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LIFE NARRATIVES AS TECHNOLOGIES OF SELF: EXPLORATIONS OF AGENCY IN A
SON OF THE FOREST AND THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MALCOLM X

by

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ABSTRACT

In *A Son of the Forest* (1829) and *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1965), the narrators describe their most formative experiences in relation to addiction and their respective religions. Though these narratives emerged at different periods (almost a century apart) in North American history, there are considerable similarities between them. As William Apess describes his struggle with alcoholism, he also appropriates both the language of popular literature and print culture in the Methodist movement, and in turn criticizes the white supremacist ideals ingrained in early American culture. Similarly, Malcolm X details his experience with substance abuse while criticizing white supremacist ideals, specifically, those that are ingrained in patriotic symbols, such as the Bible and the Constitution. Additionally, X's participation in the Nation of Islam illustrates his complex, and sometimes constrained, relationship with the leader of the religion, Elijah Muhammed. This thesis explores both subject-formation and the narrators' development of their self-knowledge. I interpret these concepts using Louis Althusser's theory of interpellation and Michel Foucault's theory of technologies of self; these frameworks are complementary due to their emphases on an individual's relationship to the state. I conclude that subject-formation and addiction are two sides of the same coin in these narratives. Apess and X struggle with addiction in their narratives but ultimately recover and are transformed both physically and mentally. By demonstrating the dynamics of agency between the narrated and narrating "I," this thesis describes the ways that these narrators develop their self-knowledge in light of their experiences, making life narrative a transformative literary platform.

I dedicate this thesis to my mother, Melanie Jenkins – for your unconditional love and support. You are my lighthouse.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

| | |
|-----|-------------------------------|
| ISA | Ideological State Apparatuses |
| MEC | Methodist Episcopal Church |
| NOI | Nation of Islam |
| RSA | Repressive State Apparatuses |

INTRODUCTION

The life narrative *A Son of the Forest* (1829) follows William Apess who describes his tumultuous youth as he experiences physical abuse from his grandmother while she is “intoxicated” (6), and as Apess escapes indentured servitude and joins the military. Apess also details his own struggle with alcoholism and his work as a Methodist preacher and missionary. Another life narrative *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1965) follows a similar trajectory, wherein the titular figure describes to his amanuensis Alex Haley his tumultuous childhood, his experiences with substance abuse, and his religious conversions. Though these narratives emerged at different periods (almost a century apart) in North American history, there are considerable similarities in these narratives that this thesis will explore. Apess and X both describe processes of subject-formation and concurrently subvert oppressive discourses. Additionally, they both emphasize their relationships to addiction and their respective religions.

This thesis explores the nuances of agency in life narrative by discussing the ways that the narrators describe their subject formations as well as the development of their self-knowledge. Chapters one and two are devoted to an individual analysis of *A Son of the Forest* and *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. Chapter one examines *A Son of the Forest*, defining Apess’s relationship to alcohol and the ways the narrator becomes an alcoholic. I then discuss the relevant scholarship that investigates the sociopolitical discourses informing Apess’s narration. I demonstrate how these literary analyses contribute to my discussion of subjection formation and religion, and ultimately conclude that alcoholism and oppression intersect in the narrative. I frame this conclusion using Althusser’s theory of interpellation.

Chapter two studies *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, explaining X's relationship to drugs and his descent into substance abuse. X is not direct about how he overcomes his addiction, however, I describe the moves in the narrative that signal his recovery. I also explore X's relationship to religion since the narrative follows his two conversions and his excommunication from the NOI. Like chapter one, I discuss relevant scholarship on the *Autobiography*, and address several analyses on X's complex narratological identity. Scholarship here also contributes to my discussion of subject formation, and I frame my analysis of X's narratological identities using Althusser's theory of interpellation.

Chapter three outlines the similarities between these narratives. I argue that *A Son of the Forest* and *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* are technologies of self, making life narrative a transformative medium for the narrators. I frame my synthesis using Foucault's theory of technologies of self to discuss the nuanced ways that Apress and X navigate agency in their narratives. These narrators' relationship to religion best exemplifies the ways they come to know themselves apart from the oppressive discourses of their respective time periods. I discuss Apress's conversion to Methodism and his ascension to leadership in the Protestant Methodist Church. I also describe the six-point rehabilitation process X mentioned in the narrative, noting its emphasis on self-knowledge.

The rest of this introduction describes the theoretical frameworks I utilize throughout this thesis, and I establish the intertextual nature of said frameworks and why these theories enlighten the reader's understanding of life narrative.

Reading Agency and Narratological Identity in Life Narrative

In their theoretical text, *Reading Autobiography*, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson state that in life narrative, “agency . . . [derives] from [the author’s] willingness to narrate [his] opacity, [his] fragmentation,” and “[his] limits of knowability” (58). Apress and X navigate their agency in complex ways. Apress describes his struggle with alcoholism as well as his conversion to Methodism. Similarly, X narrates his experience with substance abuse and describes his conversion to the NOI, and later to Orthodox Islam.

Apress and X enact different levels of agency due to the dynamic of their narratological identities. This thesis explores two narratological identities¹ in *A Son of the Forest* and *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*: the narrated and narrating “I.” There is a distinction between these identities because they relate to a subject *and* an individual. The subject is the narrated “I,” or, “protagonist of the narrative” (Smith and Watson 72). The protagonist is the author’s past self, whose experiences have altered his perception of both himself and his relationship to the world around him. Therefore, the narrated “I” has already been subjected to, and by, the sociopolitical values in his respective culture; and, since life narrative follows the protagonist at different points in time, the sociopolitical values embodied by the narrated “I” will likely change at certain points in the narrative.

In contrast to the subject, the individual is the narrating “I,” or, the persona “available to readers” who “tells the autobiographical narrative,” revealing his “experiential history” as it

¹ In *Reading Autobiography*, Smith and Watson describe four kinds of narratological identities. In addition to the narrated and narrating “I,” there is a “real” or historical “I” and an ideological “I.” The “historical “I” refers to the historical figure himself: the person who existed at a “particular time and place” (72). In contrast, the ideological “I” refers to the cultural values at the time the narrator was alive, as said values will inform the narrator’s storytelling (76).

relates to the narrative (Smith and Watson 73). It is the narrating “I,” then, who charts the changes in the protagonist’s perspective, and synthesizes the ways that his experiences contribute to his self-image.

Reading Subject Formation in Life Narrative: Althusser’s Theory of Interpellation

It is helpful to examine the narrated and narrating “I” using Louis Althusser’s theory of interpellation from his essay, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)” (1970). Althusser argues that “*ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects*” (190, emphasis in original). Or, as Smith and Watson state, interpellation is “the process through which” individuals “become” subjects via “institutional discourses” (55). Every culture promotes its values through institutions such as education, religion, media, and the military. Through such institutions, cultural values determine *what* makes a person a citizen and what *benefits* a citizen if and when they conform to sociopolitical values. In my thesis, I emphasize religion and media as the institutional discourse informing Apess’s and X’s narratives.

In some circumstances, the narrated “I” could also be called the interpellated “I,” since the protagonists, in *A Son of the Forest* and the *Autobiography*, represent the ways that religion and media fragment his understanding of his self-worth and value to his culture. This is, however, different from the ideological “I” described in *Reading Autobiography*, which refers to the narrator’s sociopolitical identity at the time that he tells his story.

Interpellation requires “subjection” to a central Subject, or institution, representing hegemony and “in whose Name . . . all individuals” become “subjects” (Althusser 196-97). After

an individual is interpellated, there must be “mutual recognition” of the subject’s self-image and of his subjection to the central Subject (Althusser 197). This is not a direct process but, rather, one that circulates via ideological state apparatuses, or , ISAs (Althusser 75).² Examples of ISAs are educational institutions, print culture, news media, popular culture, and religious institutions. In X’s and Apess’s narratives, I will examine interpellation via religion and media.

Reading Self-Knowledge in Life Narrative: Foucault’s theory of Technologies of Self

By analyzing the interpellated nature of the narrated/narrating “I” dynamic, I determine the ways the narrator understands himself and develops his self-knowledge. In his essay, “Technologies of Self,” Michel Foucault asserts that his life’s work has centered on describing “a history of the different ways” that “humans develop knowledge about themselves” through cultural frameworks, namely “economics, biology, psychiatry, medicine, and penology” (17-18). He argues that there are four kinds of technologies:

(1) technologies of production, which permit us to produce, transform, or manipulate things; (2) technologies of sign systems, which permit us to use signs, meanings, symbols, or signification; (3) technologies of power, which determine the conduct of individuals, and submit them to certain ends or domination, an objectivizing of the subject; (4) technologies of the self, which permit individuals to effect *by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations* on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to *transform* themselves in order to

² As opposed to Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs) which are used to enforce state ideals through *physical violence*, such as the judicial system: “government, administration, army, police, courts, and prisons” (Althusser 75, emphasis in original).

attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality.

(Foucault, 18, emphasis added)

Transformation refers to the process of thinking and writing about oneself. Foucault maps a rather paradoxical history of technologies of self. Until the eighteenth century, self-knowledge had its roots in Greco-Roman philosophy, and Christian and monastic principles, which equated self-knowledge with self-care (Foucault 19-22). These philosophies influenced several kinds of technologies of self, which required one to think about or record information about oneself: this could be “letters to friends and disclosure of self;” a personal “examination of self and conscience[;] “a remembering” of the self, or, “what you’ve done and what you’ve had to do[;]” and “the interpretation of dreams” (Foucault 35, 38). Recording such information was useful, as it was believed that self-knowledge required “verbalization” which helped people confess and renounce their sinful nature (Foucault 48). However, as of the eighteenth century, there was a turn from verbalization as “renunciation” to verbalization as a creation of a “new self” (Foucault 49). Before the eighteenth century, self-care required self-knowledge so that a person could interpret his actions, thoughts, and dreams in order to discover the (sinful) nature of his thoughts. However, self-care, and therefore self-knowledge, is less of an individual responsibility and becomes a “duty for the state” (Foucault 147). This is evident in “program[s] of public health for the modern state” that followed, for example, the French Revolution and World War II (Foucault 147). Ultimately, the rise of modernity, and subsequently the state, brought forth a different understanding of self and the individual in relation to the state.

Foucault is unclear on what this “new self” actually is – this phrase is mentioned in the last two sentences of his essay, “Technologies of self,” but is not clearly defined. The meaning of

a “new self” is best understood in relation to Foucault’s, essay ³“The Political Technologies of Individuals.” With the rise of the state in the eighteenth century, there also came the rise of a state entity, the police, which enforces the “reason,” or ideals, of the “state” (148). An individual, then, is only valuable to the state if he is “relevant for the reinforcement of” state ideals (Foucault 152).

Foucault specifies that the rise of police as a political technology doesn’t just relate to the rule of law, but also to the reinforcing of individuals’ behavior (Foucault 159). Self-care related to self-knowledge of the individual before the eighteenth century but afterward, self-knowledge referred to a citizen’s understanding of their role in the state. The state also imposes constraints of self-knowledge on citizens. A new self, then, is a citizen of the state. Interpellation supplements Foucault’s theory on technologies of self because Foucault describes a new self: the individual as a citizen (subject) of the state (hegemony).

Life narrative is a technology of self because the author interprets his experiences, his decisions, the rationale for those decisions, and how those decisions and experiences affect who he is at the time the text was written. Indeed, writing (or, in X’s case, dictating) an autobiography is a transformative process.

³ In *Technologies of Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, the editors end the essay collection with “The Political Technologies of Individuals.” This is a significant decision since Foucault’s work on this idea is unfinished. The final essay functions as a supplement to Foucault’s theory initially mentioned in “Technologies of self.”

CHAPTER 1: ALCOHOLISM AND RELIGION IN *A SON OF THE FOREST*

How much better would it be if the whites would act like a civilized people and, instead of giving my brethren of the woods “rum!” in exchange for their furs, give them food and clothing for themselves and children. (Apess 33)

The opening chapter in *A Son of the Forest* details William Apess’s abuse at his grandmother’s hands. The assault occurs after his grandmother got intoxicated with “the whites” (Apess 5). Apess states that this is the “consequence” of alcoholism and colonialism: the Native American is scattered abroad reeling about intoxicated with liquor, neglecting to provide for themselves and families, who before were assiduously engaged in supplying the necessities of those depending on them for support. (7)

The narrated “I” follows a similar course. He takes his first drink at fifteen when he and John, a white boy, run away from his master’s estate and they drink alcohol to maintain their “courage” (23). Later, they separate and Apess enlists in the U.S. Army after a “sergeant” and his “soldiers” manipulated him “with spirits” (25). The soldiers were frequently intoxicated, and the Army had a corrosive effect on them. Assimilating to this culture implied an acceptance of alcoholism and gambling (25). Chapter five describes the white man’s dishonesty in his commitments with the Native American. Following his discharge from the Army, Apess is penniless, homeless, and an alcoholic; and he struggles to stay employed. Apess never received compensation for his enlistment, and states that other Native Americans experienced the same treatment (31). The state is hypocritical for “refusing” compensation but also demanding submission (Apess 31).

In chapter nine, he denies alcohol for the first time as he works on a farm to provide for his wife. His employer gives alcohol to the farm-hands, but Apess refuses, even as his associates pressure him to drink. This passage represents the protagonist's development. The narrated "I" is recovered: "[his] health [is] better, [his] appetite" is "improved, and [his] mind [is] calm" (Apess 47).

Literary Analyses of *A Son of the Forest*

Critics have researched the discourses that inform Apess's narrative and affect his authorial voice. Hilary E. Wyss examines how Apess appropriated two popular genres in early America: the conversion narrative and the captivity narrative. Apess describes his conversion to Methodism using the "conventional rhetoric of Christianity" while his experiences with white people are characterized by "the language of captivity" (73). Wyss's observation is convincing - indeed, the narrative follows both Apess's estranged relationship with white men and his commitment to Methodism.

Wyss asserts that the hybridity of the narrative represents Apess being "caught between cultures," as he is both Native American and Anglo-American, and characterizes *A Son of the Forest* as a captivity narrative (73). This is a compelling argument because Apess turns the genre on its head. The captivity narrative demonizes the Native American, however Apess demonizes the *white man* for his cruelty: "instead of the captivity narrative's typical innocent white victim of Native injustice, here the innocent young Indian is victimized by the incomprehensible brutality of white people" (Wyss 75). I argue, however, that Apess is not making his racial identity

“intelligible to Anglo-American readers,” as Wyss claims (73). Rather, he appropriates the language of popular culture, and exposes white supremacy and the state’s hypocrisy.

Similar to Wyss, Laura L. Mielke also writes about Apess’s appropriation of popular genres in early America – namely: sentimental fiction, autobiography, and Native American biography. She writes that Sentimentalism “prized sympathy – or the ability to experience emotional affinity with another,” which made the sentimental genre “a source of social cohesion and morality” as readers rallied around an “authentic,” real person (Mielke 247-48). However, while it produced sympathy it also distanced the subject from the reader. Native American biographies were also a popular genre but they “were subject to fictional, poetic, and dramatic adaptation” (Mielke 250). This genre ultimately caricatured Native Americans, along with the assumptions that “Native American culture” was “exclusively oral” and that its people were illiterate (250).

Autobiography was another burgeoning genre that many writers utilized to voice their experiences with oppression (Mielke 250). Mielke asserts, however, that due to assumptions about Native American culture, the authenticity of Native American autobiography was frequently questioned. Mielke asserts that Apess was aware of the objectifying nature of sentimentalism and infused his narrative with sentimental language and imagery in order to engage with white readers (253). The portrayal of “his younger self as the pitiable object of both violence and benevolence” is especially sentimental as he recounts his grandmother’s alcoholism, his experiences of physical abuse, and the “charity” of his white foster family, the Furmans (253). Where Hilary E. Wyss asserts that Apess’s identity is more easily understood, Mielke argues that Apess challenges white readers’ sympathies and convictions by appropriating sensational rhetoric.

Peter L. Bayers follows suit with Mielke, and investigates how Apess addressed Anglo-American perceptions of Native Americans. However, Bayers discusses how *A Son of the Forest* responds to early American ideals of “republican manhood” by addressing the problematic American Dream introduced in Benjamin Franklin’s *Autobiography* (Bayers 125, 127). Bayers states that Apess’s “experience” initially “resembles Franklin's, which is that of a boy running away from home to find success as a self-made man” (129). However, Apess is met with significant obstacles due to racial biases (130). Although Apess lives with a foster family, he’s considered an indentured servant. His plan to leave home is revealed to Mr. Furman, who refuses to let him leave.

Bayers argues that through Methodism Apess finally gains “masculine independence” and accesses the American Dream of the self-made man, because “he embarks on his career as a preacher and Native activist who overtly challenges white authority” (131). In the narrative, Apess discusses the legacy of Native Americans in light of hegemonic ideals.

While Apess certainly has more agency in the Methodist movement, he still faces obstacles with white leadership. Mark J. Miller, like Bayers, examines the significance of Apess’s commitment to Methodism. However, Miller historicizes the Methodist movement in early America to show how *A Son of the Forest* responds to the nuances of the Methodist movement. In the 18th century, the Methodist movement was known for its diverse congregations, charismatic expressions of worship and prayer, and its growing print culture (Miller 230). However, by the 19th century, the movement splintered, and print culture was controlled by a dominant faction, the Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC), that perpetuated new ideals for the Methodist movement (Miller 235). White leaders of the MEC likened “spiritual excess” to “drunkenness,” and excluded people of color because they believed “intemperance”

was innate in African Americans and Native Americans (239, 245). Methodist Print Culture perpetuated a harmful stereotype and put constraints on members' level of participation and leadership.

Like Mielke and Bayers, Miller argues that Apess upends the supremacy inherent in popular discourses. Due to his familiarity with Methodist print culture, Apess appropriates its rhetoric and blames white men for his grandmother's alcoholism (244). Ultimately, "by attributing Indian drunkenness to intemperate white male greed and lust, Apess" negates "the generic [figure] of the drunken Indian man" and in turn criticizes Anglo-Americans for their methods of "imperial expansion" (245). Although Apess's liberties were constrained within the Methodist movement, the autobiographical platform allows him to assert his authority and opinions concerning the events in his community and in early American culture.

Interpellation and Narratological Identity in *A Son of the Forest*

Popular literature functions as an ISA in early America.⁴ Captivity narratives illustrate Native Americans as depraved Indians whereas sentimental fiction sensationalized Native Americans' experiences, especially their suffering. Additionally, biographies *and* autobiographies made stories of Native Americans' experiences more widely available, but these platforms did not always challenge popular discourses. Biographies reinforced racist assumptions that Native Americans were illiterate, which in turn brought the validity of Native Americans' autobiographies into question for white readers. Popular literature in early America

⁴ Defined in the introduction - ideological state apparatuses. ISAs disseminate ideology through non-violent ways.

ultimately represents cultural and racial hegemony, distinguishing a privileged, white readership from people of color, and labelling Native Americans in ways that othered them in society.

Apess, the narrated “I,” grapples with the stereotype of the the depraved Indian, arguing that the term “Indian” is used by the white man as an “opprobrious epithet” (10): it is a racial slur and its origins are biblically unfounded. Native is more appropriate because it signifies a connection with the biblical figure Adam with whom the Native Americans are “the only people who retain his original complexion” (Apess 10). Apess reiterates this argument later in chapter seven, asserting that the Native American can be enlightened, despite assumptions that he is incapable “of improvement” (34). A primary reason he converts to Methodism is because Methodists did not teach the Gospel with ulterior motives like previous missionaries (Apess 34). Apess, the narrating “I,” posits that his personal growth (and, therefore, his recovery from alcoholism) results from his faith. Indeed, he frames the narrative using religious references.

At the beginning of the narrative, he writes that “the Spirit of Divine Truth, . . . visits every intelligent being born into the world” (Apess 7-8); and by the end of the narrative, the narrator is ordained as a minister in the Protestant Methodist church (Apess 51n50). And yet, there are still constraints on his agency due to racial biases. Apess became a Protest Methodist minister after several failed attempts to be ordained by the MEC; the MEC “denied” his “ordination because he was an Indian” (Apess 51n50). Methodism, then, functions as an ISA. Like popular literature in early America, MEC leaders perpetuated hegemonic ideals and restricted members of color in the movement.

In *A Son of the Forest*, the Central Subject is white supremacy, which is idealized in several literary and religious platforms. The narrated and narrating “I” are already interpellated, however, Apess uses life narrative to push the boundaries of agency within Methodism and early

American culture. The narrating “I” challenges white supremacy by appropriating the language of multiple institutional discourses and labels white men as an “uncivilized people” (33). Apess describes several traumatic experiences that were incited when he, a friend, or a family member drink alcohol with a white man. Alcoholism ultimately signifies interpellation in this narrative.

CHAPTER 2: SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND RELIGION⁵ IN *THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MALCOLM X*

I was going through the hardest thing, also the greatest thing, for any human being to do[:] to accept that which is within you, and around you. (X and Haley 258)

Published in 1965 after X's death, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* is the culmination of a series of interviews between X and his amanuensis Alex Haley. The narrative follows the childhood, conversions, and travels of the titular subject who negotiates how his experiences shape his identity as a black rights activist.

In his *Autobiography*, X praises the Muslim six-point methodology for rehabilitation and its uniqueness to the NOI, noting that "social agencies have asked representatives of the Muslim program for clinical suggestions" (X and Haley 365). The addict must (1) acknowledge his addiction; (2) "[learn] *why*" he was addicted and (3) how to quit addiction; (4) "realize" his ability to quit; (5) "voluntarily" quit "cold turkey"; and (6) recruit and oversee the rehabilitation of his friends (X and Haley 364). X asserts that addiction is rooted in escapism (365). However, addiction ultimately prompts the black person to submit to the white man's image of him rather than constructing his own self-image.

Earlier in the narrative, X details his experiences with substance abuse. He is an addict and was "mentally dead" by the time he was imprisoned in 1946 (X and Haley 216). He starts hustling because it was necessary "to survive" in Harlem, and he "needed to stay high . . . to

⁵ It is worth noting that my analysis of Elijah Muhammed's leadership in the Nation of Islam is gleaned from X's own statements in the narrative. Additionally, my criticism of Muhammed's leadership does not extend to the religion itself or its members.

forget what [he] had to *do* to survive” (X and Haley 178). First, he smokes marijuana with his customers, and eventually his addiction extends to opium and he experienced frequent illness. In addition to opium, he later abuses cocaine to forestall a conflict with his friend and colleague West Indian Archie (X and Haley 222). Drugs become “the center of [his] life” because he can avoid the anxiety of being arrested for hustling (X and Haley 239). Once in prison, he “[gets] high . . . on nutmeg” which had the same effect as “three or four reefers” (X and Haley 246). This passage is the last time that X gives an example of his drug abuse, and he later undergoes a mental and physical change during his time in prison.

X doesn’t specify whether he undergoes the NOI’s rehabilitation process himself; additionally, he does not explain how or when he quits his addiction in the narrative. However, there are passages describing the ways he rebuilds his self-image while undergoing a physical rehabilitation at the behest of his little brother Reginald. I argue that X’s self-education and his first conversion in chapter ten signal his rehabilitation. While in prison, X meets Bimbi, who was well-read and “commanded total respect . . . with his words[,]” and inspired X to supplement his eighth-grade education (X and Haley 247). He studies writing, Latin, history, and philosophy; and he practices public speaking. While he educates himself, his brothers Philbert and Reginald introduce him to the NOI. Reginald tells him to stop consuming pork and cigarettes, and X follows. He regains control of his body when he quits smoking and stops eating pork.

Literary Analyses of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*

Scholars have researched X’s complex narratological identity. Paul John Eakin writes that X’s excommunication from the NOI deconstructs “The autobiographical fiction of the

completed self,” and reveals the latent truth of X’s autobiographical narrative: “his life . . . never” followed a “traditional conversion story,” because his first conversion appropriated his agency (237). While I agree with Eakin, it is worth discussing the ways that X is empowered by his conversion to the NOI. Nowhere is this more evident than his time in Norfolk prison, where Reginald explains to X about the white supremacy inherent in American civil religion (X and Haley 256 -62). X learns that “the religion of every other people on earth [teaches] its believers of a God with whom they [can] identify, a God who at least look[s] like one of their own kind,” but black people are “taught to worship an alien God having the same blond hair, pale skin and blue eyes as the slavemaster” (X and Haley 257). The dynamic between a follower of color and a God resembling a slavemaster suggests that, for American civil religion, members of color are unequal to white followers in the eyes of God. Ultimately, X realizes that American civil religion is divisive and limits access to members of color since they are excluded from identifying with its God.

Given his new understanding of American civil religion, X writes to Elijah Muhammed of this revelation, and thus begins a complex relationship between X and the leader of the NOI. X and Muhammed exchange letters during his time in Norfolk Prison and, soon after the start of this relationship, X officially converts to the NOI (X and Haley 264). X also writes to his friends in the “hustling world, such as Sammy the Pimp, John Hughes, the gambling house owner the thief Jumpsteady, and several dope peddlers,” even though they do not reply to his letters (X and Haley 264). Where his friendship with Bimbi inspires him to read more, X’s relationship with Muhammed prompts him to improve his writing and grammar (X and Haley 265). Although X wants to “emulate [Bimbi],” he struggles to follow along in the books he “pick[s] up” because the words are ambiguous and “might as well have been written in Chinese,” giving him “little” to

no “idea of what the book” is about (X and Haley 266). Copying dictionary entries and reciting said entries helps him to develop his “penmanship” and expand his vocabulary, which in turn develops his reading comprehension (X and Haley 266-67). X is empowered by his conversion to the NOI, which opened his mind about American civil religion and motivated him to develop his reading and writing skills. X’s self-improvement gives him the confidence to “enter the Prison Colony’s weekly debating program,” which X calls his “baptism into public speaking” (277). This program is as “exhilarating to [him] as the discovery of knowledge through reading had been” (X and Haley 280).

X’s participation in the NOI also gives him a platform to channel his activism. He strives to accurately represent the Black Muslim in the media. X’s response to sensationalism in the mainstream media was to share own experiences in the NOI and to create a platform for other members to talk about their experiences. In response to the sensational television program about the NOI, “The Hate that Hate Produced,” X circulated literature that would authenticate the NOI (338). He published articles in the *Amsterdam News* and the *Herald Dispatch*, and he established a newspaper for NOI members, *Muhammed Speaks* (339).

Even though there are several instances of X’s agency being exercised in the NOI, X was unaware of the constraints placed on his and other NOI members’ agency. Reginald is the person who introduced X to the NOI and educated him on the NOI’s doctrine. When Reginald would visit X at Norfolk Prison, the brothers would discuss both religion and literature (X and Haley 281). However, Reginald was eventually suspended from the NOI for having an “improper” relationship with the “then secretary of the New York Temple,” even though Muhammed would later commit the “same acts of immortality that he judged Reginald and so many others for” (X and Haley 282-83).

X is also constrained by Muhammed's teachings, admitting that he was codependent on Muhammed: "[he] . . . [believed] in [Muhammed] more . . . than [Muhammed] believed in himself" (309). This was the case for many NOI members: while Muhammed claimed to empower Black Muslims, he also limited their agency, compelling members to credit him with their accomplishments in the religion.

Eakin also writes that Alex Haley noticed X's "distinctly subordinate and self-effacing role" in the NOI as he kept a record of the napkins that X would inscribe during his dictations:

[Haley legitimized] the private utterance of the napkins which . . . already found its way into the mainstream of a narrative initially conceived as an orthodox work of evangelical piety. (Eakin 240)

I agree that X's first conversion inhibited his agency, however, Eakin includes a problematic assertion when he claims that Haley's actions legitimized X's subjugation to the NOI. This interpretation suggests that Haley credits himself with X's personal growth since he kept a record of the napkins and used them as proof of X's development. And yet, due to Haley's intervention, the collaborative process could also be understood as another way that X's agency was constrained. Haley's actions imply that X's dictation was insufficient for his transcription, and that he needed the napkins to help him organize X's story on the page.

Similar to Eakin, Alex Gillespie has also examined X's "narrative of metamorphosis" (81). Although he doesn't use the terms narrated and narrating "I," they're all but implied as he addresses the tension between X's multiple identities. X, the narrator, frequently discards "one of his previous identities" in favor of the most recent identity, and there are "implicit echoes" of young Malcolm, the protagonist, that reemerge later in the narrative (Gillespie 81-2). He attributes X's work ethic to Malcolm Little, who worked hard in high school and exhibited the

same drive when he educated himself at Norfolk Prison and beyond (Gillespie 81). Additionally, Gillespie credits X's "militant politics" to his experiences hustling as Detroit Red (Gillespie 82). Ultimately, Gillespie concludes that the *Autobiography* follows X's "specific trajectory through . . . social [structures], where he accumulate[s] the discourses of the 'black bourgeoisie', the hustler and the minister" (Gillespie 85). Indeed, some of X's most formative experiences occurred while he dictated his narrative to Haley. At the start of X's and Haley's collaboration, X was still devoted to the NOI. It was during this collaboration that X was excommunicated and later converted to Orthodox Islam.

Bashir M. El-Beshti argues that "X's Islamic beliefs" are significant for understanding the narrated and narrating "I" (361). The narrating "I" describes a personal development within and outside of the NOI, and describes X's development upon converting to orthodox Islam. With each of X's transformations, the narrative points more clearly to "his final destiny" as a religious leader for the black man, and "[emphasizes] . . . the black man's indomitable will to shape his life independent of . . . what white society wished him to be" (El-Beshti 363). The narrating "I" in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* navigates multiple institutions that constrain agency for the narrated "I," and yet, each experience contributes to X's understanding of himself and his goals for activism.

Keith D. Miller, like El-Beshti, analyzes the ways that X challenged sociopolitical institutions. Miller argues that X confronted white people's propensity for exclusion under the guise of religion. Miller argues that X interprets "ideals of American nationalism as a disguise for whiteness" (215), noting that when he taught Western history and culture at Temple Number Seven in New York, X implemented alternative literacy. For example, a required text in X's curriculum was the Bible, from which he quotes: "'Wheresoever the carcass is, there will the

eagles be gathered together” (214). Miller posits that the image of the eagle is generally symbolic of “God’s promise,” but X rejects this image and argues that the carcass represents black people and the eagle represents the United States (214). There is similar sentiment in his *Autobiography*, where X asserts that Christianity’s inclusivity is a lie, as is the white man’s acceptance of “non-white human beings” (X and Haley 343).

Interpellation and Narratological Identity in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*

The Christian religion is an ISA in 1950s and 60s America. This institution is a Central Subject, and represents white supremacy, or, as Miller notes, “whiteness” (214).⁶ For X, trusting in “American civil religion” implies submission to hegemony, because “Christianity ha[s] failed” black people (Miller 209; X and Haley 482). Converting to Christianity implies an acceptance of oppressive and pervasive ideals.

The Constitution is also an ISA. X attends a press conference in New York after his first trip Africa and responds to questions about social unrest in Harlem, noting that the difference between “white youth” and “black youth” crimes is “power structure”: self-defense for the white man is implied in the Constitution, but self-defense for the black man is threatening (X and Haley 477-78). That is, racial inequality is ingrained in the Constitution.

I argue that the NOI is also an ISA. Elijah Muhammed is the Central Subject and needs acclaim and submission from others, making the NOI a vehicle for him to garner the obedience and loyalty of members. NOI members, then, are *his subjects* more than they are followers of

⁶ X himself states that white ideology doesn’t relate to appearance, and instead infers “specific attitudes and actions” in regard to “non-white men” (447).

Allah's principles. This is evident in Muhammed's treatment of Reginald (mentioned earlier). This is also evident in the rehabilitation process detailed at the beginning of this chapter. Points three and six in the program depend on conversion to the NOI. At point three, "the way to . . . quit dope is through joining the [NOI]" (X and Haley 365). The core of this step is to integrate the black person into a supportive community to encourage members that quitting their addiction is possible. Point three promotes community and inspires self-confidence and renewed self-image. This step is a nuanced approach to recovery as recruits navigate their agency in new ways, but, like X, it's possible that they will be constrained by Muhammed's teachings.

At point six, the black person is rehabilitated and must recruit his associates to the program; presumably, the recruits will, then, convert to the NOI if they commit to the program. Like point three, this final step is also relevant to reconstructing self-image, despite its emphasis on conversion, because it encourages the black person to share his experience with other addicts. The final step replaces the "addict's hostility and suspicion" with familiarity, because recruits know the now-rehabilitated person (X and Haley 364). The rehabilitation program validates the addict's experience while also proving that the addict can rehabilitate himself. The *Autobiography* demonstrates how one can inhabit agency, yet still be limited by the very institution that empowered him. X's involvement in the NOI is certainly a formative, albeit difficult, time in his life. During his time in the NOI, X makes the compelling statement that "color and addiction" seemingly "have a distinct connection" (X and Haley 364). Unlike to alcoholism in *A Son of the Forest*, rehabilitation (rather than substance abuse) signifies interpellation in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*.

Or, rather, both substance abuse *and* rehabilitation signify interpellation at different moments in the narrative. This is evident between chapters seven through twelve (see table 1). In

chapters seven through nine, addiction implies interpellation; whereas in chapters ten through twelve, rehabilitation implies interpellation.

Table 1. Chapters Detailing Both X's Addiction and Recovery, and His Time in Prison

| Chapter Number | Chapter Title |
|-----------------------|----------------------|
| Chapter Seven | Hustler |
| Chapter Eight | Trapped |
| Chapter Nine | Caught |
| Chapter Ten | Satan |
| Chapter Eleven | Saved |
| Chapter Twelve | Savior |

CHAPTER 3: SELF-KNOWLEDGE IN *A SON OF THE FOREST* AND *THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MALCOLM X*

The narrator organizes the times of past, present, and future in the telling of the story as a way of teasing out narrated versions of the “I” presented and the ideological stakes of those representations in the present of narration. (Smith and Watson 78)

Briefly, I will reiterate Smith’s and Watson’s definition of agency as it applies to life narrative: “agency . . . [derives] from [the author’s] willingness to narrate [his] opacity, [his] fragmentation,” and “[his] limits of knowability” (58). That is, the narrating “I” inhabits agency *just* by describing his experiences – whether those experiences are positive, negative, or ambiguous. In life narrative, the narrator is not omniscient or omnipresent. Rather, the narrating “I” takes multiple events and memories and distills them into narrative form. The narrating “I” is ultimately tasked with determining *what* the narrative means, and therefore must ascertain how his experiences inform who he is at the time he tells the story. The process of narration is a process developing self-knowledge.

As I indicate in the introduction to this thesis, life narrative is a technology of self because the author interprets his experiences, his decisions, the rationale for those decisions, and how those decisions and experiences affect who he is at the time the text was written. Indeed, writing or (in X’s case) dictating an autobiography is a transformative process. This is most evident in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* and *A Son of the Forest*, both of which intersect with several forms of political technologies, such as pop culture and print culture.

A Son of the Forest intersects with political technologies such as popular fiction and Methodist Print Culture. Sentimentalism allowed readers to “consume the Indian as” a

“stereotype” even though they did not sympathize with the actual “Christian Native American” (Mielke 255). Similarly, literature circulated in the MEC restricted members of color from ascending to leadership. *X’s Autobiography* also intersects with political technologies in mainstream print culture (*Amsterdam News* and *Herald Dispatch*) and print culture within the NOI (*Muhammed Speaks*). The political technologies in the protagonists’ respective time frames contribute to their subjugation in society and their respective religions.

Althusser’s theory of interpellation complements Foucault’s theory of political technologies. Since political technologies determine a citizen’s relationship, and value, to the state, they have an adjacent function to ISAs. Both political technologies and ISAs represent an ideology fundamental to upholding hegemony – for Foucault it is the State, and for Althusser it is the Central Subject.

Whether it is the State or the Central Subject, these hegemonic entities are significant to understanding self-knowledge in *A Son of the Forest* and *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. Apess and X are defined in opposition to sociopolitical values and in turn their self-knowledge and “wisdom” is affected (Foucault 18). This is most evident in their relationships to substances.

As they confront the political technologies, and Central Subjects, in their respective time frames, Apess and X also describe their struggles with addiction. For much of *A Son of the Forest*, Apess finds himself “reeling about intoxicated with liquor” when he flees his childhood master, enlists in the military and then becomes homeless after completing his enlistment (Apess 7, 23, 25, 31). Additionally, in his *Autobiography*, X states that his drug abuse made him “mentally dead” by the time his was imprisoned (X and Haley 216). The protagonists lack a sense of “happiness, purity, and wisdom” (Foucault 18). Their narratives, ultimately, chart their

experiences and represent each individual's effort to better understand himself upon remembering his most formative and difficult experiences.

To return to Foucault's definition of the technology of self, I conclude that these narratives indeed fit Foucault's definition: Apess and X use "*their own means or with the help of others*" to define "their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to *transform* themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality" (Foucault 18, my emphasis). Apess's and X's recoveries and conversions are transformations. As authors of their life stories, they are authorities within their own respective communities, and, as the protagonists contend with their addiction, they also address the ways that the state has oppressed them, and, in some ways, caused their addiction.

CONCLUSION

The narrators in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* and *A Son of the Forest* both confront themselves in the context of their addictions (and, for X, his rehabilitation) and their respective religions. Apess found agency through a sub-group in the Methodist movement but, due white supremacy, he was ultimately stigmatized by the MEC and was compelled to defend the Native Americans' image to his readers. On the other hand, X (and subsequently, Black Muslims) was unknowingly subjugated by the NOI – the narrative ultimately follows X's efforts to rebuild his self-knowledge and his goal to empower Black Muslims. These narratives are explorations of Apess's and X's agency because *just* by describing their experiences, the narrators are authorities of their own stories and their respective communities.

Scholars, like Wyss and Eakin, take a reductive approach to agency in life narrative. In Apess's case, the narrating "I" is not responsible for making his identity "intelligible" to early "Anglo-American readers" who were ultimately complicit in sensationalizing the suffering of Native Americans (Wyss 73). In X's case, his agency was appropriated in *some* ways during his NOI membership (Eakin 237), but he also came into his own as a self-educated man and a public speaker.

In order to know oneself, he must confront the experiences that have *formed* him – this includes the experiences he remembers fondly, those that broke him, and those that he is unsure how to interpret. In *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* and *A Son of the Forest*, the narratives are acts of liberation resulting from each individual's practice in developing his self-knowledge.

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