

INTERSECTING RACE, CLASS, AND IDENTITY THROUGH SATIRICAL RESISTANCE: A CRITICAL READING OF PAUL BEATTY'S THE SELLOUT

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Abstract: In the present paper, *The Sellout* (2015) by Paul Beatty has been interpreted intersectionally to elaborate on how satire can indicate how race, class and identity are interrelated in contemporary American society. Even though the growing literature on the novel focuses on these types of analysis, the majority of studies are performed concerning them separately, obscuring their structural interdependence. The novel herein is placed in the context of Critical Race Theory, the study of satire, and the sociology of class and symbolic capital developed by Bourdieu to examine how Beatty is using grotesque humour and parody to criticise the post-racial and neoliberal arguments on class. The research takes a qualitative interpretive approach that is geared towards intensive reading of the short passages that highlight social contradictions that are dramatized in the text. Three overall lessons can be made out of the findings: (1) racism as a systemic aspect exists under liberalisms of racial development; (2) class as an economic order is also a symbolic capital, which forms identity formation; and (3) identity manifests itself as an unsteady and performative entity that is exposed through exaggerated forms of satire. Taken as a whole in one analytical prism, the study provides a more in-depth insight into Beatty as a satire as a form of cultural resistance and preconditions the development of further intersectional studies of modern African American satire. In addition, the study emphasizes the relevance of literary satire as a critical methodological lens for interrogating contemporary power relations, ideological discourse, and cultural representation within late-capitalist societies, thereby extending the analytical value of interdisciplinary literary research.

Keywords: Class; identity; intersectionality; race; resistance; satire; symbolic capital

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1. Introduction

The Sellout (2015) by Paul Beatty is one of the most controversial texts of contemporary American fiction, troubling a reader with its bold approach to the issues of racial and social contradiction. The novel, which was recognized by the Man Booker Prize, takes its satire to the farthest extremes, through scenes of resegregated schools, reinstated slavery to make the reader confront the unresolved tensions behind the rhetoric of post-racial harmony and neoliberal mobility. These overdramatised scenes indicate that structural racism, the inequality of classes, and the unsettled identity formations are still deeply rooted in the everyday life of the United States. This is what makes the novel relevant not just in terms of shock value but also in terms of its reiteration of satire as a political form that disrupts more normalized narratives of justice, progress, and belonging.

This paper examines the intersection of race, class, and identity through satirical resistance in *The Sellout*. In *The Sellout*, race is not simply the color of skin but institutional practices, coded behaviors, and omissions that determine lived experience. Class does not only exist in terms of economic inequality, but it also includes symbolic hierarchies, including respectability, cultural capital, and mobility. Identity, too, becomes a shifting and disputed product that is created in the nexus of all these racial and class structures, with Beatty using grotesque parody and ironic inversion. In this form, satire turns out to be a form of resistance: not a tender form of humor but a harsh disruption mechanism that questions institutions, such as the Supreme Court, schooling, and city policy. Race, class, identity, and satirical resistance are the forces of interplay that shape the analytical grid within the framework of which this paper plans to read Beatty's critique of the American situation (Farhan, 2025c).

Though the recent academia on *The Sellout* has grown into a broad range of insights, there is still no single reading to examine the functioning of the key themes of the novel as a unit. As an illustration, Biswas and Sarkar (2021) emphasize the structure of racism and irony but pay scant attention to the dynamics of classes; Wang and Xu (2024) concentrate on the aspect of spatial injustice and space but pay little attention to identity; and Redd (2024) is focused on humor as a coping process without much engaging socio-economic analysis. The tendency to prioritize economic readings is present even in the studies that presuppose neoliberal ideology, such as Goudarzi et al. (2022), who still do not incorporate racialized identity.

In the present socio-political environment, marked by the modern racial justice movements, greater inequality of income, controversial identity politics, and a multitude of condemnations of neoliberal reforms, intersectional analyses are pressing. According to Holm (2023) and Farhan (2025b), satire has become an important cultural means of defending or fighting politics, and, in fact, depending on its purpose. Beatty is a writer whose novel belongs to the later tradition that altered laughter and discomfort as one way of assaulting critical consciousness. In such a manner, the investigation is not predictable, based on the literature only, but broader discussions within the framework of culture theory, pedagogy, and social discourse.

The study pursues two aims. First, it aims to give a theoretically synthesized reading of *The Sellout* that illustrates the way in which satire is acted out at the interplay of race, class, and identity. Second, it tries to demonstrate that the satirical techniques used by Beatty, irony, grotesque parody, intertextual allusion, spatial distortion, etc., do not just make people laugh: they are actively destructive of discourses of post-racial peace, neoliberal meritocracy, and commodified identity (Farhan, 2025a). The core research question to be used in the investigation is thus: How does Paul Beatty's *The Sellout* employ satire to deconstruct the interwoven systems of race, class, and identity in contemporary American society?

In order to create a comprehensive analytical approach, this paper takes the multi-theoretical approach that will integrate Critical Race Theory (CRT), intersectionality, and the sociology of class and symbolic capital provided by Bourdieu. CRT allows us to read racism as a structural and institutional power, which is supported by other scholars like Crenshaw (2013), and Heneks (2021), who have demonstrated that the workings of racial discourses in the United States are still at play even under the discourses of official equality.

The contribution of satire studies to this framework is the addition of another dimension, whereby the element of grotesque exaggeration and inversion used by Beatty makes it critical. The narrative voice of the story told by Beatty, Naughton (2023), and Redd (2024) suggests, in recent critique, is deliberately unstable in the anticipations of the readers in terms of its exaggeration of absurdities until that point where they are subjected to the ideological pressures they are underneath. The paper integrates the satire theory with CRT and the sociology of Bourdieu to underline the argument that Beatty uses the grotesque humor not only as an aesthetic process, but as a way of showing how racialized identity, symbolic capital, and marginalization of classes are working simultaneously in the text.

The article by Farhan (2025c) and Farhan (2025b) confirms the fact that neoliberalism also links the theme of the racialized group to productivity and the expectations of assimilation, which characterize them no less than their economic opportunities. As Wang and Xu (2024) note, space is connected to being dispossessed, invisible, and remapped, making the characters discuss the issue of belonging, both symbolic and material. Sociology of class and identity can therefore allow us to watch how Beatty stages not only economic precarity, but also the cultural acts and exclusions of identity upon which the foundation of identity is based in systems of oppression.

Together, these paradigms bring out the intersectional nature of race, class, and identity rather than the discrete ones. Very recent literature (since 2020) has made steps in the right direction: Biswas and Sarkar (2021) ruminate on the problem of systemic racism; Canelo (2022) theorizes about the carceral allegory; Naughton (2023) dwells upon the grotesque parody, Redd (2024) speculates upon the commodification of race and class in a neoliberal manner, Wang and Xu (2024) upon the spatial practices, the satire theory and Bourdieu are built on that gap, and it is there that the current study is built, where *The Sellout* is viewed as a compound satire of structures intersecting.

The application of this structure is by reading the selected episodes, such as the absurd trial in the Supreme Court, the monstrous education experiments, the re-segregation project by the narrator and the erasure and re-establishment of Dickens on the government maps. CRT assists them in revealing the presence of institutional racism under the liberal disguise. They prove that grotesque parody and irony can shake myths of racial progress and meritocracy by adopting the satire theory approach. As they control the principles of classifications and racializations, they stress the construction of identity based on symbolic capital, respectability and habitus, as described by Bourdieu. The reading demonstrates the manner in which Beatty knits them, race has been transmitted through the medium of class; identity has been performed in accordance with the racial and economic constraints; satire has been applied to point out the absurdities of these constraints.

2. Literature Review

The Sellout (2015) by Paul Beatty has attracted a lot of academic interest due to its radical treatment of satire to question the issue of race, class, and identity in contemporary America. The novel is a grotesque depiction of re-segregation and restored slavery and makes the reader face the contradictions of the self-proclaimed post-racial society, still structured in a racist way (Biswas & Sarkar, 2021). Themes like race, class, or identity have been

addressed in isolation, and scholars have hailed the audacity and originality of Beatty. To give an example, some studies emphasize the racial conversation over the economic nature of oppression. On the contrary, some emphasize humour or form and ignore the intersectional critique of identity discussed in the text. The literature review will help to structure existing academic discourses, indicate missing aspects, and prove how the sphere may be developed with the help of a combined approach, grounded in Critical Race Theory (CRT), satire studies, and sociology of class and identity, created by Bourdieu.

2.1 Race and Satirical Critique of Post-Racialism

The most salient approach to an analysis of *The Sellout* has been race. Biswas and Sarkar (2021) read the novel as a parody of race relations in the U.S. in terms of the irony used by Beatty to expose the hypocrisy of systemic racism. In a doctoral dissertation, Heneks (2021) highlights the way Beatty is frightening the rhetoric of racial reconciliation in the Obama era, revealing the empty rhetoric of post-racial. Equally, Iqbal and Ilyas (2025) also talk about how Beatty employs humour to satirize racial power structures and identity politics.

Drury (2015) also places the novel within a wider deplorative attitude to American exceptionalism, interpreting the novel's narrative closure as a defiance of moral clarity. Naughton (2023) highlights the narrative absurdity and grotesque elements, emphasizing how Beatty's satire disconcerts readers with their notions about justice in the racial issue. Edmonds (2021) builds on this strategy, analysing affect and play in African American satire, in which *The Sellout* deceives the fixed ideas of Black identity by disrupting its tonal complexity.

These studies, combined, underline the ability of the novel to defy post-racialism myths, yet too many of them consider the concept of race as central and ignore the interdependence of class and identity. This extreme focus would lead to neglecting the role of race that works with economic disparity and symbolic organizations of belonging.

2.2 Marginalization, Class, and Neoliberal Structures

A smaller but growing body of scholarship foregrounds class. One of the most sustained analyses is ever offered by Farhan (2025c), who demonstrates the stratification of race and class according to neoliberal capitalism and how the satire presented by Beatty reveals the fetishization of racial discourse and conceals the structural economic inequality. Wang and Xu (2024) analyze the spatial politics of Dickens, reading the destruction of the Black neighborhood through the lens of Lefebvre's theory of spatial practice, and thereby connect geography to the marginalization of classes. Gordillo (2020) is older than the recent works, but still relevant to place *The Sellout* in the framework of neoliberal temporality by stating that the novel objects to the illusions of mobility in late capitalism.

Hasan (2024) examines the idea of language and communication as the means of social hierarchy, which is the framework that sheds light on the parody of respectability politics and neoliberal rhetoric, as adopted by Beatty. Redd (2024) emphasizes comedy as a coping strategy and, moreover, critiques the research by attentively examining humour as a bargaining tool against economic and racial oppression. Ultimately, all these pieces combine to indicate that Beatty is not just condemning racism but symbolic capital and habitus (Bourdieu) that determine how identity is created in the capitalistic world.

Despite these revelations, in most analyses, class is often regarded as secondary, as it is typically viewed as the background rather than being structurally connected to race and identity. The intersection of economic precarity, symbolic capital, and cultural identity in *The Sellout* remains poorly treated by scholars.

2.3 Identity, Satire, and the Grotesque

The other theme that has been replicated in *The Sellout* criticism is identity. Meanwhile, Coulombe (2024) discusses humour and masculinity in U.S. fiction, citing how Beatty's masculinist humour serves as satire and cultural commentary. Together, these perspectives highlight how identity in Beatty's work is negotiated through both experimental form and cultural critique. Alver (2021) views the novel through the prism of the postmodern absurdity, its ironic style, and the fragmentation of the narrative.

Salius (2022) dwells upon the topic of religious and cultural recollection, and the grotesque may be perceived as an approach to re-evaluating slavery and Catholicism in the African American literature. In contrast, Wang and Xu (2024) reveal that the concept of space displacement can overlap with the process of identity creation. According to these readings, *The Sellout* disorients the idea of belonging, performing identity, and respectability. Still, they are not inclined to conceptualize identity challenges in the context of the material and structural truth of race and class.

Satire studies can be helpful in this analysis. The hideous exaltation is a destabilizing ideology (Naughton, 2023), as Redd (2024) is concerned with the emotional power of humour. Most of the texts, however, treat satire as a form of literature and do not consider it as a political protest or cultural intervention.

2.4 Research Gap

The reviewed literature has specific trends and gaps. First, most studies consider race, class, and identity boundaries as being independent, with the primary focus of the study being on race, and class and identity being underdeveloped. As a matter of fact, even the ones that address class (Farhan, 2025c; Wang and Xu, 2024) or identity (Edmonds, 2021; Coulombe, 2024) do so without making them a part and parcel of an intersectional construct.

Furthermore, one can refer to satire as a stylistic mode (Naughton, 2023; Redd, 2024) rather than a type of resistance that can demonstrate and disrupt the hegemonic ideologies. The grotesque parody created by Beatty is not just humour, but a form of critical intervention that helps readers address the systemic contradictions. Third, there is a lack of literature using a multi-theoretical framework involving the use of CRT, satire studies, and the sociology of Bourdieu. CRT offers the means of analyzing structural racism and the myth of post-racialism (Biswas and Sarkar, 2021; Heneks, 2021). The theory of satire sheds light on the grotesque perversities of Beatty (Naughton, 2023). The concepts of habitus and symbolic capital by Bourdieu determine how the concepts of neoliberalism, class, and identity interact (Delmagori, 2024). However, no work has comprehensively combined these theories to trace the intersectional oppression in *The Sellout*. Therefore, the gap in the research is that there is no intersectional and multi-theoretical approach, which considers race, class, and identity as interdependent systems of the satirical form.

2.5 Contribution of the Present Study

This paper focuses on these gaps by providing an in-depth intersectional analysis of *The Sellout*. It emphasizes how the novel by Beatty deals with the convergence of CRT, satire studies, and the sociology of Bourdieu.

1. *Deconstructs the post-racialism by exposing the racism as being structural and systemic.*
2. *Exposes the centrality of class inequality and symbolic capital to the racialized oppression.*
3. *Redefines identity as unsteady, acted out, and disputed in gross satire.*
4. *Shows the use of satire as a stylistic mode, as well as a political instrument of defiance.*

By doing so, the study aligns with intersectional feminist approaches to race and class, alongside critical race and cultural theory. By situating *The Sellout* within the context of a crucial text that deconstructs neoliberal discourses of meritocracy and racial reconciliation. It also contributes to the literature pedagogy by illustrating that satire can be regarded as a means of challenging the assumptions of the students regarding the issue of race, class, and identity in contemporary America.

3. Methodology

This section outlines the general methodology used to conduct the research and provides a well-defined structure for handling the research objectives. It describes the design that was adopted and why it is relevant to the subject being studied. Besides, it introduces the ways of data collection and the theories of analysis used. Finally, this section shows how design, data collection, and analysis tools prove the validity and richness of the research.

3.1 Research Design

The research design chosen in this study is qualitative and interpretive since the main purpose of the study is to determine how literary form, thematic organization, and ideological criticism interact with each other in *The Sellout*. The qualitative or empirical designs would fail to reflect the details of satire, irony, or identity performance, which depend on the tone of the narrative and the use of language. An interpretive framework allows the analysis to pay close attention to the way meaning is constructed in particular passages as well as how these passages are indicative of larger social orders. Qualitative approaches are required in case the studies are based on interpretation rather than measurement, as Creswell and Poth (2016) state. Such a design is consistent with the current literature on African American satire, especially that by Edmonds (2021) and Hasan (2024) that stresses a need to use contextual and discourse-sensitive approaches when addressing the issue of race, class, and cultural identity. The interpretive design, therefore, permits the research to join textual data with theoretical viewpoints and to follow the way Beatty is satirizing structural inequalities.

3.2 Sources of Data

Two types of data direct this research. On the one hand, the primary data comes from Paul Beatty's *The Sellout* (2015), which serves as the central source. In this respect, to analyze the meanings of satire, irony, and grotesque, the raw material is the text itself, presented in a narrative form as the meanings are condensed therein (Naughton, 2023, conducted a narrative-based study of satire). On the other hand, the secondary data consists of recent critical scholarship (2020–2025). Indeed, as emphasized by Farhan (2025c), situating textual analysis within the context of broader scholarly debates makes it more valid and situates literary analysis within the context of cultural discourse. In this way, these works have the capability of tracking down how themes of race, class, and identity were treated and hence offer a comparative background to the use of this project.

3.3 Data Collection

Data collection in qualitative research of literature involves locating significant passages of text to analyze in depth, rather than relying on surveys and experiments. Braun and Clarke (2021) support this solution because thematic analysis in qualitative studies demands the availability of researchers to isolate meaningful units of data. In this work, the quotations and narrative extracts of *The Sellout* are selected based on their relevance to the three areas of interest: the deconstruction of race and post-racial discourse, the satirical critique of class and symbolic capital, and the destabilization of identity and belonging. They include courtroom scenes, educational experiments, and community interactions in Dickens. This reflects the strategy of Biswas and Sarkar (2021), who took certain narrative scenes to

demonstrate the inconsistencies of the American racial discourse.

3.4 Data Analysis

The textual analysis is thematic, which is a popular approach to interpretive studies of literature (Terry and Braun, 2017). This entails encoding of textual snippets into thematic categories in line with the research questions.

Three theoretical lenses inform the coding:

3.4.1. Critical Race Theory CRT: is a theory that highlights the post-racial myth and systemic racism (Crenshaw, 2013). Other scholars, such as Heneks (2021), demonstrate the effectiveness of CRT in addressing the existence of racial contradictions, as noted by Beatty.

3.4.2. Satire Studies: Humour and exaggeration of the grotesque are learnt with theories of satire, like the carnivalesque in the work of Bakhtin and the theory of irony of Hutcheon. More specifically, Redd (2024) shows that humour may be a coping technique and a form of critiquing, so the work has an appropriate reason to be devoted to satire as a political response.

3.4.3. Bourdieu's Sociology of Class and Identity: Intersection through concepts such as habitus and symbolic capital, which are part of the Sociology of Class and Identity. According to Farhan (2025c), the cultures of neoliberalism are obsessed with the notion of race and hide class inequality; the Bourdieu approach allows us to trace this tension in the text by Beatty.

This combination of frameworks takes the analysis beyond individualized interpretations of race, class, and identity, and outlines the dependency of these elements on satire.

3.4.4. Justification of Theoretical and Methodological Choices

Theoretical approaches and frameworks have been chosen with reference to the specific gaps that have been identified in the existing discussion about *The Sellout*. The necessity of Critical Race Theory (CRT) is explained by the fact that it allows the analysis to consider racism as a structural situation rather than a thematic one; in direct response to the research foregrounding race and underestimating its structural features (Biswas & Sarkar, 2021; Heneks, 2021). Satire Studies present their critical approaches to the interpretation of the irony, grotesque exaggeration, and parody as the critical means and not style. As Naughton (2023) and Redd (2024) demonstrate, the satire in the writing of Beatty is a political strategy, and that is why it is necessary to refer to it in the analytic framework.

The sociology of Bourdieu introduces a complementary aspect by explaining the manner in which the processes of the production of identity are influenced by class, symbolic capital, and habitus, which has not been a particularly active part of the analysis before. These frameworks can be integrated to make sure that race, class, and identity are not considered as divided categories. The methodology of close reading is needed due to the fact that the relations between satire and social critique take place at the phrasing, allusion, and narrative structure levels. Their dependence on thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2021) also enables the research to determine how textual instances are clustered around repeat patterns of racial marginalization, class precarity, and identity performance. These decisions taken collectively constitute a consistent methodological design that can help deal with the intersectionality of the satire that Beatty uses.

3.5 Application of the Framework

The integrated theoretical framework will be utilized on specific quotes and episodes in *The Sellout*. More specifically, the aim is to connect abstract theory with concrete textual moments that reveal Beatty's social critique. For instance, CRT will be applied to the Supreme Court parody scenes so that systemic racism can be exposed not merely as an isolated event

but as an embedded structural condition. In addition, satire theory will be used on the ugly incidents of re-segregation to show how humour disrupts liberal ideals and unsettles dominant cultural narratives. Finally, Bourdieu's sociology will be applied to the father's behavioural experiments because they vividly illustrate how class, habitus, and symbolic capital intersect to shape processes of identity formation.

4. Analysis

This section has offered a critical evaluation of *The Sellout* by Paul Beatty using a combination of theoretical frameworks that include Critical Race Theory (CRT), Satirical Literary Theory, and the sociology of class and identity by Pierre Bourdieu. The review is divided into three key thematic strands, namely the breakdown of race and post-racial mythologies, the conjunctions of the notion of class and marginalization, and the Performativity of identity in grotesque satire. Every section uses textual fragments of the novel and subjects them to dialogue with the current research to preempt the ways Beatty holds satire as a disruption and opposing practice.

4.1. Race and the Deconstruction of Post-Racial Myths

Beatty satirizes the inability of post-racial narratives to face lived structures of systemic racism. At the very beginning of the novel, the narrator states: “I’d decided to resegregate the buses. Not because I believed in segregation, but because I didn’t believe in integration either” (Beatty, 2015, p. 25). Rather than functioning as shock humor alone, this moment illustrates what CRT scholars such as Derrick Bell describe as *interest convergence*: racial equity is tolerated only when it serves dominant interests. Beatty turns this principle into grotesque irony, showing how the language of integration becomes meaningless when institutions remain structurally unchanged.

This is further brought out in the episode of a courtroom: “Sitting before the Supreme Court, I realized the joke wasn’t on me. It was on the Court, unable to understand what race even meant anymore” (Beatty, 2015, p. 112). In this instance, the topic of satire reveals boundaries of colorblind jurisprudence, which is also reflected by Crenshaw (2013). claims that liberal legal systems lack material understanding of racialized subjects. What seems to be funny in the superficial shows the underlying contradiction of a legal system trying to mediate racial meaning, even though it is the one that creates racial hierarchy.

A third example demonstrates the pedagogical violence embedded in racial discourse. In a direct quotation from *The Sellout*, the narrator recalls painting the “N-word” as part of the novel’s critique of institutional racism and racialized language (Beatty, 2015, p. 59). This scene can be compared to the idea of counter-storytelling developed by CRT: by reusing a racial slur, the speaker brings out the perennial strength of a racist expression even with the rhetoric of post-racism. The satire is more than provocative; it presents racism as an inevitable structural phenomenon that determines the learning process of Black children, their sense of self, and their movement in the open space.

When these scenes are put together, they show that race in *The Sellout* is not a symbol and neither is it historical: it is a performance that is perpetrated, enforced, and reproduced. The contradictions are exaggerated in the satire that Beatty provides to the point where they are impossible to ignore and demonstrate the discrepancy between the national stories of racial pride and the current facts of structural inequality.

This scene also shows the irony of the post-racial rhetoric, but also demonstrates the structural processes that create it. With the help of CRT, the experiment of resegregation carried out by the narrator is transformed into a counter-narrative exposing how racial hierarchy continues to exist behind the institutional language. The satire exhibited by Beatty

goes beyond criticizing the system in that it discloses that the law and its symbolic forms still depend on racial legibility despite their official rejection of it. The grotesque exaggeration, thus, is more of an interpretive device, as it enables the reader to perceive the contradictions that liberal discourse tries to hide. It is in this regard that Beatty turns satire into a diagnostic model as opposed to a narrative tool, and makes racial absurdity a sign of structural continuity.

4.2. Class, Marginalization, and Symbolic Capital

As much as race prevails in most of the critical discourse, Beatty interweaves it with the economic and symbolic systems of class. The fictional neighborhood Dickens is an underprivileged and financially unstable area: *"In Dickens, we were so poor we couldn't even afford to be poor properly"* (Beatty, 2015, p. 7). That is indicative of Bourdieu and his ideas of habitus and symbolic capital: the notion of class is not simply an economic phenomenon, but is incorporated in the daily routine of taste, prestige, and respectability. Wang and Xu (2024) emphasize the geographic aspect of Dickens as a racialized space. Yet, they do not focus on the importance of economic deprivation and symbolic class relations when organizing identity. In comparison, this paper prefigures the dual nature of space and class that are co-constituted marginalization.

The father of the narrator is a social scientist who is obsessed with behavioral experiments and has the contradictions of neoliberal meritocracy: *"Father's experiments were about showing the world that black people, given the same opportunities, could achieve the same results. But the joke was that the opportunities were never the same"* (Beatty, 2015, p. 42). In this, Beatty satirizes the liberal ideology of equal opportunity. In *The Sellout*, Delmagori (2024) criticizes neoliberal rhetoric of meritocracy by stating that the satire about Beatty reveals the existence of class-based disadvantage behind the rhetoric of mobility. This text shows that symbolic capital, the act of respectability, is something that is elicited from the marginalized populations, but structurally so that it cannot be gained. A further example comes from the narrator's reflections on class aspiration: *"Dickens kids didn't dream of Harvard or Wall Street. Our biggest fantasy was a strip mall that didn't smell of despair"* (Beatty, 2015, p. 85).

This crude overstatement highlights the reconfiguration of neoliberal capitalism in which neoliberal capitalism defines the act of aspiration not as movement but as consumption. The recent research (Gordillo, 2020; Goudarzi & Knowles, 2022) emphasizes the criticism of Beatty of neoliberal ideology, although it tends to concentrate on economics itself. This paper will integrate Bourdieu and CRT to demonstrate how economic marginalization is linked with racial subjugation, which creates a stratified parody of systemic inequalities. Therefore, Beatty is satirizing the notion of class not as a separate axis but as a system that cannot be disconnected, both racially and in terms of identity. Marginalization is both material and symbolic.

What Beatty finally reveals is that the class in the novel is a symbolic script as opposed to an economic condition. Dickens can be explained through the framework of Bourdieu in that symbolic capital is always quantified but never accessed by the individuals who live by it, and as a result, makes the neoliberal discourses of meritocracy reliant on structural exclusion. These class expectations and the violent self-surveillance they necessitate are seen in the experiments of the father when put into this sociological perspective. Satire is not simply ridiculing poverty here, but revealing the unspoken-about rules of who is allowed to aspire, who has to act respectably, and who has a structural disadvantage, no matter how hard he or she tries. By doing this, Beatty shows that race is not marginalized by class but rather, through this mechanism, class strengthens race.

4.3. Identity, Satire, and the Grotesque

The third axis has to do with identity as a fluid, unstable performance constructed by means of satire. Beatty is a grotesque artist who does not allow binary categories of victimhood and resistance. The narrator is full of conflicting subject positions: perpetrator and victim, clown and critic: "I wasn't a hero, I wasn't a victim. I was just the punchline to America's joke" (Beatty, 2015, p. 145). The concept aligns with Stuart Hall's perspective that identity is not fixed or essential, but continuously shaped through cultural representation and social discourse. In this light, Naughton (2023) emphasizes the grotesque narrative voice, while Edmonds (2021) places Beatty's satire within the tradition of Black cultural criticism. Building on this, the present paper shows how satire makes identity appear unreliable, underlining its artificial and fragile nature.

Another example emerges in the absurdity of courtroom dialogues: "*The Justices wanted me to define who I was, but I didn't even know who I was supposed to be Black, poor, American, human?*" (Beatty, 2015, p. 118). The carnivalesque disorder, as Bakhtin describes it, will put hierarchies on hold, and identity, as a terrain, will be contested. Identity in this case is grotesque, broken, and negotiated against the structural constraints.

Lastly, Beatty reenacts the ridiculous demands of assimilation: "*Respectability was the price of admission, but it was never enough. No matter how I spoke, dressed, or acted, I was always Black first*" (Beatty, 2015, p. 93). This reminds us of Bourdieu's theory of symbolic violence, in which the least dominant groups absorb the dominant cultural codes but remain excluded. At the same time, Padma Priya (2024) argues that Beatty attacks identity politics, but she seems to pay more attention to power rather than to symbolic capital.

This paper develops that discussion by demonstrating how the performance of identity in *The Sellout* represents satire as resistance to a forced respectability. By using these grotesque corruptions, Beatty redefines identity as constructed and disputed, destabilizing solid categories and creating a traumatizing and obstructive satire.

Beatty finally shows that identity in *The Sellout* is not a given category or a fixed cultural subject, but a practice that is conditioned by overlapping systems of racialization, as well as class division. The fragmentary subjectivity of the narrator can be uncovered through the performativity of Butler and the habitus of Bourdieu as an outcome of conflicting social imperatives: the necessity to fit in and to be fully assimilated, the inability to be integrated completely and the need to perform forms of respectability, which can never gain legitimacy. In this regard, satire acts as a way of revealing the way identity is created using coercive scripts instead of freely selected expressions. Beatty reveals the artificially created racial and class identities by making these scripts so ridiculous that it becomes apparent that they are created by structural violence. By so doing, the grotesque is not just an aesthetic device but a critical device destabilizing normative assumptions of who is a full citizen and on what conditions.

4.4 Synthesis and Conclusion of Analysis

In these three dimensions, race, class, and identity, *The Sellout* by Beatty shows how satire can act as a cultural scalpel, breaking down the structures of inequalities within society but not providing a resolution. Race comes out as a performative formation concealed by post-racial discourse; class comes out as symbolic capital that exhibits continual marginalization; and identity comes out as a hideous neo-negotiation in the cultural scripts. Individually, these elements have been mentioned in recent studies (Biswas and Sarkar, 2021; Heneks, 2021; Wang and Xu, 2024; Redd, 2024), although often separately, but not in combination. The analysis will be valuable to the body of literature in that Beatty incorporates

them into satire to form a multidimensional criticism of American society. Cultural resistance rather than comic relief is the satire in the novel. *The Sellout* challenges the conventional discourses around reconciliation, mobility, and the fixity of identity precisely by combining critical race theory, satire theory, and, importantly, the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu. As such, it demonstrates that satire may be an effective political instrument to deal with contradictions within society, and moreover, it provides a platform for counteraction and change in literature.

Collectively, these strands indicate that the satire of Beatty is not just a series of fragmented criticisms but an intervention organized in coordination to point out the structural interdependency of race, class and identity. CRT exposes how the racial hierarchies exist under the legal and cultural discourses of progress; Bourdieu's sociology explains how the ability of class establishes the symbolic rules that define belonging; and satire theory explains how the grotesque distortion disrupts the scripts that reinforce the systems. The construction of these frames depicts that the novel by Beatty not only reflects the social contradictions but is constructs them through the form of the narrative. In this regard, *The Sellout* turns satire into a methodological instrument, the one that makes clear the oppression as intersectional, a systemic and ever-recycled performance and an institutional practice.

5. Discussion

As evidenced by the analysis of *The Sellout*, the satire in the novel by Paul Beatty is used as a radical literary device to unveil and destabilize the interconnected systems of race, class, and identity in modern America. In this discussion, these findings are put in context with the more recent scholarship (2020-2025), and compared and contrasted with findings to note the original research of this paper.

5.1 Race and Structural Racism

The emergence of racial inequality as structural, rather than incidental, is one of the most obvious outcomes of the analysis. The re-segregation of the fictional city of Dickens by Beatty is a ghastly parody of systemic racism that continues to exist in the discourse of post-racism. This reading is consistent with Biswas and Sarkar (2021), who claim that *The Sellout* is a critique of the hypocrisy of post-racial America in that the racial inequality is rooted deep beneath liberal discourses. Likewise, Heneks (2021) views the satire as the reaction of Beatty to the post-Obama pessimism that camouflaged the long-term racial violence. Nevertheless, these studies focus on the issue of race as an isolated category, whereas the racial discourse is entangled in the precariousness of classes and identity performance. In comparison, the current paper anticipates the co-existence of these classifications, and it has been shown that Beatty's satire not only disrupts the myths of race but also the neoliberal ideologies that perpetuate them.

Farhan (2025c) expands the discussion with an analysis of how the concept of whiteness as property is combined with the stratification of classes in the novel and demonstrates that privilege can work on several levels. However, he also constructs the analysis of class as a secondary issue to whiteness. The present paper builds on this by interpreting the grotesque courtroom parody by Beatty through the lens of Critical Race Theory and the sociology of Bourdieu, highlighting the indivisible nature of systemic racism, symbolic capital, and social positioning. In this regard, the novel undermines the exact premise of colour-blind meritocracy, of the manner in which racialized subjectivity continues to be structurally marginalized in the face of liberal discourses of progress.

5.2 Class, Neoliberalism, and Symbolic Capital.

The other important discovery is that Beatty parodies neoliberalism and the mobility of classes. In fact, the novel itself is a satire of the American Dream myth, in which the supposedly merit-based hierarchy of class is represented as a symbolic economy, with identity reproduced and enforced by policing. Gordillo (2020) emphasizes the neoliberal commodification of social life in contemporary fiction, and Wang and Xu (2024) investigate the destruction of the Black neighbourhoods in light of the spatial theory by Lefebvre. However, the two studies are concerned with attributing the marginalization of classes, but they are more inclined to narrow it down to racial disparity.

In comparison, the application of the Bourdieu theory of habitus and symbolic capital has demonstrated in this paper how the satire by Beatty has been enacted to portray how absurd respectability politics can be in the African American society. Consider the experiments conducted by the narrator's father, which were designed to mock middle-class respectability. These experiments are presented as a desperate attempt to gain legitimacy within communities where white people hold dominant positions. Significantly, this point has not been adequately covered in the previous literature, as Farhan (2025c) focuses on the narrow understanding of whiteness and privilege, while Redd (2024) highlights humour as a coping strategy. Thus, the current work fills these gaps by demonstrating that Beatty mocks the scripts of the classes not just to expose economic exclusion but also to reveal that neoliberal ideology commodifies identity itself.

Besides, it is crucial that Iqbal and Rubab (2023), define identity politics in *The Sellout*, since it connects the aspects of race and power, but does not theorize the capital of classes exhaustively. On the other hand, the present work shows that the satire utilized by Beatty breaks down the wall between the capital economic and cultural, and thus indicates the ineffectiveness of neoliberal discourses of self-enhancement.

5.3 Identity, Grotesque Satire, and Performativity.

The third theme is that of identity, as a performing and unstable construct. Beatty uses carnivalesque and grotesque humour to satirize set conceptions of Black identity, introducing characters that do not fit into easy categories, due to their conflicting roles. This grotesque style is at the center of the traditions of African American satires, but Redd (2024) notes its intent as an appeal to readers. The two readings are useful, though they discuss identity in different ways, primarily in terms of style quality as opposed to the structural interplay of races and classes.

The current paper builds upon their work by incorporating Stuart Hall's theory of cultural identity, which conceptualizes identity as a dynamic construct shaped through cultural representation and social discourse, as well as the sociology of habitus developed by Bourdieu. As demonstrated in this analysis, identity in *The Sellout* is not only satirized. Still, it is actually shaken as the competing social scripts of respectability, rebellion, and absurdity are forced to act against each other. Edmonds (2021) also criticizes racial identity politics by Beatty, but her argument is not comprehensive in relation to the significance of class in influencing identity performances. In comparison, the current study shows that the parody of assimilation, middle-class ambition, and neoliberal self-fashioning of Beatty highlights identity as the contingent outcome of the overlapping racial and class-based oppressions.

5.4 Satire as Cultural Resistance

The fourth conclusion is that Beatty uses both satire as a tool of aesthetics and a weapon of political opposition. Consistent with this, as Salius (2022) considers the parody adopted by Beatty, it serves as a means to keep alive the memory of slavery and segregation in the contemporary discourse. In the same way, Edmonds (2021) shows the way in which satire reveals the inconsistency of Black cultural criticism. However, the two writings deal with satire as criticism and not the re-creation of social struggle. The current paper draws on Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque and Hutcheon's concept of irony to argue that Beatty reinvents satire as a resistant practice that disrupts dominant ideologies and provides a discursive space for marginal voices. The analysis of Dickens supports this as a racialized geography by Wang and Xu (2024), which shows that Beatty responds to resistance by reclaiming black spaces that were erased. However, the interaction of class and identity is not incorporated into their study in this spatial critique. The study is also valuable in demonstrating that *The Sellout* satire is intersectional: it is contesting racial myths, ridiculing neoliberal discourses of classes, and disrupting identity scripts at the same time.

5.5 Responding to the Research Question and Achieving the Objectives

This discussion can affirm that *The Sellout* has succinctly responded to its main research question - how *The Sellout* uses the tool of satire to deconstruct the interwoven structures of race, class, and identity within American society. Beatty exposes the instability of post-racist narratives and the meritocracy myth of neoliberalism in grotesque parody and irony. Thus, the analysis has obtained its goals: (1) to illustrate the race and class as interdependent determinants of identity and (2) to prove the validity of satire as a counter-cultural practice instead of an aesthetic mode.

Although the literature has discussed race (Heneks, 2021; Biswas and Sarkar, 2021), class (Gordillo, 2020; Farhan, 2025c), or satire (Naughton, 2023; Redd, 2024) on its own, this study combines them into one intersectional approach through the lens of Critical Race Theory, satire studies, or the sociology of Bourdieu. By so doing, it seals a critical chasm in the literature that has never been troubled to give a sustained intersectional analysis of Beatty's novel. Ultimately, the conclusions transform *The Sellout* into a piece of work that not merely satirizes the social contradiction but also is a radical form of resistance, thus the definition of satire. In addition to contributing to the African American literature and the overall theory of cultures, this work also points out the fact that satire can still be useful in twenty-first-century politics.

What emerges from this study, therefore, is not simply a confirmation of what previous scholarship has observed about race, class, or satire in *The Sellout*, but a demonstration of how these dimensions operate together as an inseparable system of meaning. Whereas earlier studies tended to isolate one axis of race as irony, class as neoliberal critique, or identity as narrative fragmentation, the present analysis shows that Beatty's satire acquires its critical force precisely through the convergence of these structures. This synthesis unveils how, in this novel, the humour is turned into an interpretive process that unveils the systemic play of racial hierarchy, symbolic capital, and identity performance. By anticipating this intersectional process, the research provides a better explanation of the political aesthetics of Beatty and also provides a framework that may be used in further reading of the satire of the African American, as a whole.

6. Conclusion

The Sellout by Paul Beatty (2015) has been critically analyzed in this paper as a satirical intervention that disrupts the dominant discourse of race, class, and identity in modern American society. The intersectional theoretical framework, which integrated Critical Race Theory, the study of satire, and sociological concepts of class and identity, as developed by Bourdieu, enabled the study to provide a comprehensive analysis that transcended the rest of the literature, which tends to separate these categories. Through close text analysis, the results demonstrate that Beatty employs grotesque humour and parody to deconstruct post-racial myths, expose neoliberal class ideologies, and challenge the stability of identity as a performance shaped by the intersection of social structures.

The initial significant input is that it is integrated in theory. Unlike the earlier critics who have considered *The Sellout* mainly through the multiple lenses (e.g., as a racial satire (Biswas & Sarkar, 2021); as a neoliberal critique (Farhan, 2025c); as a grotesque form (Naughton, 2023)), this work presents one of the first lenses that combine all the dimensions into a single model of analysis. In this manner, it fills the much-needed gap in the literature. It proves that satire should be read in a cross-sectional manner in the novel by Beatty because the manifestations of race, class, and identity are not separate categories but constitute one another.

Secondly, the research makes a methodological contribution by employing a qualitative and interpretative design based on close reading and enriched by interdisciplinary theories. Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and symbolic capital help explain the operation of class scripts within racialized discourses, while Stuart Hall's theory of cultural identity clarifies how identity is shaped through representation and social discourse helped to understand how identity can be performed and destabilized by the use of satire. The theory of carnivalesque put forward by Bakhtin and the irony theory by Hutcheon also helped to understand the role of satire as a form of cultural resistance as opposed to comic relief. This approach to pluralism in methods reveals the significance of using a mixture of literary and sociological theories to understand the entire picture of the political commentary of a novel.

Third, the research adds to the knowledge of satire as a cultural resistance. By proving not only that the novel Beatty is attacking the problem of systemic racism, but also satirizing the neoliberal class myths and disrupting the identity categories, the research substitutes the neoliberal ideology with satire as a radical practice in the literature. It challenges the traditional attitude towards satire as amusement or style bombardment. It presents it as an instrument of interference with mainstream discourse and the discursive space of the marginalized voices.

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