Singing Truth to Power: Folk Music and Political Resistance in Steven Conrad's *Patriot*

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"The duty of a true patriot is to protect his country from his government." – Thomas Paine
"Guard against the impostures of pretended patriotism." – George Washington

Steven Conrad's 2017 comedy-drama series *Patriot* concerns John Tavner, a deep cover CIA officer tasked to impersonate an engineer, deliver bribe money, and thereby influence an Iranian election for American interests. Though known to the Agency, these actions are off the books, risky, and, to everyone's frustration, colossal failures. Mishaps plague Tavner's operation and drive plotlines that catalog his herculean efforts to save the mission. The ensuing chaos compels viewers to navigate a peculiar and absorbing world that is singular in its unpredictability. Critical reviews of *Patriot's* two seasons have been overwhelmingly positive and cite its oddness as particularly important to its message. Some critics like John Perch in his piece "Amazon's *Patriot*: An Audience of One," quickly homed in on the philosophical implication of the series, contending that the show offers "a nihilist commentary on the futility of human endeavor itself" as it presents a universe wherein "[t]hings go wrong, constantly, but in the most plausible ways, and no one's particularly evil."

Other critics, such as Rob Lowman of *The Los Angeles Daily News* single out the main character's fraught relationships with those nearest him as particularly intriguing: "it's weird but it's the *human* moments that propel *Patriot.*" Many critics like Matthew Gilbert of the *Boston Globe,* speculate that the series' exceptional quality arises from its writers' creative daring: "*Patriot* is a show for viewers who enjoy tonal risk-taking, who are prepared to accept that you can't hit a home run unless you take a swing. The plain, generic title of the series does no justice to the

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creativity on display." Virtually all reviewers conclude, as Ben Travers of *Indie Wire* does, that "what sets *Patriot* apart is its peculiar sense of humor," and that humor usually hinges on each episode's careful arrangement of musical numbers. Indeed, in writing *Patriot*, Conrad composes an innovative piece of entertainment, contrapuntally aligning farce, tragedy, action and spectacle to produce what is in effect the Ballad of Officer Tavner.

One of the show's endearing quirks lies in the fact that the stoic Tavner is also a folk singer who employs his original music in a therapeutic fashion. His lyrics simultaneously reveal and counteract the stressors of his secretive, violent life. To his CIA handler's chagrin, John's confessional and public performances endanger not only his personal safety but, more important, national security. His lyrics explicitly recount the details of operational fiascos, and characters' lives turn on the multivalent nature of the language he chooses. John's folk lyrics allow him a linguistic means to reconsider and redefine patriotism as both an ideological concept and lived experience. What's more, the "music of the people" offers him a modicum of solace even as it challenges the vagaries of spy craft and prevarications of American foreign policy. Tavner's experience as a non-official cover (NOC) field officer forces him to reckon with his sense of self as both a patriotic American and a moral being. To understand John's psychic inventory process, the audience must consider how the entertaining voice of his lyrical compositions serves also as a voice of political dissent.

To that end, Conrad's series interrogates the interplay of a nationalistic voice, that of Tavner's father, the CIA, and the American government they serve, and a patriotic voice, that of John's conscience as informed by loyalty to his family and nation. These competing voices operate at cross purposes yet coalesce to create a dialogical hybrid, an ever-shifting amalgamated American voice which finds expression in the CIA officer's folk music. In *The Dialogic Imagination,* Mikhail Bakhtin's consideration of heteroglossia, the diversity in voices, viewpoints, and discourse styles, offers a lens through which we can examine the political significance of *Patriot's* contesting voices. Bakhtin claims that language's dialogical constitution means multiple social languages necessarily intersect, as language is "heteroglot from top to bottom; it represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past…and between different ideological groups in the present" (*The Dialogic Imagination* 288). For Bakhtin, languages are always reflexive and evaluative, each serving as a "particular point of view on the world and of oneself. . . enabling a person to interpret and evaluate

his own self and his surrounding reality" (*Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics* 47). An individual's point of view matters immensely, because social languages' reflexive and evaluative properties mean they possess power which can create and shift values in political discourse.

The Power of Song

In *Patriot*, John's lyrical compositions arise from his encounters with intersecting languages, expressions of nationalistic and patriotic voices which each reflects at once part of the identity of the other. By way of this reflection, his hybridized song lyrics expose the tension between the competing pulls of principle and distinctive values each language professes; this exposition is significant because, as Fred Evans discusses in his book, *The Multi-Voiced Body*, language hybridity has phenomenological import: "[w]e never encounter ourselves apart from a dialogue, either within ourselves or with others. We are always involved in an exchange. . . much goes on inside and outside us besides speech, but we register things in terms of what we can or cannot say about them" (57). Evans explains that hybridity is readily apparent in our everyday experiences: "we sometimes hear ourselves sounding like our parents or other figures that are significant for us […] these voices contend for audibility within the soul" (58). In *Patriot*, the nationalistic voice of father and nation ceaselessly challenges the patriotic voice of John's conscience and duty, and its language calls for blind obedience regardless of the consequences. John, a good soldier, ruefully complies; he commits atrocious acts and in doing so experiences profound trauma. His sorrow compels him to confess his gruesome exploits and folk music provides a ready forum.

In this context, Thomas Tavner, John's father and CIA handler, looms large in his psyche, because he speaks to his son with the authority of both father and state, a conflation which proves formidable as his voice aims to silence John by discouraging his musical pursuits. In the pilot episode, "Milwaukee, America," Thomas Tavner discusses with a fellow officer the problem with his son's songs: "The songs, oh, they're pretty good. Um, I mean, I'm his dad, so maybe I'm biased, but they're pretty good, but they're becoming more *honest*. Which is probably good for folk singers in general but not a good thing if you're one who works in intelligence" (emphasis added, 00:05:00-00:05:27). The truthfulness of John's lyrics and not the actions they relate is the issue Thomas finds problematic, and therefore his word choice, "honest," has multiple implications. On the surface,

Thomas is concerned his son might inadvertently reveal CIA secrets, but in fact, he's truly disturbed that John is not following the agency's script. John's honest language belies the Agency's adherence to prescribed legal protocols for covert foreign dealings. Hence, the languages of father and son collide in their desire to relate differing accounts of their espionage work, and therefore both stake claims on the discourse of storytelling.

Competing claims complicate language use. Bakhtin explains that "[t]he word in language is half someone else's. It becomes 'one's own' only when the speaker populates it with his own intentions, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention" (*The Dialogic Imagination* 294). John adopts and adapts the language of folk music, because it is a medium whose generic conventions best enable his particular semantic and expressive intention when recounting a given examples of the Agency's criminal activities. In the folk forum, his lyrics demarcate his half of the "word in language" by relating his NOC mission's recurring failures to an audience. He divulges ghastly experiences to show in "his own accent" how the CIA's current enactment of American foreign policy actually provokes, not quells violence in the Middle East. By doing so, John's songs repudiate his father's nationalistic voice and its version of events by intoning the discord between "authoritative and internally persuasive discourses" (*Speech Genres* 89).

For all its persuasiveness, John's patriotic voice is regretful, despairing and lonely. His artistic expression is warped by PTSD and clouded with suicidal ideation. Yet within this psychic miasma, his melodies still prove palliative. In *Listening to Music in Psychotherapy,* M. Butterton explains that aspects of patients' inner states are held in their choice of music (3). By choosing folk music, Tavner can self-soothe as he mulls over how often duty to his Agency's leaders conflicts with duty to his country's citizens. The importance of language's self-reflexive nature is significant as it relates to governmental institution, because it is through self-reflexivity that "social structures can be transformed into objects of discussion and possible change" (Evans 160). Revealing injustice and agitating for meaningful change are the hallmarks of American folk music. Leon Litwack, the renowned folk music scholar, explains that this genre allows artists to reach into "the interior of American lives, to get at peoples long excluded from the American experience, many of them losers in their own time, outlaws, rebels who - individually or collectively - tried to flesh out and give meaning to abstract notions of liberty, equality and freedom" (qtd. in *American Roots Music*). The politically charged

nature of folk discourse exemplifies the value creating power of language Bakhtin extolls. Calling attention to injustice, “folk musicians embody the spirit of freedom and the refusal of constraint while drawing on the lived experience of ordinary men” (Litwick). Herein lies one of Tavner’s problems; although he is an ordinary man, his work demands extraordinary, often ruthless actions. His NOC missions must always proceed without regard to what the Agency deems acceptable losses.

Viewers learn this fact in the first episode of season 1when, in an Amsterdam public square, John chooses to sing about the floundering Iranian mission.[1] His song "Birds of Amsterdam" plays as soundtrack for a bizarre, nightmarish flashback to the botched assassination attempt of an Iranian scientist. This scene marks the first instance in the series where the audience hears John’s folk music provide lyrical self-reflection about the value and cost of his work. Crooning on a park bench with an acoustic guitar, he lists the myriad ways his operation failed (00:05:55-00:07:50):

In June two thousand and eleven
The United States learned Iranian president
Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was fucking around
With new centrifuges
Egyptian physicist Mohammad Wahwa El-Mashad
Was hired to produce the catalyzed uranium
I was tasked to shoot Mashad
While he was on vacation
To keep Iran from activating
Short-range nuclear weapons
To destroy Israel
I got some really bad intelligence
Shot an old male hotel maid
Who was just making the physicist's bed (“Birds of Amsterdam” lines 1-14)

John’s lyrical recounting of his mission shows him striving to express the logic of it. He lists names, dates, locations, and particulars concerning the operation’s rationale, and his word choice, for instance “tasked,” reflects the professional

[1] John’s music also has a distinctive aesthetic, one that is rendered in melancholy, stream of consciousness narratives. In a 2017 interview, Michael Dorman, the actor and musician who plays John Tavner, discussed his process for composing John’s music. He claimed melodies and lyrics came to him organically while he imagined what John might be feeling in a given moment (Build Series).

demeanor his job necessitates. But this cool, detached language is, in the words of Bakhtin, "half someone else's" – in this case, the nationalistic language his CIA handler/father speaks. John's patriotic voice tentatively emerges when he notes that the man he mistakenly killed was "old," "a maid" and "just making a bed." The choice of these specific descriptors is important because they morally qualify his part in the killing; they signify the weight of his transgression because the crime is compounded by not only the maid's age and innocence, but also the mundane nature of his bed-making. Lines 15-20 then move on to recount what follows the maid's murder:

> I was arrested by the secret king's police
> I got a fair dose of white torture which is supposed to
> Completely erase your sense of self
> I'm showing several signs of increasing mental instability
> Talking to my wife would be... well
> That would be awfully nice. ("Birds of Amsterdam")

Here John's attention shifts from the maid's murder to tactical assaults on his own body and mind. Experiences with "white torture"[2] in Egypt, though he does not describe them, clearly damage his psychological well-being. He recognizes his vulnerability when referencing his "mental instability," and then his thoughts immediately and understandably shift to desiring his wife's comfort. In her article, "Towards a Conceptual Framework for Resilience Research in Music Training and Performance," Patricia Holmes observes that the "musician's intrinsic engagement with music drives the need to sustain an exceptional investment of personal resources – mental, emotional and physical" (4) when composing and performing. Moreover, "by the very nature of their art, musicians are vulnerable – when performing, their internal state becomes externalised in order to create meaning, as they make reference to their underlying personal, artistic intention" (4). Holmes's assessment points to the double-edged, hybrid nature of John's folk music; his composing and singing, driven by the intent to make meaning, usually position him

[2] "White torture," also known as "clean torture" or "no-touch torture" aims to break down a prisoner's psychological stability. Techniques such as sensory deprivation, sensory overload, cultural humiliation, and isolation function to erase personal identity with the goal of making captives pliable for interrogation. See Leach's discussion of the psychological ramifications of extreme torture.

as emotionally defenseless in performances.[3] In "Birds of Amsterdam," his lyrical shift from the political (his failing mission) to the personal (his wife), signifies a turning away from the CIA's nationalistic voice, whose directives imperil his mind and body, to the patriotic voice that speaks the language of everyday people, such as his wife. The latter voice understands the human cost of the former's demands, and John's latent recognition of this manifests in lines 21-27 of his musical performance:

> You can't just go back to the US after
> You target a guy on their behalf
> And some genius parked me in Amsterdam
> I've just been getting baked, just looking up at birds
> Wondering why there aren't male hotel maids in other countries
> You never see that, never see that
> Never see that. ("Birds of Amsterdam")

As in the opening lines of "Birds of Amsterdam," near the song's end John's focus moves back to acknowledging the strictures of the job, in this case his temporary exile from America. Ultimately, his voice trails off as he reflects on the scarcity of male hotel maids, but his guilt reverberates in the three repetitions of "never see that." This declarative sentence speaks the language of his patriotic voice, indicting his father and the Agency, by mourning the victims of the criminal behavior few Americans know or see.

Holmes' study helps shed light on the dynamic between musical performance and language hybridity which underpins the political discourse in "Birds of Amsterdam." She writes that

> [m]usicians are undoubtedly vulnerable when they expose their whole being in public performance … but vulnerability and other potentially stressful aspects of performance (for example, intentional risk taking) can also be sources of hedonistic satisfaction – that is, related to innate psychological needs – and are thus powerful sources of motivation for the performer … [i]t is therefore possible that, through the catalysts of courage and risk

[3] On the benefit of incorporating patients' music choices in therapeutic sessions, see Blimling 117-23.

taking, vulnerability becomes, itself, the agent of transformative experience. (8)

John's town square performance risks a great deal, but his song reflects movement toward transformation as his lyrics consider how his Agency's global agenda gravely affects individuals he encounters in his work. His preoccupation with killing the maid marks a preliminary rejection of his father's nationalistic ethos by way of a newly defined patriotic voice, one that values individual human lives and not just nation states. In this manner, his language's value-creating power emerges in the reflexive and evaluative qualities John's folk music affords; his impulse to publicize the Agency's crimes, and thereby repudiate the nationalistic voice's skewed values, intensifies as his operation's body count grows.

John turns once more to public singing after his second failed attempt to recover the Iranian bribe money in episode 2 of season 1. In this debacle, he again kills a poor man, a Brazilian immigrant, after breaking into his apartment to retrieve the cash. Deeply depressed, John performs his piece, "Charlie Foxtrot,"[4] in a crowded European café. As in "Birds of Amsterdam," the first 3 lines of "Charlie Foxtrot" begin with a recitation of facts: "Brazilians make up Luxembourg's labor force / They work as cooks or at the airport / And they're so poor they live six guys to one apartment apparently too" (00:43:00-00:44:34). After observing the context of his victim's life, he then poses a rhetorical question in lines 4 through 8, asking his audience to consider an impoverished immigrant's temptation to steal a large sum of money:

So you wouldn't hold it against one
If some money just rolled on by
And he just rolled on with it
On his little European scooter
Now would you? ("Charlie Foxtrot" 4-8)

This question is ostensibly leveled at the audience, but the lyrics above and in the song's next lines underscore John's guilt about how the Agency's operational demands can result in the unintentional killing of non-combatant citizens:

I mean you wouldn't stab his brother for doing that

[4] John's choice of title is revealing: "Charlie Foxtrot begins as a euphemism in 1960's US military slang for a poorly-managed operation during the Viet Nam war" (Site Admin). The C and F from the NATO phonetic alphabet corresponds to "Cluster Fuck," and as a CIA officer, John is fluent in the jargon.

Unless you had extenuating circumstances
That would allow you to justify it somehow.
If you really didn't work where people think you work,
Like an industrial pipe and engineering firm,
You really work for —. (00:43:00-00:44:34)

This café performance is poignant for several reasons. The audience feels John's palpable guilt when he fumblingly tries to rationalize killing the Brazilian by explaining his NOC identity. Furthermore, as with his previous performance, Tavner seems especially bothered by his victim's identity. Hotel maids and immigrants represent the very folk his musical genre should champion and his song affirms that truth. John's patriotic voice clearly verifies that it is common folk who suffer most from his government's inept, corrupt maneuvering. As William Roy asserts in *Reds, Whites, and Blues: Social Movements, Folk Music, and Race in the United States*, folk music's power "springs directly from the people – [it is] something that's pure and innocent and not ruined by industry and modern life" (46). Indeed, in *Patriot*, John's compositions resonate with power and purity because they expose the grave injustice of particular and personal operational failures. He bears witness to the real-life suffering his Agency sets in motion and his lyrical retelling of those acts delegitimizes the nationalistic voice's alleged moral code. What's more, the hybrid quality of his lyrical language provides him space to evaluate his complicity in Agency crimes. In this way, singing becomes an act of penance.

The confusion and regret John conveys in "Charlie Foxtrot" also reveal his flagging allegiance to the nationalistic voice's language. As stated before, Bakhtin contends that the heteroglot quality of languages enables the co-existence of ideological contradictions. This contention holds true in "Charlie Foxtrot," insofar as John's lyrics tease out the real-world implications of ideologies operating at cross purposes. However, the abrupt end of his lyrical confession, represented by the trail of dashes in line 13, is critical to recognize because it marks a point where the semantic intentions of John's words are compromised. In this crucial moment, John's patriotic voice is literally silenced by his brother, Rick, who grabs his shoulder and whispers in his ear a reminder about what he cannot say in public. Rick rightly fears John will destroy his NOC cover by singing the end of line 13: "you really work for --- [*the CIA*]" (emphasis added). Like Thomas Tavner, Rick

too works for the American government but as a member of congress.[5] In his professional capacity, Rick serves as another representative of the nationalistic voice. Though the end of "Charlie Foxtrot" is cut short, John's lyrics clarify that the Agency's collateral damage – the murder of innocents – does not sit well with his conscience. More significant, lyrical confession does not absolve him of his contribution to that harm. After all, he is the one who shot the maid and stabbed the immigrant.

It is also worth stating that John's music, though therapeutic, offers no panacea to his psychic pain, let alone robust resistance to government corruption. His songs demonstrate the precarious practice of trying to reconcile the ideological variance between the nationalistic and patriotic voices, both paradoxically juxtaposed and demanding his attention. This point is rendered darkly comedic in season 2, episode 3 when we learn John and a British MI6 officer, self-named Spike, were captured in Egypt and tortured with folk music. Locked together in a small metal crate, the men are forced to listen continuously to Don McLean's "American Pie," for weeks (00:00:10-00:01:30).[6] Their captors' dual use of McClean's song echoes John's struggle with negotiating the hybridity informing his lyrical compositions. The Egyptians enlist the iconic folk anthem, whose theme appropriately traces the loss of innocence, in an attempt to dismantle John's identity as an American and his sense of self as a human being. Bakhtin's explanation of the double-voiced utterance works well here to clarify the psychological import of the Egyptians' strategy. The double-voiced utterance "has a twofold direction – it is directed both toward the object of speech, as in ordinary discourses, and toward another discourse, toward someone else's speech" (*Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics* 195). The Egyptians deftly manipulate the folk song by inserting a new semantic intention into its message and the experience of hearing it, a maneuver which subverts the original aim of McClean's lyrics.

His captors compound their psychological torment by ratcheting up the men's physical suffering. Crammed in a small crate that is ringed by speakers, they must endure the tune blasting from a tape cassette at an ear-splitting volume. In this

[5] Rick, though a governmental official, differs significantly from Thomas who plans all aspects of CIA operations. In contrast, Rick is naïve and clueless about his family and government's dealings; his fecklessness illustrates the problems of civic ignorance and apathy.

[6] This is the "white torture" referenced in "Birds of Amsterdam." Torture by music was developed by the CIA during the Cold War. See McCoy for more on this history.

context, the folk spirit of “American Pie” mocks the ideals John labors to defend, while the hapless Spike suffers alongside him by virtue of MI6’s complicity in the CIA scheme. Spike labels their plight the “American Pie Scenario.” He reminds John that the song has a run time of eight minutes, thirty-three seconds with a forty second rewind time between each play (00:00:10-00:01:30). It is only in those rewinding gaps that the intelligence officers can hear or speak to each other, and significantly, when they do, they try to reaffirm one another’s identities. The MI6 officer no longer remembers his name and adopts the moniker “Spike” as a place-holder. John does manage to remember his name, barely, but by the time of his release he’s overwhelmed by PTSD.

Once freed, John’s songs’ hybridized lyrics continue to sound the jarring notes of conflicting ideologies. In season 2, episode 3 his torn loyalties finally erupt during a folk concert – his biggest venue by far – in a duet performance of "Afternoon Spray" (00:46:14-00:48:51). While singing the love song, his mind wanders to his NOC civilian boss, Leslie Claret, and his admiration of the man hijacks the tune’s lyrics. Claret is important to John as a father figure who does not speak in the language of Thomas Tavner’s nationalist voice. On the contrary, Leslie is a forthright, exacting man, who speaks with honesty and models integrity. As such, he represents the ideal, albeit romanticized, American John admires:

> My boss Leslie is like your grandfather
> That you like less than your other grandfather
> 'Cause he's kind of a prick and says things like
> Keep your hair cut
> But he just cares about things you should care about
> Like doing your work right and showing up on time
> Keeping your word and old-world craftsmanship
> And he's probably a better man
> Than your more casual grandpa
> Here's to old school
> I think you're grandpa number one
> And I just wanted to tell you that
> I'll probably mess you up somehow anyway
> Later. (“Afternoon Spray” 10-24)

In these lines, John’s patriotic voice intersects with Thomas’s nationalistic one to challenge the veracity of its discourse by delivering an explicit description of legitimate American values. Appreciatively, John states that Leslie keeps his word.

Leslie's discipline, honesty, and integrity represent the very qualities his father and Agency lack, and John sees these "old school" ideals as deserving to be recognized and toasted. John's high praise, the intention of his language, juxtaposes his father's in a distinct way; the tribute indicates "an encounter, within the arena of an utterance, between two different linguistic consciousnesses" (Evans 23). Ironically, through its reflexive form, John's praising language in "Afternoon Spray" also works to express his demoralization. As line 22 indicates, John knows that the man he admires most, the one who speaks with a true patriot's voice, will inevitably be harmed by his underhanded work. This in fact proves to be the case as John ruins Leslie's sobriety, guts his career, and fractures his family. In this way, the unraveling of Leslie's life signals the unraveling of the American dream.

The unsettling trajectory of *Patriot*'s plot justifies some critics' assessment that its ultimate message is bleak. John Perch contends that the series represents a sad allegory about America's decline at home and in the global theater ("Amazon's *Patriot"*). Dark as it is, John's saga nevertheless offers a glimmer of hope. Season 2 ends with him successfully completing his recovery mission. With this accomplishment, John's song lyrics once more slightly shift focus. His compositions now strive for harmony between the intersecting voices whose divergent languages compete for his soul, and the intent of those languages matter. Bakhtin makes clear that hybridization lacking intent occurs when languages do not explicitly come together in an utterance; rather, "the other voice is *tacitly* at play in the present utterance" (Evans 68, emphasis mine). In season 2, episode 8, John's aptly titled song "Be the One" illustrates this kind of play (00:22:30-00:25:31):

You can't be halfway gone
You can't be halfway alone
You can't be half a mother
You can't be half a father, half a son
You have to be the one
You have to be the one
You have to be the one ("Be the One" 1-7)

At first glance, John's assertion that he has to "be the one" appears to signal his acceptance that only he can save his father and the operation.[7] A second look at

[7] John's attempts to recover the stolen cash before an Agency audit discovers and reports the misappropriation of taxpayer money to Congress. If found out, Thomas Tavner would be indicted

lines 3 and 4 additionally reveals Tavner's awareness of the reasons for his family's fragmentation: John's father is incapable of fully loving his son; John's mother is primarily devoted to her career; and John is unable to speak to either of them about his pain.[8] Thus, it makes sense that in lines 5 through 7 his lyrics repeat a desire for unity. It may be too late for his family, but he might yet be able to find oneness in his own life:

> You can't be halfway home
> You can't be halfway done
> You can't be half a mother
> Half a father, half a son
> You have to be the one
> You have to be the one
> You have to be the one ("Be the One" lines 8-14)

In their reinforcement of unity, John's lyrics tacitly censure his father's language and the appalling, divisive acts the nationalistic voice requires him to commit. The intent of the Agency's message however influences political discourse because it carries the full power of the government's authority. When Thomas reports his mission's proceedings to his superiors, he redacts any mention of civilian deaths; the stories of murdered innocents are simply voiced-over in his retellings.

In his core, John cannot abide his part in this injustice. He wants to protect American citizens, the folk of his audience, but to do this effectively his patriotic voice must move from a discourse of dissent to one of action. Unfortunately, this proves unlikely to come to fruition. By the end of *Patriot*'s second season, John's psychological deterioration is compounded by a physical mutilation that does not bode well for his character. In season 2, episode 8, his father requires him to smuggle the recovered bribe money out of Europe, and to do so, John must literally deface himself. At John's request, Leslie Claret uses plyers to pull three of his teeth so Tavner can avoid face-recognizing surveillance systems by way of a gap-toothed smile and swollen cheeks (00:01:20-00:02:03). Even more disturbing, in the series final episode, "Escape from Paris," he and a friend exchange severed fingers in a

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and likely sent to federal prison. Hence, John is under intense pressure to safeguard his father's freedom along with the Agency's reputation.

[8] John's mother, referenced in line 3, is the Secretary of Transportation but appears infrequently. She, like Thomas and Rick, also represents the nationalistic voice. Her title lends comedic spin to the crisis as her son and ex-husband cannot safely or effectively transport the tainted money.

slipshod transplant procedure, so John can avoid fingerprint detection at border crossings (00:33:30-00:33:53). The scheme works, but both men's fingers quickly turn necrotic. Consequently, it's unsurprising then that Rick repeats to his father: "I'm worried he's going to go to pieces. John. I'm worried he's going to fall to pieces" ("Escape from Paris" 00:37:30-00:38:18). John pays a steep and ghastly price to escape Europe, experiencing his own collateral damage in his body's dismemberment and his mind's disintegration. Only music appears to mitigate the extent of the latter's damage.

Conclusion

In John's folk songs, competing voices interplay constantly and each articulates its own linguistic belief system. Their dialogic exchanges in his lyrics "are their mode of existence, and constitute the social body" of his reality (Evans 256). In theory, these interactions have the potential to catalyze political change. As evidenced in John's songs, change appears to depend on the patriotic voice publicly meeting that of the nationalistic in volume and conviction. John's lyrical compositions allow him a space to consider how the intention of the nationalistic voice runs afoul of his conscience which wants to demonstrate loyalty to a government worthy of it. His music, like all folk music, seeks "empowerment, freedom in a social structure" by "preserving traditions in a protean world, maintaining values, and finding strategies for seeking justice" (Wolfe qtd. in *American Roots Music*).

This desire to preserve traditions and seek justice via folk music has deep roots in American popular television and movies. Shows like *The Beverly Hillbillies* and *Hee Haw* offered viewers comedic send ups of hillbilly stereotypes, but they also produced folk performances that spoke to the very serious concerns of poverty and prejudice in Appalachia. The former's theme song "The Ballad of Jeb Clampett," [9] and the latter's "Gloom, Despair and Agony on Me"[10] explicitly address hardships

[9] "The Ballad of Jeb Clampett" was composed by Paul Henning and recorded first by the bluegrass musicians Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs. The song lyrics read:

> Come and listen to a story 'bout a man named Jed
> Poor mountaineer, barely kept his family fed
> Then one day he was shootin' at some food
> And up through the ground came a bubblin' crude. (1-4)

[10] Performed by Roy Clark; Gordie Tapp; Grandpa Jones and Archie Campbell. The chorus reads:

plaguing individuals within a discrete marginalized community. More recent entertainments, such as *O Brother, Where Art Thou* and *Justified* draw, respectively, on folk songs like "I am a Man of Constant Sorrow"[11] and "You'll Never Leave Harlan Alive" to do the same.[12] *Patriot*, however, differs from the previous examples. The lead character's use of the people's music stands apart as his folksongs are not only original, confessional, and dissenting but also serve as a call to action against an insidious form of nationalism. John's songs, that is, are much more than laments, and through the careful study of popular culture, in this case folk music and a popular series, audience members can scrutinize their roles, the effects of their voices, as American voters and citizens.

In this way the title of Conrad's show is misleading. John Tavner's public performances reveal that his patriotism is not grounded in service to the CIA, his father, or America's current presidential administration, because those voices profess a fatally flawed model of governing. In opposition, Tavner's patriotic voice sings in dissent through this dialogic, calling attention to a corrupt government that

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Gloom, despair, and agony on me-e!
Deep dark depression, excessive misery-y!
If it weren't for bad luck, I'd have no luck at all!
Gloom, despair, and agony on me-e-e! (1-4)

[11] "I am a Man of Constant Sorrow" was written and published by Dick Burnett in 1913. The opening lyrics read:

I am a man of constant sorrow
I've seen trouble all my day
I bid farewell to old Kentucky
The place where I was born and raised
For six long years I've been in trouble
No pleasures here on earth I found
For in this world I'm bound to ramble
I have no friends to help me now. (1-8)

[12] "You'll Never Leave Harlan Behind" written and performed by Darrell Scott in 1997. The opening lines read:

In the deep dark hills of eastern Kentucky
That's the place where I trace my bloodline
And it's there I read on a hillside gravestone
"You'll never leave Harlan alive." (1-4)

has strayed inexcusably far from its ideological roots. His songs prod listeners to contemplate the core principles the American Declaration of Independence and Constitution extol. Moreover, their lyrics require his audience to judge the means by which our government promotes and performs democracy on the global stage. In short, John's music exhorts us to ask ourselves, what does it mean to be a patriot?

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