ABSTRACT

CHARLES AUSTIN HORNE. African American Metamodernism: Percival Everett’s *Watershed* and the Oscillation of (Dis)Affection. (Under the direction of Professor Rebecca Walsh.)

Metamodernism seeks to supplant postmodernism by rejecting disaffection and detachment by championing sincerity and affective connections in both content and form by politically engaging with universal humanism. If postmodernism sought to disaffect its audience and eliminate grounds for a ‘politics of difference,’ metamodernism diagnoses this issue and attempts to supply organic sites for sincere affect through universal humanism and the oscillation of felt experience. These metamodernist sensibilities can be understood through Kwame Anthony Appiah’s redefinition of the concept of “cosmopolitanism” as “universality plus difference.” The overall impact is an attempt to foster dialogic and sincere connections as we move well into the twenty-first century. But what does this look like in contemporary literature?

As we examine the literary canon formation ranging from postmodernism to metamodernism, African American literary representation is sorely lacking in both postmodernism and, now, metamodernism. My project argues that African American author Percival Everett needs to be considered as a central part of the metamodern canon. By dissecting his 1996 novel *Watershed* we can see he was engaging with metamodern predilections well before most other canonized metamodern authors.

Everett’s protagonist, African American hydrologist Robert Hawks, spends the novel oscillating between his desire to sincerely disconnect from others due to his traumatic race-related formative experiences while wanting to sincerely understand why this affects him by examining his relationship with his grandfather. Meanwhile, he connects with the Native