters and bear witness to the love between Max and Horst, Sherman effectively emphasizes the humanity of queer individuals during the 1930s, 1980s, and into today.

Several critics analyze *Bent* in terms of historical context and accuracy regarding homosexual oppression during Nazi Germany. For example, Dorthe Seifert, a professor of writing and rhetoric at the University of Kentucky, states, "At the basic level of my analysis, it will become evident that the fictions dealing with this historical subject have presented historically inaccurate versions of the past" (95). She details several inaccuracies, the largest being that gay men in the 1930s and 40s would not identify as gay in the same way that it has become a badge of identity and pride in the second half of the century. While I agree with this statement, I argue that these inaccuracies are ultimately overshadowed when evaluating the play's power to resist and destabilize contemporary forms of homophobia. I argue that these inaccuracies prove insignificant in the sphere of gathering feelings and an understanding from the audience in the present. I intend

to argue that *Bent*, despite some historical inaccuracies, succeeds as a form of resistance in contemporary society that continues to be homophobic in the late 20th century.

John Clum, a theater studies professor at Duke University who specializes in British drama, American film, and gay male theater, likewise emphasizes that while gay history theatre frequently departs from historical accuracy, such deviations are ultimately in service of a more effective dramatic message. When considering gay historical dramas and their relevance, Clum states, “Gay historical dramas celebrate, sometimes even in their structures, creative anarchy as a positive counter to oppressive order. At the same time, they posit loving relationships for gay men. Gay historical drama posits the right to love, not the right to sex, as a stake in the battle against oppression” (170). I reiterate the importance of gay men being portrayed as more than sexualized figures, especially in a society that has long marginalized them as deviant or disease-bearing. Ultimately, these critics highlight how the value of *Bent* resides in its insistence on queer humanity, dignity, and the enduring right to love, even with systems present to erase it, not exclusively in its ability to accurately represent history.

In the first half of *Bent*, Max grapples with internalized homophobia for himself and refuses to accept an identity as a pink triangle. Thus, Sherman writes:

MAX: And I said, I’m not queer. And they laughed. And I said, give me a yellow star. And they said, sure, make him a Jew. He’s not bent. And they laughed. They were having fun. But... I... got... my... star. (41)

In this scene, Max has just been forced to fornicate with a deceased thirteen-year-old girl to prove his heterosexuality to the KAPO. This scene allows the reader to fully grasp the extent that men have to go to not only stay alive on this train, but also to repress their homosexuality. Max is very clearly resisting publicly acknowledging his identity at this point in the play and would rather perform such inhumane acts than be labeled with a pink triangle. When Max insists, “I’m not queer,” he not only denies himself of who he is, but also aligns himself with the forces that have taught him to deny and hate himself. Max insisting on a yellow star further demonstrates the hatred that Max has for himself. The broken way in which he confesses he “got...my...star” illustrates how he would rather be marginalized with the persecuted Jews than to be labeled as gay. The star becomes a badge of his willingness to survive at all costs, including denying his identity. This scene ultimately becomes the climax of the story, showing how societal hatred has shaped him and

sets the stage for his eventual confrontation with, and acceptance of, his identity through his relationship with Horst.

As Max continues to survive and adjust to life in the camp, we are offered a different form of resistance in the form of love as he becomes closer to Horst. Sherman writes:

HORST: We did it. How about that fucking—guards, fucking camp, we did it.

MAX: Don't shout.

HORST: O.K But I'm shouting inside. We did it. They're not going to kill us. We made love. We were real. We were human. We made love. They're not going to kill us. (57)

This conversation follows a pivotal moment when Max and Horst are both able to orgasm through only words in an act of public intimacy and explicit sexuality while at work in the concentration camp. This passage frames their verbal lovemaking as a radical act of resistance, one that defies not only the guards who monitor them, but also the system set up to genocidally extinguish queer love and humanity. Under surveillance of a world designed to erase individuality, dignity, and queer resistance, their intimacy becomes a beautiful representation of resisting the Nazi ideology. "We were real. We were human," offers the reader a striking sensation that in the camps, the men are reduced to a manipulable toy. These men are under surveillance 24/7 and have no sense of autonomy. This diction proves that through sharing this intimate moment, they have gained back a sense of humanity. Everything around the entrapped couple is controlled, manipulated, and predetermined, except for this. This moment marks a stark contrast from the earlier behaviors of Max, who previously viewed homosexuality as something to suppress in the face of survival against the Nazi dominance. Here, however, Max has crossed a threshold. Horst teaches Max that survival without identity or rebellion is not living at all, pushing their intimacy to portray a reclamation of humanity in a space designed to exterminate it. Ultimately, such public acts of intimacy and explicit sexuality on the stage and in the fictionally reconstructed space of the concentration camp, serves as an assertion of identity and rebellion in the face of oppression.

Following this empowering behavior from Horst, Max can accept and rebel against the Nazis in his queer identity. At the end of the play, Horst is horrifically murdered in front of Max at the hands of the guards. Following this, he delivers a powerful testament as he holds Horst's body:

MAX: [...] You know what? [*Silence.*] I think ... [*Silence.*] I think I love you. [*Silence.*] Shh! Don't tell anyone. I think I loved... I can't remember his name. A dancer. I think I

loved him, too. Don't be jealous. I think I loved... some boy a long time ago. In my father's factory. Hans. That was his name. But the dancer. I don't remember. [*Silence.*] I love you. [*Silence.*] What's wrong with that? [*Silence.*] What's wrong with that? (75)

Through this diction, we are offered a haunting, yet beautiful moment of self-acceptance for Max. When Max finally declares, "I think I love you," we see a complete transition from his resistance at the beginning of the play. Max's lifelong instinct to resist himself or hide behind layers of performance is overcome to highlight a beautiful declaration of love. As he recalls his past lovers, this diction reveals the past extent of his self-denial and hatred. His inability to recall these past lovers' names highlights a stark contrast to the recognition he is portraying for Horst, whose presence stands as a catalyst for Max and his journey to resistance of the outside world rather than a retreat to himself. The hesitations of silence between his declarations show that this is a very remarkable moment for him. Each pause resembles a struggle between fear and truth. This highlights the forced conditions that made him suppress his true identity and also how Horst influenced Max's confidence and identity. Such a dramatic character reversal in the denouement serves as a large wake-up call for the audiences watching *Bent* in 1979. While they cannot change the horrific oppression of the past, this scene serves as a catalyst for emotional identification with the queer community in the late 1970s. In later performances of the play, during the rise in homosexual oppression during the AIDS crisis of the 1980s, the emotional power of the play mobilizes audiences to politically take action to prevent such a genocide from happening again. Taken all together, this scene serves as a glimmer of empowerment for queer members of the audience in the present, a demand to witness the persecution of the previous generation during the Holocaust, and a call to political action to prevent this from happening again.

As *Bent* comes to its conclusion, we see a tragic yet beautiful depiction of self-acceptance and the ultimate act of resistance from Max. After Horst's body has been dumped into a pit like a piece of garbage, Sherman ends the play with the following stage directions:

He jumps into the pit. He disappears. A long pause. MAX climbs out of the pit. MAX holds HORST's jacket with the pink triangle on it. Puts the jacket on. MAX turns and looks at the fence. MAX walks into the fence. The fence lights up. It grows brighter and brighter, until the light consumes the stage. And blinds the audience. (75)

These stage directions serve as the ultimate act of resistance for Max and highlight a stark contrast to what we see at the beginning of the play. In the beginning, Max is doing horrific things to avoid

being labeled as a homosexual. His decisions were driven by fear, shame, and survival. However, in this final striking moment, we see a complete reversal. By putting on the jacket with a pink triangle, we see a choice to embrace the identity Max has spent the whole play running from. The powerful stage directions of “The fence lights up. It grows brighter and brighter, until the light consumes the stage,” emphasize the intensity that Sherman translates to the audience through the play. During the rise of the AIDS epidemic, queer people were once again treated as disposable, marginalized, and erasable. Max’s final act of acceptance directly confronts the present-day audience with a refusal to go back in the closet and be ashamed of one’s sexual identity. His death becomes a demand for visibility and recognition of queer suffering, love, and resistance at a time when queer lives were being ignored or scrutinized. In contemporary politics, this portrayal remains equally important as queer rights continue to be at threat. Max’s choice to claim his identity even in the face of oppression serves as a reminder of the necessity of resistance. The blinding light that consumes the audience mirrors the play’s insistence that the audience cannot look away from homosexual persecution, then or now. Through this final image, *Bent* bridges the past and present, transforming Max’s journey into a universal call to confront and resist oppression, no matter the scale.

In conclusion, *Bent* serves as a vital bridge between historical oppression and contemporary sexual politics on the eve of the AIDS epidemic. Sherman’s portrayal of love prevailing under brutal conditions becomes an empowering act of resistance, emphasizing societal empathy where it so often lacks. Through live action theatre, audiences are compelled to face the suffering that homosexuals face and forced to recognize the humanity within Max. By recalling the past and emphasizing the present, Sherman demonstrates queer resistance and emphasizes the importance of challenging structures of prejudice, ultimately making *Bent* an enduring testament to the necessity of remembrance, empathy, and resistance.

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Heathcliff and the Limits of the Byronic Hero

Lilly Streeval

Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, published in 1847, tells a story of an orphan named Heathcliff who is taken in by the Earnshaw family. His status as an outsider and subsequent mistreatment shapes the novel's themes of love, revenge, and prejudice. Most of the criticism around the novel analyzes his ambiguous identity and whether he should be read as a tragic figure, an ironic hero, a racialized outsider, or a violent gothic villain. While some emphasize the mysterious Byronic foundation that Heathcliff's character was initially modeled after, others focus on the racialized language surrounding Heathcliff's characterization and how it takes him away from hero and closer to villain. I argue that the Earnshaw's and the Lintons' mistreatment of Heathcliff, when contextualized alongside his racial otherness, causes him to become vindictive and retaliatory. Heathcliff begins the novel with the tropes of the Byronic hero, displaying traits of passion, mystery and isolation—key elements of the archetype. However, throughout the novel, Brontë's racialized language to describe him and his mistreatment at the hands of the other characters corrupts these qualities, turning passion into obsession and cruelty, mystery into racial otherness, and isolation to complete alienation. This corruption of redeemable qualities forces Heathcliff to challenge the foundation of the Byronic hero archetype and exposes how racial prejudices determine who can be seen as heroic.

Literary critics often analyze Heathcliff as a Byronic hero to understand how Emily Brontë creates this character at the beginning of the novel in line with existing literary precedents. For example, Oana Brîndaș, an English professor at Emanuel University of Oradea, explains how he was modeled after Lord Byron's famous heroes who are defined with mystery and inner emotional struggles. She states:

Although the general atmosphere of Byron's poems is different from that of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, the similarities between the traits and experiences of the protagonists, coined as Byronic heroes, are strikingly alike. In both cases, the heroes involved result from the authors' extreme need to create unconventional characters, with mysterious origins, men who are ill-fated and have cursed lives, who fail in everything they do and suffer due to unsuccessful love relationships. (4)

She highlights these comparisons to Lord Byron's characters because she wants to show the pattern of Byronic traits under which Heathcliff is created. For example, "the similarities between the

traits and experiences, coined as Byronic heroes, are striking alike” (4). Heathcliff is “ill-fated,” “cursed,” and does “suffer due to unsuccessful love relationships” (4). If he has these traits, like the other famous heroes and Byronic characters, then he must be a Byronic hero. While I agree Heathcliff does possess similar traits to the Byronic hero at the beginning of the novel, I argue that due to his racial otherness and the racialized language associated with him, these traits become corrupted and limit his ability to be defined exclusively as a Byronic hero.

While Brîndaş focuses on the traits that set him up as a Byronic hero, other literary critics emphasize how Emily Brontë’s racial prejudice complicates and distorts this foundation. Reginald A. Watson, an English professor at East Carolina University, argues that Brontë repeatedly characterizes Heathcliff with darkness, savagery, and foreignness before the readers can even learn who his actual character is. For example, “Throughout the novel, there are constant reminders that Heathcliff is indeed of different breed, which may explain why he is represented as a completely evil demon” (453). “The constant reminders” is an intentional choice that Brontë is making when it comes to Heathcliff. Watson’s argument is that she chooses to corrupt this tragic character with racial language because she cannot keep her prejudice out of her writing when creating a “black” or racially ambiguous character. The phrase “evil demon” is an accurate description of Heathcliff because by the end of the novel he is vengeful and violent and the other characters are genuinely afraid of him. With these constant stereotypes leveled towards Heathcliff, the characters feel justified in their mistreatment of him, ultimately inciting worse and worse behavior from Heathcliff. While I agree with Watson’s argument that the racialized language encourages readers to see him as threatening, I expand on his argument by showing how these descriptions of Heathcliff corrupt his Byronic traits, like passion, mystery, and isolation and instead turn them into obsession, suspicion, and alienation. This racial prejudice through which Heathcliff’s character is filtered distorts him from fitting into this Byronic archetype, thus shaping how racial bias affects the overall interpretation of his character.

One final trend in the criticism is how many analyze Heathcliff in terms of the unstable family environment surrounding him. Steven Vine, an English Professor at University College of Swansea, argues that his position in the family reveals the instability and tensions of domestic Victorian life. For example, “Heathcliff’s unstable position in the family structure dramatizes the forces that constitute that structure...making him both marginal to the family and exemplary of its instabilities” (343). This means that Heathcliff disrupts the family structure and highlights existing

tensions within the family. However, he does not do this intentionally because he was just a child when he is introduced. Instead, the family marginalizes him due to their own character flaws. The phrase “exemplary of its instabilities” reinforces that this emotional trauma and burden is placed on him because he is the outsider. For Vine, his outsider status mirrors the weakness already in the Earnshaw and Linton families. This weakness, ultimately, furthers the abuse directed to Heathcliff. The continued mistreatment of Heathcliff because of their own problems, turns him into a violent monster. While I agree with Vine’s argument that Heathcliff exposes the families for their cruelty and emotional instability, I develop this point by showing how this instability shapes his character further away from the Byronic hero archetype. Because he is a victim of the families’ fear and frustration, his redeemable qualities turn darker as the novel progresses. With this framing, Heathcliff’s character is ultimately tainted by the unstable environment around him along with the racial prejudice with which he is characterized.

At the beginning of the novel, Heathcliff’s introduction foreshadows how he will be seen throughout the rest of the novel. A scene in the book that supports this is in chapter 1 when Lockwood, a neighbor, describes Heathcliff upon his first arrival. He says:

He is a dark-skinned gypsy in aspect, in dress and manners a gentleman...perhaps not looking amiss, with his negligence, because he has an erect and handsome figure... I know, by instinct, his reserve springs from an aversion to showy displays of feeling—to manifestations of mutual kindness. (Brontë 5)

This scene is vital in showing how from the first chapter Heathcliff is racialized despite having key Byronic hero qualities. The first words being “dark-skinned gypsy” immediately separate him from Lockwood. It highlights Heathcliff’s difference and becomes more important than any other of Lockwood’s initial characterizations of him. The descriptors “in dress and manners a gentleman” and “aversion to display of showy feelings” are in line with Brontë setting him up as a Byronic hero. But the disconnect from the archetype is made when the comment on his racial otherness is explicitly emphasized. Additionally, this being in the first chapter of the novel is important because readers are supposed to identify the difference between Heathcliff and Lockwood immediately. In short, from the very start of the novel, Heathcliff is racialized, coloring the more positive traits the readers are meant to read into his character.

Furthermore, Nelly, a servant of the Lintons and Earnshaws, describes some of Heathcliff’s early traits from when he was a child, showing how mistreatment changed him. She recalls a time

when he was extremely sick and she was taking care of him. She says, “Cathy and her brother harassed me terribly: he was an uncomplaining lamb; through hardness, not gentleness, made him give little trouble” (Brontë 38). She begins contrasting his behavior with Cathy and her brother when she says they “harassed me terribly,” showing that she is used to the children giving her a hard time. However, she says, “he was an uncomplaining lamb” proving she behaved well for her. The lamb imagery in this scene is also highly significant to how Heathcliff is characterized. For one, lambs are symbols for innocence and moral purity. They are also associated with children and Christianity. On the other hand, lambs are also vulnerable, prey animals. This creates the imagery of Heathcliff being an innocent child but also being extremely vulnerable to abuse, especially given his racial otherness. This is shown when Nelly says, “through hardness, not gentleness.” His silence and good behavior were because of him being an innocent child, but also due to the harm he was already experiencing. Early on he was already beginning to change and his Byronic hero traits were being undermined.

Additionally in the same chapter, Nelly also talks about some of the mistreatment he faces from Hindley, Heathcliff’s rival, that will shape his behavior and prevent him from being a classic Byronic hero. She says, “he seemed sullen, patient child; hardened perhaps, to ill-treatment. He would stand Hindley's blows without winking or shedding a tear, and my pinches moved him only to draw in a breath, and open his eyes as if he'd hurt himself by accident, and nobody was to blame” (Brontë 38). She begins by saying “he seemed sullen, patient child” to express her first impression of him. Sullen paired with patience is contradictory, and it would mean he is gloomy and withdrawn alongside tolerant and understanding. These set him up to have Byronic hero traits with being isolated and emotionally restrained, but these are misread into bad qualities in the eyes of the families. Ultimately, he was accustomed to violence from Hindley. Nelly says, “he would stand Hindley’s blows without winking or shedding a tear,” meaning that with his emotional restraint paired with abuse he was used to the cycle of repeated violence. Even Nelly’s pinches do not faze him. This quote is significant because it shows physical abuse from multiple characters and how Heathcliff has learned to endure this pain even when earlier he was compared to a lamb. She says “he hurt himself by accident” emphasizing how he learned to internalize the abuse and pain and place blame on no one but himself. This a prime example on how Brontë gives him traits early on that match the Byronic hero, but this cycle of mistreatment shapes his young personality and will only get worse.

Going further, another example of the early racialization of him is when his love, Catherine, is talking with Nelly about marriage prospects. She says, “It would degrade me to marry Heathcliff, now; so he shall never know I love him; and that, not because he’s handsome, Nelly, but because he’s more myself than I. Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same” (Brontë 81). In Victorian history, choosing to not marry someone as a woman because it could be degrading often refers to the prospect being lower in status and money. However, Heathcliff lives with the Earnshaws, so he should have the same class status as Catherine. For her to say “it would degrade me to marry him,” must refer to his racial identity. At this point in the novel, he has already been separated because of his racial otherness. Her saying, “he shall not know I love him” and “our souls...are the same” proves that she would want to marry him in different circumstances, such as if he were understood as white like her. Catherine’s inability to separate his racial otherness causes her pain and ends up hurting Heathcliff. Where they could have had a good marriage founded in love, the whole idea fails because he isn’t white. This is another example of how Heathcliff is mistreated due to the racial prejudice of the era.

Additionally, since Catherine has rejected Heathcliff, he ends up marrying Isabella which further exposes how his Byronic traits become twisted. When Nelly, confronts him about his treatment of her he says:

“...she abandoned them under delusion,” he answered, “picturing me in a hero of romance, and expecting unlimited indulgences from my chivalrous devotion. I can hardly regard her in the light of a rational creature, so obstinately has she persisted in forming fabulous notions of my character, and acting on the false impressions she cherished. But, at last, I think she begins to know me—.” (Brontë 149)

Isabella, like Catherine, projects Byronic traits on him when he states, “hero of romance” and “my chivalrous devotion” when they never were there to begin with. The other characters have continuously abused and isolated him due to his racial otherness and Heathcliff has internalized views onto himself. He says, “false impressions” and “she begins to know me” because she has finally come to terms that he is not a good man. Due to internalization through mistreatment and prejudice, he is no longer a redeemable character, but has fully changed. These realizations from Isabella help prepare readers for his full collapse after Catherine’s death, showing how far these corruptions have taken him.

Further into the novel, is the moment after Catherine's death, when Heathcliff completely breaks down and some of his Byronic traits become twisted by the violent language through which he has been described. Brontë says:

“May she wake in torment!” he cried, with a frightful vehemence, stamping his foot and groaning in a sudden paroxysm of ungovernable passion... “Catherine Earnshaw, may you not rest as long as I am living! ... Haunt me then! ... Be with me always—take any form—drive me mad! ... I cannot live without my life! I cannot live without my soul!” (169)

This moment shows the full force of Heathcliff's passion, something essential to the Byronic hero. But Brontë pushes it past tragic love into violent obsession. She says, “frightful vehemence” and “ungovernable passion” making him scary and tainting his passion. Instead of making him heroic, it isolates him completely and reinforces the image of him as morally dangerous. Brontë turns a traditionally redeeming trait of the Byronic hero into something corrupted. The words along with “stamping his foot” shows not only heartbreak but the aggression he begins displaying. Paired with his racial otherness established earlier in the novel, Brontë continues to play into the racial stereotypes of racial otherness. What should have been a display of emotion for a lost love, is corrupted by the language around him challenging the Byronic hero archetype one more.

At the end of the novel, Heathcliff's final change shows the complete collapse of the Byronic hero archetype and the effects of these changes on him. He says, “An absurd termination to my violent exertions? ... my old enemies have not beaten me—now would be the precise time to revenge myself on their representatives—I could do it; and none of them could hinder me... I have lost the faculty of enjoying their destruction, and I am too idle to destroy for nothing” (Bronte 323). His vengeance has taken over his life where he once was passionate. He recognizes his meaningless cruelty when he says “violent exertions,” but paired with “enemies” and “representatives,” signifies he is still paranoid and dehumanizing. These are not traits of the Byronic hero and instead place him significantly closer to the gothic villain. While he sees these issues in himself, he also feels it has taken life out of him. He says, “I have lost the faculty,” meaning he doesn't enjoy it, but it does control his life and being. His hatred has taken his emotional depth away, something that made him sympathetic to readers. It is in this final moment that the collapse of the Byronic hero archetype has shattered due to the years of racial prejudice and mistreatment he underwent. Instead of the heroes he was modeled after he ultimately ascends into a fully-fledged gothic villain that cannot be redeemed.

In conclusion, throughout *Wuthering Heights*, Heathcliff shows how racial prejudice and abuse corrupt the Byronic hero. His passion, isolation and mystery are twisted into obsession, alienation, and vengeance through repeated cycles of abuse due to his racial otherness from the other characters in the novel. Where Brontë once modeled him after other heroes, her racialized language ultimately transforms him permanently into a gothic villain. This is important because it highlights who can be seen as heroic in the Victorian era amidst personal and cultural prejudices. Heathcliff's downfall also reminds readers that not all characters can fit into certain archetypes due to specific societal views in the time in which they live.

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Feminizing Justice: A Critique of the Patriarchal Criminal Justice System

Cadence Groce

The United States criminal justice system—through its multifaceted organization into the three branches of law enforcement, corrections, and courts (the “System”)—is intended to maintain public safety, uphold the rule of law, and ensure justice. However, the unfortunate reality is that, in many cases—and particularly cases involving sex crimes—the goals of the System are never realized. The reason for such dysfunction is rooted in its power structure, which upholds and reinforces male dominance over women. Using a theory of hegemonic masculinity, this study illuminates the System’s patriarchal construction; identifies some negative effects of the System’s patriarchal structure on women as professionals, civilians, and prisoners; and, most importantly, suggests a solution of dismantling the patriarchal structure within the System and adopting a feminist ethics of care.

First, the presence of the patriarchy within the System can be characterized by the number of positions of power that are held by men, which can be illustrated through its workforce demographics. Specifically, professionals across the System’s three branches—law enforcement, corrections, and courts — are overwhelmingly male. As of 2023, only 12 percent of police officers and only 3 percent of police leaders were women (FBI 2023). As of this year, only 29.3 percent of corrections staff, calculated across both men’s and women’s prisons, were women (BOP 2025). And, despite women making up 56.2 percent of the law student population and 51.5 percent of federal government lawyers (AMA 2024), only 34 percent of judges were women, suggesting that, even when women are proportionately represented in the System, they still hold disproportionately fewer positions of power (NAWJ 2024). This immenseness of male power and lack of female power, considering the numbers of men and women employed within the System, reinforces the patriarchy and creates a basis for dysfunction within the System.

The lack of proportional female representation in the System is both the cause and effect of the System’s patriarchal tendency to value masculine-associated traits (such as practicality and detachment) over feminine-associated traits. Specifically, this can be analyzed through a theory of hegemonic masculinity. Hegemony refers to a position of cultural authority. More specifically, hegemonic masculinity states that there is a hierarchy of gender in which any form of masculinity is valued more highly than femininity. Even among non-feminine-related traits, the System practices hegemonic masculinity, the most prized way a patriarchal society can perform

masculinity, by placing and resting its power over not only women but also over other forms of masculinity. For example, the hegemonic male holds power through his race, class, and ultimately his performance of gender. Thus, men who are not able to achieve this status often engage in violence against other men and women to achieve some sort of power. This gender hierarchy, where some masculinities are more noble than others, and all masculinities hold prestige over femininity, prioritizes traits such as emotional suppression, aggression, competitiveness, and power (Connell 2001). Therefore, hegemonic masculinity is the basis for which patriarchy exists within the System.

Moreover, acceptable job performance in the System is generally assessed by the employee's demonstration of traditionally masculine characteristics, which can be blamed for the gender pay gap and lack of advancement opportunities for women. For example, police officers must be physically strong, correctional officers must be forceful, and lawyers must be aggressive. This hierarchical valuing of hegemonic masculinity shows up in evaluations and performance reviews, despite research suggesting, for example, that officers equipped with traditionally feminine-related traits and interpersonal skills such as active listening, empathy, and de-escalation techniques are more effective at diffusing tense situations. A System that prioritized traits such as these rather than hierarchical masculine traits would be better able to effectively respond to situations without a gender bias.

The negative effects of the System's patriarchal power structure are felt, of course, by the System's female employees and other employees who do not identify as female but who exhibit feminine-associated traits. Not only are women statistically less likely to be employees of the System, but even when they are, they are paid less than their male counterparts for the same work and are less likely to advance to higher positions. Statistically, as of 2023, for police officers, women make 76 cents on the dollar that a man makes, 81 cents on the dollar as correctional officers, and 93 cents on the dollar as lawyers (Narrow the Gap 2023). Additionally, women who are hired into the System and are assessed as having good job performance within the System based on their adequate display of masculinity face challenges in the workplace, including agitation and competition from male colleagues trying to exert dominance (Britton 1997). Such practice can lead to violence, particularly for women and members of LGBTQIA+ communities. For example, female professionals in the System experience sexual harassment in the workplace at prominent rates. This gender pay gap and violence and sexual harassment against women within

the System reflect the hegemonic valuing of masculine traits within the System while simultaneously discouraging women from being employed within it.

The prevalence and implications of the System's patriarchal power structure affect not only employees but also civilians, especially victims of sex crimes. In a system controlled by hegemonic masculinity, officers, prosecutors, and judges alike reveal all too often that they are ill-equipped to respond to, prosecute, and assess acts of violence against women. Because hegemonic masculinity and the patriarchy uphold men's experiences over women's, men generally cast doubt on the testimonies and experiences of women, thus most men within the System uphold the patriarchy through this. Victims of sexual assault, for example, experience the trauma of revictimization by officers who require multiple retellings of the incident, prosecutors who insist on victims' testimony in court, and judges who are more likely to believe men over women and excuse perpetrators or grant them reduced sentences. Influenced by outdated myths surrounding rape and sexual assault, System professionals at every level discriminate against sexual assault victims through hypermasculine techniques of interrogation, victim-blaming, and threats. Additionally, the effects of the System's performance of patriarchy, especially in interactions with victims of sex crimes, reverberate to society at large. The System's devaluing of female victims' experiences and testimony implicitly communicates society's dangerous beliefs about the devaluation of women's lives, including the lack of importance of both women's safety and women's credibility generally. Such practices have led to, and continue to lead to, increased violence against women and the unwillingness to report it (Tracy et al. 2012).

Furthermore, sexual assault in corrections, specifically the prison systems, presents power structures and hegemonic masculinity within different dynamics. For those who are incarcerated, the System's performance of hegemonic masculinity is also displayed through its treatment of sexual violence. Through incarceration, male prisoners are stripped of their masculine power, rendering them more vulnerable to sexual violence from both prison staff and fellow prisoners. In the gender hierarchy, male prisoners are beneath all staff, both male and female. Female prisoners, who were already ranked lower than men (including male prisoners) before incarceration, hold the least amount of power of all, which can be explained as an increased vulnerability to violence and coercion and a lack of autonomy.

Unsurprisingly, the System that perpetuates this hierarchy of violence offers little remedy when the violence happens. Prisoners, both male and female, who experience sexual violence

technically may file a civil lawsuit against the government or individual officer who committed the act, through the Prison Litigation Reform Act. However, the civil court system often finds that the conduct is not egregious enough to meet the legal standard (Coker 2014). Even if the act of sexual violence is deemed to be so shocking to the conscience of the judge or jury that it meets the legal standard, the civil court system's perpetuation of traditional notions about gender work to maintain the belief that men, for example, are unable to be emotionally or physically harmed by sexual assault because they are men (Coker 2014). This stigma about men's ability to experience sexual assault from the courts reinforces hegemonic masculinity, in which some men hold more power than others and engage in violence against other men to uphold their power. Michael Kimmel argues that through this hegemonic masculinity, men perform their masculinity for the approval of other men. Additionally, because sexual assault is stereotypically considered to be only a crime against women, men who do experience this crime are stripped of their masculinity in the eyes of other men. Thus, when men do experience sexual assault, they are less likely to report it in fear of judgment from other men (who make up most of the criminal justice system). In this way, male prisoners face a double bind of being both more vulnerable to sexual violence and less likely to be believed if it happens to them. Thus, hegemonic masculinity affects and harms everyone, even those who are supposed to be benefiting from it (Kimmel 2016).

Fortunately, because gender hierarchy—including the patriarchy existing within the System—is socially constructed, it can be dismantled (Connell 2001). Increasing the number of women working as professionals within the System is one solution that will benefit all men and women, both as professionals and civilians. The System is overwhelmingly male, but increased female representation and involvement in criminal justice careers will encourage women to pursue the field and enable them to envision professional success within the System. For example, programs such as the FBI's 30x30 initiative encourage police agencies nationwide to strive to increase female police representation to 30 percent by 2030. This initiative acknowledges the detriments from a lack of female representation within the System and encourages participating agencies to share their practices, progress, and reports with one another to foster an environment to increase the number of women employed in the System (FBI 2023). However, while female representation is a way of decreasing rates of gender-based discrimination and sexual violence in the workplace, this representation does not completely solve the issue on its own. Because hegemonic masculinity ideology is so embedded within society, there must be a change within the

gender dynamics of men as well. Michael Kimmel calls on men to participate in care work in an attempt to redefine masculinity, arguing that this care work benefits men as well (Kimmel 2015). For men in the criminal justice system, this would mean abandoning traditional toxic masculine traits such as aggression, hyper-individualism, and assertion of dominance. Thus, redefining masculinity and abandoning hegemonic masculinity within the System would foster an environment that would encourage women to enter it in larger numbers, while also creating conditions that allow for more freeing and less rigid expectations for men and their masculinity.

But merely having a seat at the table will not solve the gender hierarchy of the System. To dismantle patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity, the System should adopt a feminist ethics of care. A feminist ethics of care, popularized by feminist scholars such as Sara Ruddick and Carol Gilligan, focuses on how care work would benefit all of society. This care work can be defined as work that values caring for individuals and developing relationships, rather than the traditional masculine focus on individuality. While care work has traditionally been limited to the private sphere, Carol Gilligan argues that this ethics of care should be applied to the broader social and political realms. Thus, Gilligan argues that care work should not be characterized within the boundaries of gender, meaning that men can and should also perform this care work (Gilligan 1982). Thus, a System guided by a feminist ethics of care would focus on compassion, relationships, and the honoring of human life (Curtis 2021). For example, in such a System, police officers (male and female) would be skilled in practicing empathy and trauma-informed policing, which would improve victims' experiences within the System and potentially decrease the prevalence of underreporting of sex crimes. Even more broadly, just as the current System's patriarchal structure reverberates to society at large, the System's adoption of a feminist ethics of care could have the same expansion, leading to more positive public perception of and trust in the System (Meier and Nicholson-Crotty 2006).

In prisons, instilling a feminist ethics of care would involve, as Helen Brown Coverdale explains, "meeting basic needs, building capabilities, or avoiding unnecessary pain" (Coverdale 2020), which is reflective of how a feminist ethics of care focuses on caring for individuals as the basic tenet. It would require treating a prisoner as a whole human being, and it would mean instituting, as core job functions, the duties of noticing and addressing a prisoner's individual needs. It would demand that prison guards treat prisoners as "moral equals" who deserve care, support, and adequate housing, and it would necessitate the reprimand of guards who dehumanize

or objectify prisoners or other colleagues. A model for an ethical care-based approach in prisons already exists in Norway, a country with a recidivism rate of 25 percent after five years compared to the U.S. rate of 70 percent (First Step Alliance 2022). This focus on promoting care-based rehabilitation rather than punishment reflects how a feminist ethics of care, when performed by both men and women, can benefit those within the System. Thus, the System's adoption of a similar feminist ethics of care could not only decrease violence but also reduce recidivism.

Critics, such as feminist scholars and hyper-masculine employees within the System, may argue that an ethics of care and an ethics of justice are opposing philosophies, in which a feminine ethics of care focuses on the individual needs of a person, while a masculine ethics of justice focuses on fairness and rules. However, a true feminist ethics of care acknowledges that care is neither the appropriate solution in every situation nor mutually exclusive with justice (Coverdale 2020). Instead, the System should exercise both ethics in harmony. Considering prisons, this would involve providing care and rehabilitation to individuals but also still ensuring justice is provided through inmates serving time and abiding by rules, where both ethics are being executed concurrently, which occurs in Norway's prison systems. Instead of placing justice hierarchically above care, or vice versa, these concepts should be considered in relation to each other, in a system where care nurtures justice and justice fosters care (Curtis 2021).

To conclude, the current state of the American criminal justice system is ruled by the patriarchy, in which it is statistically populated by men among police, the courts, and corrections. Considering a theory of hegemonic masculinity, the system values masculine traits over feminine traits, where it is much more difficult for women as professionals to move up and be respected. Hegemonic masculinity and the patriarchy also harm victims of sexual assault, which can be viewed through the treatment of victims by professionals. However, I argue that a System operating with a feminist ethics of care, which includes using an ethics of justice when appropriate, would correlate to reduced recidivism, better reporting, decreased violence, and other benefits. However, to successfully implement a feminist ethics of care, the current structures of patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity residing in the System must be eradicated. It is only through that dismantling that the System can ever truly serve its intended purpose of ensuring justice.

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**“Our Weapon is Truth”:
Ukraine’s United24 and Connotations of Propaganda on Social Media**

Alannah Bowman

Wars are not only fought on battlefields, but in minds and hearts where stories take the place of tanks and guns. We often think of propaganda as evil and purely lies, but that is not entirely true. Sometimes, propaganda is just the truth presented in a certain way, and we are inundated with it through the social media apps we use daily. Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, propaganda has been a hot subject. However, Ukrainian propaganda never receives the same scorn as its Russian counterpart. Often, we find ourselves uncomfortable even addressing it as such. United24 Media is a government-affiliated company that produces propaganda on Instagram, where it has crafted a brand identity for Ukraine through framing and fostering familiarity.

Firstly, the use of the word “propaganda” must be addressed. In the United States, propaganda is typically associated with America’s historic enemies (Bonard et al., 2024). In a study of general readings given to students, the words most closely associated with propaganda were in this order: “‘nazi’, ‘nazis’, ‘hitler’, ‘alliance’, ‘fascism’, ‘berlin’, ‘anti’, ‘1945’, ‘allies’, ‘1917’, ‘bolshevik’, ‘germany’, ‘fatherland’” (Bonard et al., 2024, p. 1082). These are words either directly or closely tied to the villains of America’s past, including Russia and the Soviet Union. Therefore, it is no surprise that the word “propaganda” has such a sinister connotation.

Propaganda is often perceived as inherently evil or untrue. However, it does not have to be either. Propaganda can be defined as “the systematic dissemination of information, especially in a biased or misleading way, in order to promote a political cause or point of view,” and by this definition, it does seem sinister (Bonard et al., 2024, p. 1082). Biased and misleading are both words that suggest propaganda must always be a form of disinformation. However, that is not true. Disinformation is defined as “non-attributed or falsely attributed communication, written or oral, containing intentionally false, incomplete, or misleading information (frequently combined with true information), which seeks to deceive, misinform, and/or mislead the target” (Shultz & Godson, 1984, as cited in Maschmeyer et al., 2025, p. 50). While the two definitions have clear overlap, there is a difference. Propaganda does not have to be disinformation; it can be true, and disinformation does not have to be propaganda, as it can lack a political goal. With this framing,

propaganda and misinformation, while containing similar motivations of deception, have differing social and political impacts.

Therefore, calling United24 a propaganda network does not imply that everything it posts is falsified or misleading. It is calling it what it is, information presented in a heavily biased way meant to sway the viewer's sympathies. Perhaps this is unethical, perhaps it is necessary, but what is certain is that it is marketing. Through posts on two accounts, United24 attempts to build a brand identity for Ukraine. These accounts, united24.media and u24.gov.ua, share the same end goal but work to accomplish it in different ways. Both accounts are government-affiliated, having been launched by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, and both work to deliver up-to-date information on the invasion. However, their styles vary.

Nation Branding Through Social Media Posts

The more informal of the two accounts is u24.gov.ua, with its posts focusing less on direct military and government actions and more on the daily lives of Ukrainians, Ukrainian culture, and events. It describes itself as "Ukraine's official fundraising platform, launched by President @zelenskyy_official" (United24 Media, n.d.-a). The spoken goal of the account is to fundraise for the war effort, and multiple posts reference raising funds for air defense turrets, AI to help defend cities, among other initiatives (United24 Media, n.d.-a). The more formal account, united24.media, focuses more on the war itself. Its posts are about attacks on cities, soldiers, and Ukrainian people on the world stage (United24 Media, n.d.-b). Their bio states that they intend to "help people see how war in Ukraine affects every person in the world" (United24 Media, n.d.-b). Like u24.gov.ua, their mission statement is genuine, but it is part of a larger effort to brand Ukraine as a nation that matters and deserves support and allyship.

Nation branding is considered a relatively new phenomenon, having gained increased importance with the advancement of globalization (Briciu & Briciu, 2020). A nation brand is similar to any other brand; it differentiates the nation from others, like a product brand differentiates products (Cateora et al., 2024). Most countries pursue this approach with two primary goals in mind: to sell and to foster positive relationships with other nations (Montanari & de Moura, 2018). However, in the case of United24, their focus is on building relationships. Both United24 accounts attempt to brand Ukraine as a resilient nation that deserves sympathy and, most importantly, support and allyship. Ukraine has a high long-term orientation, rated at 86, compared to the United States' rating of 26; therefore, one could argue that it is in Ukraine's economic

interest to create a positive brand image (Hofstede, 2025). This “long-term orientation” refers to a culture or nation which prioritizes long-term goals over short-term effects, ultimately showcasing Ukraine’s intentionality in cultivating a brand which will have long-term success. This is correct, but even economic growth and security are ultimately linked to the goal of Ukraine’s nation branding: survival. At the root of every post made by one of United24’s accounts is a desire to help Ukraine survive the war and then rebuild quickly and efficiently.

United24 utilizes three genres of posts to create its brand. These are cultural posts, event posts, and war posts. The accounts frequently cross streams, posting the same content or reposting, but each does have its own focus. Cultural posts focus on Ukraine’s culture and history, both domestic and abroad. One example is a Canada Day post that praises Canadian diversity and explains the impact of Ukrainian immigrants on their culture (United24 Media, 2025). Event posts focus on specific events, a leader from another country visiting, protests, or concerts. War posts are simply posts about the ongoing war. They may include clips of soldiers speaking, reports regarding attacks on cities, or even Russian officials (United24 Media, n.d.-b). Despite being different genres or styles of posts, they maintain some unified themes or qualities that help tailor a brand image.

Cultural posts aim to introduce and familiarize viewers with Ukrainian culture and its traditions. Branding countries can be more challenging than branding others due to historical factors. Ukraine, for instance, has long been a part of the Russian cultural sphere, and these posts are a way not just to separate from that, but to join the Western cultural sphere as equals and allies (Evans, 2022). The post about Canada Day is a good example of an attempt by United24 to align Ukraine with a Western country. This post praises Canada’s diversity, claiming that it is why many Ukrainian people chose to immigrate there, and that this has helped Canada (United24 Media, 2025). It compliments Canada and then espouses a shared history, stating that Ukraine matters to Canada.

Another cultural post that shares a similar theme is a video by u24.gov.ua explaining what Ukrainian culture is and is not. The opening seconds of the clip show “russian” distortions of Ukrainian culture, this specific account makes a point to avoid capitalizing Russia and Russians, wherein Russian performers are dressed in parodies of traditional Ukrainian clothing (United24 Media, 2025-d). These images bear a strong similarity to racist caricatures of African-American people. One woman shown seems to resemble the mammy stereotype, or, the popular image of

Black women as engaging in care work, even wearing a similar headband often seen in these depictions. Another shows people in mascot-style costumes with large, red lips meant to resemble Ukrainian women, and once again, these seem to be reminiscent of dolls modeled after minstrel shows. The video goes on to show what real Ukrainian culture looks like, featuring people laughing and smiling, rather than performances or objects for sale (United24 Media, 2025). The video then makes a point to show a Black woman in traditional Ukrainian clothing which symbolizes Ukraine's embracing of her. This post aims to compare Russia to the racist Jim Crow era of American history, while Ukraine is likened to the more modern and accepting America (Appendix, Figures 1 and 2).

Many cultural posts like this attempt to appeal to a specifically American audience by calling upon cultural aspects unique or familiar to the United States, and war posts do similarly. In June 2025, one video shows a man being baptized "despite the sound of heavy Russian shelling in the area" and smoke rising in the background (United 24 Media, 2025-e). The individuals depicted in the video are reportedly members of the Ukrainian Evangelical Church; however, the majority of Ukrainians belong to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Salnikova & Savelyev, 2025). This clip aims to highlight similarities between Ukrainians and Americans, the majority of whom are Protestant. Ukraine's brand is intended to be Western, which garners a sense of familiarity with the target market. Ultimately, this induces sympathy and brand appeal within the digital ecosystem (Hanchukova & Velikova, 2025). This post is telling Americans that people like them are in danger and that they have the power to do something about it.

The last genre is event posts, many of which also attempt to prove similarities between Ukraine and its desired Western allies, especially America. One such example is from July 2025, when widespread anti-corruption protests took place in Ukraine. United24.media and u24.gov.ua cross-posted these protests. Protests, in general, pose a significant threat to national branding, as they disrupt the symbolic status quo that nation brands strive to establish (Jiménez & Dolea, 2024). There are three frames through which we can view protesting and its impact on national promotion. First, protests are perceived as a threat, then as an expression of the country's "true" nature, and finally, as strategic communication (Jiménez & Dolea, 2024). United24 could have chosen to accuse the protestors of disloyalty or refused to report on it at all. Instead, they said it was an example of Ukrainian spirit and freedom (United24 Media, 2025-f). Specifically, United24 stated that the protests exemplified Ukrainians' love of liberty, justice, and independence, all of which

many consider core American values. Even under (Russian) threat, their people were continuing a fight to better their country.

Each of these posts reinforces the brand image that United24 has been trying to build, showing that a relationship already exists between Ukraine and its desired allies, specifically the United States. They point out shared religious views, values, and even shared discrimination in the case of Black Americans. It is all an effort to create familiarity through branding. It is the same technique many politicians use when they show themselves participating in normal, everyday activities like sitting down and having dinner with their families (Serafin, 2022). United24 Media primarily markets to Americans, and therefore, their brand must be both uniquely Ukrainian and American at the same time.

Additionally, each of these posts represents an attempt by United24 to distance Ukraine from the Russian cultural sphere. Nation branding, in itself, is often faced with many challenges, and among them are stereotypes and preexisting beliefs that other countries may hold (Montanari & de Moura, 2018). Traditionally, Ukraine has been perceived as being very similar to Russia; therefore, United24 must highlight the differences. They aim to align Ukraine with the same sphere as its desired allies, Western countries such as Canada, the United States, and France. Through these posts, they practice cultural relativism by portraying Ukraine's brand, which can almost be viewed as a product. These products seemingly share the same values as these countries, values that Russia opposes.

Other than the end goal, these posts share a few similarities. Brands require certain unifying elements to differentiate themselves from one another; at its core, this exemplifies competitive advantage in marketing (Canon et al, 2024). These may be logos, designs, symbols, or even phrases (Cateora et al., 2024). They are repeated and unify the posts across different accounts, while simultaneously separating Ukraine's brand identity from that of other countries. The tryzub, for instance, is a recurring symbol in many United24 posts. It is the trident, a national symbol of Ukraine, and can be seen on anything from military uniforms and everyday outfits to flags and statues (United24 Medi-f). This symbol, the bold white lettering, the United24 logo, along with certain phrases, creates a unified visual identity for Ukraine, while the content of the posts provides the substance of the brand.

“I Changed, You Did Not”: Volodymyr Zelenskyy’s Role as a Brand Ambassador

Ukraine’s president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, has also become a part of this Ukrainian brand. He is more than simply a politician; he is now a brand ambassador. Brand ambassadors are people, typically celebrities, who are paid to publicly support and market for a brand (Perrault et al., 2024). He himself often wears the logo of Ukraine, the tryzub, and dresses in dark, somber colors. Zelenskyy’s appearance is a key part of his ambassadorship. From his facial hair to his clothing, he is a symbol of the Ukrainian brand, much like the tryzub or even the flag. It is a carefully tailored appearance on his part; politicians, after all, are just marketers, but that does not make it disingenuous. He appears frequently in United24’s posts.

Zelenskyy was elected in 2019, and even during his campaign, social media played a key role. His campaign exemplified what Michael Cole called “a new breed of populism, consisting almost entirely of infotainment” (2025, p. 452). Zelenskyy had played the president on a comedy TV show, and this became a key part of his campaign (Cole, 2025). So clearly, the use of pop culture and social media propaganda is not new to him. His creation of United24 Media is an extension of methods he already used. The primary difference is that the audience is now external rather than internal. This shift is common in nation branding (Montanari & de Moura, 2018). You must adapt what already exists inside the country for an outside audience.

Before the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Zelenskyy presented as most politicians do. He wore suits, was clean-shaven. Yet, after the invasion — and somewhat infamously in the United States — this changed. Zelenskyy ceased to wear suits, opting instead for somber-colored business casual clothing, which often displays the tryzub on the chest (Cole, 2025). He also grew a beard. It was an effort to connect to his people, to show that he is one of them and not a man who sits in an office in clean suits while they suffer. However, it was also a message to the world. Zelenskyy’s transformation from clean-cut and polished to visibly exhausted and almost soldier-like represents Ukraine’s transformation from a relatively peaceful country to one that is tired of fighting and yet perseveres.

As mentioned earlier, Zelenskyy is frequently featured in United24’s posts, but they rarely consist of him giving a speech. Rather, they tend to focus on his connection to others, such as non-Ukrainian politicians or the Ukrainian people. Another video shows him kneeling, leaving flowers at the sight of a missile strike where 22 people, including 4 children, were killed (United24.media, 2025-g). In this clip, he wears a black shirt, military green pants, and work boots. Zelenskyy, in

this video, represents all of Ukraine mourning these deaths. His clothing places him at the level of both the average Ukrainian and the viewer; therefore, once again using him as “a kind of living (Ukrainian) flag” (Cole, 2025). For non-Ukrainian viewers, Zelenskyy is meant to symbolize the pain the country is going through. He is an emotional appeal.

This tactic of making himself seem like a normal citizen of his country is not at all unique to Zelenskyy, however, many politicians attempt to portray themselves as one of the people. Yet, the specifics of Zelenskyy’s methods differ. He presents himself as suffering like an everyday Ukrainian, yet he also projects an aspirational image. Much of what United24 posts is jarring, both emotionally and visually. They show buildings being blown up, people bleeding, but posts with Zelenskyy never do (United24 Media, 2025-b). In them, he is always calm, solid, especially when compared to the posts around him. Zelenskyy is a pillar of Ukraine’s brand as a resilient nation. He is a solid figure, carrying his people through the war.

Internally, the success of these methods is clear. Prior to the full-scale invasion, Zelenskyy had an approval rating of just 41% (Vigers & Ray, 2025). This was in 2020, just one year after he took office. When compared to United States Presidents, there is a significant difference. During their first terms, every president since 1993 averaged at least 41.1%, only slightly higher than Zelenskyy, but that was at the lower end (Gallup, 2025). The majority of these presidents were over 49% (Gallup, 2025). However, Zelenskyy’s approval rating skyrocketed to 84% just after the invasion and, despite dipping after the initial attacks, has remained consistently high at 67% (Vigers & Ray, 2025). This proves that inside Ukraine, his manner of presenting himself has been successful.

Framing Theory

Framing is essentially the process of creating a frame, a social identity for something or someone, which then forces that thing to fulfill the frame, leading to what Erving Goffman called “dramatic realization,” wherein the framed object becomes the frame (Goffman, 1974, p. 208). Therefore, when Zelenskyy would meet with NATO leaders to discuss NATO issues, it was an attempt to become one. Framing is often employed in politics and was even used by Zelenskyy himself before he launched United24. Before the invasion, he framed himself as an EU leader (Cole, 2025). Ukraine wanted to join the EU and NATO, so Zelenskyy would in some ways act as if it already had.

United24 Media also creates a frame for both Ukraine and Russia. This frame creates preconceived notions that will impact our views of wartime events. The frame they create for Ukraine is one of honor, resilience, and sacrifice. Not a single post refers to Ukrainian soldiers as soldiers; they are always defenders (United24 Media, n.d.-a). Ukraine is defending its right to exist; it is not just fighting. Russian soldiers, however, are soldiers and in some cases, mercenaries from other countries (United24 Media, 2025-h). In just those words, there is a major difference. Soldiers fight, mercenaries too, but there is an aggressiveness to both words and, in the case of mercenaries, a lack of perceived honor. Defenders, on the other hand, protect; they do not do it for money but because they value what they are defending.

Both accounts post anti-Russian content, but u24.gov.ua tends to be more obviously hostile. This account makes a point never to capitalize Russia or Russian, a technique through which they frame Russia, and therefore its claims to Ukrainian land, as being illegitimate (United24 Media, 2025-a). Legitimate countries are proper nouns; they are capitalized, but as United24's posts will tell you, Russia as a state is corrupt and cruel. Such a corrupt, flawed country can hardly be put on par with better, freer nations like Ukraine or its hopeful allies. It is tactical ethnocentrism, or, evaluating a culture based on principles from one's own.

Many of United24's anti-Russia posts seek to compare the two countries in strategic, but still ethnocentric, ways. For example, one posted video shows two captured Russian soldiers asking if they will be executed, to which the Ukrainian defenders reply "no, we are not like you" (United24 Media, 2025-i). This sentiment is at the core of nearly every post about Russia. Ukraine is not like Russia; the countries Ukraine hopes to ally with are not like Russia. United24 is attempting to separate Ukraine from the Russian cultural sphere and isolate Russia from the rest of the world. In this clip, everyday Russians are depicted as so conditioned to the violence and mistreatment of their nation that they expect to receive it in return. Yet, they were spared as Ukraine "continues to adhere to international humanitarian law, including the Geneva Conventions," rules which the same video claims Russia violates daily (United24 Media, 2025-i). Ukraine obeys international law, the laws every country is meant to follow, but Russia does not.

Two different posts, posted one after the other, also compare the two countries while once again proving Ukraine is similar to other Western countries, specifically the U.S. The clip posted first is of a little girl lining up her *Paw Patrol* figures for the moment of silence observed daily at 9:00 AM (United24 Media, 2025-j). She is not a specific child but representative of any child that

might be found almost anywhere. Her toys are characters from the popular American show *Paw Patrol*; they are toys that any American girl might have. This is another attempt to create sympathy through familiarity (Hanchukova & Velikova, 2025). The post directly after that is about toys of Russian soldiers that the Russian government plans to provide to kindergartners (United24 Media, 2025-k). In these photos, the toys are faded and washed out, especially when compared to the previous little girl's bright, American toys. These two posts highlight the differences between Russia and Ukraine while simultaneously showing that Ukrainians have similarities to Americans (Appendix, Figures 3 and 4).

These frames are a tool to control the audience's reception of the posts. In audience reception theory, United24 Media's posts have little to no inherent meaning (Hall, 1973). Audiences assign meaning to the posts and the events in them, so the creator must find ways to encourage the audience to assign a specific meaning. A post of a crumbled building with no context has no real meaning, as the audience cannot know what happened to it. It is the context around the message, in this case a photo of a building, that gives it meaning (Hall, 1973). United24 provides this context in part through framing.

The aforementioned posts each contribute to the frame. The post about children's toys frames Russian culture as militaristic and aggressive. This is how United24 encodes its message. Sometimes, it is more overtly stated in the captions of posts, but the overall frame of Russia is the result of repeated messages, both implied and overt. After spending some time on either United24 account, the audience will have a frame through which they can interpret the posts even without captions or direct references to Russian violence. The photo of a crumbled building is given context and takes on meaning; it is the result of Russian violence.

Social Media as a Vehicle for Propaganda

As stated previously, both united24.media and u24.gov.ua are Instagram accounts, and each post thus far has been a post on Instagram. It is an unsurprising choice for the Ukrainian government to use a social media platform to release propaganda. In fact, it is not unique at all. Nearly every country and every politician use social media in order to further their agendas (Finlayson, 2022). Social media is a powerful tool, and Instagram, prioritizing visual content over written words, is an ideal vehicle for propaganda. It gives the advantage of the myth of photographic truth, wherein we believe that photographs are an objective depiction of the truth (Cole, 2025). Due to an array of factors, including framing, this is not true.

In addition, social media as a whole is often used for this style of propaganda. Firstly, roughly 70% of American teenagers are active on TikTok alone, making it an easy way to reach that segment of the population (Evans, 2025). Popularity of the platform alone, however, does not guarantee a successful propaganda campaign. What truly helps is the algorithm. It is designed in order to continue further interaction (Evans, 2025). Each video you watch makes more and more appear on your feed, thus creating more familiarity, which, as mentioned previously, leads to more sympathetic viewpoints (Hanchukova & Velikova, 2025).

Propaganda posted on social media also has to be entertaining, which United24's posts often are. They use attention-grabbing visuals and images from American cartoons like *Scooby Doo* (United24 Media, 2025-l). Politics on social media is not evaluated as purely politics but rather as entertainment like any other social media post (Finlayson, 2022). Therefore, it is imperative for United24 Media to be entertaining and eye-catching. That may mean videos like the one mentioned above, or it may mean the use of celebrity ambassadors such as Kathryn Winnick and Misha Collins (United24 Media, 2025-m). This reflects Zelenskyy's previous use of infotainment as a campaign tool (Cole, 2025).

The number of followers each account has proves that presenting the message as entertainment works. While u24.gov.ua may be more casual in its messaging, united24.media is more dramatic, and so it is not surprising that it is the account with more followers (United24 Media, 2025-b). Their posts are often visually shocking, containing explosions, blood, and moments of deep anguish, but sometimes they are also simply eye-catching, such as one video, which seeks to answer the question "what's the mysterious Russian soul about?" (United24 Media, 2025-l). This post is humorous, but the message behind it, that the Russian soul is corrupt, depressed, and conditioned to inequality, is anything but. This account is more entertaining than the other, which is a benefit. Posts on social media, even those meant to be purely informational, are judged as entertainment, much like news on television (Finlayson, 2022).

Conclusion

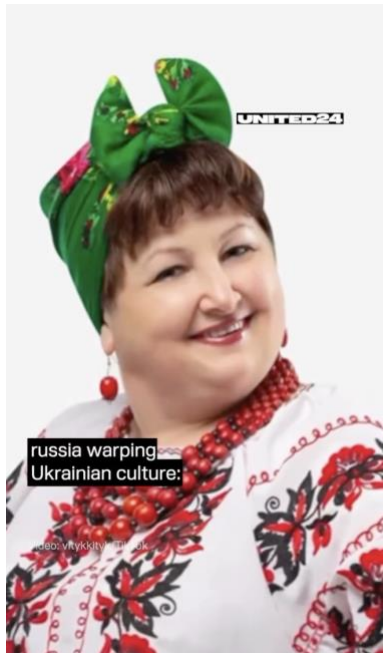
In summation, United24's use of Instagram to frame the invasion of Ukraine and foster familiarity between its audience and Ukrainians has been reasonably successful. Between the two accounts, they have a total of roughly one million followers (United24 Media, 2025-a). They have also raised millions of dollars just in recent months for various causes (United24 Media, 2025-n). While the money is a clear benefit, it is the followers who are a true sign of success. Each of these

followers likes and shares posts, leading to a higher chance of more people seeing them and being persuaded to support Ukraine. Through these people, they spread awareness of Ukraine’s brand as a resilient nation that deserves support and allyship.

Appendix: Images

Figure 1

Russia warping Ukrainian Culture



[Screenshot from a United24 video.] (2025).

<https://www.instagram.com/p/DNTfjqRt9IV>

/

Figure 2

Russia Warping Ukrainian Culture



[Screenshot from a United24 video.] (2025).

<https://www.instagram.com/p/DNTfjqRt9IV>

/

Figure 3

Childhood in Ukraine



Figure 4

Russia to Provide Kindergartners with Toys



[Screenshot from a United24 video.] (2025). [Screenshot from a United24 video.] (2025).

<https://www.instagram.com/p/DOty2tnjtUL/> https://www.instagram.com/p/DOtrtjDjvFN/?img_index=1

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On Earth as it is in Heaven: The Synthesis of Christian Belief and Socialist Theory in Western European History

Yesh Singayao

In 1915, a young minister was invited to speak before the assembly of the Social-Democratic Party in neutral Switzerland on the topic of the catastrophic war then engulfing Europe. Disillusioned with the militancy and nationalism of many in the Christian churches of that time, the young minister in question, Karl Barth, declared, “A real Christian must become a socialist, if they want to do with the reformation of Christianity in earnest.”¹ This was certainly an unorthodox theological suggestion, especially considering the tumultuous history between socialist regimes and the Church. However, such radical suggestions have been put forward by other prominent theologians and ministers during the tumultuous rise of Modern Europe. By examining Modern European history, one can see how post-Enlightenment thinkers, clergymen, and theologians attempted to find a synthesis between theology, radical reform, and socialism. These attempts were in response to revolution, industrial change, and the effects of nationalism and militarism in 17th to 20th century Europe. The ideological roots of European socialism can be traced back to Christian communal groups that formed in the wake of the religious revolts and civil wars of the Protestant Reformation.

One chief example of these groups was the Diggers, who formed in Great Britain. In 1642, the three kingdoms of Great Britain plunged into rebellion and civil war. The monarch of the kingdoms, Charles I, had caused great unrest amongst his subjects by collecting taxes and imposing a form of Anglicanism that closely resembled Catholicism, all without the consent of Parliament. Scotland rebelled in 1638, followed by Ireland in 1641. Then, in 1642, radical members of the English Parliament, seeking reforms of the state and the English church, rebelled as well.² In 1649, the wars climaxed with the beheading of King Charles I. Radical change came soon after, with the rebel English House of Commons officially abolishing the nation’s old monarchy and declaring the creation of a new English Republic. However, revolutionary unrest continued to boil over. With England ravaged by the civil war and struck by famine, poverty, and hunger became commonplace. The countryside and the streets were filled with the starving poor,

¹McMaken, W. Travis. *Our God Loves Justice: An introduction to Helmut Gollwitzer*. Fortress Press, 2017, 181

² Gaunt, Peter. *The English Civil Wars, 1642-1651*. Oxford: Osprey, 2003, 20-23

widows, orphans, and maimed soldiers. In light of these conditions, people began to push even more radical change.³ One of these was a man named Gerrard Winstanley.

Gerrard Winstanley was a cloth merchant in London who was bankrupted by the disruption of the cloth trade by the war. Disillusioned, he first turned to the sale and trading of commodities that led to his destitution, coming to believe, "...the whole earth of trading is generally become the neat art of thieving and oppressing fellow creatures."⁴ Based on a radical interpretation of Acts 4:32, which recounted how the early Christian community held things in common, he came to believe that when Christ returns in the last days, mankind would be freed from the oppression of the aristocracy and landlords, and that everybody would be equal before the creator. The resources of the earth would be held in common, and everybody would be able to take what they needed. Preempting this new earth, Winstanley envisioned the establishment of a community along these lines. He gained a following, with the group becoming known as the Diggers. The movement was short-lived, but Digger communities were established in several areas in England.⁵ Winstanley's ideals of social equality in service of the eventual establishment of God's Kingdom would later emerge amongst burgeoning socialist movements amidst the revolutionary upheaval of the 19th century.

During the 19th century, in the aftermath of the French Revolution and the restoration of the monarchy, inequality began to grow between laborers and the newly restored aristocracy and clergy in France. As industrialization began to take place, the newly enriched middle class took its place amongst the ruling elite. Henri De Saint-Simon, a former revolutionary officer, came to believe that the only way to alleviate the growing class divide in society was through a new social philosophy of universal brotherhood.⁶ Like many post-enlightenment philosophers of his era, he sought to find a spiritual and philosophical alternative to the dogmas of the Catholic church, and to that end, he sought to meld his new philosophy with a revised view of Christian ethics.⁷ In his 1825 work, *New Christianity*, he argued that everyone should embrace the Christian idea of

³ Hessayon, Ariel. "Early Modern Communism: The Diggers and Community of Goods." *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 3, no. 2 (2009), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41887629>, 3-7.

⁴ Gurney, John. *Brave Community: The Digger Movement in the English Revolution*. Manchester University Press, 2007. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt155j5m4>, 70-71.

⁵ Hessayon, "Early Modern Communism: The Diggers and Community of Goods." 24-27

⁶ Soliani, Riccardo. "Claude-Henri De Saint-Simon: Hierarchical Socialism?" *History of Economic Ideas* 17, no. 2 (2009): 21-39. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23723368>, 23-30.

⁷ Marx, Karl, and Friedrich Engels. *The Communist Manifesto*. Edited by Gareth Stedman Jones. New York: Penguin Books, 2002, 8.

brotherhood and that society's goal should be "the most rapid possible amelioration of the condition of the poorest class," which would be the true fulfillment of the Messianic kingdom preached by the early church fathers.⁸ In the aftermath of his death, his followers, the Saint-Simonians, continued to preach and follow a Christian-style communalism, and helped to develop early socialist and communist ideals, alongside the Icarians, under Etienne Cabet and the Fourierists under Victor Considerant, who also proclaimed that their own forms of socialist ideology were akin to a newly reformed Christianity.⁹

During the July Monarchy of French king Louis Phillippe, the rapid industrialization of France continued, further bolstering an increasingly wealthy and powerful middle class. In reaction against the Enlightenment rationalism favored by the middle class, oppressed workers turned to Christianity, radicalizing it into a new revolutionary ideology.¹⁰ Jesus Christ, in his role as a carpenter, became a symbol of the working-class man, with revolutionaries taking up the triumphant cry of "Long live Christ!" after they stormed the royal palace and overthrew the monarchy in 1848.¹¹ Moving with the religious zeal of the working classes, socialists formed a left-wing political coalition with radical republicans, which combined radical democratic-socialism with religion, known as the Montangards.¹² As part of their mass political campaigns, the Montanard's alluded to the kingdom of God when talking about the implementation of their planned political order, with one Saint-Simonian, democratic-socialist newspaper declaring that "God reigns just as much over the earth as he does in heaven," and that his will is done by improving the material conditions of all humanity, "especially of the workers, who live under the constant exploitation of capital."¹³

German revolutionaries, inspired by revolutionary socialism in France and the utopian Christian ideals of the radical French Catholic priest, Felicite de Lammenais, adopted an idea of communism which based its philosophy on the Biblical community of goods. Their leader,

⁸ St. Simon, Henri De. "New Christianity." Translated by J.E. Smith. Google Books, 1834.

<https://books.google.com/books?id=08UTI3KYuJ0C&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false>, 1-7.

⁹ Erik J. Freeman. "'True Christianity': The Flowering and Fading of Mormonism and Romantic Socialism in Nineteenth-Century France." *Journal of Mormon History* 44, no. 2 (2018): 75-103.

<https://doi.org/10.5406/jmormhist.44.2.0075>, 75-77.

¹⁰ Berenson, Edward. *Populist Religion and Left-Wing Politics in France, 1830-1852*. Princeton University Press, 1984. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt7ztmrk>, 36-38.

¹¹ Berenson, *Populist Religion and Left-Wing Politics*, 203-04.

¹² Berenson, *Populist Religion and Left-Wing Politics*, XIII-XXI.

¹³ Berenson, *Populist Religion and Left-Wing Politics*, 100-101.

William Wietling, laid out his Christian-inspired communism in his 1843 book, *The Gospel of a Poor Sinner*.¹⁴ Like other Christian communalists before him, Wietling spoke of the ideal of the Kingdom of God as his justification, saying, “We must establish the kingdom of God upon earth. If we have not the courage to do something towards establishing this kingdom on earth...then let us not bother about establishing it in heaven either...all this by God and by right is our common property.”¹⁵ The advancement of Wietling and other early revolutionary socio-religious socialists would help to pave the way for the secular, scientific socialism that came after. Karl Marx’s first introduction to socialist ideals was through the followers of St. Simon.¹⁶ In fact, Marx’s famous phrase, of “Each according to their needs,” was inspired in part by Saint-Simon.¹⁷ Marx would later supplant Wietling's place as leader of political doctrine in the growing German Communist movement that the latter built.¹⁸ With the publication of the Communist Manifesto during the revolutionary upheaval of 1848, Marx’s new Secular scientific socialism came to dominate Europe’s revolutionary labor movement. However, religious socialism still played a large role in Industrial reform movements.

Going back to the upturning of traditional social, economic, and religious structures in the aftermath of the British civil wars, a new social class, which included merchants, bankers, and early industrialists, came to dominate English society starting in the late 17th and early 18th centuries. This new social class ushered in a new age of prosperity for England, known as the Commercial Revolution. However, similar to what would later happen during the Industrial Revolution, this prosperity also came with extreme social and economic inequality. The government allowed employers to pay their workers the lowest wages possible to maximize profits. Furthermore, the enclosures of common agricultural land in the rural areas led to mass unemployment, poverty, hunger, crime, alcoholism, and disease, especially in the major cities.¹⁹ The elite chose to ignore the mass suffering, and some even argued that destitution was necessary to make people keep working. However, some groups did embark on social work to alleviate the

¹⁴ Marx, and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 40-44.

¹⁵ Wietling, Wilhelm. *The Poor Sinner's Gospel*. Translated by Dinah Livingstone. London: Sheed and Ward Ltd, 1969, 115.

¹⁶ Marx, and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 173.

¹⁷ Bloch, Ernst. *Atheism in Christianity the religion of the exodus and the Kingdom*. Edited by Peter Thompson. Translated by J T. Swann. S.I.: Verso, 2009, XXII.

¹⁸ Marx, and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 44-49.

¹⁹ Clarke, George, ed. *John Bellers: His life, times and writings*. New York : Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987, 10-14.

suffering of the poor, including the Quakers, who helped establish workhouses and served on committees dedicated to helping the less fortunate.²⁰ One Quaker, John Bellers, went beyond charitable work and into planning a new economic order.

Bellers, born in 1654, was, like other Quakers, appalled by the conditions of the poor. Unlike most of them, however, he combined his work with critical commentary on the way the ruling class gained its wealth. He argued that there would be no wealth without the labor of the poor, so the government should care about the well-being of its people. He argued that Parliament should work to completely abolish unemployment and poverty by instituting free education, free healthcare, a re-division of the common land among the poor, and the establishment of institutions where work would be done communally. Ultimately, wealth would not be produced primarily for personal gain, but for the common good of society. He urged other Christians, as well as other Quakers, to support these ideas and to commit to relieving the suffering of the poor on the basis that they must do on Earth what they hope God will do for them from heaven.²¹ Bellers is a figure worth noting in the development of socialist ideas, due to the fact that his ideas were rediscovered by the early 19th-century Englishman, and socialist Robert Owen, and later by Karl Marx himself, who studied Owen. While Beller's work did not have a direct effect on the beginnings of these men's ideologies, they did help to confirm belief and commitment to the developing ideas of Socialism during the Industrial Revolution.²²

By the early 19th century, the conditions of the British working class had not improved. By 1848, coinciding with the outbreak of revolution in France, demonstrations erupted over the lack of political enfranchisement and culminated in a workers' march on London.²³ In the midst of this unrest, Christian socialism was born. Inspired by the Catholic Saint-Simonian socialist, Philip Buzhez, lawyer John Ludlow, together with clergymen Frederick Dension Maruice and Charles Kingsly, argued that the only way that the Church could stay relevant amidst increasing working class radicalism, was for the clergy to reemphasize what the Bible had to say on justice and poverty, and to support a state owned and worker managed socialist economic order.²⁴ In the group's published work, *Tract on Christian Socialism*, Maurice, argued that the church should

²⁰ Clarke, *John Bellers: His life times, and writings*, 14-15.

²¹ Clarke, *John Bellers: His life times, and writings*. 16-23.

²² Clarke, *John Bellers: His life times, and writings*. 26-27.

²³ Dorrien, Gary. "Social Democracy in the Making: Political and Religious Roots of European Socialism," Yale University Press, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvfc51g5>, 40-41.

²⁴ Dorrien, *Social Democracy in the Making*, 40-42.

embrace a more moderate co-operative socialism that had Christianity as its foundation, and which would help check the selfishness, greed, and the spirit of Capitalist competition widespread in Industrialized Britain, which he saw as directly in opposition to God's law, and the divine order of the Kingdom of God.²⁵

In the 1880s, England went through an economic downturn due to stagnation in their industries, which led to mass unemployment. The class divide became even more pronounced, especially in the Anglican Church. The working poor were not welcome in the Church, or in any of Britain's traditional institutions.²⁶ In response, Christian Socialism in Britain experienced a revival, starting with the founding of the Guild of St. Matthew in 1877, by an Anglo-Catholic student of Maurice, Stewart Headlam. In opposition to Anglican practices, he began to promote Sacramental Socialism, which argued that the sacrament of Baptism and the rituals of the Mass revealed the equality and consecration of all in the eyes of God. Reflecting its comparatively radical theology, the Guild advocated for the giving out of land, the redistribution of wealth, more widespread involvement of the people in the government, and the rejection of class-based standards of worth.²⁷

Others who were inspired by Maurice's radical doctrines founded the newspaper, the *Christian Socialist*, which denounced British Imperialism and advocated for public ownership of land, capital, and all means of production. Other organizations founded from the 1880s, and later up to the early 20th century, included the so-called Labour Church, the Christian Social Brotherhood, the Church Socialist League, and the Christian Social Union.²⁸ Some Christians joined the more secular Fabian Society, while a few even joined the Marxist Social Democratic Federation (SDF). Radical Anglican Marxist Clergymen, like H.H. Champion as well as the aforementioned Anglo-Catholic Stewart Headlam, blurred the lines between religion and social activism.²⁹ The longest lasting effect of this synthesis of socialism and Christianity was the Labour Party, founded by the Congregationalist Christian socialist, Keir Hardie, in 1893, and still active into the modern day.³⁰

²⁵ Dorrien, *Social Democracy in the Making*, 43-45.

²⁶ Dorrien, "Social Democracy in the Making," 62-63.

²⁷ Dorrien, "Social Democracy in the Making," 64-71.

²⁸ Dorrien, "Social Democracy in the Making: Political and Religious Roots of European Socialism," 65-66

²⁹ Dorrien, "Social Democracy in the Making: Political and Religious Roots of European Socialism," 75-90.

³⁰ Dorrien, "Social Democracy in the Making: Political and Religious Roots of European Socialism," 311-312.

Around the same time, socialism was also gaining support amongst the protestant clergy in the Industrial regions of France. In 1887, the *Association Protestante Pour l'Etude de Questions Sociales* (APEQS) was founded in France, presided over by the prominent Protestant minister Tony Fallot. Having joined a mission started by the British Congregationalist minister, Rober McCall, who ministered to impoverished working-class industrial neighborhoods in Paris, Fallot had become convinced that Protestants in France should support socialism, which he compared to the preaching of justice by the Hebrew prophets in the Old Testament. Fallot called his new Social Christianity movement, a synthesis of socialist ideology with Protestant doctrine, describing it as “the idea of the Kingdom of God on earth.”³¹ Many pastors and seminary students from the Reformed and independent Evangelical churches joined the APEQS. These protestant pastors created new ministry centers in working-class neighborhoods, which, along with a traditional focus on evangelization and charity, also advocated for social reform based on socialist ideas. The French Protestant socialists on some occasions, worked together with the English Protestant socialists, with one notable revival event on Pentecost Sunday involving Keir Hardee, the leader of the Labour Party, as a major speaker.³²

Similar to France, Protestant clergymen, under the leadership of the Reformed theologian Friedrich Vogelin, were instrumental in the founding of the Workers' League in Switzerland during the 1870s.³³ Religious socialism received a further boost in the 1890s, when the prominent German evangelist Christoph Blumhardt, a famous evangelist and faith healer, joined the SPD, a prominent democratic socialist party. Blumhardt's rhetoric connecting social democracy with a more all-encompassing idea of the Kingdom of God found popularity among clergymen who were discontent with the Protestant Church's submission to state authority and its regressive views of social issues, especially in Germany. Theologians like Hermann Kutter and Leonard Ragaz argued that atheistic socialists acted more Christian than actual Christians.³⁴ As one can see, the Christian socialists in Britain, France, and Switzerland helped to inject more radical reform elements into the socially passive church, which also had, to varying degrees, effect on society as a whole. This

³¹ Chalamet, Christophe. *Revivalism and Social Christianity: The Prophetic Faith of Henri Nick and Andre Trocme*. 1st ed. The Lutterworth Press, 2013. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvj4sw9s>, 12-18.

³² Chalamet, *Revivalism and Social Christianity*, 18-34.

³³ Dorrien, *Social Democracy in the Making*, 148.

³⁴ Dorrien, *Social Democracy in the Making*, 217-266.

trend would continue and later radicalize even further, especially in Germany, in the aftermath of WWI in response to Nationalism and aggressive militarism.

In the aftermath of WWI, German society and its economy were devastated. The mass disillusionment caused by these conditions, amongst returning veterans and starving workers, led to a massive backlash against the previous conservative, nationalist status quo in Germany.³⁵ The majority of the representatives in Germany were moderate social-democratic socialists from the SPD. More radical revolutionary socialist groups, such as the Independent Socialists and the German Communist Party, also gained prominence.³⁶ This swing to the left was reflected in the religious sphere of Germany as well. In the lead up to the war, many theologians and clergymen of the German churches had supported nationalism, and had supported the war. After the war, new theologians and clergymen emerged who were critical of the conservative, liberal-bourgeois nature of Germany's churches, and sympathetic towards the idea of a new radical socialist order.³⁷

The young Theologian Karl Barth, in the first edition of his commentary *The Epistle of the Romans*, led the initial charge into this new radical theology by declaring, “the now-dying ember of Marxist dogma will blaze forth anew as the world's truth, when the socialist church will be raised from the dead in a world gone socialist.”³⁸ In subsequent editions, he elaborated on this by saying that Christianity, exemplified by Christ's parable of Lazarus and the rich man, has a strong tradition of favoring the poor and oppressed over the powerful, and so the goals of socialism should meet with approval from the Christian community.³⁹ Foreign academic influence also began to push even more German clergy into progressive and socialist ideals. One prominent theological institution, Union Theological Seminary in the United States, pushed the idea of a proletarian Jesus to their students. One of these, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, upon his return to Germany, declared, “the hope for our ‘bourgeois’ church lies in a renewal... which is only possible if the church succeeds in winning the proletariat.”⁴⁰ New radical religious organizations like The Association of Religious Socialists in Germany (BRSD) were founded on the belief that only the ideals of the

³⁵ Kaes, Anton, Martin Jay, and Edward Dimenbourg eds. *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*. 1st ed. Vol. 3. University of California Press, 1994. <https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.8501352>, 5.

³⁶ Kaes, *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, 35-36.

³⁷ Dorrien, “*Social Democracy in the Making*, 217-218.

³⁸ Hunsinger, George. *Karl Barth and Radical Politics*. 2nd ed. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017, 162.

³⁹ Barth, Karl. *The Epistle To The Romans*. Sixth ed. London: Oxford University Press, 1968, 463-464.

⁴⁰ Marsh, Charles. *Strange Glory: A life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*. New York: Vintage Books, a division of Penguin Random House LLC, 2015, 123-124.

New Testament would lead to socialism, and that in turn, only socialism would lead to the fulfillment of the promises of the New Testament.⁴¹ One former army chaplain and veteran, Paul Tillich, formed the Kairos circle, of Christians and non-Christians, who were dedicated to re-examining and debating the ethics and a new potential spirituality of socialism.⁴²

As fascism took hold in Germany, some of these radical theologians were at the forefront of the opposition to the Nazis. In his ten theses, Paul Tillich vehemently criticized growing popular support for fascism. Paul Tillich associated the continuance of the consequences of capitalist-feudal forms of domination with the efforts of the Nazi party, all of which, to his dismay, were sanctioned by the Protestant Church.⁴³ In his 1933 book, *The Socialist Decision*, he emphatically declared that the Church could either submit to Fascist barbarism and let it destroy Europe, or it could find salvation in Socialism, under a new prophetic expectation.⁴⁴ Put on a list by the Nazis to be purged, he later fled the country for the United States.⁴⁵ Karl Barth, who was also expelled from Germany, worked together with the Communist Committee for a Free Germany, while in exile in Switzerland, urging other Christian dissidents in the Confessing Church to work with them as well.⁴⁶

In the aftermath of the Second World War, some of these German theologians, despite the rise of totalitarian state socialism in the East, continued to express sympathies for a more moderate socialism. They spoke out against Western policies, especially West Germany's rearmament, and later, the country's alliance with the United States, during the latter's invasion of Vietnam.⁴⁷ Karl Barth, in his *Church Dogmatics*, reaffirmed his socialist sympathies, calling the transfer of wealth into the hands of a few powerful men a demonic process. He argued that the spread of an authoritarian form of Marxist State Socialism was an inevitable consequence of Western society not addressing the failures and exploitation of the capitalist system. As such, Christians in the West should seek to remedy the objectification of mankind and its labor by taking the side of the

⁴¹ Berger, Stefan. "Difficult (Re-)Alignments – Comparative Perspectives on Social Democracy and Religion from Late-Nineteenth-Century to Interwar Germany and Britain." *Journal of Contemporary History* 53, no. 3 (2018): 574–96. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26500311>, 585.

⁴² Tillich, Paul, and Franklin Sherman. *The Socialist Decision*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2012, XV.

⁴³ Kaes, Anton, Martin Jay, and Edward Dimenbourg eds. *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*. 1st ed. Vol. 3. University of California Press, 1994. <https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.8501352>, 171.

⁴⁴ Tillich and Sherman. *The Socialist Decision*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 160-162.

⁴⁵ Tillich and Sherman. *The Socialist Decision*., XXIV.

⁴⁶ Hunsinger, *Karl Barth and Radical Politics*, 26; 47

⁴⁷ Hunsinger, *Karl Barth and Radical Politics*, 55; 88.

oppressed in society, and pursue socialism if it can, for the theological purpose of fulfilling the hope, power, and glory of the kingdom of God.⁴⁸

In the following decades, Christians and Marxist intellectuals engaged in cordial dialogue based on a shared desire for peace and disarmament starting in the 1960s, with the end of the Stalinist period. Those on both sides of this dialogue began to drop the preconceived notions of their respective orthodoxies and began to be more receptive to each other's worldviews. Marxists worked toward increased religious toleration, and Christians away from Western middle-class assumptions.⁴⁹ In the midst of this dialogue, Helmut Gollitzer, Barth's protege, carried on and refined the dialectical theology of his mentor, including its radical political implications. Gollitzer called for the rejection of the capitalist and neo-colonial policies that kept the Third World subordinated to the West. As such, he believed that the traditional Christian response towards poverty in the world was insufficient, believing that charity does not ultimately address and change the conditions that lead to material suffering. He argued that Christians should seek an alternative way to serve the poor and oppressed. He argued that only through Democratic socialism could the West and Christian community truly live up to its ideals.⁵⁰ Like his mentor and many other radical Christians before him, he sincerely believed that "True Socialism is the Kingdom of God."⁵¹ This connection between socialist and communal ideals, and the theological implication of the Kingdom of God, can be found in 17th to 20th century Europe in response to Revolutionary upheaval, Industrialization, and Militaristic Nationalism.

By studying some of the more obscure socio-religious contexts of the tumultuous events that led to the creation of modern Europe, stretching from the religious wars of the 17th century to the 20th century during the Cold War, one can see how radical pre- and post-Enlightenment beliefs melded together with unorthodox interpretations of Christianity to form the doctrines of early socialism. Some in the Church, instead of fighting the growing radicalism of socialism and the labor movement, attempted to find a synthesis between the socialist goal of the classless state, and the Christian conception of the Kingdom of God. By examining the rise of modern Europe, one can see how clergymen, theologians, and laymen alike attempted to find a synthesis between

⁴⁸ Barth, Karl. *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Creation III.4*. Edited by G. W. Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance. London: T & T Clark, 1961, 531-545.

⁴⁹ Kee, Alistair. *A Reader in Political Theology*. London: SCM Press, 1974, 2-4.

⁵⁰ McMaken, *Our God Loves Justice*, 97-108

⁵¹ McMaken, *Our God Loves Justice*, 119.

theology, radical reform, and socialism in response to the revolutions, industrial change, and the militarism of its history.

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**Faith Beyond Boundaries:
The Historical and Cultural Context Beyond Marks Miracles**

Ada Gass

The Gospel of Mark presents two powerful stories that were woven together, one describing the healing of a woman and the other focusing on the daughter of a man named Jairus. These two events were found in Mark 5:21-43, and together they convey important lessons about faith, healing, and how Jesus responded to people regardless of their social position. These stories of the hemorrhaging woman and Jairus's daughter were intentionally intertwined by Mark to show that faith goes beyond social status or even personal circumstances such as illness or death. When viewed through a historical and cultural lens, it became clear that Mark used the contrast between two individuals, one with a higher status and one with a lower status, to reveal that faith, not rank, was what truly connected people to Jesus.

In Mark 5:21-43, Jairus was described as a ruler of the synagogue and a man of high status within his community. A synagogue served as both a gathering place and a center of worship for the Jewish people. This was where members came to practice their place and worship. Each synagogue was overseen by a leader, such as Jairus.⁵² This leader was responsible for organizing worship services, maintaining the synagogue, and overseeing the people, ensuring that they followed Jewish law. Because of these responsibilities, someone of this status was seen as influential, respected, and knowledgeable within the community. Understanding Jairus's background helps to highlight the significance of his actions later in the biblical passage.

Initially, when Jesus arrived by boat and entered the city of Capernaum, Jairus immediately approached him to ask him if he would come to heal his twelve-year-old daughter, who was near death. As Jesus made his way to Jairus' house, another person entered the story, a woman who had been suffering from bleeding for twelve years. Unlike Jairus, she was not given a name, which may suggest that she was of lower social status and overlooked by society.⁵³ Being a female during biblical times, it was not uncommon for women to be overlooked during this time, for this woman specifically. Her bleeding condition was a huge part of why she was excluded from society, because she was seen as dirty, unclean, or as a misfit. But, apart from this, the woman believed that if she could just touch Jesus' garment, she would be healed. Acting on her faith, she did exactly

⁵² Dunn and Rogerson, *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*, 2003

⁵³ Dunn and Rogerson

that, and she was immediately healed. Jesus noticed that someone had touched him and turned around and asked who it was. Even though she was afraid at first, the woman came forward, fell to the ground before Jesus, and confessed that she was the one who touched him. Jesus responded, “Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.”⁵⁴ Jesus’ words implied that the disease would no longer trouble her, and that she had not done any harm by touching him ⁵⁵

Around the same time, word came that Jairus’ daughter had died; Jesus told Jairus not to be afraid, and instead only to believe. When Jesus entered Jairus’s home, he heard commotion and crying because of the daughter’s reported death. Jesus said, “Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep.” This response was met with laughter.⁵⁶ They were in disbelief that Jesus could bring the girl back because they thought she was surely dead. Jesus then took Jairus and his wife into the room where their daughter lay, took her by the hand, and said “Talitha Koum”, meaning “Little girl, I say to you, arise.”⁵⁷ The girl immediately got up and walked, amazing everyone who was there.

After summarizing the passage, we can now examine the cultural context. During the early first century C.E., women were seen through a different lens. They were often considered the property of another man, whether that be their father or husband. Their public roles and rights were limited, and they were expected to value obedience, modesty, and faithfulness. Their main role involved managing the household, caring for the children and men of the household, as well as performing tasks such as cooking, cleaning, collecting water, and weaving⁵⁸. All of this went to support the claim that the woman in Mark was already treated unfairly within her culture simply for being female, and to make matters worse, she also suffered from a chronic bleeding condition.

The relevance of this woman’s condition became clear when read in light of Leviticus 15, which described the uncleanness associated with this issue of blood. In first-century Judaism, women during their monthly period were considered unclean. During the span of their bleeding, they were isolated, unable to attend public events, and forbidden from touching anyone or

⁵⁴ Mark 5:34 KJV

⁵⁵ Dunn and Rogerson, 1068

⁵⁶ Mark 5:31 KJV

⁵⁷ Mark 5:41 KJV

⁵⁸ Zeba A. Crook, *The Gospel to the Romans: The Setting and Rhetoric of Mark’s Gospel / The Purpose of the Gospel of Mark in Its Historical and Social Context*, 2005 p. 553

anything because that would make the other person unclean. After seven days, they could return to normal activities. However, the concept of being “unclean” involved far more than hygiene; it reflected a spiritual and social status within the community.⁵⁹ Because of the woman’s twelve-year condition, she experienced years of social isolation and shame. People at the time believed that human bodily functions, such as menstruation or a bleeding condition, should not be brought into areas considered holy. An example of the extremity of the unclean occurs in Genesis 31:25, when Rachel hid her father Laban’s idols in her camel’s saddle. Laban did not even look there because she claimed to be menstruating and was sitting on the saddle. Therefore, the woman was unable to attend temple worship, touch others, be near people in public, or marry. She was most likely shunned while also experiencing physical pain. During this time, such treatment was not viewed as unfair; it was considered a normal occurrence to isolate women for menstruation. Despite these social and cultural barriers, the woman went out into public and touched not only another person, but Jesus Christ himself. By doing this, she demonstrates extraordinary bravery and faith in doing such a thing, knowing it could have negative consequences.

This act of the hemorrhaging woman signified a deeper meaning as well. By touching Jesus’ garment, she was not only healed physically from her disease, but she is also healed spiritually. Her act of physically touching, I think, also symbolizes the deeper point that she is being restored not only in body and spirit, but also back into her community. She had been isolated for 12 years, leaving her cut off from any kind of normalcy within the community. Her touch represents a reclaiming of dignity and belonging, showing that Jesus heals the whole person, not just the illness.⁶⁰

The story of Jairus and the healing of his daughter demonstrated incredible faith. Even when those around them doubted, Jairus and his wife continued to believe. He was so certain in Jesus that he was willing to put aside everything and lie at Jesus’ feet and beg Him. He had likely tried all that he could medically at the time, because he had the money and resources to do so. Yet despite all his status, wealth, and connections, he recognized that none of it could save his daughter, and that only Jesus could. His willingness to humble himself shows deep trust in Jesus. And when the situation seemed hopeless, Jairus still followed Jesus’ command not to fear, revealing that true faith held on even when extreme circumstances happened.

⁵⁹ Dunn and Rogerson

⁶⁰ Stephen E. Fowl, *Theological Interpretation of Scripture*, 2009

When looking more closely into the story of Jairus and his daughter, it is significant that the child is a daughter. In first-century Judaism, women were considered socially and legally inferior to men and were not treated equally. Families typically desired sons, who could carry on the family name as well as inherit property. This made daughters less of an advantage both socially and economically. The fact that Jairus goes to great lengths to seek Jesus' help and save his daughter reveals his character. It shows that he cared deeply for his child regardless of her gender, and that faith and love were strong enough to motivate him to act. This also highlights a contrast with cultural norms of the time. His actions suggest that he recognized the value of his daughter's life and that his trust in Jesus was not limited by established norms.

The incredible act of faith is what linked these two stories together and is one reason I believe that Mark intentionally put them together. The hemorrhaging woman believes before even touching Jesus' garment, and then Jairus and his wife both believe even after their daughter's death. Both women in these stories are being restored, one more socially and physically, and then one primarily physically. These miracles ultimately show that miracles of healing require incredible faith, courage, and allow breaking social norms. But I also believe that they are foreshadowing Jesus' resurrection and the gift of eternal life.⁶¹

When looking into the context of this scripture, looking beyond the Bible itself can help us understand the main point.⁶² Mark was intentionally combining these two pieces of scripture into what is commonly called a "Markan sandwich" or Markan intercalation. This was a literary technique where one story is interrupted by a second, and then the first story resumes, all to indicate a deeper meaning within the text. This happens nine times in the book of Mark.⁶³

Although Jairus and the hemorrhaging woman show faith, the story was centered on Jesus and what He revealed about Himself. Mark told this story to show Jesus' compassion, power, and willingness to meet people where they were. Mark "rhetorically urges his readers to follow Jesus' model in ministering to the marginalized and empowering them through humble service and sacrifice."⁶⁴ Jesus did not hesitate to help anyone, rich or poor, known or unknown. He stopped for the desperate woman in the crowd just as quickly as He went with Jairus. His

⁶¹ Raymond E. Brown, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 2016 p. 214

⁶² Meaders and Kaiser

⁶³ Brown

⁶⁴ N. F. Santos, "Jesus' Mission to the Vulnerable: The Power of Servanthood in the Gospel of Mark," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 48, no. 1 (2024) p.34

healing of the woman showed His power over suffering, and His raising of the little girl showed His power over death.⁶⁵ These moments pointed to who Jesus truly is, the one who brings hope, restores life, and offers eternal life. Even when people around Him doubt or mock Him, Jesus remains calm and steady. His response shows his gentleness, his authority, and his deep love for all people.

Ultimately, these two stories show that Jesus cares for people, whether it's a woman who reached out for his robe or a father begging at his feet. By looking at the cultural and historical background, we can now see how different their lives were, yet Jesus treated them both with the same love and compassion. He healed the woman physically, spiritually, and socially, and he brought Jairus' daughter back to life. Through this "Markan sandwich" structure, Mark highlighted that faith is important and that Jesus cares for everyone, no matter their status or situation.

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Children's Rights Through Children's Media: A Reading of *Bluey* and *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*

Chloe Taylor

Think back to your childhood bedroom, carefully tucked into your bed as your parents read your favorite bedtime story. What was it? Do you recall the illustrations? The cadence? The characters? How about the lesson? What did you learn from that book? To share, be kind, work hard, or to be obedient? What was that really teaching you about how to be a 'good' person, or member of society, what values were most instilled? This book, or even a TV show or movie, from your childhood was quietly shaping you into the person that you are today. Children's media is a reflection of the dominant culture and ideologies of the time, thus acting to ensure that you reproduce the status quo.

Children's literature, as a genre, uses formal elements such as illustrations and accessible language to effectively communicate complex ideas to a young audience. Because of this, it is able to act as a tool for the state to interpellate the dominant ideologies of the culture perpetuated by the state to mold children into ideal future workers, parents, and voters. I assert that, through the seemingly trivial literary form of children's media, authors and creators interpellate children into citizens of the state, specifically when working in the social forms of citizenship and family for children. One way authors do this is by portraying their child characters either as idealized citizens of the dominant state, like in *Bluey*, or as oppositional to the dominant ideology of the time, as Beatrix Potter does in making her character, Peter Rabbit, both the protagonist and a "naughty bunny." Because children's media is inherently a tool of interpellation due to its role as an Ideological State Apparatus (ISA), it can be used to either reinforce or create change within social forms.

Though the ideal citizen is subjective and dependent on the current culture, the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) defines citizenship as "engagement in the duties and responsibilities of a member of society" ("citizenship"). As children's media is instructive, this definition of citizenship grounds my analysis of how *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* and *Bluey* raise future citizens who function for the social good of a society. Giuliana Fenech provides a framework of how citizenship is taught through children's media in her book *Child as Citizen: Agency and Activism in Children's Literature and Culture*. She states, "I am thinking of child and young adult agency as multidimensional and based on the possibility to engage in a broad range of entangled civic

systems and processes” (3-4). When applying this definition to my analysis of children's media, it is clear that *Peter Rabbit* and *Bluey* have vastly different ideas of how a citizen of the state should behave, but interpellate them in a similar way. For *Peter Rabbit*, citizenship and family are interpellated through the depiction of a family and a young boy who disobeys his mother by going on an adventure. Meanwhile, *Bluey* portrays citizenship through play by overcoming issues within the family through self-advocacy, which is a key value in democratic processes. By portraying family and civic duties through play, children's media acts to interpellate children into the dominant ideology of the current culture in which the book or show is created.

Althusser's theory of interpellation frames my analysis of both *Bluey* and *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, with ISAs serving to interpellate children into citizens of the state in different ways depending on the dominant culture and power. This ensures the reproduction of that state's ideal citizen in order to preserve the state's power. Louis Althusser, in his book *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, argues that subjects are interpellated into the dominant ideology, and, as such, forms the pessimistic belief that there is no agency for the subject apart from ideology. This interpellation begins at a young age: “the school teaches ‘know-how’ but in forms which ensure *subjection to the ruling ideology* or mastery of its ‘practice’” (1337). This means that while the school is necessary for education, it also serves as indoctrination to continue the “subjection” or control over those it teaches. This “subjection to the ruling ideology” is a key part of how ISAs serve to preserve the ideology of the state, as the state would not interpellate values which would lead to its demise; instead, ISAs aim to interpellate a subjection to the ruling ideology, which will ensure the continuation of the status quo. Similarly, children's literature teaches children lots of valuable lessons; obedience, for example, could be used to interpellate children into different ideologies based on the way that it is approached. Blind obedience due to fear of punishment is entirely different from obedience out of respect and understanding. This difference teaches children whether or not they should question the authority of the ruling class, which may be a negative in a monarchy but a positive in a democracy.

One of the main vehicles for this interpellation, Althusser suggests, is through Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA), which he defines as, “a certain number of realities which present themselves to the immediate observer in the form of distinct and specialized institutions” (1341). Children's media, working in both “the communication ISA (press, radio, and television, etc.)” and “the cultural ISA (literature, the Arts, sports, etc.),” thereby shape, or interpellate, subjects into

the dominant ideologies of the ruling class (1341). To simplify, ISAs are a tool of the state that present themselves as social institutions, meant to shape or interpellate subjects into the dominant ideologies of the ruling class. Further, ISAs aim to establish an identity and value within different classes, including the working class, which interpellates citizens into their social and economic class to identify with the categories they are in, so that they do not rebel. Both *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* and *Bluey* are examples of ISAs, which interpellate children into the dominant ideology of the time and place of its audience. *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* interpellates readers into the Victorian ideals surrounding conservatism, the domestic sphere, and obedience. The TV show *Bluey* acts as an ISA to reproduce the status quo of a “good” Australian citizen, to reinforce the values of democratic liberalism practiced in Australia by interpellating children as future voters by depicting the importance of self-advocacy. It also reinforces the democratic notion that leaders are necessary and good because they maintain order and protect the rights and freedoms of their constituents. The children's book *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* acts as a cultural ISA by depicting a quaint British family that upholds the values of the British monarchy in the Victorian era such as gender roles in the family unit, the domestic sphere and obedience to interpellate children not as democratic citizens, but as subjects of the monarchy, in contrast to *Bluey's* emphasis on leadership, self-reliance, and independence. For *Bluey*, the culture relies on the liberal democratic notions of advocacy and equality, but for *Peter Rabbit*, the ruling class valued obedience from its subjects. Althusser's theory reinforces my argument by providing the framework of ISAs, which are represented by the primary texts themselves, and interpellation to the ruling class in which the primary text was written, the Victorian British monarchy and the Australian democracy, respectively.

Using Althusser's framework of how ideologies operate on the subject, Caroline Levine argues in her essay “Strategic Formalism” that social forms, like democratic liberalism or citizenship, are impacted by literary forms. Unlike Althusser's claim that ISAs are always interpellating subjects to accept the dominant, capitalist ideology, Levine attempts to theorize how literature has the power to subvert and challenge dominant ideologies, saying, “the potential for revolutionary social formations may come less from organized resistance and conscious radicalism than from the unexpected encounter between forms” (651). As “revolutionary social formations,” or positive change in the system, such as more diverse leadership and viewpoints and the questioning of authority, come from the way that literature shapes and interacts with social forms

like the family unit and roles within, or how citizenship is interpellated. The intersection of children's television as a form and the social forms of agency and citizenship offers a space to instill and reinforce positive ideologies like the ideas of democratic liberalism and self-advocacy, rather than oppressive ideologies surrounding selfishness. Further, the way that citizenship is depicted in children's media then shapes the upcoming generation's perspective on democratic roles. Levine complicates Althusser's claim that interpellation removes free will by arguing that change can be made within the system through literature. Levine and Althusser's theories on interpellation and social forms intersect in reinforcing positive ideologies surrounding the children's media in both *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* and *Bluey*. For my argument, I focus on how the social forms of family and citizenship are depicted on a formal level. In *Bluey*, these social forms are depicted through play, dialogue, and setting, while *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* depicts them through characterization and illustrations that create empathy. The British ideals of family and citizenship are depicted by Peter's family, which allows the book to be read as an act of interpellation on behalf of the state, but Potter plays with this expectation by allowing Peter to practice agency in a way that pushes against the obedient values of the era. Levine's theory on social forms, focusing on citizenship and family, maintains the positive outlook that my chosen texts create positive change in the dominant systems.

To fully understand how Potter works within the dominant ideologies surrounding the social forms of citizen and family structure, one must understand the historical context of the Victorian era to see why strict roles and obedience were so heavily interpellated into citizens. The idea of childhood as we understand it today was created in the Victorian era. Before, children were treated as the rest of the family, working rather than playing. The child as a subject who is allowed to play while being free from adult responsibilities was a fairly new concept. According to Ginger Frost in her novel *Victorian Childhoods*, "At the end of the century, the welfare of children was the subject of much political debate. By 1914, Victorians had vastly expanded childhood by building on and transcending movements begun in earlier periods" (4). This assertion refers to the political movements surrounding child labor laws and the protection of the rights of children. These movements ultimately led to further education of children as well as children remaining in the home, which came along with the Victorian ideal of family and the domestic sphere. Frost states, "Victorians idealized the family, and in theory, had strict roles for husbands, wives, and children" (3). These uncompromising ideals resulted in the restrictive domestic positions for

women as mothers in the angel of the house ideal, while the father provided for the family. The children at the time were also viewed as pure, innocent, and protected as they learned and played at home. However, it is important to remember that this is an idealized version of Victorian life reserved for those in the middle and upper classes; in reality, there were a multitude of lived experiences dependent upon class and gender. Victorians adhered to strict social rules, and childhood was no different; children were meant to be seen and not heard, with obedience being a priority value; Jesús Moya Guijarro states in his paper about the multimodal elements of *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* that, “the tale was intended for children of the English middle class in the Victorian era, characterized by strict and conservative manners in court and in children's education” (124). The strict codes of conduct dictated all parts of life for both adults and children. This emphasis on obedience to social rules translated into the creation of easily controlled subjects and workers who did not question authority. While working within the ideals of the British monarchy, Potter creates a cultural ISA through the *Tale of Peter Rabbit* in her depiction of the family, but subverts this expectation through formal elements, creating empathy with our ‘naughty’ protagonist. The dominant ideologies of the Victorian era shaped children's literature, which resulted in a reliance on the idealization of the social forms of the family and the domestic sphere, as well as obedience to social rules.

In shifting to an analysis of *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, this paragraph focuses on how Victorian ideals of citizenship and family are portrayed in order to interpellate the readers into the dominant ideology. Potter operates within the dominant ideology of the Victorians by portraying a middle-class family in what seems to be a cautionary tale of obedience at first glance. As Guijarro states, “In line with the moralising literature addressed to children that Potter was familiar with, the author, who also doubles as illustrator, no doubt followed the ideological requirements of the Victorian period” (124). Potter does this by depicting a middle-class Victorian family with a mother and three children which are verbally characterized as either “good little bunnies” or “naughty.” This reproduces the status quo of being a “good” child who will grow up to be a “good” British subject, like Peter's sisters, rather than being a “naughty” child, like Peter. The British ideals at the time valued obedience and adherence to strict codes of conduct. Thus, priming both children and adults to follow the status quo without questioning authority, thereby ensuring the reproduction of the monarchy and the passive nature of both the working and middle classes to support the upper class. The subject of children and being a subject of the British monarchy are

conflated in this tale to interpellate children not only as children but as subjects of the monarchy. Potter reinforces the dominant ideal of British citizenship at the time in the exposition of the book by introducing the middle-class family and the value of obedience. On page two of *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, the narrator introduces the family unit, saying, “Once upon a time there were four little rabbits... they lived with their mother in a sand bank, underneath the root of a very big fir-tree” (2). This shows the reader a family with four children being taken care of by their mother, which reflects the motherly role expected in the Victorian era; however, it leaves the reader wondering where the father is. Depicting a middle-class Victorian family interpellates readers into the dominant idea of family, which follows strict gender roles and values the domestic sphere. However, this is not entirely the case with Peter Rabbit's family because his father is gone. This means that Mrs. Rabbit must also provide for the family as a widow, and while this is not directly addressed in the book, it leads readers to question these roles in a subtle way.

Potter continues an analysis of gender between Peter and his sisters as well as instilling the ideal of hard work into the readers through those differences, using the girls as the model of good citizens. Mr. Rabbit, the father, is instead used to set up a cautionary tale. Mrs. Rabbit warns, “You may go into the fields or down the lane, but don't go into Mr. McGregor's garden: your father had an accident there; he was put in a pie by Mrs. McGregor” (Potter, 3). The dialogue on this page is quite dark and acts to warn the children of danger. However, when examining the illustration paired with this text, there is a stark difference between Peter and his sisters. While the girls face Mrs. Rabbit and presumably listen intently, which is in line with the Victorian Ideal of childhood, Peter faces the opposite direction. This establishes the difference between the children and is further reinforced when the narrator says, “Flopsy, Mopsy, and Cotton-tail, who were good little bunnies, went down the lane to gather blackberries; but Peter, who was very naughty, ran straight away to Mr. McGregor's garden and squeezed under the gate!” (6-7). The narrator directly hails the girls as “good” because they listen to their mother and go to pick blackberries. Picking blackberries furthers the example of what it means to be a good Victorian citizen because the girls use their time to work, which instills the value of hard work into the readers. Peter, on the other hand, is hailed as “very naughty” by the narrator. Not only does Peter disobey his mother's direct warning, but he also follows in his father's footsteps directly into the path of danger. It is interesting that Peter is following the actions of his father rather than listening to his mother like his sisters. I suggest that this is because, as a boy, Peter longs to be like his father. Even in his absence, Peter

aims to model himself after his father, whereas his sisters differ from their mother, who is an example of what it means to be a woman in the Victorian era due to the strict gender roles of the Victorian era. *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* acts to interpellate readers with the dominant ideal of Victorian citizenship by portraying a middle-class Victorian family that aims to follow the gender and familial conventions of the time, which focus on the mother's rules over the domestic sphere and child rearing. She also uses hailing to signify good and bad examples of what it means to be a good citizen through the example of Flopsy, Mopsy, and Cottontail.

While Potter operates within the constraints of the dominant ideology of the Victorian era, as explored above, she subverts the expectation to leave child readers with the idea of rebellion through play. As a canonical work of children's literature, *Peter Rabbit* has been analyzed countless times, and as Guijarro states, the dominant understanding is that "Potter's voice seems to be that of a rebel in defence of liberty and natural instinct" (124). This is seen in the ways that Potter and the narrator empathize with Peter rather than entirely condemning his actions. Although Peter knowingly puts himself in harm's way, he does not deserve to be hurt; all children make mistakes and learn by testing boundaries. Potter emphasizes this by illustrating the book in a way that creates a connection between Peter and the reader. Once Peter makes his way into Mr. McGregor's garden, he gorges himself on the garden vegetables and soon comes face to face with Mr. McGregor (Potter 10). This scene is depicted by creating a physical difference between Peter and Mr. McGregor, with Peter being much smaller, even though he is in the foreground. Guijarro analyzes the structure of this illustration, stating, "simultaneously having a reader's perspective and a character focalization. This technique is known as 'viewing along with the focalizing character.' We (the reader) also see the farmer from Peter's viewpoint, and at the same time, the protagonist has his back toward the observer" (128). Staging the illustration in this way allows the child reader to put themselves into Peter's shoes as well and creates a kind of bond between the two, so when Peter begins to run away in fear for his life, the reader is scared too and roots for the disobedient bunny. The strategy of using angles to create empathy for Peter continues in the rest of his escape. As Peter is running away, he gets the brass buttons of his coat tangled up in a gooseberry net and is unable to free himself; "Peter gave himself up for lost, and shed big tears" (Potter 13-14). This illustration's point of view is from above, which makes Peter look even more helpless to the reader. When adding the big tear to his eye, the illustration is rather gut wrenching for the reader and creates sympathy in the audience. The emotional attachment that Potter builds

between the protagonist and the audience through the illustrations serves to subvert the idea that Peter is bad.

While he may be a little naughty, he is still a child who is exploring and learning. It seems that the narrator also sympathizes with Peter because at the end of the book, once Peter escapes and makes it safely home, the narrator says, "I am sorry to say that Peter was not very well during the evening" (26). The narrator inserts their opinion in saying, "I am sorry to say," which signifies their alliance with Peter because they feel bad for him. This further subverts the reader's original expectation formed from the value of obedience in the Victorian era and instead leaves the reader relieved that Peter is unharmed in spite of his disobedience. Instead, Peter is only faced with the consequence of overindulgence rather than a punishment from his mother or a death sentence from Mr. McGregor. Guijarro states, "And, indeed, some moralistic values predominate in the verbal narrative: the good little bunnies, as Potter calls them, are rewarded at the end of the tale with a nice supper while Peter, after disobeying his mother, ends up with a stomach-ache" (124). The moralistic values of the Victorian era are still upheld on the surface level as the obedient daughters are called good and "rewarded" a lovely supper while Peter who disobeyed was left with a stomach ache and unable to eat the supper. Potter upholds and continues to interpellate her audience into the ideals of Victorian society through the family unit and verbal hailing of what is good and bad, but subverts this narrative by creating empathy with the naughty bunny Peter, ultimately leaving the child readers with the idea that it is okay to make mistakes and disobey on occasion, and it does not make them "bad."

The modern idea of childhood, however, is heavily focused on the idea of social-emotional learning and self-discovery in order to become well-rounded adults and citizens who can participate fully in democratic processes; children's media depicts these ideals through social forms such as family and citizenship. Most countries in the modern western world practice a kind of democracy, for *Bluey* which takes place in Australia they have a liberal democracy, which is defined as, "a democratic system of representative government in which individual rights and civil liberties are officially recognized and protected, and the exercise of political power is limited by the rule of law" ("Liberal Democracy"). This means that there is a representative government in which citizens have power through their vote, and civic engagement is important for all citizens to protect their own rights and interests. Similar to the Victorian era, children's media is often still centered around the nuclear family. However, rather than having strict gender roles in which the

mother is the caretaker and the father is the provider, both parents often have careers as well as take an active role in child rearing. This is the case in *Bluey*, as the family that the show focuses on is made up of a mother, father, and two daughters. Both parents in the show have careers and talk about going to work, but what the audience sees most is how those parents spend time interacting with, playing with, and teaching their daughters. This is reflective of the ideal family in the current culture and acts to interpellate both parents and children in how they should behave in order to fit into the dominant ideologies surrounding the social form of the family and, in turn, of the state.

Because *Bluey* is a TV show rather than a book, I apply film analysis to my argument to understand how the visual, auditory, and framing affect the meaning of the text as a whole. Laura Mulvey, a film critic known for her psychoanalytic approach to film, introduces the idea of gaze. In Mulvey's analysis, she speaks of a "gaze" from the male's perspective in which women are the passive image and the male perspective the active onlooker (809-810). In applying this idea of gaze as well as active or passive to media intended for children, it poses the question of what gaze is being considered. In children's media, I argue that rather than a gaze for the male perspective catering to their interests, it is a child's gaze catered to their understanding. However, the difference is that children are still passive as an audience because they often lack the autonomy to create, buy, or even choose. *Keywords for Children's Literature* explores this idea in its chapter on audience, it states, "given that decision makers are not part of the ostensible audience, the nature of children's literature very much depends on how adults construct childhood and children" (21). So, while children's media may feature a kind of child gaze, it is still subject to the male gaze as well as it is created by adults through their view of the world. Additionally, because *Bluey* is an animated series rather than a live-action film, many of the genre norms are different because of the entirely creative nature of animation. "The Language of Animation" explores how animation bends space and time to create visual representations of the imaginary in order to more accurately convey an indescribable feeling, stating, "animation can change the world and create magical effect, but most importantly, it can interrogate previous representations of 'reality' and reinterpret how 'reality' might be viewed" (232). This medium's ability to create and shape reality makes it perfect for children's literature in its ability to create visual representations of complex ideas. Lessons such as standing up for oneself and how to be a good leader, like in *Bluey*, are examples of complex and

abstract ideas that can be taught through animation and interpellate children into the dominant ideology of the state.

While *Bluey* is perceptibly Australian and created with an Australian audience in mind, it speaks to a more global or at least Western audience in terms of its interpellation of children as citizens of a liberal democracy and thus future voters and workers. Anna Potter, a scholar of cultural studies and digital media, explores how *Bluey* has become a global phenomenon through streaming services even though it was written for an Australian audience in “Globalizing the Local in Children’s Television for the Post-Network Era.” Potter states, “While *Bluey* is identifiably and indubitably Australian, the show’s creative origins can also be found in the global: in the movement of its key creative personnel, in the working relationships formed on other transnational television properties, and in the international funding and distribution arrangements that are critical to its production” (19). This means that while *Bluey* is perceptibly created with an Australian audience in mind, which can be seen in its specific setting and cultural references, its production has become global through its diverse creative personnel and international funding via streaming services such as Disney+. Because of this global funding, the values being depicted are applicable to a more international audience while preserving the cultural Australian charm. Potter emphasizes that *Bluey* is funded by the Australian government, and as such, it is a tool for interpellating children as Australian citizens. To invoke Althusser, public broadcasting and, more specifically, *Bluey* are used as an ISA in creating Australian citizens who will adhere to the status quo of acceptance of diverse citizens and self-advocacy through the form of voting for democratic leadership that prioritizes its subjects’ quality of life, which will uphold the status quo of the Australian state.

One of the ways in which interpellation is so successful for *Bluey* is that parents watch the show as well. This further reinforces the positive ideologies depicted in the show, such as a family unit absent of traditional gender roles and children who are treated as valued subjects and future citizens. These ideologies aid in the development of the state as a whole, serving to interpellate both parents and children into the ideology of the state that values voice in future voters. “Metarecipient Parents’ #Bluey Tweets as a Distributed Fandom Affinity Space” by Marta Dynel and Andrew S. Ross is a study that looks at how parents perceive *Bluey*, in conversation with how they believe their children perceive the show. More importantly, for the purpose of this paper, the study aims to see how *Bluey* impacts the day-to-day lives of families who watch the show, which

aids in proving that the show acts as an ISA to interpellate families and children into the ideology that values social-emotional learning and a lack of rigid gender roles in both children and parents. Because this piece of children's media is in the form of an animated show, the music, facial expressions, and perspectives call on ethos to create empathy with the characters. Dynel, a Polish linguist and university professor, and Ross, a linguistics professor, focus heavily on the way that the discourse used in *Bluey* bleeds into the lived reality of many families. They state:

Another learning-related dimension that can be detected in the show concerns vocabulary use. Parents' tweets indicate that neologisms, both individual words and phrases, from *Bluey* are subject to recirculation in real-life discourse, a phenomenon testifying to the interest that fictional discourse can hold for viewers. (9)

In breaking down this quote, neologisms, or newly coined words, from *Bluey* are being circulated in a real-life context ("neologisms"). This "phenomenon" shows just how much impact that "fictional discourse," or the language used in literature, shapes the lived experience of those who interact with it. This context supports Levine's theory in the aspect that literature shapes social forms, like what it means to be a citizen and why democratic liberalism is a positive structure. In this example, the state is literally creating child-centered language, which places value on a child's voice and point of view, thereby shaping both children and parents into an ideology that does the same. While it is impossible to avoid being interpellated into a system, this does not necessarily have to be a bad thing, as the dominant norm becomes more progressive, valuing emotional intelligence and viewing children as subjects, which aids in creating more engaged and responsible citizens, voters, and workers, because they will understand their own value. When looking specifically at children's media, it is important to understand how the social forms being presented both reinforce the status quo as well as push against it in positive ways. For *Bluey*, one example of this is that while children are being interpellated as citizens, they are also being taught how to advocate for themselves in ways that aid in the state's reproduction of itself as it is creating voters that will choose the best leaders to ensure the state's success.

To see how self-advocacy, which leads to democratically-minded citizens, is depicted in *Bluey* as opposed to the formerly dominant idea that children should be seen and not heard, leading to more easily controlled citizens and possibly resulting in a tyrannical government, I first turn to the season one episode "Yoga Ball." In this episode the dad, Bandit, is playing with his daughters, but it is too rough for the younger sister, Bingo. This can be seen when Bandit bounces the girls

on the yoga ball, first Bluey, who has fun, and then Bingo, who is clearly uncomfortable with this rough play. The audience can see Bingo's discomfort by the shift in perspective to a low-angle shot, so that the audience can see Bingo's reaction (1:58-2:00). Bingo has wide eyes and furrowed brows rather than the smile sported by her sister. This shot also seems to bounce along with the ball to give the watchers the same dizzy feeling that Bingo would be experiencing. Because of the way in which this scene is depicted at a formal level, the audience builds empathy with Bingo because they are feeling the same discomfort. Once Bandit sits Bingo back down it is clear that she is still feeling the effects of being bounced too rough as she sways side to side from dizziness and lets out a sad little "ooooohhh" which lets the audience know that she is still feeling hurt but cannot vocalize her feelings to her dad (2:05). At the end of the game Raiders, Bingo is run over by the yoga ball. Bandit picks her up, sets her on her feet, and says, "Walk it off, sport" as he ruffles her hair (ears?) and walks away (4:38-4:40). The audience can see that Bandit does not realize that Bingo is truly feeling powerless and hurt in this moment because Bandit maintains a smile, not even looking down at his child. Because his daughter is physically out of his line of sight, he does not recognize her. This is a visual representation of how adults often overlook children emotionally or otherwise because they are physically not equals and, in turn, not emotionally or mentally equal either. Further, in this moment, by calling Bingo "sport," he interpellates her into the practice of his generation of remaining stoic when upset. This highlights the generational divide in the difference in how children were viewed as subjects. In the first half of this episode, Bingo and Bandit have a disconnect within the family unit because of Bandit's lack of awareness of his child's feelings. This leads parents watching the episode to reflect on their own parenting style and interpellates them into a more progressive form of parenting that leads to more social and well-rounded children.

Feeling sad and unseen, Bingo goes outside to hide under a tree and has a cry (4:40-5:00). Bingo curls up in a little ball under the tree with a growing tear in her eye, the frame slowly moves in towards her, and sad piano music plays. This brings the audience into the same mindset as Bingo, feeling alone and misunderstood. The empathy felt with Bingo brings the audience close to tears because they feel how she feels due to the formal elements that emphasize Bingo's feelings through her expressions, camera angles, and music. As Bingo is curled up with a tear in her eye, a field hockey ball rolls past her. The perspective cuts to a wide shot to reveal Chilli, the girl's mom. Chilli immediately sees that Bingo is upset and asks her what is wrong. Bingo climbs out from

under the tree, rubbing her arm to show the audience that she is unsure of herself, she confides in her mother that, “Daddy is playing too rough with me” (5:06). Bingo’s mother recognizing her child's feelings and giving her the space to talk about her emotions allows Bingo to begin learning how to recognize her own feelings and needs which is a crucial first step to self-advocacy. Chilli then gets down on Bingo’s level by dropping onto her knee and validates her feelings, this is a visual representation of treating children as equals and conscious subjects with a valid perspective rather than physically and emotionally overlooking them as Dad did in the first part of the episode (5:08). Chilli then asks, “Did you use your big girl bark?” to which Bingo responds, “No, because I don't have a very good big girl bark” (5:14-5:20). I argue that “big girl bark” is a metaphor for self-advocacy. Chilli aims to teach her daughters how to stand up for themselves, but Bingo feels she's not very good at it, so they practice. On the last bark, Bingo begins feeling confident, her face lights up, and her tail starts wagging as they go to talk to Dad. (5:25-5:35). Bingo, still feeling a bit nervous, communicates her feelings to her father, saying, “Sometimes you play a bit too rough with me.” At this point, signifying a change in Bandit's point of view, realizing that his daughter's point of view is valid, he gets down on his knees to visually depict their equality and apologize. Feeling truly sorry and wanting to do better in the future, Bandit repeated the game from the beginning of the episode, bouncing Bingo gently at first, then a little more roughly. When it is too rough, Bingo uses her bark, “Woof!” to signify her discomfort (5:57-6:45). This is a big moment for both Bingo and Bandit. At this point, Bingo learns to advocate for herself and clearly communicate her needs. For the children watching the show, not only are they learning that their feelings are valid and should be heard, but this is not only a positive change from past generations but also interpellates them as future members of society. In the past, children were seen and not heard, which could lead to expecting to be mistreated by those in power. Meanwhile, the current push toward child self-advocacy creates citizens and future voters who will advocate for their rights. For the parents watching, they are called to reckon with the outdated belief that they may have been interpellated with as children, the idea that children are not subjects as adults are. Because of the pushback on an outdated belief, parents are called to do better and reinforce the ISA's interpellation of children as subjects.

To reinforce the idea that children's media, specifically *Bluey*, acts as an ISA in interpellating children as subjects to the dominant ideology of democratic liberalism, I turn to the episode “Circus,” which takes place on voting day. The episode opens with the Heeler family

walking through a park lined with blue, red, and green campaign signs, which represent the three main political parties in Australia. With the girls trying to understand what voting is, the following conversation, which sets the tone for the rest of the episode, takes place:

Chilli: You don't vote for someone based on what they look like, you vote based on who would be the best boss.

Bluey: How do you be the best boss?"

Bandit: Well, I guess you tell everyone what to do, but in the best way.

Bingo: Ugh, I hate being told what to do.

Bandit: I know, mate, but sometimes you just have to. (0:50-1:05)

In starting the episode with this conversation about the importance of voting and leaders telling you what to do, the rest of the episode immediately becomes a metaphor for civic engagement. Importantly, Bandit does not complete his statement on why, sometimes being told what to do is important, which leads to the girls learning the value of leadership through play. This acts as an ISA to interpellate children as future voting citizens of a liberal democracy.

In this episode, Bluey and Bingo represent two different roles in the democratic system: leader and citizen. Bluey is established as the leader in their game of circus when she says, "I'll be the ring master. I tell everyone what to do" (1:43). Bluey acts as a good example of a leader in this episode, exhibiting problem solving skills to keep the game running smoothly and that makes each of the other kids who were playing feel valued. This interpellates kids into the dominant ideology of democratic liberalism because it shows a positive example of a leader who protects their subjects from abuse of power and keeps the society running smoothly. The "leader" that Bluey is contrasted against is Hercules, a bully who abuses his power and makes the other kids play games they don't want to play. Bluey, however, being the good leader she is, diffuses the situation by giving him a role in their game as "muscle man." While this does push against the political ideology of dictatorship, there is more left to be done, as Bluey simply appeased the bully and distracted him. In Bingo's role as a citizen, she uses the self-advocacy, taught in an earlier season, to stand up to a bully exerting power that restricts the freedom of her and the other kids. The bully, Hercules, has Bingo and two other kids lie down on the ground to be his dirt bike jump, even though they didn't want to (4:55). Hercules represents an abuse of power and oppressive government. Finally, Bingo, having had enough of this abuse, advocates for herself and her friends by standing up with her hands (paws?) balled into fists, and sternly says "Stop!" (5:20). This is representative of how

citizens of a democratic society should reject the abuse of power. Bingo's plot line in this episode represents the importance of self-advocacy in a way that leads the audience to think of voting and protest as a form of advocacy by setting the episode on voting day. This interpellates children as citizens and future voters of a liberal democracy by teaching the basics of democracy through a playtime scuffle, but draws the connection back to civic duty through the setting.

When comparing the texts *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* and *Bluey*, it is clear how children's media is a reflection of the ideals of the dominant culture and acts as an ISA to interpellate the readers into the ideology and, in some cases, work within those constraints to advocate for a more progressive version of childhood and family. For *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* the dominant ideals of the Victorian era which focused on strict gender roles, the family, and obedience, Potter interpellates the readers by creating a family which fits into these norms upon first reading, however the more it is analyzed it becomes clear that Potter subverts these expectations by creating a family with no father so the mother must perform both roles and creating empathy with the naughty main character who knowingly disobeys his mother, ultimately creating a book in favor of a more progressive family structure and approach to childhood which allows for less rigid gender rolls and a childhood that allows for adventure and mistakes rather than blind obedience. *Bluey*, on the other hand, depicts an ideal Australian family with a lack of gender roles within the home and a focus on emotional intelligence and self-advocacy in children so that they grow to be citizens who value empathy and use their voice to elect officials who will preserve the Australian state. This interpellation does not stop at children's literature; next time you read a book, watch a movie, show, or listen to a song, think about the message and ideals being interpellated. How does it act as a tool for the state to ensure that your values align with the state?

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**I Got Myself Born:
Appalachian Identity and Race
in *Demon Copperhead* and *The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek***

Megan Whitson

In 2024, Silas House, a notable author from Lily, Kentucky, was nominated in the “Best Music Video” category at the Grammy Awards for Tyler Childers’s song “In Your Love.” House is most recognized as the former Poet Laureate of Kentucky, for his fiction about Appalachian culture, and prestigious literary awards such as the Duggins Prize. The “In Your Love” music video, which House wrote, shows the love story of two gay coal miners in poor Appalachia—assumedly, Kentucky. House, an openly gay man from Appalachia, carried just a small part of his reality into this piece by challenging the legacy of assumed heteronormativity in the South. Appalachia, situated within the American “Bible Belt,” has been criticized and stereotyped as “white trash,” or those who are ignorant of modern life, politically backwards through homophobia, and foolish in their voting. However, House and Childers reframed the region on the national stage of the Grammys as an impoverished and abused land with diverse voices and identities. Through House, rural Appalachian artists were shown as equal to Hollywood elites. The story House told through “In Your Love” challenged preexisting notions of Appalachia as a land of toothless, barefoot-and-pregnant hillbillies typically perpetuated by popular culture and the literary canon (Massey, 130). Ultimately, this moment in which Appalachian artists such as House are receiving social capital within popular culture destigmatizes the popular perceptions of Appalachia as “White Trash.” House’s presence as a proud Appalachian writer at the pinnacle of American culture signifies a moment in which these narratives surrounding Appalachia are beginning to change.

This anecdote about House speaks to the Appalachian voice, which has long been defined through negative stereotypes. Though the Appalachian voice has been recognized in terms of the distinct Appalachian dialect, this dialect is tied to white trash stereotypes of a monolithic region populated by poor whites and various racial others. This narrative, steeped in Appalachia’s legacy of poverty, has been the dominant tale of Appalachia in popular culture. Authors and artists such as House constantly use their voices to subvert the stereotypes of Appalachians as the quintessential “hillbilly” into intelligent subjects capable of conscious and nuanced thought. For instance, Barbara Kingsolver’s 2022 novel, *Demon Copperhead*, a reworking of Dickens’s *David Copperfield* through the eyes of a poor Appalachian, has received critical acclaim and recognition

within the literary canon, winning the 2023 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. This novel complicates stereotypes of Appalachia as exclusively white and poor through Demon's identification as a racially mixed Melungeon—assumedly African, European, and Native American heritage. Additionally, in her popular fiction novel, *The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek* (2019), Kim Michele Richardson continues this push for Appalachian voices within the canon through her portrayal of Cussy, a Blue-skinned Packhorse Librarian in Kentucky. The Packhorse Library Project, crafted by Roosevelt's Works Progress Administration in the aftermath of the Great Depression, was composed of women who traveled by horseback through treacherous terrain to deliver books to the rural mountain folk. Both novels not only reframe this "stereotypical Appalachian" but also place them within a racialized context, complicating "White Trash" stereotypes in the South. These contemporary works centering on Appalachia rewrite not only the narratives of Appalachia, but also how the voices of this region are received as a result of a failure to meet class standards of whiteness.

While House's Grammy appearance reflects the recognition of Appalachian voices in popular culture, what ultimately comes with this recognition is a renegotiation of American and Appalachian identity in terms of class and race. American identity is often assigned through status. The American Caste System is defined by Pulitzer Prize winning journalist Isabel Wilkerson as "the architecture of human hierarchy, the subconscious code of instructions for maintaining a four-hundred-year-old social order" (22). This refers to how individuals are assigned status, thus creating a racial binary in which people were either legally white or Black (Morrison 52). Yet, as characters like Demon and Cussy show, many Appalachians could not fit into either category. But with no objective definition of whiteness, many racially ambiguous Appalachians became legally defined as "nonwhite" through the 19th century One Drop Rule, or the law that defined an individual as Black if they had even one nonwhite ancestor. Thus, the American race binary left many Appalachians like these protagonists in a troubling subject position of being neither white nor Black. To be clear, this argument is not suggesting that there are only two races in America. Instead, I emphasize that those who have been inscribed as "White Trash" in Appalachia often ambiguously live between these racial binaries. I argue that this liminal or in-between state for Appalachians, presents an inability to fully categorize them in terms of legal racial categories due to their failure to meet the class standards that determine whiteness. Such resistance to categorization is the core of their dehumanization and source of the stigma against the Appalachian

accent. This is visible through the physical presentations of Cussy and Demon as two racially ambiguous Appalachians who speak in voices that are ridiculed for their Appalachian dialects. Cussy's vocal shift away from her Appalachian dialect not only elevates her position in the dominant discourse, which James Gee defines as a means of identification of a "socially meaningful" group (18), but also allows her to perform whiteness as she adheres to standard English. Demon, however, directly troubles the negative stereotypes surrounding "White Trash" Appalachians through his critical comic strips that reframe an Appalachian as a hero, thereby empowering the quintessential Appalachian character and accent. Unlike Cussy, he pushes back against the dominant discourse, in this case, upper-class, urban, white Americans. Unlike Cussy's conformity, Demon does so through refusing to value the performance of whiteness through wealth. This pushback, however, does not earn Demon the rewards of the discourse, as he, and all Appalachians, continue to be trapped in this system.

I now move to the context of both novels to further elaborate how both protagonists fall outside of the binary of whiteness and Blackness, thus rendering them "nonwhite." In *The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek* the protagonist Cussy Mary, is a young, white woman with Methemoglobinemia, a blood disorder resulting in tinted blue skin, who is greeted with a great deal of suspicion from the poor whites of Troublesome Creek. Despite her blood disorder, and resultant darker skin, Cussy continues her job as a librarian in Eleanor Roosevelt's WPA Packhorse Library Project. Richardson's first-person narrative examines the complicated nature of Cussy's reality as a Blue woman, which leaves her neither white nor Black, and how she is able to manipulate her Appalachian accent to gain the respect of the white community, thus granting her social status and legal power. Barbara Kingsolver's *Demon Copperhead*, on the other hand, follows Damon Fields, or Demon, as he grows up in a coal mining town in Lee County, Virginia, during the 1990s and early 2000s. Demon struggles with his identity as the son of a single, addict mother and an absent, Melungeon father. As a Melungeon, Demon, like Cussy, must face a damning reality of not only being Appalachian, but an impoverished racial other within Appalachia. He, however, marks his positioning within Appalachia not through accent and dialect, but art that allows him to maintain his unique subject position without conforming as Cussy does.

In the minimal scholarship that exists on *The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek*, it is most often interpreted as a work of Appalachian historical and popular fiction and not included in the formal literary canon. In contrast, *Demon Copperhead*, cements its place in the literary canon

with the Pulitzer but also by being an adaptation of Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield*. Dickens's 1850 work is a bildungsroman centering on a young David Copperfield as he navigates the loss of his mother, poverty, and life as an orphan in 19th-century England. Similarly, *Demon* faces struggles as an impoverished orphan within an Appalachian town shredded by drugs and the coal mining industry. While *The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek* and *Demon Copperhead* may differ in terms of critical recognition, setting, and plot, the pairing proves useful for the ways in which they highlight similar phenomena throughout different sociohistorical moments that shape Appalachia: The Great Depression and the aftermath of the opioid crisis. Both of these events, a result of capitalism's impact on rural mountain towns, reflect the perceptions of poor white trash in Appalachia, particularly, the ways they are excluded from the benefits of wealth and status afforded by the dominant discourse and instead suffer constant stripping of identity and resources.

To understand the influence of white class standards in Appalachia, one must first understand what it means, historically and implicitly, to be white. Critical Race Theory scholars Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic posit the idea that while race is fundamental to the ways individuals are categorized within society and throughout modern history, there is no true bearing or method to measure race (7). It is not biological, nor is it always visual. Instead, race is a social and legal construct. Derrick Bell, one of the founders of Critical Race Theory, defines racism as a "symbiosis," arguing that American society is founded upon and only functions today as a result of the legacy of slavery and its benefit for whites (10). Therefore, racism must be understood in terms of systemic and structural privileging of a white supremacist status quo. Though Bell defines attitudes of racism as a "symbiosis," the concept of race itself must be specifically understood as a binary. Toni Morrison, an African American theorist and novelist, analyzes conceptions of race in *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. Morrison argues that American whiteness was defined in the Transatlantic Slave Trade, writing that "Africanism is the vehicle by which the American self knows itself not as enslaved, but free; not repulsive, but desirable; not helpless, but licensed and powerful; not history-less, but historical; not damned, but innocent; not a blind accident of evolution, but a progressive fulfillment of destiny" (52). Whiteness, thereby, can only be defined in opposition to Blackness. The "destiny" for "the American self" positions whiteness as the path to escape the brutalities that the Africanist subject will inevitably face. American identity, in this sense, becomes defined through the idealization of a "new, white man."

Morrison's definition of whiteness as only meaningful in opposition to Blackness shows the racial binary that slavery and white supremacy established in the United States. In conjunction with Morrison's assertion of whiteness as a part of a raced binary, Gee's argument of the dominant discourse's portrayal of whiteness as an "identity kit" anchors discourse itself as a performance of whiteness (18). Essentially, whiteness functions as the dominant mode of upper caste principles, with discourse reflecting the standards of whiteness to maintain dominance through the caste system.

While one's racial position within the Black-white binary is often determined by skin color, whiteness also became a performance tied to class. "White Trash," often used to describe Appalachia, codifies the intersection of socioeconomic status and race in America. In essence, to be fully white, to rise above this nonwhite, Africanist distinction, is to have class mobility or generational wealth. This can be seen in the history of light-skinned African Americans who successfully pass as white in the United States by performing upper-class manners and social markers, thus gaining access to class mobility and capital. In *White Trash: The 400-Year Untold History of Class in America*, American historian Nancy Isenberg illustrates the history of "White Trash" southerners and Appalachians. Isenberg notes that southern whites who could not achieve financial prosperity "acquired the most enduring insult of all: 'poor white trash.' The southern poor were not just lazy vagrants; now they were odd specimens in a collector's cabinet of curiosities, a diseased breed, and the degenerate spawn of a 'notorious race'" (135). These poor southern whites, these "vagrants", essentially, failed to uplift themselves fully from the poverty that marks the African slave. They were geographically isolated and exiled to the Appalachian region as this "diseased breed" and "notorious race." Additionally, Isenberg describes these lower-class populations as "waste people," furthering the idea of Appalachia and its immigrants as a land relegated to "othered" individuals who fail to perform the class markers of whiteness. Cussy and Demon exemplify Isenberg's designation of "waste people" as they are excluded from the dominant discourse as a result of both skin color and class, failing to perform American whiteness.

Given that the stigma against Appalachians as "White Trash" must be read through both class and race, I argue that the difficulties in categorizing Appalachian identity racially, socially, and economically reveal an American caste hierarchy. In her work *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents*, Isabel Wilkerson defines caste as: "an unconscious ranking of human characteristics and sets forth the rules, expectations, and stereotypes that have been used to justify brutalities

against entire groups within our species” with race as the front-man (23). Calling back to Isenberg’s description of poor “White Trash” as a “notorious race,” caste becomes another method to align or separate an individual or a group from the dominant discourse. Wilkerson describes how the caste system became so prevalent within North America as immigrants continued to arrive and blend into society, writing that “Becoming white meant defining themselves as furthest from its opposite—black. They could establish their new status by observing how the lowest caste was regarded and imitating or one-upping the disdain and contempt, learning the epithets, joining in on violence against them to prove themselves worthy of admittance to the dominant caste” (48). Here, individuals are admitted into the dominant discourse, or recognized values and narratives of society, through effectively distancing themselves from the lowest caste. This is accomplished through the multiple acts of “violence” that Wilkerson describes.

Ultimately, Wilkerson does not merely align whiteness as a circumstance of caste, but also as a performance of it. To achieve recognition within the upper-caste, one may commit acts of violence against the lower castes to successfully perform whiteness (48). As Morrison maintains that race can only be described by aligning the white against the nonwhite, caste must do the same by internally separating and defining the upper and lower castes against one another. While the lowest caste is aligned closely with the African Slave and race, Wilkerson claims that it also encompasses those who fail to meet the needs within the larger production and social order, thus presenting class as another marker for caste (51). Appalachia is situated within and defined by this multifaceted caste system due to the “White Trash” narratives that have bridged race and class together to define the region. Thus, the region is no longer defined by separate concepts of race and class as symptoms of a greater illness of Isenberg’s “diseased breed.” Caste is the glue that bridges class and race designations in society, acknowledging how race and class are inherently connected performances fundamental to American identity.

At the core of Appalachians’ failing to align with the caste standards of the ideal American is how they, like many minority groups, are perceived as laboring bodies over intellectual minds. bell hooks, a Black, Appalachian critical theorist, analyzes essentialist definitions of race in her work, “Postmodern Blackness.” She states, “blackness is associated solely with concrete gut level experience conceived as either opposing or having no connection to abstract thinking” (2510). Her description of this “concrete gut-level experience,” illustrates how definitions of Blackness are relegated to the body, rather than intellect. This essentializes African Americans, perpetuating

stereotypes of primitivity in contrast to the “evolved” white man. While hooks, in this quote, is engaging with essentialism as it applies to Black subjects, this essentialist framework can also be applied to Appalachians. As Appalachians fail to perform hegemonic whiteness through wealth, education, and dialect, they too are dehumanized and viewed as genetically inferior. hooks’s proposed solution to essentialism suggests that the authentic, lived experience of the devalued subject must be paired with the language of the dominant discourse to gain agency within these hegemonic norms and write back from within the discourse (2514). hooks, therefore, performs her critique of essentialism in the jargon of poststructuralist theory combined with anecdotes from her experience as a Black woman in elite circles of academia. In one interpretation, Appalachians may only achieve legitimacy as speaking subjects, or acknowledgement by the dominant discourse as intellectual persons, through speaking the standard English of the upper-class, white, urban American discourse and, effectively, muting their own dialect to perform whiteness. Both Richardson and Kingsolver engage with this argument in various ways. Richardson, through Cussy, rejects hooks’s advice as Cussy begins to code-switch out of her Appalachian dialect in order to obtain standing within the white community while abandoning her authenticity and lived experience. Kingsolver’s *Demon*, on the other hand, attempts to follow hooks’s lead by subverting essentialism directly through his comic strips that reframe an Appalachian man as a hero rather than a subhuman figure. In doing so, he contextualizes the Appalachian individual in terms of his own lived reality, reclaiming the Melungeon Appalachian from the degrading stereotypes and language of the dominant discourse into a positive light. Through *Demon*, Kingsolver attempts to dismantle the power of the dominant discourse’s language surrounding poor, “White Trash,” as a failure to perform standard whiteness.

Through these considerations of race, the Appalachian “White Trash” dialect remains a marker that reflects the performativity of caste, specifically the discrimination towards Appalachians for their position in the lower caste. While this dialect faces criticism in popular media and culture, it offers a specific purpose within literature. In his analysis “The Treatment of Dialect in Appalachian Literature,” Michael Ellis defines this purpose as follows: “Most of these writers use dialect in one way or another as a means of creating a regional and cultural identity for their characters. A literary dialect can help create that sense of place, home, community, and family. Literary dialects can also be used to illustrate the social barriers inherent in language differences” (Ellis 15). For Appalachians, this dialect, while conveying a sense of home, also bears

witness to the perception of the dialect as a signal for “White Trash” through its deviation from Standard English. He also acknowledges that this accent promotes conversation of the Appalachian dialect as “a better means of encouraging discussion about how and why we positively or negatively value our own spoken language and that of others” (15). Here, the Appalachian dialect not only functions as a positive claim of identity and voice, but also as a negative reflection of its status within the lower caste. With Ellis’s framing, the Appalachian dialect remains a performance of race and class as it fails to meet the class standards of whiteness as defined by the dominant discourse and the caste system. Essentially, Appalachian identity continues to be defined and placed into the lower caste through this accent, as it reflects the failed performance of whiteness. However, many authors, such as Richardson, use this accent in literature to “write back” to the dominant discourse and reclaim Appalachians as thinking subjects while acknowledging this maltreatment in the dominant culture. Ultimately, accent and dialect are not only a marker of dehumanization and a failure to align within caste binaries, but also a critical device in understanding the caste stigmas attached to these Appalachian voices and the performances they must uphold within the discourse.

To turn directly to the primary texts, Cussy, the protagonist of *The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek*, inherited her physical attributes, or her “race,” through family ties that will forever define her as nonwhite. While it has long been understood by scholars that race has no true biological grounding, it remains a factor that contributes widely to the idea of caste and Appalachian identity. For instance, Richardson’s depiction of Cussy as a young woman with Methemoglobinemia illustrates this idea of an inessential factor as holding significant bearing in determining an individual’s legitimacy. The most current definition of Methemoglobinemia, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is “The presence of an abnormally high concentration of methaemoglobin in the blood; any clinical condition (acquired or inherited) characterized by this” (Methemoglobinemia N., 2024). This “methaemoglobin,” according to another entry from the 1990s, resulted in what was commonly known as “Blue Baby Syndrome” (Methemoglobinemia, 1990). Despite the medical condition of Methemoglobinemia being represented in the dictionary, the “Blue People of Kentucky,” or, the Fugate family, who were some of the most famous bearers of this condition in Appalachian history, were not represented or referenced at any point within the dictionary. Thus, Appalachians are othered and racialized on a formal level as they are excluded from even the most trusted sources, such as the *Oxford English*

Dictionary. This blood disorder, though not understood for many years, is a confirmed medical condition within the *Oxford English Dictionary*, representing, in Cussy's case, a genealogical failure of obtaining whiteness.

In understanding the legacy of Methemoglobinemia, I now pivot to my interpretation of *The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek*. Cussy becomes nonwhite through her appearance as a Blue woman, but also as an Appalachian. Though she is excluded from the dominant discourse on the level of race, Cussy, while delivering the literary resources of the Packhorse Library Project, also obtains the literacy of the dominant discourse herself. This evolution is represented throughout her journey within the novel. For instance, after stumbling upon Cussy's attempts to "talk proper," her dear friend Queenie, a Black woman, confronts her: "You have a right nice voice, an honest one without needing to fancy the words or fatten them with the untruths of cleverer words," to which Cussy responds, "I want to learn. Want to know'd [...] know all the words Queenie.' I raised my chin. 'All 'em and proper-like too'" (101). Here, in the presence of Queenie, Cussy continues to use her thick, Appalachian dialect through her use of "know'd," "em," and so on. However, with this replication of dialect, Cussy expresses her desire to obtain the "proper-talk" of the dominant discourse. Richardson's use of code-switching through Cussy's expressed yearning to "know all the words" calls back to hooks's argument that the experience of an outsider, when analyzed by the dominant discourse, can only be elevated by applying the authentic, lived experience of an individual to the discussion and theory of that discourse. Queenie's description of "the untruths of cleverer words" echoes hooks's idea that the value of truth is not in the standardized language or beliefs of the majority, but the actual lived experiences and authenticity of those not recognized by the dominant discourse. However, this provides a tension point as Cussy is not relying on her lived experience to maintain her legitimacy. Rather, Cussy can use this power of language to place herself closer to whiteness, an option that Queenie, a Black woman, will never have. Cussy barely has more agency as a Blue woman than Queenie does as a Black woman; however, Cussy may elevate herself through this language to more closely achieve the discourse standards of whiteness through speech. In spite of this elevation, Cussy is not empowered through her lived experience and seeks to shed her Appalachian voice rather than embrace it. Cussy can gain legitimacy as a speaking subject, or literacy, through her ability to be educated through the dominant discourse and be able to enter this discourse as a white speaking subject. Cussy, through attempting to achieve a proximity to whiteness, seeks to break free of this "White Trash"

perception of her in the dominant social order, which keeps her trapped within the binary of whiteness and nonwhiteness. Cussy, through this attempt at speaking the language of the dominant discourse, is embodying a performance of whiteness and, ultimately, failing.

Cussy, in seeking this whiteness, begins to visually witness this “progress” as her attempts to code-switch away from her Appalachian dialect positions her closer within the dominant discourse to literal whiteness and status. Essentially, Cussy’s vocal change is tied to her physical shift to whiteness. Within the novel, Cussy is prescribed medication to “cure” her Blueness as she continues to establish herself further in terms of literacy. In fact, there is a particular moment in which Cussy begins to revel in the joy of her passing: “But in a minute, I returned to the mirror to stare at myself, delighted, spellbound by my normal, pretty white skin. Soon, I was practicing smiles and whispering at my reflection in my very best radio-newscaster voice” (194). Unlike previous instances within the novel, Richardson is not writing dialogue through Appalachian dialect. Rather, she is showing the narration within Cussy’s own mind in the standard English of her “radio-newscaster” voice and absence of the Appalachian dialect, paired with the fantasy of Cussy as a beautiful, white, Lexington lady. She is, in a sense, erasing her authenticity through the concealment of her true form and circumstances. This assimilation by Cussy through prescribed drug intake also presents a complication of her Blueness as an “infection” that must be cured, even when this medicine itself causes her to be deathly ill in various moments. Here, Cussy’s code-switching enhances her performance of whiteness by any means necessary. By obtaining physical whiteness, Cussy’s own inner dialogue mirrors the lovely “radio-newscaster” that she is taking great pleasure in impersonating rather than the young woman speaking her regional dialect. In this moment, Cussy is no longer categorized by her inability to fit into Morrison’s idea of a racial or class binary, but rather, comes out on the “right side” of it as a privileged, educated white woman. Here, Cussy’s performance of whiteness through codeswitching and literal transformation positions her further into a temporarily successful performance of caste as she embodies whiteness visually and at the level of discarding the “White Trash” dialect.

As a result of this performance, I argue that this moment serves to illustrate how Cussy becomes a part of the dominant, white, educated discourse that is constantly criticizing her. First through race, then through language. However, instead of using language to convey her authentic lived experience, Cussy aims entirely for the immersion, language, and attitudes of the mainstream discourse. An essentialist argument would emphasize that code-switching at the level of language

allows Cussy to regain legitimacy as a speaking subject in the larger discourse; however, I posit that this moment indicates how this elevation is merely temporary and a poor reflection of her true identity. Cussy can never truly escape her identity as a Blue, Appalachian woman, and this performance does not allow her to truly enter the discourse because she has lost the authority and value of her own lived experience through this moment of becoming white and abandoning her dialect. Though Cussy is both literate and educated, much like the current audience that Richardson is writing to, she has been conditioned to think that this language, like her Blue skin, has no legitimacy or place in comparison to proper English and that true acknowledgement of herself as a subject lies in the embodying of the mainstream standard. Additionally, the significance of this moment as occurring within a mere reflection may indicate the social-constructed nature of race. Cussy's reflection in the mirror is not only a distorted representation of her reality, but a fleeting one as well. Cussy soon returns to her Blueness while holding tightly to her elevated language. This moment further situates the overall argument of Appalachian identity, including dialect, as an othered, raced identity that falls outside the binary of the white, lovely "radio newscaster." Ultimately, Cussy's attempt to perform whiteness has failed as she, herself, is experiencing the violence enacted by the caste system, including incoming legal challenges in relation to her marriage. Though Cussy has modified her appearance and dialect to fit the standards of the white, upper-class discourse and can now codeswitch successfully, she remains ridiculed within the social sphere as this performance remains just that, a performance. Despite Cussy's continued experience with caste violence as a result of her performance of whiteness, she still, in abandoning her authenticity to "pass" within the discourse, retains some of the rewards of whiteness.

As Cussy proceeds on her way to a "happily ever after" with her kind, new husband, both are threatened with a miscegenation charge: "I gasped. It had never happened here, but I'd read about the laws in the city newsprints and know'd they were being enforced in other places. Folks were charged and thrown in jail for courting someone not like themselves, for taking another color to their marriage beds" (276). As Cussy substitutes the idea of taking another "color" to a marriage bed rather than a person, she illustrates the legal attitude toward miscegenation. To mate with a nonwhite individual, even if the white spouse is considered "White Trash," is an abomination in that it mixes whiteness with someone who is not recognized as human under the law. Their

marriage is illegal because of the anti-miscegenation, or race-mixing, law (Sussman).⁶⁶ Despite this criticism, fear surrounding the idea of “race-mixing” often prevailed in social and legal circles, as this concept became a crime in many states. In this moment of encountering the legal ramifications of miscegenation, though Cussy has, at this point, mastered the language of the dominant discourse, her use of the word “know’d” reveals her Appalachian dialect slipping back through her speech. Though Cussy has mastered the language of the discourse, as hooks recommends, her dialect (“know’d”) and status as a Blue woman pushes her back into this subject-position of “nonwhiteness,” thus incriminating her in her marriage to a white man. This miscegenation charge also, ultimately, functions as yet another example of how Cussy’s performance in an attempt to “pass” racially becomes inconsequential, as she continues to be targeted through caste violence via her near-arrest. Kimberlé Crenshaw discusses how these legal categories have designed race: “Laws and customs helped create ‘races’ out of a broad range of human traits. In the process of creating races, the categories came to be filled with meaning—Blacks were characterized one way, whites another” (43). Though Cussy, in both Isenberg and Morrison’s eyes, falls outside of the binary of whiteness and class as an Appalachian, law and legal standards are what truly categorize her as nonwhite through race, and unable to fully reach the standards and rewards of whiteness as a result of this status. It is now her Blueness as an Appalachian that excludes her, rather than her identity as an Appalachian alone. Thus, the Appalachian identity in itself faces this same violence and dehumanization as a result of their nonwhite status and, like Cussy, their inability to attain legitimacy as subjects in the eyes of the dominant discourse and upper caste. This violence, in particular, also applies to Cussy at the level of gender. As a Blue *woman*, Cussy’s “race,” the object of disgust to many of the poor whites in Troublesome Creek, became intertwined with her gender through the perception of race as matrilineal (Spillers)⁶⁷. Essentially, Cussy is not merely perceived as a bride of an abominable marriage, but as a potential means to taint whiteness through passing her Blueness onto the next generation as a mother. This race-mixing that is so feared and criticized within marriage, then, through Cussy, may manifest itself into a child. Because of Cussy’s status as a woman, caste violence then presents itself through

⁶⁶ Miscegenation: Defined by Anti-Abolition pamphlet “Miscegenation: The Theory of the Blending of the Races, Applied to the American White Man and Negro” as race-mixing. This race-mixing was made illegal in many American states and punished with incarceration and violence

⁶⁷ Hortense Spillers’s “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book” posits that race is made “matrilineal” through the 1965 Moynihan Report (3).

the policing of miscegenation to soothe the poor whites regarding their own caste positions: in this case, via legitimate legal repercussions.

Though Richardson begins this novel and Cussy's development through dialogue, she chooses to end it in the written, internal word. In a letter to her old friend, Queenie, Cussy updates her and the readers on the last few years of her life. She writes, "Last month, I received an invitation from the Kentucky Federation of Women's Club in Louisville, and was given an award for outstanding service and dedication to the Packhorse project" (284). Here, Cussy concludes her story in a written letter, neglecting a final usage of her Appalachian dialect. Cussy speaks of the recognition given to her not only as a librarian, but as an Appalachian woman. She has been lent this recognition by the "Kentucky Federation of Women's Club in Louisville," thus reaching the dominant discourse of primarily white, urban, wealthy individuals for her "outstanding service and dedication" to a project that she was very nearly excluded from because of her Blueness. In spite of this acknowledgement, Cussy has not achieved her recognition through the authenticity of her lived experience as a Blue, Appalachian woman. Rather, she has manipulated these systems of the dominant discourse by separating herself from her Appalachian dialect. Like Silas House, Cussy is recognized by the discourse; however, unlike House, she was required to abandon her authentic identity to do so. At the level of authorial voice, Richardson herself, while criticizing the negative stereotypes faced by Appalachians like Cussy, is also working to expose the necessity of the performance of whiteness in an attempt to gain legitimacy as a thinking subject within the dominant discourse. She has utilized a whiteness performance as a means of removing herself and Cussy from this legacy to avoid caste violence. Cussy has mastered codeswitching out of this racially marginalized Appalachian voice and is now reaping the rewards of alignment with whiteness in the early 20th century. She has abandoned her "non-white" status through performance and abandonment of authenticity as a raced, Appalachian woman. Essentially, Cussy has not triumphed over this prejudice and "White Trash" designation through acknowledging the value of her lived experience, but has adhered to these dominant conventions of language, which position her in the "white" status she has longed for all along. Though a nonwhite, White Trash character such as Cussy may obtain rewards of whiteness through codeswitching and passing, they still, by legal standards, will never achieve the full benefits of whiteness.

Another contemporary example of the racial boundaries drawn for White Trash individuals can be found in the Melungeon identity of Kingsolver's titular *Demon Copperhead*. The

Melungeon subject has faced significant othering within Appalachia that can be attributed to, much like Cussy, their racial ambiguity. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* a Melungeon is “A member of a North American people of mixed white, black, and Indigenous descent, inhabiting the southern Appalachian Mountains of the eastern United States” (Melungeon N., 2023). While the dictionary presents the relatively ambiguous origins of this group of individuals, it also acknowledges the speculation of many that Melungeons are of a mixed-race identity, explicitly including Black ancestors (rather than European, Portuguese, etc.) (Melungeon N., 1998). Thus, this inability to truly identify or categorize this group of people not only emphasizes the tenets of Critical Race Theory that describe race as having no true biological grounding, but also presents how these poor, racial others are dehumanized as subjects at the level of voice. In her analysis “The Melungeon Identity Movement and the Construction of Appalachian Whiteness,” Anita Puckett examines the criticism aimed towards Melungeons, as well as how whiteness is guarded from Melungeons by “White Trash” Appalachians. One such method is through instilling fear and misconceptions regarding those of this mixed-race identity through phrases such as “Be quiet or the Melungeons will get you” (133). She further posits that the term “Melungeon” in itself is a tool of oppression and violence by those of the lowest caste: “Current valid historical evidence suggests strongly that the term was an exonym, used by whites in southwestern Virginia, east Tennessee, and southeastern Kentucky (hereafter called the “southern Appalachian faction”) to oppress and marginalize those of presumed Native American, African, and northern European racial ancestry” (133). In this way, Melungeons within Appalachia, such as Demon, as well as assumedly any racial other, face the violence described by Wilkerson at the level of caste. With the same logic of the One Drop Rule, Melungeons do not qualify as “white” due to this racial mixing, that explicitly includes Black ancestry.

With this framing, I now turn to Demon, identified by Kingsolver on the first page as a Melungeon orphan caught in the crosshairs of poverty and the opioid crisis in Virginia. Demon presents this phenomenon of poor, white Appalachians as futilely attempting to cling to a place within the dominant discourse that they are so inherently excluded from as a result of poverty. In the second half of the novel, when conversing with his white art teacher, Ms. Annie, about the condemnation she faces surrounding her marriage to a Black man, Demon makes the following observation about his fellow Appalachians: “‘Certain pitiful souls around here see whiteness as their last asset that hasn’t been totaled or repossessed’ I wondered if the laws pertained to my

people making their Melungeon babies way back when, or if we were too far backwoods for the higher-ups to give a shit. Age-old story, who gets to look down on who, for what reason” (684). Here, this view of whiteness as an “asset,” or a privilege that cannot be “totaled or repossessed” like a car, confirms that, for Appalachians, their visibly white skin is the only privilege that they may have that cannot be damaged or taken away from them. This “white” designation, despite being devalued by their status as poor, remains the one advantage that they may have over visibly nonwhite Appalachians in terms of caste designation. Ultimately, to be given the rewards of whiteness withheld by essentialism, such as legitimacy and acknowledgment as intelligent thinking subjects, poor whites must commit these acts of violence; they must “look down” on the lower castes, like the upper caste, to maintain what meager benefits they do hold. Demon also describes this “Age-old story” as a cycle in which the “higher-ups” look down on those lower than them, specifically Appalachians, for their inability to achieve both whiteness and wealth, thus describing the dynamic of the upper caste’s domination over the lower castes for their inability to fit into this raced and classed binary. In this way, though Appalachia falls outside of this binary through their “White Trash” designation, visible whiteness and the rewards of such are utilized to continue the promotion of the American Caste System, thereby continuing the dehumanization of Appalachians and racial others within it. This dehumanization, to be clear, is not remotely similar to the oppression Black persons have faced throughout history. Rather, my point is that this dehumanization is a reinforcement of the way in which a lack of social mobility for whites directly fails to uphold the performance of whiteness within the Caste System.

Through their lowly status within the Caste System, Appalachians continue to be defined through the language of the dominant discourse through essentialism. This language, as hooks would argue, reduces Appalachians to the level of the body by stripping them of their status as thinking subjects. Demon offers a few examples of this as he describes the plights of the “hicks, rednecks,” and “trailer trash” who the world throws “garbage” at. Specifically, he describes Appalachia as “the dog of America” (671). The specific diction used to belittle the poor whites in Appalachia directly mirrors the impact behind the “White Trash” designation as well. In particular, the description of Appalachia as the “dog” of the nation directly attempts to convey the ways Appalachian characters are animalized and dehumanized through language. These characters are not attributed consciousness, but rather a continued perception of poor, nonwhites as inhuman and

a drain on the upper castes. While Demon calls out the hypocrisy behind this language, he soon reclaims it to challenge the placement of Appalachians and reposition them within the discourse.

Demon, an avid artist who has looked to comic strips and superheroes to escape his dreary circumstances, channels his frustrations with the treatment of Appalachians into altering this perception within pop culture. With help from his friend and foster brother, Tommy, Demon publishes and trademarks a new superhero: “I’d started with a different version where he swaps out lines at the pole, so instead of lightning he’s stealing the power of a mansion house up on a hill. You could see it fizzle out up there, satellite TV, outdoor security lights, while the little trailer goes bright [...] I named my strip *Red Neck*. Signed, Anonymous” (675). Here, Demon is positioning his titular hero, Red Neck, as an Appalachian Robin Hood, reclaiming the resources from the upper class who have stolen them and giving them back to the rightful owners. In this case, the poor whites have been dehumanized by those living in the “mansion house,” which takes on a new meaning through this diction. The “mansion house” is not a home, but it is reflective of these upper caste systems through the language of a poor Appalachian. Additionally, there is this anomaly of the Appalachian “redneck,” a derogatory name for poor Southerners who likely labor outside instead of a cushy job, being transformed into a hero. Demon’s description of “the little trailer” as lighting up again also reemphasizes his previous frustration with the term “trailer trash.” Though this classed language, much like “White Trash,” is used to relegate Appalachia to this cycle of poverty and consistently promote Isenberg’s notion of the “waste people,” Demon rebrands the trailer not as a marker of shame, but as a home. This home directly contrasts the inaccessible “mansion house up on the hill”, attempting to shield itself from the “White Trash” down in the trailer park.

Through his subversion, Demon, unlike Cussy, does not code-switch out of the Appalachian dialect in order to achieve legitimacy within the dominant discourse, but rather, troubles essentialism and the language of the discourse through his artwork. Unlike Cussy, who faces violence from the upper caste while attempting to adopt and perform the dialect of the dominant discourse, Demon’s blatant reframing of the language of this discourse through Appalachian identity and pride serves as its own performance. Essentially, *Red Neck* pivots from an act of caste violence through language into an ownership of heroism and justice within this prominent caste divide. The language itself is no longer offensive, but an act of rebellion. Through representations of Appalachians in popular media, Demon can see this form of caste violence so

easily. This is the violence that the poor whites must administer to remind themselves, much like the law in Cussy's miscegenation charge, that their whiteness will not be "repossessed." This phenomenon becomes the core of Demon's anger and frustration, which he depicts in *Red Neck*. Further, this act and art embodies Demon's response to the upper caste in terms of their criticism and acts of violence on Appalachia. Although Appalachians fundamentally remain in the lowest caste as a result of their inability to achieve wealth or fall in line with the race binary (Black Appalachians, of course, fall even further below White Appalachians in this hierarchy), Demon enacts hooks's recommendation that they must speak the language of the dominant discourse while insisting on the authority of lived experience to finally write back and inscribe themselves in the discourse.

As Demon attempts to channel his frustrations into fighting the attitudes of the dominant discourse towards Appalachians, it becomes increasingly apparent that this language of the upper caste is, in itself, a continued act of violence on the lower caste Appalachians. In particular, Kingsolver focuses on how Appalachian characters and voices are represented within pop culture. With the founding and publication of *Red Neck*, Demon responds to the various ways in which Appalachian and poor whites were represented in mainstream media and comic strips:

They were always on the side of the money-earning people, and down on the land people, due to various factors Tommy mentioned, monetize this, international banking that [...] So, the one's in charge started cooking it into everybody's brains to look down on the land people, saying we are an earlier stage of human, like junior varsity or cavemen. Weird-shaped heads" (842).

Here, the "money-earning people" utilize the Appalachian dialect to refer to the upper caste as a contrast to the "land people." Both statements, while embodying this dialect, also serve to use their adjectives to distinguish the "have" from the "have-nots." While the "money-earning people" retain the social and monetary capital of the upper caste, the land people do not possess either because of their status as Appalachians. Ultimately, Demon presents the internal complications between the upper and lower castes. Specifically, how the upper caste attempts to retain the resources from the land people through this depiction of them as this "earlier stage of human." In particular, Demon proves the importance of a character such as *Red Neck* in challenging this essentialist rhetoric that Appalachians are lumped into by the dominant discourse.

This animalization and refusal to consider Appalachians as intelligent thinking subjects through the media portrayal of them with these “weird-shaped heads,” ultimately reflects hooks’s argument of how essentialism reduces minority populations to their biological baseness. Appalachians, in particular, are portrayed this way as a result of this cycle of poverty that they have been relegated to in an attempt to belittle them by the dominant caste. Additionally, the image of the “weird-shaped heads” in itself has also been a dominant myth used to identify Melungeon heritage. These portrayals, an instance of Wilkerson’s described caste violence, affirm that the only true way to acknowledge and rewrite this dehumanization is through taking the language of the dominant discourse and flipping it on its head entirely through lived experience. Demon begins this work and performativity through *Red Neck*, but must always be aware that these acts of dehumanization toward Appalachians will continue as a result of this inability to fit into this race and class binary set forth by the caste system. In their description of Critical Race Theory, Delgado and Stefancic also engage with the phenomenon of caste. In particular, how “Racial hierarchies determine who gets tangible benefits, including the best jobs, the best schools, and invitations to parties in people's homes” (17). This perception of Appalachians as a result of their “White Trash” status not only dehumanizes them within the dominant discourse, but also determines how they are granted class benefits through caste. So long as Appalachians are poor, they will be considered failures at performing whiteness and therefore excluded from the discourse and the rewards of whiteness that Cussy experiences. Again, while I refer to this phenomenon through the language of racing, this primarily reflects on the failure to “perform” whiteness rather than the ability to physically appear white. White Appalachians are still white, but are excluded at the level of caste. Although Demon combats the essentialist perceptions of Appalachians as subhuman, he also experiences pure rage in realizing the caste system he is locked into will never change.

On the idea of Appalachians as dehumanized through caste as a result of their inability to be categorized through the racial binary, Sarah Robertson makes a further case for why these Appalachians are depicted as this “earlier stage of human” that Demon describes. Robertson examines the relegation of poverty in Appalachia, specifically in relation to the drug crisis and addiction, and the ways that these conditions make an individual “monstrous.” In her analysis “War and Diseases of Despair in Gothic Appalachian Literature,” Robertson argues that *Demon Copperhead* shows addiction as disease, stating: “However, their gothic turns to the broken bodies of drug crises typically offer nuanced insights that take readers beyond mere spectacle to

understand the wider socioeconomic and political forces behind addiction” (19). Here, Robertson takes the language of these “broken bodies,” or, Appalachians, and attributes this phenomenon of addiction to the poor caste of Appalachia. These Appalachians, plagued by addiction, such as Demon, are not fully whole through this fragmentation. This reduction of Appalachians, again, at the level of body, reaffirms their nonwhite status and how they are dehumanized by the dominant discourse through this language. Additionally, addiction in Appalachia in itself functions as an act of caste violence and a tool of the dominant discourse. After rescuing his childhood friend, Emmy, from a drug house in Atlanta, Demon’s “Aunt June” pulled the pair close to her in the backseat of the car and reminded them that ““They did this to you”” (736). This statement by Aunt June, directed at two young adults trapped in the throes of drug addiction, directly takes the blame of addiction off of poor “White Trash” and places it on the dominant discourse seeking to rob Appalachia of its resources. Robertson also addresses this particular scene and how Demon, Emmy, and all Appalachians affected by the drug crisis are saved from this “monstrous” distinction through recognizing the upper-class, specifically, “Big Pharma” as a predator (30). Ultimately, the legacy of addiction, largely marketed by companies to keep Appalachians within a lowly subject position, is a brutal act of caste violence. Such violence, ultimately, positions Appalachians as another failure of whiteness as a result of the legacy of this addiction. While never experiencing true addiction, Cussy, nearly 100 years earlier, also experiences this “predator” and cycle of “White Trash” drug use through her unsuccessful ingestion of pharmaceuticals to perform whiteness. The “broken bodies,” the “monsters” seeking their next high, play directly into the stereotypes of the poor, “White Trash,” who are defined as lazy, unpredictable, and mentally weak. This stereotype directly calls back to Isenberg’s “waste people” and the degradation of those, like Cussy and Demon, who can never control their own circumstances or placement within the discourse and caste system.

While *The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek* and *Demon Copperhead* center on two different eras of Appalachian history, both present the ways in which race becomes a binary that is largely applied to poor “White Trash” in Appalachia. These subjects, defined by a lack of wealth and whiteness, remain uncategorized by the dominant discourse and upper-class, thus dehumanizing them through essentialist rhetoric. The Appalachian dialect and identity, a signifier of this dehumanization, is marked by the discourse through “White Trash” stereotypes that relegate Appalachians to a lowly subject position as a result of this cycle of poverty. Richardson’s *The*

Book Woman of Troublesome Creek reflects the treatment of this dialect and identity through Cussy, an Appalachian with Blue skin, and how she attempts codeswitching through a performance of whiteness in order to assimilate to the dominant discourse. Kingsolver's *Demon Copperhead*, on the other hand, utilizes a Melungeon protagonist in order to challenge the notions of poor, "White Trash" and Appalachia within the dominant discourse. Through the perspectives of two racially ambiguous Appalachians, both Kingsolver and Richardson tackle the dehumanization of Appalachians as a result of their "nonwhite" status, as well as this ultimate failure to perform whiteness in the face of violence from the upper-caste. These works of contemporary Appalachian literature, as well as the rising recognition of artists such as Silas House, may one day rewrite these narratives entirely and finally recognize Appalachians as legitimate, intelligent subjects in a way that they have yet to be portrayed by the dominant discourse. If nothing else, they grittily expose these acts of caste violence as *Red Neck* lights up another trailer somewhere in Virginia.

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**There is No Exit to this Nightmare:
The False American Dream in *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*
and *American Psycho***

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Hanged men, dangling from ropes, swing back and forth in the poplar trees as the Southern breeze releases the smell of kerosene into the air, just like Billie Holiday crooned nearly 90 years ago. Alongside this image are others, like a homeless Black man, bent over with his eyes gouged out, and innards splattered on the pavement in a back alley in New York City. Another is a man, the same complexion, being chased by an angry mob with loud raahs for a South that was never real, only a hell. The observers of these two scenes are two men: one from the 1910s, watching in horror, the other from the 1980s, creating the horror. While both images and both men may believe they are seeing different things, they are actually seeing the same: the bloody and violent nightmare that is caused by the American Dream. Yet, this nightmare was not conjured out of nowhere; it was constructed by a literary tradition as synonymous as Holiday's images and tunes and the horrors seen by these two men, the genre of American autobiography. While this project aims in part to understand how the American autobiography influenced the American Dream, it also primarily seeks to highlight the way its fictional cousin, the *fictional* American autobiography, highlights and reveals these horrific images seen by the two men. Additionally, in doing so, it will illustrate the hypocrisy and danger caused by the literary categorization and the cultural ideology that occurs in making an *American* autobiography.

In this work, I examine how James Weldon Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912) and Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* (1991) satirize the genre of American autobiography as a way to critique the promise of the American Dream as a nightmarish fiction. In both their works, Johnson and Ellis illustrate that no person can achieve the prosperity of the American Dream through hard work alone, explicitly undermining the narrative arc and premise of the American autobiography as a genre. Their works make this critique through violent imagery, essentialist rhetoric, and inner monologues to show that the American Dream can only be achieved through exploitation, violence, neglect, and amorality. Ultimately, I argue that these works show that to achieve the American Dream promised by the genre of American autobiography, one must betray oneself utterly, thus leaving an America filled with no true Americans, since any person living this nightmarish dream has had to become an untrustworthy, violent psycho to do so.

To understand my argument about what the genre of American autobiography is doing with the construction of the American Dream and how Johnson and Ellis critique it, I first need to define what those are. The defining text for American autobiography as a genre is Benjamin Franklin's *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, due to its interweaving of personal, political, and ideological mythmaking into the fabric of his work that begins to shape what not only an American should hope to achieve, but what they should write about in their narratives of themselves. Like Franklin's colonial work, the genre conventions of the American autobiography are born alongside the United States. In his article "The Autobiography of American," autobiography scholar James Olney traces the foundations of the American autobiography, finding that the genre is intertwined with "... the American experiment in selfhood and nationhood..." and is fundamentally experimental, much like the country itself was (382). Olney's words are key here, since in understanding that the literary tradition and the ideology making of the American Dream that it creates is as old and fundamental to the country's founding is necessary to see not where these thoughts and ideas come from, but how they have evolved and mutated into the horrific nightmare that Johnson and Ellis highlight in their fictionalized versions of this genre.

Understanding American autobiography and its origins is important, but arguably more so are the literal characteristics of the genre. Olney describes how the genre itself has no defining formal characteristics, only subtle similarities in style, plot, and motive, and those that try to police it, such as a perceived "genre police" "... [need] to keep careful watch over autobiographers to maintain some semblance of law and order in their all-to-often lawless practice" of autobiographical form (382-390). Olney's words highlight just how "lawless" the practice of American autobiography is, and the ability to label what is or is not a piece of literature as such is a hopeless task. It also highlights that, fundamentally, American autobiography as a genre, much like being an American, is considered differently by different people. For example, Philippe Lejeune defines an autobiography as "a retrospective prose written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality" is of the utmost importance (McLennan 4). Lejeune's words highlight that to him, any autobiography, American or not, must focus on the person and their ideology and personality, not what they hope for others. However, other scholars, like Olney in his own words, say that applying such a label to any autobiography, especially American autobiography, is such a fundamentally flawed practice. Ultimately, in understanding the conversation about defining American

autobiography, it becomes clear that scholarship has difficulty defining autobiography itself, let alone American autobiography.

Scholarship already has some difficulties in defining American autobiographies and overall autobiographies, but the biggest challenge that is being faced is not so much what is being written about in these works, but also *who* is writing them. Scholars like Donald Goellnicht in his work analyzing *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* have expressed that autobiographers who are writing and detailing their stories in America are societally disadvantaged in embodying the label of an American if they are not economically successful, male, white, and heterosexual. Goellnicht in his work discusses how writers like Johnson, who had also written his own autobiography in addition to his fictionalized novel, as well as other real-life autobiographers of varying racial, gender, and socio-economic backgrounds, had to deal with the public's perception of what their works would be labeled as. He summarizes, rather blatantly, that autobiographers like these varying identities would often have to settle for being named something else, not just for profitability, but for readability. A clear example of this that he points out is how many Black American autobiographers would label their ex-slave narratives just that, narratives, rather than autobiography, primarily because it was "far more popular with white audiences" (Goellnicht 18). However, Rachael McLennan, an associate professor in American Literature and Culture at the University of East Anglia, furthers this, noting in her introduction to *American Autobiography* that while these definitions and qualifications for non-white, successful, male, and heterosexual were once (and continue to be) important, it is now more so the "presumed truth of autobiography" that allows for a large allowance of who gets to be an autobiographer, and label their works as autobiography (McLennan 11). McLennan's words in context with Goellnicht's begin to highlight the tension point in understanding what constitutes and defines an American autobiography, primarily that the overall culture (something that evolves and shifts) does the labeling. This labeling, however, is fickle due to this evolution, such as calling works that in our modern contexts would be considered American autobiographies or, at the very least, autobiographies like enslaved narratives just that, narratives when they were conceived. It is through this understanding that one cannot understand American autobiography as one of merely an identity category and plot beats, but something else.

I define this "something else" through furthering this idea by McLennan, that definitions of American autobiography should not be through plot-driven genre analysis and identity

categories, but rather through form and an understanding of the American Dream. As such, I define American autobiography in my project (as lawless as Olney claims it to be) through the formal conventions common to the genre, and then the subsequent representation of the autobiographer's depiction of the American Dream. These conventional (and form-based) expectations are: first-person narration (as Olney himself as well as McLennan seem to agree are staples of the prose for this genre), choices like maintaining chronological order and clear signposting when flashbacks and recollections occur, a journey that results in an evolution into a more American self, and the reaffirming of the power of the American Dream (Olney 390; McLennan 4). This definition, going forward, will begin to demonstrate that *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* and *American Psycho* satirize the genre of American autobiography and are texts deserving of examination with this framing of form and ideology.

Like the American autobiography, the American Dream is a contentious and complex concept, not only in scholarship but also in popular culture. The most basic definition provided by the *Oxford English Dictionary* describes it as "The ideal that every citizen of the United States should have an equal opportunity to achieve success and prosperity through hard work, determination, and initiative" ("American Dream"). This definition, published for the first time according to the OED in the *Chicago Tribune* in 1916, has been permeating American culture ever since. However, the concept, as the same article by the *Chicago Tribune* stated, existed under a different name in the age of the Founding Fathers, which would be far more familiar to autobiographers like colonial Franklin: "the American hope" ("American Dream"). The fact that the American Dream is a term descended from an American hope implies that the ideology of the American Dream *should* be a hope-filled one, based on self-determination, drive, and (most overtly), the belief that hard work will lead to financial and social success. Understanding that the American Dream is as fundamental and birthed in the same context as the American autobiography is pivotal, since as scholars like Susan Balee in her work "From the Outside In: A History of American Autobiography" notes, Benjamin Franklin "provided the template of the American dream" through his writing of American autobiography developed this American hope, an American hope constructed by his "rags to riches self-made man" story (56). The connection that scholars like Balee make that the American Dream is as fundamental to and created in the same breath as the American autobiography represents how pivotal it is to understanding what makes a

piece of work be categorized in this genre. Moreover, it highlights that Franklin's specific idea for the American Dream, an economically successful and powerful one, is the one to fully follow.

Understanding the connection between the American Dream and the American autobiography being birthed in the same time frame is important, but understanding why Franklin's words and tradition were put forward as the standard rather than others is also fundamental to this connection. Balee that not all Americans were afforded the same authority over their own stories as the ever-looming Franklin. African Americans, she writes, primarily those ex-enslaved persons like Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs, have their narratives relegated to the genre of "slave narratives" instead of autobiography, and thereby are "crush[ed]" by the white American culture surrounding it" (61). Balee's words, rather similar to the complexities of who gets to write an American autobiography as described by Goellnicht and McLennan, are troubled by the fact that the *Oxford* definition implies that "every citizen of the United States" would be allowed to participate in the American Dream. However, as Balee implies in her discussion of how slave narratives were excluded from the genre form of American autobiography, she illustrates that in the history of both the creation of the genre as well as the ideological concepts guiding the American autobiography, enslaved persons were not perceived as full citizens of the United States under doctrines like *Dred Scott v Sandford*, and thereby could not fulfill the American Dream.⁶⁸ This, in conjunction with the dominance of the successful white Americans in the genre of American autobiography, would seemingly leave no room for the American Dream for those not white and successful.

Yet Balee goes on to note that Black American autobiographers carried the other most important part of the *OED* definition that is more closely related to the more historically grounded idea of the "American Hope,": self-creation and resilience. Balee describes how autobiographers like Douglass and Jacobs, living in the era of Dred Scott and the looming expectations of Franklin's American Dream, continued to describe their stories by focusing on "The theme of self-created despite the attempts of the majority white culture to crush it" is how "virtually every autobiography by an African American" distinguishes and identifies itself (Balee 61). Balee's repeated use of the word crushing and then the subsequent resilience against it highlights two things: that Black autobiographers embodied the traits of the American Dream that enabled them to tell their stories,

⁶⁸ Dred Scott v. Sandford was an infamous court case in which the United States Supreme Court ruled that enslaved persons who were descendants of enslaved persons were not and could not be citizens of the United States.

primarily hard work, determination, and initiative, to be heard despite the circumstances, and that the attempted suppression is not only prevalent but violent.

With this understanding that even though the American Dream has changed in terms of who gets to experience it and what it is called, I argue that the American Dream is a concept that is constantly in flux and shaped by not just those who embody it (whether a society believes they do or not), but by those who are determined not to. It is through the violent crushing or enforcement of the dream by those who gain the most power from it—white, rich men—and the subsequent resilience to said crushing (primarily minority and marginalized voices) that the American Dream becomes not just a concept of self-determination and hard work, but is rather a violent, bodily, and physically crushing competition. This competition, however, it is veiled as a positive dream and story of success that anyone can achieve, as seen in works similar to Franklin's, to hide the now warped, unrecognizable, unwinnable, and nightmarish "American Hope."

I will now provide an overview of the two works to examine how they critique both the American Dream and the genre of American autobiography. It is through this critique, ultimately, that Johnson and Ellis reveal both of these seemingly concrete, foundational American notions to be lawless, unwieldy fictions. James Weldon Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912) is a novel that takes the form of an American autobiography from the very title of its work. The fictional Narrator of Johnson's work, an unnamed, fair-skinned Black man, narrates his life according to the genre conventions previously laid out in this project. The novel uses first-person narration to describe the Narrator's life, depicting his journey and his travels around the world, and his decision to pass as white after witnessing a brutal lynching in the South, and culminates in his achievement of the American Dream through his marital, financial, and racial success. It also uses other formal techniques similar to the genre of American autobiography, such as the work consistently being written in chronological order or with clear signposting for flashbacks or recollections, and direct questioning to the reader. However, as the Narrator discusses all of these things, despite his success in being rich, marrying a white wife, and having successful children, he is ultimately left a broken man. This formal choice to undermine the success of the Narrator's American Dream while still having him achieve it is one of the strongest merits in seeing *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* as an American autobiography. As Johnson's work shows, while he is still fundamentally critiquing the American Dream through his fictionalized American autobiography, rather poignantly through the use of these formal means, the fact that he still

maintains the status quo for his Narrator and shows the inescapability of it shows that the prevalence and pushing of it (for better or worse) is key to the genre.

If the prevalence and pushing of the American Dream (again, for better or worse) following these previously mentioned formal conventions is key for a piece of American literature to be read as an American autobiography, I begin to wonder what other works not only further Johnson's critique, but show it to its more realistic, nightmarish form. That led me to one specific, violent, and strange novel: Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* (1991). The novel was published nearly 80 years after Johnson's work, and it too has a first-person narrator that, similar to Johnson's fictional narrator as well as other concrete American autobiographers like Franklin, is written consistently in (seemingly) chronological order, and has (partial) signposting when deviated, all coming in the form of Patrick Bateman, a 1980s, Wall Street yuppie. He is similar to the Narrator in living his Wall Street yuppie life: he is rich, has a beautiful fiancée, attracts many women, and is seen as a powerful figure amongst his peers. He, too, goes on a journey that ultimately leaves him changed, but unlike Johnson's Narrator, he is explicitly self-destructive. Throughout the novel, Bateman unravels from a well put-together and "sane" person, to the titular American psycho, having gone mad from the violence necessary to attain the prosperity of the American Dream that the Narrator only had to obtain through passivity. Analyzing these two novels together highlights how fictionalizing the American autobiography serves as a way to critique not just the formal conventions of the work, but also the American Dream. It also illustrates that as time has progressed since the writing of these two novels and even since Franklin's inception of it in his own seminal work, the violent performance to maintain this nightmare has progressed as well. Thus, we are left with the contrast between the passive and scared Narrator, and now the active-and-bloody Bateman.

Scholars of Johnson's work take one of many approaches to analyze what he is doing through it, be it Critical Race Theory (CRT), New Historicism, or Post-Structuralism. Scholars such as the aforementioned Donald Goellnicht represent this intersection of CRT and New Historicism in his work, "Passing as Autobiography: James Weldon Johnson's the Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man." He traces how the racialization of works like Johnson's, primarily how publishers and readers take the race of the author (or, for a time, lack thereof) into account, and how its dual "passing" narrative form reflects Johnson's critique of passing fundamentally. Goellnicht specifically highlights how *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* must be read

with the context of American slave narratives in mind, a racial categorization for the sake of separation from the mother genre of American autobiography, and how Johnson must have known this when writing and labeling his work an autobiography. Goellnicht then notes that when publishing the novel, Johnson and his publishers had to be aware that “black autobiography” labeled as a slave narrative, *not* autobiography, “has been immensely successful” (Goellnicht 19). As such, Johnson had to “be willing to risk the publication of this text, provided it was as autobiography” as he believed it truly was (Goellnicht 19). This is absolutely key, since Goellnicht goes on to further note that due to Johnson’s work having the Black subject shifting towards whiteness, it was accepted into the folds of autobiography on this technicality (Goellnicht 19). This represents that through Goellnicht’s New Historicist and CRT reading and his argument that Johnson understood the racialized nature of the genre of American autobiography and the inherent favoritism towards whiteness within that genre and the ideology of the American Dream it attempts to push, it highlights how flexible the perimeters of American autobiography can be. As he notes, as long as the narrator of a work is fundamentally white in some way, be it white inherently or turning himself white, and thus fulfilling the American Dream through that achievement (or already owning) of whiteness.

It is important to note that other scholars, like Julie Anne Naviaux and Jeff Karem, apply similar frameworks to their analysis of Johnson’s work to further my illustration of how “lawless” (again, quoting Olney) the perimeters of American autobiography truly are. In their respective works, they illustrate the importance of understanding Johnson’s work from an intersecting racial and historical perspective. They make comments first discussing how Johnson, both himself as an anonymous writer and in his narrative form, passes as a white autobiographer and a work of American autobiography. Karem especially highlights that through observing his work through a post-structuralist lens, Johnson’s passing is a means of highlighting the untrustworthy nature of an author’s intentions for its audience, and that any genre (even the long-trusted form of a perceived *white* American autobiography) is subject to deception and fiction (Naviaux 389; Karem 67). This represents that historically, when discussing Johnson’s work, critics focus on a CRT perspective that emphasizes the importance of race in not just understanding Johnson’s narrative, but also the literal publishing and perception of the work, and do so through pairing it with New Historicism. This pairing is important because it represents that Johnson’s work is a work that must be understood within its historical timeframe, and reading it in any other context would be a disservice

to Johnson's original intention of having his work pass as a *white American* autobiography. My personal use of CRT in my readings will further this by considering that this racialization of both authorship and genre that other scholars specify is integral in also understanding that the American Dream is fundamentally racial as well, and that the only way for all of these factors to remain in check, as Johnson and Ellis too will highlight, is through the continual and perpetual state of violence.

Literary scholars discuss Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* in a vastly different way from Johnson's work, primarily focusing on how Ellis deals with this more modern (and bloody) American landscape and how it invites more critics to analyze the novel using post-modern, feminist, and psychoanalytical theory. Literary scholars like Martin Weinreich and Arne De Boever comment on the fact that this is aided by the novel's more culturally relevant sibling, its film adaptation, which is the one more often analyzed for literary criticism (Weinreich 75; De Boever). They also highlight that Ellis's novel is a representation of both the deterioration of the American psyche due to consumerism, as well as the psychopathy developed by living in American society. I will further this by correlating this psychopathy to the struggles in achieving the American Dream. This psychopathy, they both argue, is specifically developed through the obsession with material wealth, which is only created and perpetuated by achieving the American Dream (Weinreich 75; De Boever 73). This illustrates that for the most part, scholars are not discussing *American Psycho* as an American autobiography, but rather, analyzing how the character of Patrick Bateman and his confessional style of narration, similar to that of Johnson's Narrator or even the looming Franklin, highlight the failings of late-stage American capitalism. They also note that this failing is directly resulting from one of the primary necessities in achieving the American Dream: financial success. Scholars like Weinreich and De Boever grapple more with the individual violence and psychopathy of Bateman as a character, rather than the world in which he inhabits, something that is integral to American autobiographies. This is important to my reading of *American Psycho* as American autobiography because it illustrates that while Ellis's work may not seem comparable to American autobiography, the formal elements it embodies, such as having first person narration, chronological narration with sign-posting when it is not, and the ideological pushing of the American Dream to its most extremes, demonstrates that in spite of some abnormalities in very select chapters, this work should be read with the American autobiography in mind. If Ellis's work is not read in the way I am to do so, it undermines not only

the importance of Ellis's work being a critique of the American Dream, but also the stakes of which are at play in modern contexts. If Ellis's work is the natural evolution of Johnson's, the ramifications of the genre of American autobiography and its American Dream has gotten a whole lot bloodier for all.

Arguably, the most important literary lens through which *American Psycho* has been read, and which will be important to my subsequent readings, is a feminist literary framework. Berthold Schoene, in his own analysis of *American Psycho*, argues that the hegemonic and American masculine form is both a gendered social and psychological construct. Schoene furthers current feminist understanding of gender as a performance to specify that specifically *American* hegemonic masculinity has a uniquely violent and hidden nature to it, equating how men "mask" and "perform" masculinity is similar to how a high-functioning autistic person would too "mask" and "perform" for a non-disabled audience. Schoene ultimately adds to this that the way the specific American performance is maintained in *American Psycho* is through American-on-American violence. Schoene makes this claim by basing it on fellow theorists like Weinreich, illustrating that the character of Bateman and his overall use of violence against female subjects is an attempt to reaffirm his masculinity and mask any subversion of it (Schoene 389). His claim is similar to Weinreich's, since it shows that due to the psychopathy of the hegemonic nature of American masculinity, primarily caused by fulfilling the American Dream, it is ultimately carried out now not just in harming the self, but through violence against others to uphold that same value. The (relatively limited) scholarly conversation of Ellis's novel, not the film adaptation, emphasizes how most critics do not analyze the American autobiographical elements of the work. Rather, most scholars use the novel as a case study to examine hypermasculinity within the novel, or the psychopathy of Bateman in contrast to feminine violence through feminist and psychoanalytic theory, in an attempt to understand the nature of what causes a Patrick Bateman to possibly exist in both the real world and in literary canon. In pushing this thinking further through understanding *American Psycho* as a satire of the genre of American autobiography, I provide a basis as to not only the questions other theorists are asking, primarily why a Bateman would exist in the first place, but also direct them to the notion that the genre itself highlights the need to fulfill the American Dream. More specifically, looking at Ellis's work on these merits of American autobiography shows that the American Dream as it has since evolved since the time of Johnson and Franklin is one that needs violence now to be facilitated. Bateman, through telling his tale of

being an American, is constructing an autobiography as legitimate as any other due to it fundamentally following through on the tradition of the American autobiography by depicting the American Dream, despite how bloody it may be. This is shown by the fact that the parameters to qualify as such is relative to *who* is reading one's writing, as apparent with Black American autobiographies going against white audiences.

In my readings of literary criticism of these two novels, three prevalent factors have resulted in my reading of these two works together with the framework of American autobiography in mind. First, to my knowledge, no scholars have read these works together. Second, while some scholars use one or two of these theoretical lenses (CRT, Feminist theory, New Historicism, Psychoanalytic theory, etc.), there is no criticism that positions these texts within the context of American autobiography. This is important, since as I have attempted to explain, the qualifications amongst scholarship on what makes an American autobiography an American autobiography is an effort to gain success that is nearly impossible, but one that, if uncovered, not only highlights a genre importance, but also the ramifications on a literary tradition that continues to evolve and shape the United States and its ideology. The third, and arguably most important factor in my decision to read these novels together is that scholars are quick to note Johnson's work as a fictional work of autobiography, even perhaps as far as an American one, but are hesitant to apply the same label to Ellis's *American Psycho*. I believe, in many ways, that is due to the unfathomable thought that Ellis's work (a novel written in the latter half of the 20th century and published in the 90s by a queer white man) would be the direct evolution of Johnson's (a novel written by a Black man in the early 20th century who advocated and was a part of organizations like the NAACP). If one reads the evolution of American autobiography in the ways I suggest, it shows that the genre (though fictional in this comparison) has evolved, and that the true ideology making has evolved as well, highlighting that the American Dream has become grotesque and violent, and something from which we cannot look away. In making these claims, I further the conversation in current scholarship by using CRT and Queer Theory (a branch of feminist theory) in tandem with a formalist reading these works as American autobiographies. Additionally, I use the framework of essentialism with hegemonic performance to illustrate how analyzing Johnson and Ellis's critique of the American Dream as fictional American autobiography, said 'dream' is actually a violent, evolving, bloody performance. Americans, whether they want to or not, participate in this performance by either initially overlooking the violence to their countrymen, like Johnson's

Narrator, or being forced to perform it, like Ellis's Bateman. Moreover, the genre of American autobiography (and both the readers that consume it and scholars who are hesitant to analyze works of fiction as autobiography) perpetuates and continues to veil the false idea of the American Dream into the American consciousness. It is only through examining and critiquing the genre through this fictional form that we see Johnson and Ellis's critique of the American Dream that allows the falsehoods in our American consciousness to be highlighted and acknowledged.

To elaborate on CRT as one of my fundamental theoretical lenses, scholars like Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, in their work *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, illustrate the "voice of color thesis," which is inherently different from essentialism. This term, "voice of color thesis," focuses on the idea of people of color reassessing traumatic histories and concepts by speaking into existence their own experience, stating that some believe that "the cure for bad speech is more speech" (Delgado and Stefancic 27). This idea would make sense as one framework to use when analyzing *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, primarily due to Johnson being an author who is attempting to speak back to white expectations of Black authors. Critics of Johnson's work note this motive for writing *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*. Goellnicht, Naviaux, and Karem all stress how Johnson's own language and writing of the novel as a Black man "exposed the hypocrisy of Northern [white] bourgeois values," reaffirming his belief of "the ability to destroy racial prejudice" through recontextualizing the American subject as not just an American, but an "image that is [and can be] a black one" (Goellnicht 29; Naviaux 395; Karem 77). This demonstrates that when CRT perspectives are involved in the analysis of *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, the primary focus is on the verbalization of a voice gaining credibility through passing, and how that passing can only be done through Johnson participating in the passing of a different literary form, an American autobiography.

While this "voice of color framework" is important in critiques of Johnson's work, I argue that considering another framework, essentialism, adds another dimension of understanding as to how he is critiquing the American Dream in his fictional autobiography. Essentialism, also defined by Delgado and Stefancic, is the idea of understanding the Black body from a strictly physical, bodily standpoint, though they are quick to note like the other CRT scholars of Johnson that it is important to also examine the same body from a non-essentialist perspective, such as focusing on the mind (Delgado and Stefancic 22). The framework of essentialism provides a basis of understanding the American Dream that Johnson, and Ellis too, critique is not only a mental and

psychological performance, but also a fundamentally physical and violent one. These two authors do this through the satirized violent, bodily, and personal imagery in their fictional American autobiographies to fundamentally show that while the American Dream may just be an ideology, an idea, in actuality it is as bodily as murdering someone or any other forms of physical brutality, like lynching and slavery. In understanding this, it allows me to pursue a path that other CRT scholars of these two texts, but especially Johnson's, have not pursued, primarily that of analyzing the physical brutality depicted in a novel like *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* as just as vital to breaking down how Johnson writes back to these "Northern [white] bourgeois" audiences through his words. Those words, through inhabiting the power of the American Dream adopted by the genre of the American autobiography, here inherently bodily and physical.

Yet, I do not only use CRT to emphasize how Johnson and Ellis critique the American Dream through the voyeuristic watching of violence and inhabiting the same language used to justify said violence. They are also doing so through the literal performance of bodily violence to reinforce hegemonic expectations of being an American. In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Judith Butler defines performativity concerning gender, but also identity, as something that is "constituting the identity it is purported to be" and "identity is a performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (Butler 25). Citing Butler here and her foundational text for Queer Theory as a means of understanding the performance of identities highlights that performativity is made up of expressions, expressions that can be related to a multitude of things, but are summarized and collectivized to make a "purported hegemonic identity" that can apply to many things, such as gender or, for my purposes, being an American. Additionally, applying Butler's notions also demonstrates how in order to fulfill the genre of American autobiography's identity expressions of the American Dream, one must do it through their physical body. Through examining Johnson and Ellis's independent illustrations of the physical body being violated and damaged, with the narrators either acting as witness or perpetrator, I illustrate this performance in action. Moreover, I show that the American Dream as expressed in the genre of American autobiography occurs as something real and indeed physical—it depends on a physical body to work and work hard to be successful, and is actually only real through being physically violent, with the rest relegated to fiction.

This realization of performativity via language from Butler is key to my argument about the American Dream. Ultimately, being an American is a fundamentally bodily and bloody

performance. Johnson and Ellis, through their specific critiques in the same medium, are warranted in being read together with this lens in mind. This is primarily because both narrators must perform under the hegemonic American masculinity performance that Butler begins to define in her examination of all things being a performance. Their evolving expectations of approval (both as men but also as American autobiographers) hinge upon the evolving necessities of what it means to perform for the American Dream on an essentialist level. Thus, with this understanding that both novels demonstrate these aspects of performativity and critiques of essentialism necessary for American Dream creation and success, and despite the hesitancy of literary critics to label these works as autobiographies or apply these lenses to them, they are warranted in being studied together under these terms.

I now turn to how Johnson and Ellis, in their respective works, follow through on their critique of the American Dream by illustrating the violent, physical, and barely attainable performance expected by American autobiography and their specific and prevalent form of the American Dream. Johnson's Narrator begins his observation of violence on Americans first, not on the Black male body, but on the white female body. This body is rarely thought of when discussing the American autobiographical genre, since, as already discussed, the American Dream is inherently coded male with the idea of hard work, prosperity through hard work, and a love life (particularly through the domination of a wife) that is stable amounting to children. All of these things, one would assume, would not be equated to femininity, but that is where Johnson already begins to subvert what *could* be a successful American, particularly highlighting how a successful white widow is exactly that: successful but also female. The Narrator notes how the widow has a "very aristocratic-sounding name" and would flaunt her success by having a Black companion, something that the Narrator notes as causing him unease, stating "somehow I never exactly enjoyed the sight" (Johnson 74). In this situation, the "very aristocratic" widow is not only the dominant power in the relationship, but she is also the one with the financial success and backing. She herself is a subversion of the expectations of performance that the American autobiography's American Dream would demand: she is white, but she engages in a sexual relationship with a Black man, seemingly (for the time) undermining her white privilege to outsiders. She is female, but financially successful and has the power in her relationships with her Black companion and others through her capital and whiteness. This, in comparison to her noted "black companion," the Narrator's subsequent uneasiness, represents two things: the American autobiographer, the

Narrator, is critiquing the white successful female subject like the genre itself would, and that due to the success of the widow, she troubles the performance expected of the American autobiography and its parameters for the American Dream. While the Narrator's unease and never exactly "enjoy[ing] the sight" comment against the widow is certainly in reference to her relationship with her Black companion as a white woman, it also comes from a point at which the Narrator is seeing an example that troubles his developing perceptions of what it means to be an American. As to this point in the novel, the Narrator has begun to learn the overwhelming importance of self-making, such as working in a cigar factory. Here, however, the performance is now less on a man caring for himself or those around him, a criterion important to the American Dream and maintaining the hegemonic expectations that result from American masculinity associated with the ideal, but a woman caring for herself and a Black American *man*. All of this culminates in the Narrator's sense of unease, and the necessity of violence to follow.

The necessity of violence against the widow's continual disruption of the expectations of the genre of American autobiography's performance of the American Dream is pivotal in the Narrator's understanding and shaping of his idea, because it is the first instance of violence that will begin to shape the Narrator's future performance. As time passes, there is an implication that the currently non-passing Narrator may have been seeing the widow himself, which leads to a scene in which "... her companion... [a] black fellow... whipped out a revolver and fired; the first shot went straight through her throat" (Johnson 84). The quick violence caused by the revolver going straight through the widow's throat, the essentialist reduction of the widow down to just that, a throat, and the violence being caused by a Black *man* is significant since it highlights that not only did a masculine figure, but also the apparent perversion of the American Dream, illustrates the quick and bodily violence carried out against those that stray off the path of the genre of American autobiography's ideology. Moreover, the fact that there is emphasis on the swiftness of it, that the violence was "whipped out" and "straight through," demonstrates that when others significantly stray out of line, it will be met with swift violence. Johnson's subsequent descriptions after the fact also highlight the swiftness of this violence and bodily nature of it, such as the Narrator describing that he "... felt like one fleeing in a horrible nightmare" and "I could see that beautiful white throat with the ugly wound. The jet of blood pulsing from it had placed an indelible red stain on my memory" (Johnson 84-85). This quote, again using both bodily, essentialist language such as "throat" and "pulsing" and "blood" in tandem with words of quickness and horror

like “fleeing,” “jet,” “stain,” and “nightmare,” illustrates the swiftness and fundamentally physical violence that will occur when one steps out of the hegemonic performance and demands of both gender, racial, and social hierarchy necessary for the American autobiography’s American Dream. Moreover, it illustrates a necessary moment of learning for the Narrator, that to not be met with these same sorts of words violently and swiftly and to see his own “throat” “pulse” with “blood” that others have to “flee” from, he must begin on his American autobiographical journey of self-discovery to become ex-colored to hopefully have more success than his white, successful, but unfortunately female widow counterpart.

While the Narrator’s initial introduction to American Dream making violence is through the white and troubling widow, it is a much more personal (and far more likely to happen to him) subject that sets into his entire journey to become ex-colored. The Narrator describes the violent lynching of a Black man, depicting how the body was reduced to a “... scorched post, smoldering fire, blackened bones... [then] shame swept over me. Shame that I belong to a race that could be so dealt with” (Johnson 128). The reduction of the Black body down to not just a physical body, but to inhuman and corrupted objects such as “posts” and “blackened bones,” along with the subsequent shame felt by the Narrator, illustrates that physical violence is not only key in constructing his shame, but opens his eyes to the full extent of violence other humans can cause against others. This idea that it is key to construct his shame is demonstrated through the use of the word “delt” by the Narrator, similar to how one would deal with an animal. In using this word in reference to a lynched man that was brutalized because he did not succeed in fulfilling the expectations set forth by American autobiographies, first and foremost being white, it highlights that the Narrator is already passing and conforming to the expectations of the genre. More specifically, it illustrates that the Narrator is already beginning to ascribe physical detractions to their American “other’s” body, such as it being “delt” with like an animal. In witnessing this dehumanizing, physical violence in the Black body, the Narrator realizes that African Americans will never be able to fulfill the American Dream, but will only be brutalized by it. This understanding leads the Narrator to fundamentally alter his performance of Americanness to fulfill these identity expectations Butler hints at for all identities, through ignoring, and thereby tacitly endorsing, the brutalization of Black bodies. This brutalization then allows the Narrator to succeed. This success is now him performing as a now “approved” American autobiographical subject,

setting him fully on the path of becoming an actor in the genre's violent, bloody, and performative American Dream.

After the lynching, the Narrator realizes that to survive the horrors of being an American in America, he must begin to participate thoroughly in the performance of expectations and expressions demanded by the American Dream: to become physically white, wealthy, and neglectful of the horrors being inflicted upon others for his own self-preservation. The Narrator states that, "I would availed myself of every possible opportunity to make a white man's success; and that, if it can be summed in any one word, means 'money'" and then explains his various acts of physical labor, such as being a clerk and a school teacher (Johnson 132). The fact that the Narrator uses the words "white man" followed by "success" is a deliberate allusion, first and foremost, to the hegemonic American performance that he is attempting to embark on. By the Narrator quite literally casting himself as a "white man," and a successful one at that, he is already developing an idea of specifications he will need to perform to achieve this new role. To fulfill this new role he's assigned himself, he then turns to the genre conventions of American autobiography, since to be a successful American fulfilling the American Dream, one needs success, and to be successful, one must be white. He soon does this by correlating his ascribing of "success" to "money" and "whiteness" and his subsequent use of his physical body for said success, which illustrates that the Narrator is tying his new white American performance directly to his physical body. Further, the Narrator recognizes that to use his body to produce the money he makes means he can pass not only just as white through performative whiteness (or said another way, merely looking the part), but can pass as a "successful" white American, fulfilling the American autobiography's definition of the American Dream by neglecting those that cannot achieve like he can.

This successful performance of whiteness and wealth comes at a cost. While this neglect of brutalization of others for his self-preservation has succeeded, and he has made his own "white man's success," the Narrator's final lines describe that in becoming ex-colored and learning this essentialist truth, he has "... the only tangible remnants of a vanished dream... I cannot repress the thought that, after all, I have chosen the lesser part, that I have sold my birthright to for a mess of pottage" (Johnson 144). One sees the hollowness of the Narrator's victory in achieving the American Dream through the fact that he feels as if he sold his "birthright," or put another way, his very being outside of being an American, for a "mess of pottage," the false American Dream.

Additionally, Johnson's use of the word "dream" coupled with "vanished" is key here, since it highlights that while the Narrator has achieved *a* dream, the American Dream, that was not the true and hopeful dream that Franklin and others alluded to. Rather, the actual "vanished" dream was his own true original self, untainted by the American autobiography's American Dream, his original birthright, that he sold for the nightmarish "mess" of "pottage" that is this bloody American Dream. Ultimately, it is due to the immense brutalization and subsequent need for the Narrator and others to save oneself from being victims of it, such as the lynched Black man or subversive white successful but still failing widow, he and others must continue to participate and perform in this inauthentic, bodily and nightmarish way as an American subject, not a Black and authentic one.

Nearly 80 years later, Ellis's narrator Patrick Bateman continues to show the necessity of violence in achieving the American Dream. Bateman uses his physical body, and the bodies of others, not only to affirm his achievement of the American Dream, but also the failures of others. Throughout the novel, Bateman describes at length the violent mutilation of other Americans he enacts, primarily attacking persons who are either a racial minority, poor, female, or all of the above. To Bateman and the genre of American autobiography, none of them fully fulfill the expectations of the American Dream: they are not rich, they are marginalized, and they can be sexually or physically dominated. This unfulfillment is similar to Johnson's widow dilemma: she is white and successful, but is female and able to be dominated. The widow's domination of not just the Narrator in some parts of the novel, but in particular her Black companion, was quickly remedied by said companion. Bateman, as I will soon prove, shares a similar sort of swiftness when it comes to squashing those who step out of the performance expectations of the American Dream through violent brutality and reducing them to essentialist forms. This issue of domination or not fully succeeding in the expectations and expressions of being an American fulfilling the American autobiography's American Dream is illustrated first in the novel when Bateman murders a homeless Black man named Al. Bateman, before enacting his physical violence on his body, does so only after extensive questioning much like the genre of American autobiography questions the subjects reading and writing it, such as "... why don't you get a job?" to those unsuccessful, and "Do you know how bad you smell?" culminating in Bateman stating, "Al... I'm sorry. It's just that... I don't know. I don't have anything in common with you" (Ellis 129-131). The word "common" in Bateman's phrasing is key, since while he does not have anything socially or

economically in common with Al, seeing as Al has failed the American Dream by being homeless, he and Bateman do share an identity of being Americans. Moreover, Bateman's repeated asking of "why don't you get a job?" and "Do you know how bad you smell?" also ties to the fact that Al is also a failure from another aspect by not being economically or socially successful because he quite literally does not have the means to support himself enough to take a shower. The "I'm sorry", as genuine or not as it may be, also highlights arguably the cruelest aspect of Bateman's performance up to this point: he is attempting to *appear* empathetic to a category of person that, to him and the genre of American autobiography, is seen as a lost cause for the American Dream. This is reinforced since, despite this "I'm sorry," Bateman then violently attacks this failure of the American autobiography's American Dream, similar to how Johnson ignores the failure that is the lynched Black man, through active and bodily participation via blinding and gutting him. These two actions illustrate that Bateman, a man who has succeeded on all counts of the American Dream by being rich, successful, and both physically and influentially powerful, violently attacks those who do not fulfill the criteria of expressions set forth to be a part of the identity of an American autobiography American. Those criteria again being socially and, more importantly, economically successful. Further, through enacting this violence, Bateman is punishing those who do not conform or participate in the physical expressions of performance required to fulfill this type of American, like he ultimately does, thus demonstrating that those who do not achieve this nearly unachievable form will be brutalized by those who do.

It is not only supposedly "failed" American subjects like the homeless Black Al that Bateman brutalizes, but fellow successful "Bateman performing" and "American autobiography performing" Americans. As Bateman goes on his own journey of psychopathy, discussing the increasing levels of his mutualization of bodies such as torturing sex workers with close hangers or killing a boy at the zoo in a chapter literally as such, and attempting to understand why he does so and affirm the success of his own American Dream, he encounters fellow rich, socially affluent, and fiancée-having work rival Paul Owen. While throughout many chapters he describes his disdain for Owen, primarily asking his colleagues constantly if he is still managing the coveted "Fisher Account," the peak of his disgust in him as a fellow American and rival is when Bateman brutally murders him (Ellis 146). In this instance, in Bateman's narrative, he has described the violent mutilation of "inferior" American bodies, be it Queer, Asian, Black, female, poor, etc. While those instances of brutalization in the pre-Owen death half of the novel are often quick and

brief, Bateman takes special concern, as an autobiography may in recounting a fundamental shift in their life, discussing his murder of Owen:

The ax hits him midsentence, straight in the face, its thick blade chopping sideways into his open mouth, shutting him up. Paul's eyes look up at me, then involuntarily roll back into his head, then back at me, and suddenly his hands are trying to grab at the handle, but the shock of the blow has sapped his strength. There's no blood at first, no sound either except for the newspaper under Paul's kicking feet, rustling, tearing. Blood starts to slowly pour out of the sides of his mouth shortly after the first chop, and when I pull the ax out—almost yanking Owen out of the chair by his head—and strike him again in the face, splitting it open. [...] I scream at him only once: "Fucking stupid bastard. Fucking bastard..." (Ellis 218).

To start, the length of the violence and the extent to which Bateman is willing to allow readers to see the violence is key to how important it is to reaffirm his (and the genre of American autobiography) necessity for violence. Additionally, his mentions of the blade physically "shutting him up" and the way he now does not call Owen by his last name, but the more boyish and submissive "Paul," demonstrates that Bateman sees himself as the rightful successor and occupier of the approved performing American subject, and has the autobiographical authority to both physically, through violence, and formally, by not letting him speak, shut Owen up. Additionally, the fact that despite the violence and the quick "striking" and "splitting" and "involuntary" volatile nature of the attack on Owen that would be an ample time to call Owen many names, Bateman opts to call him a "stupid bastard." This emphasis on "stupid" and "bastard" is important since it highlights that Bateman not only thinks Owen is stupid for not fighting or seeing his attack coming, but that he should have *known* as such because, to Bateman and those aware of the American Dream, blood and violence is necessary, and if you cannot fulfill the expectations of it, one would be a "bastard" child, never to enjoy the fruits of the ideology, and the actual "legitimate" and American thing to do would have been him attacking Bateman first. Moreover, this long depiction of brutality on a fellow successful American and reduced down to essentialist bodily attributes such as his "eyes," "mouth," "feet" and "head" represents that to covet the success and positions that Owen and others like him inhabit, Bateman believes he must now not only neglect the harm being inflicted on his fellow countrymen like the Narrator in the early 20th century, but now actively participate in it and the creation of this reduction. It is because of the prevalent nature

of the genre of the American autobiography and its American Dream that equips Bateman with the passion and drive to carry out his bodily violence against other Americans, since he is doing it to succeed in his performance better and more successfully by limiting the number of “actors” in said performance.

American Psycho also reaffirms the toll that performing the American autobiography’s American Dream has on a person, especially when violence and brutalization are no longer passive for self-preservation, but active and necessary in the performance of it. Bateman attempts to illustrate what being “Patrick Bateman,” or, put more plainly, a true idealized American, means to him. He states towards the end of the novel that “... there is an idea of a Patrick Bateman, some kind of abstraction, but there is no real me, only an entity... All I have in common with the uncontrollable and the insane... all the mayhem I have caused and my utter indifference toward it... [I] hold onto one single bleak truth: no one is safe...” (Ellis 377). The fact that Bateman is labeling himself the realized and idealized American subject fulfilling the American Dream highlights that the Dream is just that: an idealized idea. Moreover, his statement that his acts of physical “mayhem” are all attempts at connecting to this truly “American Bateman,” but has only resulted in an illusory and violent “entity” that is connected to the “uncontrollable and the insane,” illustrates that fundamentally an American who fulfills the check marks of the American Dream is just that: uncontrollable and insane. In understanding what Bateman is saying here, it demonstrates that despite everything Bateman had done thus far in his own American autobiography, many portions that coincide with the expectations and expressions required to acquire the identity of an American fulfilling the American Dream found within American autobiography, such as economic advancements in his business ventures, romantic partners, and social climbing at local bars and clubs, are all at the cost of the brutalization of not just others like the homeless Al or the various women he slaughters, but also his mind. Truly, as Bateman explains, “no one is safe,” to both the bodily violent performing of being an American, and that no one is safe in succumbing to the ultimately “bleak” (in every sense of the word) “truth” of what it actually means to be an American in a successfully labeled American autobiography: a “Patrick Bateman.”

Bateman, similar to Johnson’s Narrator, begins to feel the negative ramifications of trying to fulfill this expectation in the American autobiography. Bateman reflects on the impact of his brutal, psychotic, but ultimately inescapable performance (much like how the Narrator in *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* does in realizing he must continue to be a white man to be

safe) of the American autobiography's American Dream has not only on him and his narrative, but also on his other colleagues. When asked what being Patrick Bateman, and ultimately an American means to him, Bateman, after going on a nearly four-hundred page long journey to answer this question through the brutalization of others, merely says, "I'm twenty-seven for Christ's sakes and this is, uh how life presents itself in a bar or in a club in New York, maybe *anywhere*, at the end of the century and how people, you know, *me*, behave, and this is what being Patrick means to me, I guess, so, well, yep" (Ellis 399). Bateman's discussion of himself demonstrates that, despite all the violence he has committed and witnessed, his being at a club or a bar is just as important to him and his performance as the brutalization he's committed. Moreover, the fact that he equates "how people" and then the subsequent emphasized "me" also highlights that he believes the autobiographical narrative he's discussed is just as relevant (despite its psychopathy) to any other American, or the "Patrick Batemans" surrounding all of America. It is important to understand this context since it illustrates that to Bateman, a "successful" American subject and now successful American autobiographer who is wrapping up his narrative, he has succeeded in fulfilling the American Dream, and it is now the job of readers of his autobiography to use his work as a template to achieve it for themselves. Bateman goes on to add that with this revelation, his depiction of brutality and mutilation is something no one is safe from, and that he truly believes his narrative is universally what it means to be an American, and an American autobiographical template that can be followed. The final line of the novel seals an additional truth. As Bateman is thinking of all these things, he looks up at a door in the same place he frequents, and it reads in "red velvet" the words for himself as well as the readers of his autobiography to be left with "THIS IS NOT AN EXIT" (Ellis 399). The fact that these letters are written in red velvet, harkening back to the constant mentions of blood in all his murders to solidify his performance of being an American autobiographical American, but especially the graphic murder of fellow competing American Paul Owen, as well as the final words of the novel after Bateman has realized he can continue this brutalization unchecked and be rewarded handsomely by it, signifies the bodily and violent nature required of the American autobiography's American Dream. More specifically, the fact there is "NO EXIT" to the nightmarish, physically and ultimately essentialist (and primarily bodily) performance that Bateman produces for himself and others, as well as the nightmare that Johnson's narrator repeatedly attempts to flee from and realizes he is unable to, show that to successfully

perform as an American means accepting there is no exit to this nightmare: the nightmare of the American Dream.

In conclusion, while *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* and *American Psycho* were written nearly 80 years apart, both authors, through the satirization and fictional mode of the genre of American autobiography via violent, essentialist imagery and performance, develop a profound critique of the concept of the American Dream. Moreover, it is through reading both works and the formal elements they embody that allow them to be read as if they were legitimate American autobiographies, particularly first-person narration, chronological ordering, sign-posting when reflection is had, a journey that results in an evolution into a more American self, and the reaffirming of the power of the American Dream. Additionally, as scholars of both works demonstrate, there is much more work to be done to read these works from new perspectives, such as combining CRT and Queer Theory to understand that being an American living the American autobiography's American Dream is a fundamentally essentialist, violent performance. Understanding this not only equips readers to understand the critiques being made by fictional American autobiographies like Johnson and Ellis's, but also enables them to critique themselves and the "real" autobiographies with the understanding that the genre constructs an unachievable standard of what it means to fulfill the American Dream. This construction, ultimately, creates an America filled with no true Americans. While in 1912 one could achieve the expectations of the American performance by neglecting the brutalization of their fellow countrymen for self-preservation, Bateman shows that in the contemporary age, one must now actively participate in it. Understandably, most would not, but the genre of American autobiography and its nightmarish American Dream do not care what people want. Its primary goal is to perpetuate these specific qualifications of expressions and expectations (to be white, successful, heterosexual, male, and ultimately violent) much like who it decides is endowed with the privilege of being named an American autobiographer. The subsequent truth, that there are no true Americans, is coupled with the same fictional, false, and hollow feeling that both the Narrator and Bateman share at the end of their respective autobiographies, making one wonder if they would have been better off chasing the American Hope, without expectations of hegemonic American masculinity, instead of following the founding fathers' American autobiography with its construction of the violent, bodily, and performative American Dream. If representing the American Hope, perhaps they, and all Americans, would not be left fending for themselves in this inescapable nightmare.

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