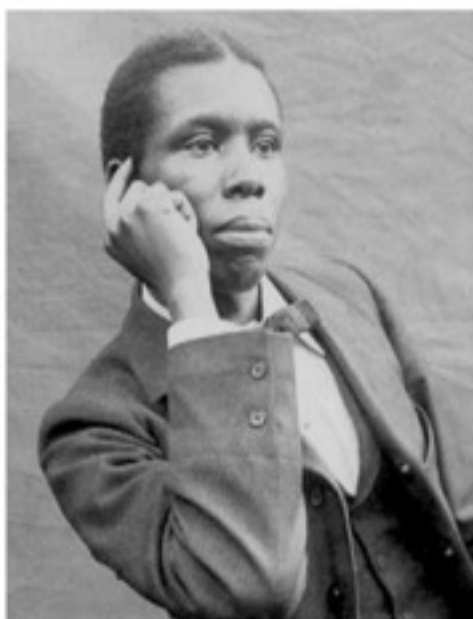

Making and Unmaking Whiteness
in Early New South Fiction
After the Civil War

Its Relevance for Multiracial Democracy Today

Peter Schmidt

AN iBOOK ESSAY



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From upper left, clockwise: Joel Chandler Harris,
Pauline E. Hopkins, Kate Chopin, and Paul Laurence Dunbar

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Introduction

“By the rivers of Babylon ...
our captors asked us for songs,
and our tormentors for mirth, saying,
Sing us one of the songs of Zion!”
—Psalm 137

After Reconstruction, did fictional texts contribute to post-slavery racial formation as new forms of white racial dominance, collectively known as Jim Crow or the “color-line,” came into being in the U.S. in the 1880s and after? [\[footnote 1\]](#) If so, how? Simultaneously, was there fiction that troubled rather than abetted this racial formation process—perhaps even fiction that subverted the color-line and imagined other ways for people of different races to interact? How should we understand such moments historically, and their relevance for us today?

This essay will sketch answers to these questions via both an overview of this key moment in U.S. history and readings of representative samples of early New South fiction treating the topic of “race,” particularly the issue of how white supremacy in fiction narrated its origins and rights. Perhaps surprisingly, when a broad selection of such narratives is read what emerges is not just orthodoxy and claims to certainty on the topic of white racial identity, but also ambivalence, anxiety, and profound confusion. Regarding the rise of Jim Crow segregation as a post-slavery racial formation, much attention has rightly been given to non-fictional discourse, such as political speeches and Supreme Court rulings, in the making of post-slavery race hierarchies in the New South after 1877. (Such studies also consider the complex ways such symbolic acts intersected with other developments, from share-cropping to lynchings.) But the role that short stories and

novels—many of them hugely popular and influential—played in the postwar racial formation process in the New South has not been given the sustained attention that it deserves. Inherently multi-vocal, fiction allows us to get an extraordinarily dramatic view of post-slavery whiteness in formation—where whiteness reveals itself to be anything but inevitable, monolithic, or “supreme.” Why is this important? Because if we understand how making whiteness historically was a contingent process, it then becomes possible to envision how whiteness may be unmade, both as a personal expectation of entitlement and as a set of complex social formations sustaining privilege.

Studying often ignored post-Reconstruction stories by both black and white writers—and including them on the syllabi of high school, college, and university classes in U.S. literature and history—will open important possibilities for reinterpreting the U.S.’s complex racial past. Unless such discussion is part of the curriculum, we cannot effectively prepare our students for the new United States that is now in formation, as the nation moves with great social turbulence and occasional violence towards a time soon after 2040 when, according to projections from current U.S. Census figures, the U.S. as a whole will be a nation of minorities, with no one group comprising more than half the population. (In many areas, especially urban ones, whites are no longer “the” majority, and by 2023 more than half of all children in the U.S. will be children of color. Beginning in 2012, according to the U.S. Census, over half of all births nation-wide were children of color, and many states highly attractive to immigrant populations, such as New Jersey, passed that transition point several years earlier.) All groups, including whites, have increasing numbers listing themselves as being of mixed race or ethnicity, what the U.S. Census now calls the “in-combination” population.

Concurrent with such developments, however, is a dangerous set of counter-trends. As U.S. society grows more diverse, many elements of our society are rapidly *re-segregating* by race as well as class, including its public and charter schools. The result for many young people is less rather than more interaction with a broad range of their peers of other races, ethnicities, and incomes. This holds true for many students of color as well as for white students. Increasing diversity countered by rising segregation is dangerous for U.S. democracy. Schools with poor di-

iversity become poor training grounds for the interactions across class- and color-lines that increasingly need to occur in the workplace and many other realms. They rarely can teach students how to find common ground with others, be knowledgeable about our shared past, or be a responsibly involved citizen in a diverse public sphere and a cosmopolitan world. Curricular changes by themselves of course cannot directly affect the structural pressures in U.S. society that lead to segregated schools. But nothing can be done without such changes either: they are a necessary component for progress. Reading and critically understanding authors who wrote about the color-line over one hundred years ago give us a broader and deeper sense of the history that brought us to our current dilemmas. It can also change how people imagine the possibilities of inter-racial interaction, good and bad—and that is a necessary first step for possible structural changes that our society needs to create better citizens. As we become a nation of minorities, we will either be at each other's throats fighting for dominance or will recognize, finally, that we are now all minorities together and need to find new ways of making a more equitable unum out of our ever more pluralistic *pluribus*. [2]

In literary studies, we need to look more closely at how narratives of white supremacy justified themselves in fiction, including in the early post-slavery era. Particularly neglected from the New South period are not tales of overt violence and assertions of superiority, such as Thomas Dixon's *The Clansman*, but narratives in which white dominance imagined itself to be beneficent and enlightened, offering roles for other minorities to play that were generous and supposedly performed voluntarily, even thankfully. Several examples of such masked forms of racism are examined carefully below. But in studying this era we also must not neglect stories that imagine *other* ways for people of different races to interact that were not riddled with self-serving lies—scenes in which people improvise or construct more respectful and productive ways to communicate and interact, even though they cannot change the color-line divisions that structure the society in which they are a part. Having students read and discuss all these kinds of narratives may provide them (and their teachers) with a way to think about race in the U.S. in a responsible and historical way. The conversations such readings provoke may also allow us not only to trace the many disguises that racism assumes—a crucial task at a mo-

ment when the nation nervously keeps trying to assure itself that it is becoming more and more “post-racial”—but also to look at alternative, more hopeful, and more just scripts for listening to each other’s stories and interacting with each other in a more just and humane way.

For most of us the world of the early “New South,” the period after the fall of Reconstruction to the early twentieth century, could not seem less relevant to these contemporary needs. It is understood to be the nadir of U.S. post-slavery race relations, a dark nightmare of lynching and poll taxes, neo-slave labor and vitriolic cant. Such an assessment is accurate. But that is not the whole story. Early New South fiction dealing with the topic of “race” is much more diverse than most of us realize, and it has much to teach us now. At least, that is what I will argue in this essay. We can’t just focus on recent literature if we want to understand our racial past and imagine new directions we may take. But to move forward we must also *know* our past, both our best and our worst, including that of the post-Civil War era, a crucial earlier moment of profound historical change producing new forms of racial formation and interaction. The one liability of New South racial literature from 1880 to the early twentieth century is that its focus is primarily on black/white interactions. Yet that sharp focus is also this literature’s strength. Understanding representations of black/white interactions historically in all their diversity and depth is a good first step in creating a broader ability to respond critically and empathetically to other racial histories and interactions in the U.S.

Neglected fiction about the early New South will not only work well to foster conversations about race, or provide guidance into how *not* to repeat the patterns of the past. It also gives us small but crucial measures of hope: some key stories discussed below show individuals able to work together in ways that seriously challenge the scripts about race dictated to them by the times in which they lived. In short, the authors discussed here give us stories about the making and the exercise of white power, including racism’s many ruses and disguises, but collectively New South authors—including the four who receive careful attention below—also provide us with tools by which we may think critically about “race” and the difference it makes. They help us to imagine the *unmaking* of white dominance and the possibilities that may come after. They teach us to challenge unjust forms of racial

power, even ones that present themselves as benign rule that is not even “racial” at all. And they help us to imagine other possibilities, other worlds.

In this essay, as a small contribution towards the new curriculum we’ll need, I propose a different approach to studying the representation of whiteness and racial difference in early New South fictional narratives. Building upon much insightful recent work on the U.S. South, as well as cultural studies and colonial/postcolonial scholarship, I treat white supremacy in this period as neither a given nor a static social formation, but as a risky masquerade—a story that had to be retold and affirmed by an assenting audience. Such an emphasis on the theatrical and fictional qualities of whiteness hardly means to downplay the devastating and privileging actual effects of “race” as it was lived in the early New South. But such an emphasis on race-as-performance allows us to experience vividly how racial identity is always defined not in absolute but in relational terms, via difference and consent, denial, or some volatile mixture of both. Narratives that present themselves as fictional are particularly revealing in this regard because by their very nature they understand identity to be performative, relational, mediated, and often multi-vocal, caught in a complex process of exchange with an audience in a very particular time and place.

This essay offers comparative readings of one particular narrative pattern that shouldered a huge part of the burden of shaping post-slavery whiteness in the U.S. This pattern appears again and again in fictional texts about the South published in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, yet it has been much less studied than blackface performance. We may call this narrative motif the *command performance scene*. Like blackface minstrelsy’s interactions with its audience, command performance scenes in fiction give us interpretive conundrums involving overt and covert meanings in tension. [3]

A white person is not usually at the center of the command performance scenario, a black person is. He or she is asked to tell a story or otherwise give a performance that, in one way or another, normally affirms the validity of white superiority, not just the virtues of particular white characters. The emphasis also usually

falls on how supposedly voluntary and sincere the black person's requested performance is and how transparent its meanings are to interpret. And yet what begins to emerge again and again in such scenes, even sometimes against the author's efforts to downplay them, are suggestions of coercion, duplicity, and instability in power hierarchies and racial identities. In these normative examples white supremacy is demonstrably not a given; it is imperfectly produced by these performances, or at least reaffirmed under stress, in a way that locally conditions any power whiteness may claim. And if a white person's sense of entitlement is so dependent upon the performance of another person, to what degree could such a sense of self be threatened, made anxious, or even be unmade in such encounters? Far from asserting only the reality, purity, and superiority of whiteness, many of these narratives either overtly or covertly outed whiteness as a masquerade, a fraught performance dependent upon an audience affirming it as real.

Requests for performance can vary greatly in tone and meaning, of course—from an apparently friendly request and/or a voluntary performance, to situations that involve overt or implied coercion, even violence. That racial difference is at the heart of many such scenes, of course, means that the exchanges are neither innocent nor equitable; an unequal power dynamic is always involved. Many requests in southern fiction by whites for blacks to tell stories or otherwise perform for them mask a deep need on the part of whites to control another character's words, actions, and meanings while having the actions of the other character appear to be voluntary. Yet so insecure may the figure be who tries to wield power that violence may threaten to break out if desires are thwarted.

Interestingly, many command performance scenes popular in the U.S.'s early Jim Crow era also set their events not in the present but in the past—either in the first days of blacks' freedom during and after the Civil War or, just as often, in slavery times. Why should this be? The answers are many and complex, but they all hinge on a paradox: in trying to define post-slavery whiteness, southern fictional narratives kept returning to the master narrative—pun intended—of whiteness defined by slave-owning power. Yet the core element defining whiteness in such tales was not the ability to subjugate a slave by brute force but to win his or her loyalty by force of character. Such a supposedly voluntary admiration of the white mas-

ter or mistress also became an endorsement of white supremacy in general. Adapting antebellum defenses of slavery that argued it was a civilizing institution for Africans (yet one also rightfully ruthless in cracking down on those who rebelled), many southern narratives in the post-Reconstruction era suggested that, when it came to “race,” modeling an inferior’s loyalty to his or her superiors was one of their major tasks. The command performance scene was seemingly ideal for this goal. Yet the power dynamics of this primal scene were potentially unstable, for in effect they made white security dependent upon repeated black performances of loyalty—a paradox of power that Hegel had recognized much earlier in the nineteenth century in his famous parable about lordship and bondage, master and slave. [4]

Imagining white supremacy in the Jim Crow era as a scene of performance rather than a fixed truth, early New South fiction opened whiteness up to the possibility of revision and even negation. This fiction hinted at issues of status anxiety *within* whiteness even as it also obsessed over power relations between the races in the strange new world of the post-slavery South. Admittedly, most contemporary consumers of this fiction were probably not interested in such subtleties or paradoxes. But conundrums involving the meaning of racial difference are demonstrably there in much of the fiction that sold so well. It’s not reading anachronistically or whimsically to notice such anomalies in the archive of the past; rather, it’s reading responsibly, opening up a way of understanding that “our” shared past can and must be reinterpreted if we want to be able to think freely about what our current responsibilities are to each other as a people. Furthermore, we should recognize that although stories from the early New South may not be on many people’s reading lists now, they were greatly popular and influential nationwide in the 1880s and after. Indeed, it’s not much of an exaggeration to say that the U.S. as a whole looked to the South to define what post-slavery whiteness and blackness would look and sound like. The nation’s readers sought out these stories in prominent periodicals such as *Harper’s*, *The Atlantic*, *Century*, *Lippincott’s*, and *Scribner’s*. If we seek to rethink the roles that inherited racial categories might play in the drama of U.S. democracy in the present and the future, we need to know better

the range of voices and visions in these stories about “race” from over one hundred years ago.

Consider the following plot synopses of short stories by whites and blacks published between the end of Reconstruction and the beginning of the twentieth century. Some contain relatively straightforward scenes of “command performance.” Other examples below vary the basic scenario considerably, but the politics of performance—i.e., the issue of how power flows and what this reveals—is arguably still a central issue for interpretation. Command performance scenes were memorably featured in antebellum and postwar novels as well, including of course Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852). [5] This essay, however, has room to discuss briefly just two instances from postwar novels, Mark Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn* (1884) and Pauline E. Hopkins’ *Hagar’s Daughter* (1901-02). It will focus mostly on post-Civil War short fiction, for these examples should be better known.

- In a “comic” story by Sherwood Bonner (the publication pseudonym for Katherine Sherwood Bonner McDowell) entitled “The Gentleman of Sarsar” (*Dialect Tales*, 1883), a black servant agrees to be hunted down like a fox or a coon as part of an elaborate trick played by his former owner on a visiting bill-collector. During his performance as “prey” the servant is shot and wounded.
- A colonel and war hero can’t let his daughter be married unless his Negro man-servant agrees to return “home” (Page’s “Polly: A Christmas Recollection,” *In Ole Virginia*, 1887).
- An anonymous white stranger encourages a black servant to speak of his dead master—then pays him “several spare ‘eighteen-pences’” because the story’s sentimental reminiscences so satisfy him (Page’s “Marse Chan,” *In Ole Virginia*). Given this tale’s huge popularity with both northern and southern audiences, it perhaps may be called the archetypal early New South command performance story. Far from simple in its message, however, “Marse Chan” upon close reading reveals fascinating interpretive puzzles. [6]

- A loyal black servant not only assists her impoverished mistress set up a household in postwar New Orleans and provides the household with a small income by taking in laundry; she also assists her white mistress in revising a short story about a Mammy that becomes the white woman's first paid publication (Ruth McEnery Stuart's "Blink," *A Golden Wedding*, 1893). [7]

- In perhaps the most egregious command performance scenario in all New South literature, one of the patriarchal heroes of Thomas Dixon's *The Clansman* (1905), Dr. Cameron, proves able to hypnotize blacks and force them to confess their secrets. In the climax of the novel, a cave "trial" scene before the assembled Ku Klux Klan, a black man, Gus, is forced by Dr. Cameron to re-enact in pantomime his rape of a white woman, which is imprinted on his retinas and in his memory like images on film. [8]

The above scenarios advanced national reunion and white supremacy after the Civil War by stressing the honor and self-sacrifice of southern whites while modeling what respectful versus dangerous blacks looked like. There are also in early New South fiction some overt acts of rebellion against, or at least parodies and revisions of, the standard command performance scene, including the following:

- In the best stories in George Washington Cable's *Old Creole Days* (1879) events undercut the narrator's authority to decode racial markers unambiguously. In "Tite Poulette," for instance, Zalli appears to present proof that her daughter is "Spanish" rather than part Negro, in order to encourage marriage with Kristian Koppig, a recent immigrant from Holland. (Zalli has determined to help her daughter escape the quadroon balls, where light-skinned women were marketed as mistresses for New Orleans' white elite while wearing pink-white masks over their faces.) We may take Zalli's "proof" as a fine example of how masks may be used to manipulate identity. Unlike the quadroon balls, in which white males have all the real power, Zalli's dance along the color-line stages a small power reversal and allows her daughter to escape her mother's fate. Cable's silence at the end of this story (the narrator refuses to resolve the issue of Poulette's "racial" identity) keeps

the focus on Zalli's courage and wiles, yet also well emphasizes the emotional costs to her of the complex gamble she must make.

- Five mixed-race (Indian-black) women are commanded to tell stories by a white girl, in a collection of animal tales that changes the scenario between Uncle Remus and the little boy that made Joel Chandler Harris famous (Mary Alicia Owen, *Ole Rabbit, The Voodoo, and Other Sorcerers*, 1893). In Owen's revision, the storytellers are revealed to be more independent and the child's needs less central, thus shifting the basic way in which Harris "framed" and contained the Negro folklore he retold. [9]

- Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* includes numerous variations on the command performance scene, from Huck requesting Jim read a "hair ball" early in the text to, most notoriously, Tom's forcing Jim to stage elaborate performances of imprisonment so that Tom can play the hero's role and free him. Less discussed are the fascinating ways in which, at moments when Huck's identity as a white male is most unstable, Huck himself appears to play the role of the black person in a standard command performance scene. Huck is sometimes adept at satisfying his audience's expectations, while at other times is comically incompetent. Twain's narrative as a whole finds many ways to critique and undercut the performance expectations placed on Huck and Jim. [10]

- In two short stories by Charles W. Chesnutt, a black woman holds the key to a white woman's and a white man's identities and must testify before the woman can marry or the man can inherit his estate. In the former, "Her Virginia Mammy," the woman testifies compassionately, possibly protecting the "white" woman from discovering that her mother was black, while in the other story, "The Dumb Witness," the black woman refuses to speak and makes the man's plantation as well as sanity decay. Chesnutt's *Conjure Woman* tales, which feature the black storyteller Julius, of course are Chesnutt's most famous explorations of the possibilities of the command performance dynamic. Because Chesnutt's stories have received such rich commentary elsewhere [11] I will just note them here, but this is not in any way meant to question our current sense of the centrality of Chesnutt to early New South literary history. Indeed, surveying com-

mand performance examples from early New South fiction reaffirms the audacity with which Chesnut engaged this staple narrative motif of the period.

Further attention is given below to four authors—Joel Chandler Harris, Paul Laurence Dunbar, Kate Chopin, and Pauline E. Hopkins—who used fiction decisively to test the dynamics of the command performance scene and to sketch possible scenarios in which white supremacy might be unmade, or at least questioned, in the early Jim Crow New South.



Joel Chandler Harris

Recent scholarship by historians such as Trudier Harris, Cheryl Thurber, Grace Elizabeth Hale, Kimberly Wallace-Sanders, and Micki McElya on nostalgia for the black Mammy provides excellent starting-points for a reconsideration of black male and female story-tellers in Joel Chandler Harris, for more than any other nineteenth-century U.S. writer it was Harris who most successfully impersonated—gave voice to—the male and female Negro protector figures whom whites so desired as a refuge from everything in postslavery modernity that unsettled them. Along with Uncle Remus, the most important of such figures was the Mammy stereotype. In Hale’s apt words, “the [M]ammy symbol increasingly focused all the evasions, confusions and contradictions of a white supremacist ideology of domesticity” and the faithful black servant (88). The Mammy’s social role wasn’t merely to recognize whiteness and work for it, as if it already existed without the Mammy’s presence; in many ways this figure was invented to *wet-nurse* whiteness, to feed it and train it. Such an icon must therefore be understood as a response to anxieties the post-slavery world, not merely a vestige of what had been lost. And such intense dependency was bound to cause uneasiness, not just a sense of security and entitlement. Harris is most well known for creating Uncle Remus, but arguably he played a crucial yet under-recognized role in the 1880s and 1890s in establishing the female black parental figure of the Mammy in the American popular imagination.

Harris’ story “Aunt Fountain’s Prisoner,” from *Free Joe and Other Georgian Sketches* (1887), presents itself as a parable showing how Negroes could become independent of the federal government’s supposedly corrupt Freedmen’s Bureau, plus how the plantation economy and proper class hierarchies could be restored in the New South by checking the rise of Northern carpetbaggers and Southern poor whites. [12] Bringing ginger-cakes she’s baked on the plantation to the nearby town cen-

ter and selling them there, “Aunt Fountain” becomes for the narrator an icon of the new resourcefulness the South needs for its rebirth after the War.

Yet some confusion emerges over just what happens to the money Fountain’s enterprise earns. Some believe her former owners use her proceeds as their primary source of income—a kind of gingercake-sale sharecropping (77). The narrator also strains to make his Mammy not just an example of how some southerners could adapt to the postwar market economy, but also a reassuring emblem of invaluable continuities remaining from slavery time:

The old China-tree in the shade of which she used to sit had been blasted by lightning or fire; but she still had her stand there.... I could see no change. If her hair was grayer, it was covered and concealed from view by the snow-white handkerchief tied around her head. From my place I could hear her humming a tune,—the tune I had heard her sing in precisely the same way years ago. ...To see and hear her thus gave me a peculiar feeling of homesickness. (79)

Here the woman who signifies the prospects for New South independence is rewritten to become also the icon of connection to the slave past, including “proper” subordination of Negro initiative within white supremacist order. All this Mammy’s eloquence and invective, all her “independence,” must be directed to restoring whites to what she sees as their rightful place in society. To such an end, she can speak bluntly and “p’intedly” (pointedly) to her white “superiors,” even as they are financially and spiritually dependent upon her. In Harris’ rewriting of Reconstruction, Fountain indeed becomes a *fountain*—of white identity and privilege, the bearer of many of its most memorable narratives of its origin, rights, and destiny.

Just as valuable for whites as Fountain’s (and the northerner Triunion’s) economic discipline are her verbal skills in storytelling; this too is appropriated for its “proper” service—not just by the Mammy’s “masters” but by the story’s narrator himself. The power dynamics here are complex and paradoxical, as suits the Mammy’s role. Embedded within the narrator’s “proper English” version of the

story of his return to the town of Rockville, his childhood home, are Fountain's Black English tales of postwar events. Such embedding would seem at first glance to make Fountain's voice subordinate to the narrator's; after all, it is the narrator's standard English voice that "frames" Fountain's tales, and she is twice commanded "tell me about it" by the narrator (81-82). He is the one with power and higher social and racial standing. Yet it is in fact Fountain's interpretations of character and meaning that prove most influential to the narrator; he not only quotes her language, he adopts her point of view (with only minor modifications: 96). Fountain nurses the narrator so that he is finally able to grow up and make the transition from uncontrolled "homesickness" for what was lost in the war (79) to a new appreciation for both the Old South's past and the New South's bright future within a reunited United States. In short, the subtlest but most powerful feature in the command performance scenario in "Aunt Fountain's Prisoner" occurs when the white narrator in the frame tale gains his own authority by appropriating then recreating the major black character's voice in order to suggest a newly healed *national* vision of the post-slavery U.S. with North and South reconciled and racial and gender hierarchies properly recalibrated. [13]

Are there any stories about blacks and whites in Harris' stories where his construction of racial consensus collapses, or comes under strain? I would nominate at least two, though there is room to discuss just one here. "Where's Duncan?" (1891) is the fourth story in collection *Balaam and His Master* (1891); it is set in the antebellum years and features a man who "passes" for white with violent results, ending in parricide and the burning of a plantation mansion. The second, "The Case of Mary Ellen" (1899), set mostly in the postwar years, also deals with passing. It may very well be Harris' most provocative treatment of "racial" identity as a masquerade—not just for those blacks whose light skin color allows them to pass as white, but, most scandalously, for whites themselves. It, too, has a Mammy at the center of the action. Both these tales have received astonishingly little commentary, yet their publication in the decade of frequent lynchings in the South and the Supreme Court's *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision shows a level of audacity that may be the closest Harris ever approached in his own "adult" tales to the strategies of the Rabbit trickster. One wonders, at the very least, what Harris could possibly

have thought these tales signified, or how he tried to rationalize their meanings to himself.

“The Case of Mary Ellen” concludes Harris’ collection *The Chronicles of Aunt Minervy Ann* (1899), the only cycle of stories Harris wrote in which a fully developed Mammy figure is the main character, acting both as one of the narrators and also as a primary agent in the events of which she speaks. The critic John Tumlín was probably right to claim that Uncle Remus and Minervy Ann are the two strongest characters in all of Harris’ writing (xviii). In most of the tales in *Chronicles*, Minervy Ann is a Mammy used as a comic spokesperson for white disgust at Reconstruction. “The Case of Mary Ellen” poses a problem for such an agenda, however, because it is a story of passing—a violation of the Jim Crow color-line that winds up being sanctioned by Harris’ protagonists both black and white. [14]

“The Case of Mary Ellen” is the story of two girls, Mary Ellen Tatum and Sally Blasengame, who become best friends but are separated when Sally’s rich father Bolivar Blasengame finds out that his daughter’s playmate is the daughter of Fed Tatum and his Negro housekeeper. Bolivar’s Sally proves inconsolable at the loss of her friend, and her father soon comes to regret his intervention when Sally dies of heartbreak. As the threat of Civil War looms, Mary Ellen is sent to the North while her mother stays in the South, supposedly so that the townspeople won’t suspect that she’s the mother (191). After the War, it turns out that Mary Ellen has graduated from a northern school and passed for white. Upon returning to the South after the war, Mary Ellen finds her father has dissipated the family fortune and she is now practically penniless. She receives a telegram that a northern friend from school will visit her and is desperate to hide both her present poverty and her black identity in her home town. Minervy Ann comes to the rescue. She takes Mary Ellen to the house of the parents of her lost childhood friend, Sally Blasengame, and broadly hints to Bolivar Blasengame that he should pretend to be Mary Ellen’s father for the duration of the northerner’s visit. After some shock, Bolivar warms to Minervy Ann’s proposed masquerade and pulls it off with aplomb, while teasing Minervy Ann that (as she quotes him), “Fum de time I fust know’ed you, you been gittin’ me ... in hot water” (201). Minervy Ann knew Bolivar felt guilty about his daughter’s death and the earlier suffering he caused her,

and she uses this guilt to get him to accept into his household the woman he expelled as a child. When he wavers, she tells him to “look at poor Miss Sally’s picture” on the mantel—and that decides it (200).

Once again in a Harris tale we have a white narrator who “borrows” a black character’s story-telling ability, sometimes paraphrasing Minervy Ann, sometimes quoting her directly. Rather than enforcing conformity to the “proper” racial order of the New South, as most of Minervy Ann’s actions and words do in the other *Chronicle* stories, her tale-telling here arguably has the opposite effect. One such incident occurs when Minervy Ann convinces others to join in her plan of “jumping Jim Crow,” allowing Mary Ellen to pass as white. In recreating how she convinced Bolivar Blasengame to violate the color-line, she also winds up inspiring her present white audience, the narrator and his wife, to sanction what she has done.

The whole scene from beginning to end had been enacted by Aunt Minervy Ann. In the empty spaces of the room she had placed the colonel, his wife, and Mary Ellen, and they seemed to be before us, and not only before us, but the passionate earnestness with which she laid the case of Mary Ellen before the colonel made them live and move under our very eyes. (199)

Harris’ tale here suggests that the excitement of violating Jim Crow hypocrisy may be contagious; powerfully presented by a story-teller, it draws in first Bolivar Blasengame, then Minervy Ann’s present auditors, the narrator and his wife. Minervy Ann’s eloquence also inspired Blasengame to convince the entire town to go along with the scheme. And what is that scheme’s goal? Not just for a mixed-race young woman to be able to impress her northern friend, but to pass for white while in the South as a way of honoring the violated interracial friendship she once had with a white girl. Minervy Ann has thus reversed conventional power roles and, most dangerously, seduced a broad spectrum of white spectators—including, perhaps, Harris’ readers—into silently endorsing such a reversal. The unmistakable implication is that Harris’ tale may have the same subversive effect on

his audience across the United States: the color-line may be crossed if done for a good cause. But if so, what then? [15]

There is no need to overstate the ways in which Harris' final "chronicle" in his *Minervy Ann* collection was dangerous for the U.S. racial order in 1899. The rebellion Harris' Mammy figure foments—as even she admits—is an exception to the rule, occurring privately and with no overt public consequences. Yet it demonstrably questions the moral and supposedly practical foundation on which Jim Crow segregation allegedly rested. And the contrast between Harris' use of the Mammy stereotype that dominates *Chronicles* as a whole and her trickster persona in "The Case of Mary Ellen" is a startling case indeed; these different portraits of Minervy Ann are irreconcilable except under one condition—that Minervy Ann's subversive trickster persona is understood to be her real one. A conventional Mammy is never a trickster except to enforce the status quo, but a true *trickster*—as I am arguing Harris' Minervy Ann comes to be—could sometimes pass as an unthreatening Mammy, not to mention arranging for Mary Ellen to pass as white. [16] The repercussions of this woman's act of subversion hardly "disappear from the face of the earth" (210), much less Harris' *Chronicles* of the New South, even though its author might guiltily and sentimentally wish they would do so. Slyly drawing our attention to double meanings and covertly enraptured by the story-telling powers of his trickster Mammy, Minervy Ann, Harris here becomes a "case" study all his own.



Paul Laurence Dunbar

Signifying significant new interest in Paul Laurence Dunbar's short fiction, his stories have recently been collected and edited by Gene Andrew Jarrett and Thomas Lewis Morgan. In their introduction the editors make a strong case for reinterpreting Dunbar's stories as part of a necessary reassessment of the career of the most commercially successful African American writer of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Jarrett and Morgan do find many examples of the kinds of vignettes Dunbar called "trash" (*Complete Stories* xxxvi) purveyed to well-paying newspapers and magazines such as *The New York Post*, *Lippincott's*, *The Saturday Evening Post*, and others. Most of these tend to feature nostalgic plantation narratives chronicling the adventures of loyal slaves, or other stories of the postbellum era that pander to the white reading audience's taste for stereotypical black characters. But the editors point to a good number of Dunbar's tales that question and revise such caricatures, either in covert or openly daring ways. They also rightly stress the importance of the new subject matter Dunbar introduced to black writing—not just southern narratives featuring mainly white characters, but also others placing blacks in northern and urban settings. [17] We have not yet properly assessed the full breadth and variety of Dunbar's methods of engagement with stock narrative components, especially those derived from popular New South fiction, blackface minstrelsy, advertising imagery, and other forms of U.S. commercial culture. I would like to contribute to this ongoing reevaluation of Dunbar's short fiction by focusing here on examples of Dunbar's complex relationship with two white predecessors, Thomas Nelson Page and Joel Chandler Harris, who dominated the popular magazines' representations of blacks.

One of Paul Laurence Dunbar's innovations was the command performance scene gone askew. In some cases, blacks perform the accepted role but with negative consequences that neither they nor their white "benefactors" expect ("Mammy Peggy's Pride"). In others, black characters significantly change what

whites expect or demand (“The Case of Ca’line”); play on whites’ (and blacks’) expectations in order to dupe them (“The Mission of Mr. Scatters”); or *take* broad initiative in ways that whites covertly sanction (two stories about “Aunt Tempe,” discussed below). Further, in a number of tales in *The Strength of Gideon* (1900) and other volumes the narrator’s deadpan and terse voice makes it very hard to tell whether the narrator’s comments are to be taken as “true” on face value, or ironic. Read skeptically and with a sense of humor, some of these narratives suddenly seem as if they might be *camp*—trenchant parodies of clichés about blacks’ behavior, not unthinking reproductions of these. [18] Creating such a conundrum between “straight” and camp readings, I would argue, is one key source of strength for Dunbar’s best fiction allowing it to connect to today’s readers.

Several stories in *The Strength of Gideon* mime standard command performance story components, but the performances cause disastrous consequences for Dunbar’s main characters, not the kind of ending that Thomas Nelson Page would purvey. The title story, for example, may or may not be an ironic take on the standard New South figure of the loyal black slave who, though freed by the Civil War, chooses to stay with the family who owned him. Certainly it would have been easy for Dunbar’s readers to conclude that Gideon’s refusal to claim his freedom with other blacks at the story’s end marks his “strength.” Dunbar’s ending links his protagonist both to the heroic warrior Gideon in the Book of Judges and to Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane resisting a “tempter” offering him \$20 to leave (*Complete Stories* 93). But the name Gideon in the Bible also means “destroyer,” and it is an open question whether the story’s ending should be read straight or ironically. True, there is little else in the story cueing a reader to see Gideon’s loyalty as other than heroic. (He made a promise to his dying master, he says, and he will stick to it even after the fall of slavery, giving the phrase “his word is his bond” an odd new twist.) Despite the clear plausibility of such a sentimental reading, the story is also quite emphatic about how much Gideon must sacrifice to renounce freedom: the woman he loves rejects him. Moreover, once Gideon leaves the plantation, any “freedom” he might gain would hardly be unconditional: the Union officer who is Gideon’s tempter merely wants to buy him for a body-servant. One wonders how many of Dunbar’s readers, then or now, notice the tension between the

narrator's triumphal concluding sentence—"Gideon had triumphed mightily" (94)—versus Gideon's constricted choice of paid versus unpaid servitude. The story was safe enough to publish in a national magazine: *Lippincott's Monthly* printed it in October, 1899 (*Complete Stories* 534). The real "strength" of Dunbar's lead story in his second collection is that it decisively opens up the *possibility* for debate regarding not just the protagonist's attachment to his former master's plantation, but also Dunbar's fidelity to New South plantation-fiction plot conventions about "good" blacks being loyal.

Dunbar's "Mammy Peggy's Pride," the next story in *Gideon*, is more certainly revisionist. Set in postwar Virginia and featuring a figure whom Dunbar pointedly calls "a typical mammy of the old south" (27), the story appears calculatedly generic in places, as if Dunbar tried to take on stock plot-lines in New South fiction involving the struggles white plantation owners had keeping their property after the War, one of the most popular themes in New South fiction. The sale of Miss Mima's "home place" is pending to a suave and well-to-do northerner named Bartley Northcope. Miss Mima's only hope in the world is her Mammy by her side and, perhaps, enticing Northcope into marriage.

"Oh, mammy, mammy," she cried, "I have tried so hard to be brave—to be really my father's daughter, but I can't, I can't. Everything I turn my hand to fails. I've tried sewing, but here every one sews for herself now. I've even tried writing," and here a crimson glow burned in her cheeks, "but oh, the awful regularity with which everything came back to me. Why, I even put you in a story, Mammy Peggy, you dear old, good, unselfish thing, and the hard-hearted editor had the temerity to decline you with thanks."

"I wouldn't 'a' nevah lef' you nohow, honey." (*Complete Stories* 95)

A Scarlett O'Hara Miss Mima is not. And if Mammy Peggy may be a "grenadier" of strength and loyalty (32), here she is also comically literal-minded, unable to understand the reference to Miss Mima's last attempt to raise money, selling a portrait of her Mammy to the northern magazines. Yet Dunbar's sly reference

here to the Mammy as a postwar commodity made out of words should alert us to the possibility that at least parts of Dunbar's "Mammy Peggy" tale may perhaps be taken as wily parody, not hack recycling. Almost all the story's major action is determined by Mammy, both what draws the white characters together and what splits them apart. She's a strange ventriloquist, or puppet-master in control of almost all the action. If things don't turn out the way she expects, it's because both white protagonists are so comically proud and incompetent and have no clue how to follow her advice. Dunbar appears to be challenging his white readers directly to see if they will be so literal-minded and tone-deaf as his tale's white protagonists. As Mammy Peggy quips in the story's punch-line, "oomph, well, you'd bet-tah look out!" (102).

Dunbar's *In Old Plantation Days* (1903) presents a diverse spectrum of stories engaging New South truisms about the slaves' roles in antebellum plantation life. Most of these stories follow a comic formula similar to Terence's and Plautus' Roman comedies, many of which chronicle the shenanigans and dilemmas of a clever slave working for his superior while simultaneously mocking or subverting his authority. Two tales featuring a Mammy, "Aunt Tempe's Triumph" and "Aunt Tempe's Revenge," open up more directly subversive possibilities for contesting Page's and Harris' popular literary legacy. Dunbar gave these two pieces particular emphasis by placing them first and second in his 1903 collection. In "Aunt Tempe's Triumph," Aunt Tempe claims the right to give away in marriage the daughter of the plantation owner, Miss Eliza Mordaunt, whom she has raised. Dunbar's portrait of her confrontation with Stuart Mordaunt renders the scene comically but clearly presents the strength of Tempe's feelings and her owner's respect for her power within the plantation household.

"Look hyeah, Mas' Stua't," she said, as she settled down on the veranda step at his feet; "I done come out hyeah to 'spute wid you."

"Well, Aunt Tempe," said Mordaunt placidly, "it won't be the first time; you've been doing that for many years. The fact is, half the time I don't know who's run-

ning this plantation, you or I. You boss the whole household round, and ‘the quarters’ mind you better than they do the preacher.” (202-03)

“Aunt Tempe’s Revenge” arguably presents the most powerfully original Mammy figure in all of Dunbar’s work. The plot is relatively straightforward, concerned with how blacks as well as plantation masters had considerable say in whether or not a slave could marry “off the plantation,” joining not just a spouse through marriage but also another plantation’s slave crew. [19] Dunbar’s tale focuses on two generations of relationships among black slave communities. We learn that early in her life Tempe allowed her philandering husband to leave his marriage so that he could partner with a woman on the nearby Norton plantation. She mourned for decades and never took a new lover. Her son with her former husband, Tom Norton, who grew up on the other plantation (as suggested by his name), is now courting a slave on Tempe’s plantation, Laramie Bell. Stuart Mordaunt, as well as many of his slaves, strongly disapproves of these events, for as a general principle he is against “this mating of servants off the plantation” and, furthermore, doesn’t want to buy Tom or sell Laramie Bell to bring them together. After watching Laramie Bell in misery for weeks, Tempe, for whom this affair revives old wounds, decides she must act. She confronts her master with her plan: buy her former husband’s son and let the couple marry and live on the Mordaunt plantation. Mordaunt at first flatly refuses, claiming somewhat disingenuously that he’s “not a nigger trader”: “You let me alone, Tempe, and don’t concern yourself in this business” (210). But Tempe wins out in the end, as is proper for the comic heroine.

Dunbar’s rendering of the conversation between master and slave is remarkable for several reasons. First, their talk displays mutual respect and humor that belies their social roles; if quoted out of context and Tempe’s black English were changed to standard English, it would be difficult to tell that this exchange involved a piece of property talking back to her owner. Tempe seeks out her master for “anothah one o’ my ‘sputes”:

“Mas’ Stua’t, I’s n’ ol’ fool, dat’s what I is.”

“Ah, Tempe, have you found that out? Then you begin to be wise. It’s wonderful how as you and I get old we both arrive at the same conclusions.” (209-10)

After Tempe states her plan and quotes both Biblical precedent and practical reasoning for her act of generosity, Stuart Mordaunt uses all the power at his command to deny her, and she leaves in tears. But her words have had their effect: “Confound Tempe,” Mordaunt was saying. “Why can’t she let me alone? Just as I quiet my conscience, here she comes and knocks everything into a cocked hat” (210). Mordaunt eventually capitulates and goes to Tempe’s cabin—that detail is very important—to propose that they collaborate on a fictive performance that will help Tempe accomplish her goal yet allow Mordaunt to save face and the illusion of his principles. In effect, Tempe is allowed to act as a white person, buying a slave and arranging his fate. Mordaunt’s concession to Tempe, of course, is hardly unmotivated by self-interest; if he blocks the marriage of Laramie Bell to Tom Norton, both she and her mother will continue their disruption of his plantation household. And his collaborative performance with Tempe hardly threatens his ultimate power as a slave-owner. But she’s no longer predominately performing *his* scripts; she’s creating her own. Dunbar’s focus on Tempe’s power within the plantation household—and, just as important, how she uses that power to promote her own sense of justice, even though that is emotionally painful for her—makes Tempe’s story the prominent one, not Mordaunt’s. Dunbar’s stress on black slaves’ agency within the restrictions of the plantation household anticipates work by many contemporary historians, such as Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, who mined ex-slave testimony in WPA records.

Dunbar’s revisionary relationship to Harris is not the same as how he engages Page. Dunbar may give us new ways of reading the latent possibilities inherent in Page’s black character “prodjickin” or masquerading in “Marse Chan” [20], but overall his challenge to Page’s authority is disdainful and parodic. As for Harris, given the evidence here presented it would be simplistic to think of Dunbar as simply at odds with Harris. There is more than a little of Harris’ trickster Mammies

in a figure like Tempe. Dunbar picks up Harris' elliptical style, his talent for coded messages or subtexts often triggered by a single word or phrase. Under the partial disguise of familiar plantation-fiction conventions and a light "comic" tone, Dunbar mounts a mordant (pun intended) critique of white privilege and power. Simultaneously, he stages an alternative way for whites and blacks to speak to each other. In his best work Dunbar also slyly hints that his reworking of black-white relations, though sometimes set in "old plantation days," profoundly applies not just to the antebellum era but also to the future of the postwar nation.



Kate Chopin

Mammy figures abound in stories in Kate Chopin's most famous collection of stories, *Bayou Folk* (1894), and elsewhere. Not all of Chopin's older black women are unsterotypical, but some of her portraits of such figures are inventive and subversive, revising the performances expected of them. "La Belle Zoraïde" in recent years has rightly become one of Chopin's most commented-upon tales, [21] and at its very center is a command performance scene: the elderly black housekeeper, Manna Loulou, is requested to make her Madame Delisle drowsy every night with a story. Chopin's innovations with this format can be well measured by briefly considering the role a Mammy plays in another important but less well known tale from *Bayou Folk*, "The Gentleman of Bayou Teche."

The story Manna Loulou tells her mistress Madame Delisle in "La Belle Zoraïde" hardly proves a lullaby—and not just because its tragic heroine, the young and light-skinned Zoraïde, falls from a position at the height of slave society to the depths of madness. As Patricia Yaeger has shown (69-74), Manna Loulou's tale holds a mirror up to whites who treat black labor, black bodies, and the black family as disposable. First, the child's father is sold away, then the child removed to be raised on Madame Delarivière's distant plantation, then la belle Zoraïde, her madness making her no longer useful, is left to wander homeless, now called "la folle" while she sings lullabies to her "piti" (petite one), a doll she has constructed of rags and believes to be living. Manna Loulou's depiction of this effigy of Zoraïde's child emphasizes both its abjection—it is a "senseless bundle of rags" and a "dummy"—and its potentially sacred qualities: the rag bundle is once described as "swaddling clothes" (316), the same phrase used to describe baby Jesus in the manger in Bethlehem (Luke 2:12). "[S]tung with sorrow and remorse at seeing this terrible affliction that had befallen her dear Zoraïde" (316), Madame Delarivière presents Zoraïde with her child, guiltily trying to assure her that "no one will ever

take her from you again” (316). But it is too late; Zoraïde refuses to believe the girl is hers, and her haunting cry of “piti” ends Manna Loulou’s tale-within-a-tale.

Some lullaby. At the conclusion, Madame Delisle is not only wide awake; she cannot get the sound of Zoraïde’s cries (as rendered by Manna Loulou) out of her head. To avoid contemplating directly the accumulated losses in which the story’s slave-mistress is directly implicated, Madame Delisle focuses on just one, the baby that has been replaced by a rag-doll. Identifying with Zoraïde’s crying, Mme Delisle does feel some of her pain—and just this touch of a slave’s trauma, her own “petite” or miniature version of infinite loss, makes Madame Delisle restless. But she also uses this detail, and her repetition of Zoraïde’s cry for her child, as a substitute that blocks out memory of all the other causes of Zoraïde’s anguish—causes like the “disposing” (315) of Zoraïde’s lover. Madame Delarivière never tried to make compensation for that sin, or even admitted that it occurred. The perverse “logic” of Madame Delisle’s substitution—one small death mourned, while many other sins of slavery are not—is made clearer by her wish that Zoraïde’s baby had actually died in childbirth. Such a death of course would have absolved the Madame in the story of some of her responsibility for Zoraïde’s pain. “[B]etter she had died,” as Madame Delisle says—but better for whom? In short, Madame Delisle uses *her* miniature mourning object, the refrain “the poor little one,” to shield herself from contemplating all the wrongs against black families wrought by slavery—the profits from which have placed both Madames in their privileged position in Louisiana slave-owning society. There is even perhaps an eerie suggestion embedded in their last names that these two women’s guilt is as inseparable as an island and the river that surrounds it. “La Belle Zoraïde” appeared innocuous enough to be published in *Vogue*, a bit of colorful back-country exoticism and sadness among all the fashionable ads touting the latest in American urban lifestyles. But what Chopin’s readers got instead when they read that ladies’ fashion magazine, or bought Chopin’s book of fiction later that year as a Christmas present, was a story as strong as conjure. [22]

Another less known story in Chopin’s *Bayou Folk* also profoundly twists the power balances of the standard command performance scene, and it too features what Willa Cather eloquently called Chopin’s “flexible iridescent style” (*Complete*

Novels and Stories 1052). It was placed immediately after “Zoraïde” in the collection. Interestingly, this variation, “A Gentleman of Bayou Teche,” focuses predominantly on poor white Acadians, not black-white relations, and it is set in the postwar period when photographic cameras were becoming common. Because the primary characters are Cajun, the tale’s traumatic fault-lines follow fissures of class more than race. But the effects of the color-line are hardly absent. As with Manna Loulou’s shrewdness as a story-teller, so too in this tale the performer resists the expected script—and his determination not to conform is sparked by a black woman, “Aunt Dicey,” who appears in the tale only briefly, though to powerful effect. The tale is additionally interesting because it is perhaps Chopin’s most direct and sardonic commentary on the market forces associated with national periodical publishing determining both what “local color” stories about the South should be printed and what they should mean. That the primary signifiers in this tale are associated with visual arts rather than story-telling makes little difference: both involve selling “truths” that Chopin’s tale teaches us to see as suspect performances.

In some ways, Chopin’s portrait of Dicey follows quite recognizable lines: earning money by ironing in her cabin, Dicey is voluble, abusive, cynical, and blunt. The first sounds we hear from her are the hiss of her spit on the hot iron, her “unqualified abuse” of her son, and then derisive laughter. And like the conventional Mammy she is hyper class-conscious, paying particularly attention to the differences between respectable whites like Mr. Hallet, who owns the local plantation, and poor-white Cajuns like the story’s two main characters, Martinette and her father Evariste. Verbal explosiveness and class pride are familiar elements in a Mammy, but here there is something else, something more volatile and rebellious. Accosted at her work by a visiting white boy with a camera who asks to take a picture of her ironing, rather than politely requesting that she dress up in her Sunday best, Dicey says she should have rearranged that boy’s face: “I gwine make a picture outen him wid dis heah flat’ion” (320). More, she’s heard from her son and the blacks’ gossip network that the boy’s father, Mr. Sublet, is staying at the Hallet’s while searching for picturesque rural subjects to sketch and sell to magazines. [23] The black woman’s guess is confirmed by the story’s narrator, who wryly says

that Evariste was a tempting subject “to an artist looking for bits of ‘local color’ along the Teche” (318). Dicey is right about another fact: Mr. Sublet wants Evariste in his portrait to wear his roughest working clothes, as if he has just emerged from the swamp. And she is certain that when Evariste’s portrait appears in the “picture paper” it will be framed by a caption in a highly prejudicial way: “‘you know w’at readin’ dey gwine sot down on’neaf dat picture?’ ... ‘Dey gwine sot down on’neaf: “Dis heah is one dem low-down ‘Cajuns o’ Bayeh Teche!’”” (319). Though almost certainly illiterate herself, Dicey somehow knows all about “reading” and interpretation and the seductive pleasures well-to-do readers will receive from being able to view class differences and Deep South local color safely from a distance.

Dicey’s sardonic honesty transforms Evariste’s daughter, arousing all her Cajun pride. She decides to persuade her father not to sit for his portrait, even though they are impoverished and desperately need the two silver dollars (and possibly more) that Mr. Sublet will pay. Chopin’s narrator has implied throughout that the Acadians are barely “white,” and economically this particular family is much poorer than the ex-slaves: “they sat within the low, homely cabin of two room, that was not quite so comfortable as Mr. Hallet’s negro quarters” (318). MartINETTE’S shoes are worn and her ragged dress too thin and short for the winter season, and when she appears at the edge of Mr. Hallet’s sumptuous sitting room to ask a favor the narrator emphasizes her “small, brown face” (321).

Eventually, through plot complications too involved to summarize here, Mr. Sublet relents and promises Evariste he can pose for his portrait in any guise he wants, plus dictate the caption as well. Evariste proudly proclaims he will don his best clothes and the caption will read, “Mr. Evariste Anatole Bonamour, a gentleman of the Bayou Teche.” Gently mocking Evariste’s vanity, Chopin’s story also affirms his natural aristocracy, his inner nobility. But the tale’s ironic intelligence, like Dicey’s, understands that both noble and “low-down” qualities cannot exist transcendentally; rather they are generated by the discourse of “local color” conventions governed by an urban marketplace. Evariste may be able to revise somewhat how he is “read,” but he can hardly invent an entirely new language to use to represent his world. Contemplating what his caption should say, he “began care-

fully to trace on the tablecloth imaginary characters with an imaginary pen; he could not have written the real characters with a real pen—he did not know how” (324).

Though powerful and literate, Chopin is in a somewhat analogous situation to Evariste: she too can dictate some changes to what editors most want in New South fiction, especially when it comes to “exotic” Louisiana bayou country and the character types that are supposed to emerge from it. But Chopin knew well she did not have a completely free hand. If she ever forgot, her many rejections from editors and book publishers reminded her. [24] It is hardly an accident that “Aunt Dicey’s” caustic comment on the caption Evariste’s portrait will receive echoes the title of one of Chopin’s own earliest successes, “A No-Account Creole,” published in *The Century* in 1894 and as the lead story in *Bayou Folk*. Perhaps we can “read” the one character who most aggressively threatens to rearrange the conventions of performance and print representation—“I gwine make a picture outen him wid dis heah flat’ on” (320)—to be Chopin’s dicey and dangerous alter ego, one of her hidden selves. In short, if we study Chopin’s Mammies, we may discover that the strongest of these figures, including Manna Loulou and “Aunt Dicey,” possess signifying powers that allow Chopin’s revisionary art to plumb its deepest sources of strength and trouble U.S. white racial formation at the turn to the twentieth century.



Pauline E. Hopkins

Pauline E. Hopkins had trouble in mind as well. The goal of her novel, *Hagar's Daughter*, which was serialized in *The Colored American Magazine* in Boston in 1901-02, was to render visible the secret history of Reconstruction and the New South. Instead of portraying Reconstruction as a tragedy and white rule in the New South as the restoration of proper racial hierarchies—the reading of those events portrayed by the rise of the “Dunning school” of professional historians in the 1890s and after [25]—Hopkins insisted that white supremacists had infiltrated the national government, not just the South, and were wreaking havoc on its institutions, not to mention on the Constitution itself. In *Hagar's Daughter* and other works Hopkins also exposed as frauds the racial genealogies on which Jim Crow segregation was based.

Although attracted to the romance mode in her fiction, particularly its tendency to organize characters into polarities of good and evil, Hopkins revised a favorite feature of romance, the law of *kalokagathy*, whereby a person's exterior appearance usually indicates inner character. [26] Many of her novel's figures, by contrast, have two identities, where outward appearance sharply contradicts the hidden reality. Villains in particular are two-faced. The principal rascalion, the Maryland slave-owner and Confederate supporter St. Clair Enson, reemerges after the Civil War in Washington, D.C., as “General Benson,” chief of a major division in the U.S. Treasury Department. His double identity is figured very literally: Benson has two faces matched to two kinds of behavior. Yet Hopkins blurs the boundaries of these identities, so that while events unfold both the novel's other characters and its readers cannot be fully sure who characters really are, either racially or ideologically.

Hopkins became interested in theories of hidden, multiple selves from her reading of William James and the French psychologist Alfred Binet, as well as of popular fiction. [27] For much of *Hagar's Daughter* the narrator appears to be an

authoritative guide toward interpreting such double-faced identities. The good characters may be confused and haunted by what they think they see when confronted with secretly bad characters, but the reader is often given the illusion that interpreting hidden identities will not be that difficult with the narrator as guide. The seemingly trustworthy narrator in *Hagar's Daughter*, however, turns out to be rather two-faced as well. Hopkins' novel's most hidden secrets involve unknown or suppressed family connections and the black bloodlines of two characters, Hagar and her daughter Jewel, both light enough to pass for white and for a time deluded into thinking that they are white. Hopkins' narrator calculatedly misleads her readers regarding these important plot elements.

Unlike earlier novelists such as Lydia Maria Child or William Wells Brown (who also featured characters who were ignorant of their black history), Hopkins went out of her way to suggest that one can be black *without* a visual trace of that racial identity in any of the usual markers, such as hair or skin-color. Child's young heroines in *The Romance of the Republic* (1867), for instance, are described in ways that stress the presence of what Child believes her readers will interpret as indubitable markers of blackness, such as dusky skin or curly black hair or a propensity for singing and dancing. Regarding Hopkins' heroine Hagar, we are pointedly given no such kalokagathic keys. Hagar has recently married the Maryland aristocrat Ellis Enson and given birth to a baby girl. When she suddenly learns from a slave-trader that her mother was a slave, the "black abyss" into which she is hurled is comprised solely of verbal and written evidence; no visual signs of blackness can be seen on her body, by her or by others. The slave-trader's sole piece of evidence is a written bill of sale, confirmed by Hagar's long-repressed memories, suddenly resurfacing, of "the terror of her childish heart caused by the rough slave trader" (57). When Hagar looks into a mirror "even to her prejudiced eyes there was not a trace of the despised chattel" (57). She uses the pointedly non-visual, legal category of "chattel" to define her newly abject self. [28]

Such moments in Hopkins' 1902 novel address the ambiguities embedded in the U.S. Supreme Court decisions *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) and *Williams v. Mississippi* (1898), both of which recognized—with a good deal of anxiety—that a system of segregation like Jim Crow built upon visual appearances was a poor determiner of

identities and enforcer of racial hierarchies in comparison to the old slave system. [29] These incidents in *Hagar's Daughter* also reveal Hopkins experimenting with a narrative voice significantly more complex and ambiguously authoritative than the didactic narrator who reigns over her earlier novel, *Contending Forces* (1900).

Hopkins deploys such complexities to make “character” more important than “race,” and, moreover, to apply the Supreme Court’s standards of character just as vigorously and equitably as the Court purported the law would do, so that in her novel “vicious whites” and blacks are judged by the same standards. Hopkins pointedly attacks the *Williams* decision’s racist generalizations about the effects of slavery on blacks’ character and reveals that with one exception the characters most corrupted by slavery are white. Her anatomy of white pathology includes not just evil southerners who benefited from the slave system but also liberal northern whites like Cuthbert Sumner, the purported hero who plans to marry Hagar’s daughter Jewel. Despite the novel’s subtitle referring to “southern caste prejudice,” in other words, Hopkins targets how southern caste prejudices have become national. [30]

Hagar's Daughter is not especially marked by textual density on the micro- or sentence-level. Its language is often rather conventional, even clichéd, as are its characters, even the “split-level” ones. Indeed, Hopkins’ texts, including *Hagar's Daughter*, have generated a good deal of critical controversy and sharply different assessments. [31] Where the novel does generate considerable complexity is on the level of its plot, including its revisionary takes on narrative motifs from popular fiction such as the racial discovery plot, the detective story, and the command performance scene. Examples of these revisionary moves will be discussed in a moment, but first let us turn to a scene that is quite rich at the micro-level. This episode occurs much later in the novel, immediately following the dramatic revelation that a character we readers were told was “Mrs. Bowen” proves actually to be the heroine Hagar. She has survived a suicidal plunge into the Potomoc River with her baby girl and now “passes” for a white woman, the wife of a wealthy U.S. senator recently deceased. She believes her child to be dead. Examining the contents of her dead husband’s “hair trunk” (274)—a small storage chest apparently covered with horse hide—containing mementos from his life, including clues to her

“adopted” daughter Jewel’s past, Hagar discovers that Jewel is in fact her real daughter. Hopkins renders this moment using figurative language and visual complexity as richly inwrought and layered as the clues Hagar withdraws from their hiding place. [32]

When Hagar opens the hair trunk, her attention is first drawn to a rolled-up cashmere cloak with “a deep embroidered design tracing the edge of the deep hem.” Seeing this design releases a sudden “flood of memories,” and she unrolls the bundle to find a number of child’s garments the cloak had “enfolded”—all clothes she recognizes as belonging to the baby daughter she thought was drowned. A locket that was around her child’s neck also appears, and Hopkins’ description of it also emphasizes a “deep” design whose “edge” holds secrets: “she was pressing her fingers along the margin of filagree work [*sic*] which decorated the edge of the locket; presently the back fell apart; then she pressed again and a third compartment opened and from it the face of Ellis Enson [Hagar’s first husband and the father of their “lost” girl] ... smiled up into her own” (276-77). Hidden in the locket’s third compartment is a page from a memorandum book proving that Jewel—the foundling Hagar/Mrs. Bowen is raising believing she is her adopted white daughter—is indeed her own lost biological (and therefore “black”) child.

In Hopkins’ *Hagar*, edges or margins contain hidden compartments or folds that hold the repressed past’s secrets. Fingering the grain of such filigreed edges suddenly releases “deep” spaces and recovered identities. In a novel obsessed with sight—visual markers of both surface identities and emergent ghostly ones—it is remarkable that the climactic revelations in chapter XXXVI are figured using touch, not sight—almost as if the novel briefly switches from illusory ocular representations of racial identity to a kind of braille or embroidered coding that can be known best only by the fingertips. Further, such touch-patterns are twice subtly linked to *hair* texture that for both whites and blacks signifies Negro blood. Not only are all of the clues to Jewel’s identity stowed in Senator Benson’s “hair trunk”; inside, Jewel’s embroidered shawl is wrapped in brown paper and tied with a string whose “kinks and curls” Hagar unconsciously attempts to smooth down with her fingers before she learns what the shawl reveals (276). Here, at a climac-

tic moment of Hopkins' racial discovery plot, she does reference the visual coding of "race" difference that elsewhere she withholds. Hopkins' novel thus reveals itself to be a kind of hair trunk, locket, or memorandum-page placed into the laps of her early twentieth-century black readers, one carefully designed to express its secrets only when readers linger over the edges of its surfaces, feeling for hidden connections and meanings. Yet Hopkins' language signifying blackness equally mixes social and legal dicta (bills of sale and memorandums) with phenotypic clues like color or hair. Such a *mélange* of clues means that she understands Hagar's and Jewel's blackness not just to be a social construction as well as a biological or "blood" fact. It also traces how Hagar's understanding of and emotional response to blackness evolve in the novel. Put most simply, these shift from horror to love.

How does Hopkins' heroine use her new knowledge? For that we must turn to an analysis of the novel's revisionary plotting. To begin with, Hopkins audaciously does not punish Hagar for choosing to pass as white after her suicide attempt fails. As many commentators have pointed out, *Hagar's Daughter* is also an ambitious compendium of different genres and literary modes, all of them layered together and contesting each other for interpretive authority. Rather than simply reproducing generic conventions wholesale, so to speak, Hopkins hand-embroiders her own crucial variations that add new meanings onto these older forms—all with the goal of creating a powerful critique of the status quo and historical amnesia in the post-Reconstruction U.S.

Some of Hopkins' most sardonic salvos in *Hagar's Daughter*, for instance, target New South clichés of pastoralism in the depiction of proper race relations. Borrowing the tropes and essential arguments of prewar apologias for slavery, postwar plantation fiction by whites such as Thomas Nelson Page favored idealized rural settings in which the relations between a master race and its servants were depicted not so much as an economic or social bond as one sanctioned by Nature herself. Most nature references in such texts become twined like a trained wisteria vine around the pillars and posts of white supremacist ideology. When postwar plantations in whites' New South fiction are portrayed in an anti-pastoral mode, it was normally to suggest that decay and neglect came to once-prosperous domains

with the unjust rise of Negroes and white trash to positions of power during Reconstruction. Reconstruction was thereby made unnatural, the slave plantation the site of Edenic pastoral harmony, with just one snake in the garden—slavery—that was now eliminated.

Compare such depictions with tropes of decay and pastoral plantations in *Hagar's Daughter* in a scene in Chapter XXVIII where we discover that Hagar's daughter Jewel has been kidnapped by General Benson and imprisoned in a decrepit Maryland mansion. Jewel escapes from her dungeon by turning her gaze from a barred window with views of ruined gardens and plantation buildings to a painting on the wall of her prison—the “portrait of an impossible wood nymph” in a pastoral landscape (214-15). Feeling a draft, Jewel takes a knife and cuts apart the painted canvas' cliché to find a hidden passageway leading to freedom. The context makes it clear that Hopkins alludes here not just to a set of conventions in painting but also to key tropes in southern literature's defense of black subjugation. [33]

Hagar's Daughter is also historically important for creating a character, Jewel's maidservant Venus Johnson, who has a double life as the first black detective in U.S. fiction. Venus is a detective's assistant, strictly speaking, but Hopkins guessed her audience would delight in Venus' prominent and witty role in the last part of the novel, when she becomes far more than merely Jewel's dark-skinned maidservant. Venus Johnson's importance in *Hagar's Daughter*, though, has been rather slighted by the novel's commentators. [34]

When Venus Johnson appears on the scene of the haunted mansion to investigate, she takes possession “of one of the dilapidated [*sic*] antebellum huts, formerly the homes of slaves, many of which still adorned the outskirts of the little hamlet” (229). The narrator's mock pastoralism here well complements Venus' project, which is to do her detective work cross-dressed as a cute pickaninny boy, the better to uncover evidence of General Benson's guilt and rescue those he has kidnapped. Like her detective heroine, Hopkins' *Hagar* undertakes investigative work for her black readership—uncovering the nefarious designs beneath the placid pastoral nostalgia of pre- and postwar plantation narratives nationally popular with whites. Furthermore, Venus is accompanied by a second black detective in disguise, who

creates a diversion with an over-the-top parody of the loyal black servant who tells tales of his master's nobility, hunting and fishing, and the Civil War—all to an adoring audience of “black and white harmoniously blended” (229). Except for the narrator's comic tone and hidden intentions, such an episode could be lifted straight from either Page's *In Ole Virginia* and most any of Harris' short story collections. Like Dunbar on occasion, Hopkins here plays command performance conventions for camp, and the outcome validates not whites' approval but black rebellion and escape.

The final chapters of *Hagar's Daughter* are also worth briefly considering in the context of Hopkins' revisionary narrative strategies, for the novel ends with a measure of hope in the midst of the debacle of the 1880s and after. It imagines a publicly recognized inter-racial couple (Ellis Enson and Hagar) raising a white child—Hopkins' perhaps overly pastoral fantasy of a non-racist imagined community in which high class status would trump the color-line. The most intriguing concluding tableau of a reborn United States in *Hagar's Daughter*, however, may come not in its final pages but in Chapter XXXI, one of the few moments where the paths of the novel's light-skinned “main” black characters intersect with those of its darker-skinned “minor” ones in ways that confound any simple isomorphic mapping in the text of social status onto skin color. Chapter XXXI provides an idealized portrait of how adults of all skin colors might act toward each other as part of a truly *civilized* post-Jim Crow multiracial national community.

Here are the narrator's words describing this unusual social gathering: “Anyone who had entered the room would have been surprised at the kind solicitude and graciousness shown old Aunt Henny who was an honored guest” (240). Her usual perspicacious self despite the rather formal surroundings, this black elder reigns over the festivities nodding her “turbaned head” at the conversation. The liveliest moment in this episode is not narrated in the rather cultivated and proper voice usually used by Hopkins' narrator, however, but in the spirited and often comic voice of Venus as she recounts her ruse to sneak into the mansion to free Jewel and expose General Benson's conspiracy: “‘Well, you know Mis' Bowen, I ain't a bit slow, no'm, if I do say it, an' I jus' thought hard for a minute, an' then *it struck me!* ... keep up all the fuss you can,’ says I, ‘an' in the kick-up why I'll sneak

in and hide” (240). This scene in Chapter XXXI is important not just because black characters are treated as social equals to whites, but also because for a moment the book’s two dark-skinned heroines, Henny and Venus—the tale’s so-called “Mammy” or “Aunt” figure and a young maidservant who is much more than she appears—both are briefly featured in the novel’s primary, not secondary, narrative voice and point-of-view. And though they are telling stories to an audience they (and we) believe is all white, neither the content of their tales, which stress satiric resourcefulness exposing lies, nor the dynamics of the scene itself, which demonstrate black/white social equality and truly voluntary story-telling, conform to the norms of the command performance scenario in most New South fiction. [35]

First-time readers of *Hagar’s Daughter* cannot understand how radically Hopkins has revised her command performance scene in Chapter XXXI until they’ve read further in the novel and discovered that the white Mrs. Bowen presiding there is really our long-lost black heroine Hagar. Hopkins’ selective misinforming of her readers regarding major characters’ identities is done with carefully plotted purpose. Along with the contents of that hair trunk, second-sight, recovered memories, and independent thinking, Hopkins’ novel hopes to instill in her readers the ability decode how—in the most nightmarish command performance scenario of all—the post-Reconstruction United States has *misremembered* its own past and is forced to perform a lying fiction again and again, like an abject ex- (or not so ex-) slave story-teller. In the end, Henny’s and Venus’s actions, memory, and laughter-filled story-telling in *Hagar’s Daughter*—when aligned with the actions of Hagar and Jewel and those of Hopkins’ wily narrator—embody a very different national future, one that has begun to undo amnesia and lies. Together they provide us with different scripts to perform, all marking the multiracial genealogy of the U.S.’s family romance. Imperfect though it often may be, Hopkins’ *Hagar’s Daughter* stages a significant breakthrough in imagining how whiteness and its forms of power can be unmade. It must also be added that *Hagar’s Daughter* unmakes blackness too in order to re-imagine what it could be. This compound project Hopkins carried forward in her next two novels, *Winona* and *Of One Blood* (1902-03).



Conclusion

Like blackface performance on a stage, the command performance scenario in fiction may use both laughter and sentimentality to reinforce the social inequalities that stereotypes legitimate. But such performances have potentially subversive revisionary powers too, so that social scripts underwriting class and racial hierarchies and the cultural work that stereotypical characters perform may be reimagined. Joel Chandler Harris' trickster Mammy emerging at the end of his *Minervy Ann* chronicles challenges not only the color-line but also the foundation of how the white New South narrates its own legitimacy. It's long past time to encounter Harris anew, no longer typecasting his non-Remus tales merely as servile pro-white plantation-school clichés. Chopin and Dunbar, similarly, in their deepest interpretations of the Mammy figure find mourning, rebellion, and dignity—and, in the case of “The Gentleman of Bayou Teche,” a way for whites to draw inspiration from the Mammy's strength as way to question class boundaries. (That story of Chopin's, though, also marks the *limits* of revision: I argued earlier that it is hardly possible for Evariste, or Chopin, to ignore or erase inherited scripts defining class or racial difference, or the expectations of audiences regarding what a commercial “local color” illustration or story will deliver. But those expectations can at least be challenged, and the story shows how.) Hopkins builds on these three authors' exempla to imitate then break apart stereotypical Old and New South characters and plots as she tries to imagine a new genealogy of memory for a multiracial U.S. emerging into the twentieth century.

All four of these writers may be profoundly useful for today's readers because they teach us to be vigilant about the many new guises that racism and other narratives of privilege take as they adapt to changing times. There are limits, admittedly, to what fiction's virtual worlds can do to change the “real” world that we tell ourselves we inhabit. But many of the writers discussed in this essay prove adept at teaching us to see that what passes for the “real” or the “natural” is also a set of

fictions, a world created by performing scripts. Once that is understood, change is possible; repeating what is in those scripts may no longer simply be commanded. The brief sampling of writers here considered underscores how early New South literature contains much that is profoundly timely now, when U.S. democracy needs all the help it can get as it tries to know better its own multiracial past and become a truly more perfect union.

Even though the early New South era is still marginalized in U.S. literary history, writers from that time laid good groundwork for some of the best fiction to tell about the South in the later twentieth century and beyond. I'm not just thinking of Johnson, Faulkner, Hurston, or Thurman here, or of Porter, McCullers, Welty, O'Connor, Percy, Margaret or Alice Walker, Gaines, or Morrison, to name a few. We also want to keep in mind figures like Peter Taylor, who in stories such as "A Wife of Nashville," "What You Hear from 'Em?" and "A Friend and Protector" brilliantly and ironically reshaped the portrayal of blacks in fiction by whites, as did Ellen Douglas in *Can't Quit You Baby* (1988) and *Truth: Four Stories I Am Finally Old Enough to Tell* (1998). (Taylor and Douglas of course are of interest for a great many other reasons too, in part because they write about class brilliantly and always treat our past as contested terrain.) Or, to choose a final example, consider Edward P. Jones, whose innovations in his *All Aunt Hagar's Children* stories (not to mention his novels) cannot be fully felt unless you know that where he's coming from as a writer includes Paul Laurence Dunbar and Pauline E. Hopkins.

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Notes

1. For the concept of racial formation, see Omi and Winant (1994): "the process by which social, economic and political forces determine the content and importance of racial categories, and by which they are in turn shaped by racial meanings" (61). Racial formation is continuous and operates at two levels, shaping both individual identity and a society's systems of stratification (where it can interact with other stratifying forces, such as gender and class). Omi and Winant distinguish between racial dictatorships (which enforce difference via violence) and racial hegemonies (in which the dominant group strives to maintain power by setting the terms for limited inclusion of other racial groups), while acknowledging that these two patterns often function interactively. Establishing racial hegemony via the appearance of consent, arguably, is *the* cultural work of the standard command performance scene in fiction discussed in this essay. One key factor in racial formation that Omi and Winant slight, however: *cultural* forces created by oppressed racial communities that enable them to push back against dominant racial formations, creating their own counter-process. Omi and Winant's phrasing quoted above is at once too top-down determinate (the first clause in their claim) and too ambiguous (the second clause, which vaguely describes a feedback loop). For a different take on racial formation, one that focuses on the effects of the culture of segregation in the South from the 1890s through the 1940s, see Hale, *Making Whiteness*. For essays focusing on contemporary issues, see the *Making and Unmaking of Whiteness* anthology, Rasmussen et al (2001).

2. United States Census Bureau, "An Older and More Diverse Nation By Mid-Century." August 2008.

<http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/population/cb08-123.html>

[.] For one insightful article on the re-segregation of U.S. schools with a focus on New York City, including the role played by "charter" schools, see Kleinfield, "Why Don't We Have Any White Kids?" Kleinfield charts the one hundred most

and least segregated schools in the city and seeks to understand the causes and consequences of these developments.

3. The anxieties of the command performance scenario, in which blacks are commanded to perform for whites, can and did easily cross over into the fraught symbolism of blackface performance, where whites themselves often performed the “black” roles they desired to see and hear. Aside from the well known studies of blackface minstrelsy by Saxton, Toll, Lott, and Cockrell, I especially recommend McElya’s more recent *Clinging to Mammy: The Faithful Slave in Twentieth-Century America*, including her chapter “Anxious Performances,” which focuses on elite white women (some of them Daughters of the American Revolution members) who received acclaim impersonating blacks, especially the Mammy, in public performances throughout the nation. McElya stresses class and status as well as racial anxieties at the heart of these performances. For more on “race” as performance in post-Reconstruction, see Daphne Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent*.

4. Hegel’s discussion, now often called the “Master-Slave” dialectic, was originally entitled “Interdependence and Dependence of Self-Consciousness: Lordship and Bondage.” See paragraphs 189-196 in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Mind*, sometimes translated as *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807). Hegel’s dialectics of power here are also profoundly pertinent to the power dynamics between ex-slaves and masters, and indeed Buck-Morss has recently argued that Hegel’s entire meditation was inspired by the Haitian revolution and its aftermath (1791-1804). A host of post-emancipation tracts, reworking Hegel, sought to argue that freedom brought a degeneration in the black race, or perhaps the emergence of inherent traits that made the race inferior, once the disciplinary regime of the master (i.e., slavery) was abolished. For a history of post-Civil War black degeneracy theories that shaped alliances among white New South Progressivists, see Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race*, particularly 111-223. For philosophical analyses of Hegel’s lordship-and-bondage parable that explores divergent historical and psychoanalytical directions, see Kojève’s lectures (which date from the 1930s) and Kelly, respectively. I also recommend Cole’s commentary and historical overview, “What Hegel’s Master/Slave Dialectic Really Means,” which urges consideration of the particularly *feudal* “material problems of possession” (580) addressed by Hegel. Cole valuably cautions

that the historical specificities of the lordship/bondsman tie in Hegel's analysis have been too elided by inaccuracies in translation and ahistorical generalizations.

5. See, for instance, the opening chapter of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, where Mr. Shelby commands a young slave boy whom he calls "Jim Crow" to sing and dance for a slave trader, paying the child in raisins and an orange. Stowe teaches her readers that interpreting such scenes is quite problematic: the dancing child proves to be the son of George and Eliza Harris. Another early portrait of a slave, "Sam," appears at first perfectly to conform to stereotypes of blacks' selfishness and incompetence, but such a reading must be rethought after Chapter VI, in which Sam uses his alleged incompetence to help George and Eliza escape. "Topsy" is an even more intriguing and contradictory portrait of a slave's various performances on command. Regarding what I have called the "Hegel paradox" inherent in the command performance scene, see George Harris' reflections: "My master! and who made him my master? That's what I think of — what right has he to me? I'm a man as much as he is. I'm a better man than he is. I know more about business than he does" (Chapter III).

6. The ex-slave's veneration of Marse Chan long after his death (Page's story is set in 1872) confirmed many whites' beliefs that what southern blacks most wanted in the turbulent post-slavery era was not freedom but protection and a return to proper hierarchies of race and class. Sam doesn't even know the name of the alien new owner of the Channing plantation, who is a "half-stainer" (lower-class white); rather, he spends his days tending the Channings' graves and pining for the "good ole times" that once were (3, 10). The e-text of Page's story, with its revealing original illustrations, is available at <http://etext.virginia.edu/railton/huckfinn/marschan.htm> [.]

What may most intrigue today's readers of Page's parable is that the frame narrative surrounding Sam's command performance creates some unnecessary but fascinating tensions within any simple interpretation of "Marse Chan" stressing the servant's undying loyalty. Two recent commentators on "Marse Chan," Scott Romine (94-99) and Caroline Gebhard ("Reconstructing Southern Manhood"), make just this point, with Romine calling Sam's story a "performance," "the strategic construction of a veil behind which lurks a man discontent with his place in the so-

cial order” (96). Before he tells his tale, Sam is first encountered teasing Marse Chan’s dog to jump over the railing of a fence so he won’t have to lower it. When the dog refuses, Sam grumpily lowers the railing, all the while protesting that the dog’s stubbornness is “Jes’ like white folks—think ‘cuz you’s white and I’s black, I got to wait on yo’ all de time” (2-3). Sam’s behavior changes markedly when he notices he is being observed by a white man on a horse (“Sarvent, marster”). Sam hurriedly explains that he was “jes’ prodjickin’” (3) with the dog, i.e., teasing it. Does such behavior support the veracity and moral authority of Sam’s ensuing tale, or undermine it? Why is this detail even in the narrative, which could function perfectly without it? Does Sam’s sudden change suggest that he may often mean the opposite of what he says (as with the dog), and that therefore Sam’s Marse Chan nostalgia may be a “project” concocted precisely to compensate for the fact that a white stranger discovered him being a less than reverential servant? Or did creating a brief glimpse of Sam when he is unaware of being seen actually *reinforce* for Page’s original readers Sam’s authority to discourse on what true white nobility is? Certainly the unnamed “marster” who hears Sam’s tale sees nothing amiss in Sam’s behavior that would suggest disrespect. But his interpretation need hardly be the only one: after Sam’s “prodjickin’” comment, we can never prove that Sam is not wearing a mask, or that his story contains no hidden significations. Testifying in favor of divinely sanctioned, immutable race and class differences, Page’s tale also could not stop itself from hinting that such hierarchies had to be continually performed and reaffirmed—and may indeed be a paid-for lie improvised to fit what a white audience needs to hear.

7. For more on Stuart’s “Blink,” see my earlier article “Command Performances.”

8. For a reading of this command performance scene in a cave in *The Clansman*, including the role played by the analogy to film, see the chapter on Dixon in my *Sitting in Darkness: New South Fiction, Education, and the Rise of Jim Crow Colonialism, 1865-1920*.

9. See, however, Keith Cartwright, who rightly argues that Harris’ later Uncle Remus collections, especially *Nights with Uncle Remus* (1883), feature more black

story-tellers performing for each other, while they diminish somewhat the role of the white auditor.

10. Concerning Huck's unstable identity as it intersects with numerous instances in the novel where Huck must perform for others, see my "The 'Raftsmen's Passage,' Huck's Crisis of Whiteness, and *Huckleberry Finn* in U.S. Literary History."

11. Chesnutt criticism, particularly on *Conjure Woman*, is too extensive to survey here, but see Stepto, Brodhead, Callahan, and Sundquist 271-454. Many readings of the *Conjure Woman* tales, including Sundquist's, stress the ironic contrasts between John's world-view and Julius' responses; they also explore Annie's (John's wife's) fascinating border-crossing between her husband's interpretations and her own intimations of Julius' hidden meanings. For a consideration of how John's, Annie's, and Julius' relations reproduce elements of colonial power relations, see Goldner, who documents Chesnutt's reading in the history of imperialism. Readings of "The Dumb Witness" are relatively rare in Chesnutt criticism, but see Sundquist 389-92 and Schmidt, "Command Performances."

12. Harris' *Free Joe* collection is out of print but available online via Project Gutenberg: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/31160/31160-h/31160-h.htm> [.]

13. Of many examples in Harris' story of the narrator's dynamic of appropriation and supplementation of Fountain's voice, here is one near the conclusion: "[The Tomlinson daughter Miss Lady] inherited a certain degree of cold stateliness from her ancestors; but her experience after the war, and Trunion's unaffected ways, had acted as powerful correctives.... As for Mrs. Tomlinson ... I think that in her secret soul she had an ineradicable contempt for Trunion's extraordinary business energy. ...But she had little time to think of these matters; for she had taken possession of her grandson" (97-98). Compare Fountain's earlier version: "Mistiss [Tomlinson] never is come right outen say she 'greeable 'bout it [her daughter's marriage], but Miss Lady wuz a Bledsoe too, en a Tomlinson ter boot, en I ain' never see nobody w'at impatient nuff fer ter stan' out 'g'inst dat gal. ...[B]ut fer dat [marriage], I dunno w'at in de name er goodness would er 'come er dis place" [the Tomlinson plantation]" (95-96). Fountain emphasizes the daugh-

ter's initiative in overcoming her mother's objections to the marriage, which saved the Tomlinson plantation. Harris' narrator also stresses "Miss Lady's" new assertiveness caused by the upheaval of the War, while adding details about how the older woman's maternal instincts toward her grandson overcame generational tensions. Without Fountain's words and insight (not just the facts of Tomlinson family history), the narrator's interpretive authority here would be impossible.

14. Harris' *Chronicles of Minervy Ann* is available online via Google Books: <http://www.archive.org/stream/chroniclesauntm00frosgoog#page/n9/mode/2up> [.] The best reading of "The Case of Mary Ellen" in the context of *Aunt Minervy Ann* as a whole is Strickland's, to which I am indebted; see also Bickley 134-37. Strickland stresses the subversiveness of this story and contrasts it with the others in the collection; he also provides evidence that Harris' character Minervy Ann was based on a real person at Harris' Wren House in Georgia, a servant named Chloe (no last name given) whose photograph is featured on Wren House tours. Two holograph fragments of rejected beginnings to "The Case of Mary Ellen" under its original name, "A Serious Social Problem," are in the Harris papers at the Robert W. Woodruff Library, Emory University, Series II, OP 6, Folder 6. Harris' original title suggests some unease with the story's hidden endorsement of passing, as perhaps does his rather clinical choice of the word "case" to describe Mary Ellen's plight and Minervy Ann's solution. Tumlin's 1975 selected volume of Harris' stories featured several of the more conventional Mammy/Minervy Ann tales but not "The Case of Mary Ellen."

15. Harris' "Case of Mary Ellen" fantasizes that there are no consequences in Georgia in 1899 for such a public violation of the color-line:

Marse Bolivar ain't wait fer me ter hear what folks say. He went polin' up town de nex' day, an' tol' 'bout it in eve'y sto' on de street, an' de las' man in town vow'd 'twuz de ve'y thing ter do. An' dat ain't all, ma'am! De folks dar raise a lot er money fer Mary Ellen, an' de way dat chile went on when Marse Bolivar put it in 'her han' an' tol' her whar it come fum wuz pitiful ter see. (203)

It would not be hard to argue that such a moment is an example of Harris' addiction to happy endings at its worst; he is using his art to promote the sentimental fantasy that the town would feel as guilty and sentimental about Mary Ellen as Bolivar does and would look the other way as the color-line was violated. Of course, the fact that it is a northern stranger who is tricked, not the town's whites, may have something to do with explaining the town's generosity. (Compare the standard plot of earlier "Southwest humor" tales, in which rural townspeople trick a pretentious outsider. For background on "Southwest" humor formulas, see Budd, "Joel Chandler Harris," who chides Harris for "genteeling" American humor; and Cohen and Dillingham, "Introduction.") Also a factor may be Bolivar's unquestioned status among the town's elite, and the fact that Mary Ellen's masquerade occurs only briefly (less than one day) and within the privacy of Bolivar's home. Yet merely censuring Harris for a lack of "realism" regarding passing under Jim Crow leaves unaddressed most of the interesting interpretive questions regarding his little parable.

16. On trickster figures in late nineteenth and early twentieth century U.S. literature, see Elizabeth Ammons' and Annette White-Parks's fine anthology *Tricksterism in Turn-of-the-Century American Literature*, which briefly mentions Harris in the context of Native American rabbit trickster figures (104n4), but focuses on other versions of such figures by writers who were Harris' contemporaries. Of course, many commentators on Harris mention B'rer Rabbit as a trickster and in some cases consider Harris a trickster too underneath his mask of the shy nostalgist. More work needs to be done on possible trickster figures in Harris' short stories, particularly those focusing on black-white relations. For scintillating commentary on trickster, signifyin', or "storying" moves in black cultural traditions, see Henry Louis Gates' *Signifying Monkey* and Kevin Young's *The Grey Album*.

17. Peter Revell's *Paul Laurence Dunbar* (1979) provides one example of the earlier, mostly negative critical consensus about Dunbar's short fiction, stressing Dunbar's subservience to Page and Harris when it came to plantation stories. Comparing Dunbar to Harris and Chesnutt, for instance, Revell claims that the "characters of Dunbar's stories are more likely to survive by a kind of rugged simplicity than by cunning evasions" (134); he is particularly dismissive of *In Old Plantation*

Days, “in which the stylized and unreal world of Mordaunt’s plantation provides an escapist setting for humorous stories of the eternal struggle between devilry and righteousness” (133). Overall, though, Revell’s consideration of the whole of Dunbar’s career remains well worth reading; Revell values the dialect poetry most highly and concludes that “[f]or all its defects, [Dunbar’s] representation of black American life is wide enough and deep enough to be a continuing source of interest to later writers (174-75). Although it focuses on Dunbar’s poetry, Rowan Ricardo Phillips’ essay on Dunbar in *When Blackness Rhymes With Blackness* is a fine short introduction to Dunbar’s life and work. Phillips traces how the split at the heart of Dunbar’s poetry between his “dialect” and his “proper English” verse and subjects generates a “quiet turbulence” (84) in Dunbar’s sense of lyric form. Such a conception of double-voiced discourse is profoundly relevant for understanding Dunbar’s fiction as well. Signs of a revival of interest in Dunbar among contemporary black poets is also evident in Kevin Young’s astute reflections on Dunbar in *The Grey Album*: “Paul Laurence Dunbar, His Descendants, and the Dance of Dialect.” Critical reassessment of the possibility of “cunning evasions” in Dunbar’s fiction began with Darwin Turner’s 1967 essay and Martin’s 1975 essay collection. Examples of recent Dunbar criticism that stress the complexity of his mask-wearing, besides the material in *Complete Stories* that I have already mentioned, include articles by Sollors, Ramsey, Black, Gebhard (“Inventing a ‘Negro Literature’”), Fishkin (“Twain and Dunbar”), and Bennett. See also the 2006 special issue of *Midwestern Miscellany* dedicated to Dunbar, edited by Primeau et al.

18. Gebhard earlier proposed that plantation fiction’s sentimentality can easily be parodied and made into camp. See especially “Reconstructing Southern Manhood,” but also “Inventing a ‘Negro Literature.’” The origin of *camp* as an amusing, over-the-top imitation-parody predates Dunbar’s era, according to the Random House dictionary; it described “a teasing, theatrical manner.” But in 1905-10, according to Dictionary.com, camp took on new significations: “perhaps dial. camp, impetuous, uncouth person (see kemp); hence, slightly objectionable, effeminate, homosexual; in some senses prob. special use of camp [as] brothel, meeting place of male homosexuals” (“camp.” *Dictionary.com Unabridged* (v 1.1). Random

House, Inc. Accessed 06 Feb. 2008.

<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/camp>

19. Although I make a case for subversive energy in Dunbar's "Aunt Tempe's Revenge," I concede that this comic entertainment for his national readership does not even hint at slavery's more complicated histories: slave-masters intentionally breaking up black families and other networks, or using as an income source the sale of new slaves produced from whites mating with slave women.

20. For more on the meaning of the black story-teller "prodjickin'" in Page's "Marse Chan" see Romine and Gebhard, mentioned in footnote 6 above.

21. Fine readings of Chopin's "La Belle Zoraïde" are in Patricia Yaeger's *Dirt and Desire* (69-74) and Anna Elfenbein's *Women on the Color Line* (131-135), but see also Nancy A. Walker's general comments on Chopin (39-40).

22. The special artistry achieved by "La Belle Zoraïde" is well demonstrated by contrasting it with another tale featuring Madame Delisle, the concluding story in *Bayou Folk*, "A Lady of Bayou St. John." Though this story takes place during the Civil War and appears close to the other chronologically, it is as slight as the earlier tale is deep, merely concerned with providing a sentimental tribute to Madame Delisle's refusing to marry again in order to keep alive her memory of her dead husband. The narrator now calls Madame a "child" and emphasizes her narcissistic focus on her own beauty in a mirror; Manna Loulou meanwhile appears merely as a faithful servant promptly bringing coffee and stories when Madame wants them (325).

23. The son photographs, the father draws: what difference does this make for Chopin's "A Gentleman of Bayou Teche"? Chopin has carefully captured a crucial moment in the evolution of magazine illustration technology in the nineteenth century, as woodcut engraving gradually lost out in popularity in the 1890s to engraved images using half-tones to make the results look like photographs. At this stage of development, photoengraved half-tones could be produced from pencil sketches like those that Mr. Sublet proposes to sell. As foretold by Mr. Sublet's son's hobby, photography eventually did replace engraving in illustration in the twentieth century, "but before that photography joined and transformed wood en-

graving so as to favor its claims as a fine art” (Rice). Chopin’s story is quite correct regarding the preference in this era for captions for magazine illustrations, particularly portraits, that would give viewers a guide for how to “read” the pictures.

24. For a succinct summary of Chopin’s trials and tribulations with her publishers see the Chronology at the back of the *Complete Novels and Stories*, helpfully compiled by Sandra M. Gilbert: 1048-53.

25. Named after William Archibald Dunning of Columbia University, the “Dunning school” was a group of historians influential from the 1890s onwards who contended that Reconstruction was a disaster because blacks could never be ready for self-rule. Powerfully attacked by W. E. B. DuBois in *Black Reconstruction* (1935), the Dunning school’s claims about how to interpret postwar southern history remained largely unchallenged within academia proper until the rise of the post-World War II Civil Rights movement. (The school’s emphasis on the importance of recovering and preserving primary source materials, however, has not been rejected.) For a representative work of Dunning’s, see *Essays on the Civil War and Reconstruction* (1898); for an influential later critique of the Dunning school see Stamp, *The Era of Reconstruction* (1965). A historiographical survey arguing that Dunning’s “school” of thought regarding Reconstruction was *not* monolithic is Smith’s *Slavery, Race, and American History: Historical Conflict, Trends, and Method, 1866-1953* (1999). A brief overview of the Dunning School may be found at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dunning_School [.]

26. Illuminating brief discussions of the principle of *kalokagathy* as adopted by both the Southern plantation-fiction tradition and sentimental anti-slavery narratives may be found in Boeckmann 54-56 and 92-93. Hopkins’ *Hagar’s Daughter* has been reprinted in the Oxford Schomberg Library of Nineteenth-Century Black Women Writers, as one of three works in *The Magazine Novels of Pauline Hopkins*, edited with an introduction by Hazel V. Carby. *Hagar* was published in Boston in *The Colored American Magazine* in 1901-02 under the pseudonym of Sarah A. Allen. Hopkins (1859-1930) was also active as an editor and, earlier in her life, an aspiring playwright, composer, and the lead soprano in “Hopkins’ Colored Troubadours, Guitar Players and Southern Jubilee Singers.” This group toured widely in the 1880s performing programs featuring miscellaneous songs but sometimes also

full-length musical dramas authored by Hopkins with titles such as “Escape from Slavery” and “Peculiar Sam; or, The Underground Railroad” (Hopkins Papers and Memorabilia, Fisk University, Franklin Library, Special Collections, Hopkins scrapbook.) For an early biographical sketch done before the revival of interest in Hopkins’ work, see Shockley; but see most especially Carby, “Introduction,” *Magazine Novels of Pauline Hopkins*; and Gruesser.

27. On the William James connection, see Sundquist *To Wake the Nations* 570-71, who stresses the relevance of Hopkins’ reading for novels other than *Hagar’s Daughter*; and Gillman; Schragar; and Rohrbach. The relevant William James essay is “The Hidden Self,” published in *Scribner’s* in 1890.

28. Pamplin (181-82) emphasizes the fear of a connection to Africa, not just “black” blood, once Miss Hagar realizes she is “chattel.” McCann has well discussed the convention of the heroine’s “swoon,” her loss of consciousness signifying a crisis in adult social identity, in Hopkins’ earlier novel *Contending Forces*. McCann also notes that the motif of a villain able to “see” and exploit invisible markers of racial identity appears with many variations in Hopkins’ novels.

29. As Michaels, Pamplin, and others have shown, the lesser-known 1898 *Williams* decision made *character* rather than skin-color the crucial determinant when it came to eligibility to vote for males. The Supreme Court admitted that using standards of “character” and knowledge of the Constitution might have a disproportionate effect on blacks, but the Court endorsed the lower court’s generalizations about their character: “this race had acquired or accentuated certain peculiarities of habit, of temperament, and of character which clearly distinguished it as a race from the whites; a patient, docile people, but careless, landless, migratory within narrow limits, without forethought.” Yet the *Williams* ruling also claimed that any voting tests would apply equally to whites as well as blacks, thus making it constitutional: “the operation of the Constitution and laws is not limited by their language or effects to one race.” More work needs to be done regarding how fiction writers both black and white engaged with the Supreme Court’s *Williams* decision regarding “character” rather than color, as I am arguing Hopkins did. The more famous *Plessy* decision from two years earlier, 1896, in comparison, has received much more analysis from literary historians. A brief list must include Sundquist,

To Wake the Nations 225-70; Michaels, “The Souls of White Folk”; Fleishmann; Pamplin; and especially two essays by Brook Thomas.

Both Supreme Court decisions reflected widespread anxieties among whites about blacks passing for white. Such revelations figured centrally in the plots of novels created by antebellum and postwar novelists such as Lydia Maria Child, William Wells Brown, Frances Harper, and Charles Chesnutt, among others. Conversely, whites discovering to their horror that they were black was not a plot generally favored by white writers, though along with Twain’s *Pudd’nhead Wilson* (1894) both Lydia Maria Child’s *Romance of the Republic* (1867) and Ellen Ingraham’s *Bond, Then Free* (1882) are interesting exceptions. For analyses of the Child and Ingraham texts, see Schmidt, *Sitting in Darkness*, chapters seven and eight. For discussion of many variations in the “racial discovery plot” and its importance in nineteenth- and twentieth-century U.S. fiction, see the lucid overview in Bussey’s dissertation.

30. Hopkins’ choice of the word *caste* in her subtitle also highlights a slippage between racial identity, character traits, and social standing that obsessed the nation in the 1890s and after, as confidence began to erode that visual markers of racial difference were reliably legible. A search in the online database Corpus of Historical American English reveals a large uptick in the number of uses of *caste* in U.S. publications in the 1900s through the 1920s: see <http://corpus.byu.edu/coha/> [.]

31. Earlier critics such as Hazel Carby, Mary Helen Washington, Houston Baker, and Claudia Tate were instrumental in returning Hopkins’ work to print and to U.S. literary history, but they tended to see her utilization of the conventions of melodrama and Victorian proper womanhood as primarily conservative and counterproductive. In Hazel Carby’s words, *Hagar’s Daughter* and the other novels are bedeviled by “the contradictions inherent in Hopkins’ attempt to use popular and easily accessible narrative forms to question the morality of, rather than restore faith in, the social formation” (“Introduction” xli). More recent critics, including Ann duCille, Janet Gabler-Hover, Sean McCann, Carol Allen, Claire Pamplin, Kristina Brooks, Dickson Bruce, Susan Gillman, Augusta Rohrbach, and Susan Bussey, in contrast, have tended to argue that the narrative con-

ventions Hopkins appropriated at least to some degree enable and structure her revisionary understanding of American racial and class discourse, rather than only compromise it. We need both a more nuanced explanation of the contradictions that beset Hopkins' narratives and a more precise sense of where her innovations as a writer lie. Rohrbach provides perhaps the best recent short overview of Hopkins' three magazine novels, but I disagree with her claim that between *Hagar's Daughter* and *Of One Blood* Hopkins progresses from a fixed to a fluid or hybrid understanding of racial identity. In my reading all the latter elements are present, sometimes in imperfectly realized form, in *Hagar's Daughter*. As I argue above, I think *Hagar* is most significant because it is Hopkins' first experiment with an *unreliably reliable* narrator dramatically appropriate for a novel showing how "race" is unreliably understood. (The clever and thoroughly useful term of an unreliably—i.e., unpredictably—reliable narrator is Michael Wood's, in *How Fiction Works*, though of course Woods associates it with "masters" such as James and Joyce, not relative unknowns like Hopkins.) Hopkins' later attempts to re-mark racial identity visually (such as the lotus symbol on the skin in *Of One Blood*) are arguably a regression and a simplification, despite much of interest in her last novel. Jackson's 2012 article on the novel valuably discussed Hopkins' innovations as she engages in revising Brown's *Clotel*.

32. For a discussion of the "racial discovery" plot in *Hagar's Daughter* and American fiction in general, see Bussey. For Carby's brief but solid comments on the "hair trunk" scene in *Hagar*, see her "Introduction" xl-xli.

33. For a fine analysis of how ideals of pastoralism shaped Old South discourse, see Grammer; Tise's history of pro-slavery ideology also engages with this topic. Some studies of the New South read its desire for modernization as a rejection of Old South pastoralism, not just slavery, but Grammer (159-67), Gaston, Ayers, Blight, and Hale, among others, show that New South discourse generated a complex tale of attempted synthesis between pastoral ideals and modernization. Pauline Hopkins' attention in 1901-02 to the important role pastoral ideology played in New South discourse thus provided one precedent for lines of inquiry taken much later in the century. See also Carol Allen's reading of the ruined plantation scene in *Hagar's Daughter*, 38-40. Hopkins' satiric use of pastoral conven-

tions to stress the delusions of a mixed-blood heroine who thinks she is white was certainly anticipated by Brown's *Clotel* and Child's *Romance of the Republic*. Neither, though, was arguably as adept as Hopkins in mocking the falsity of such pastoral clichés and exposing their ideological agenda.

34. One exception to my generalization is Hazel Carby: "Hopkins extends her use of the masculinized female to the character of Venus who evolves from being a black maid to becoming a heroine of the story" ("Introduction," xxxix). See also Gruesser on *Hagar*, 1-4. The connection between Hopkins' *Hagar's Daughter* and Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson* may be mentioned here but deserves fuller study. Like Twain's novel, Hopkins' features a detective-hero and a set of children who grow up confused about their "true" racial identity. Twain's novel is notable for its riddling ambiguities, particularly on the matter of whether racial "blood" or environmental influences most determine a person's character. Twain's ending (including the diatribe by Roxy, a marginalized figure as important to the novel's outcome as Pudd'nhead Wilson) notoriously presents a strong case that "blood" rather than upbringing is the primary determinant of character. Hopkins' *Hagar's Daughter* reverses Twain's plotting even as she alludes to it. She features several black characters who are raised as white: Hagar, her daughter Jewel, and Aurelia Madison. Yet though they all have about the same mix of "black" and "white" blood producing light skin and dark curly hair, only Aurelia proves villainous. And the major speech in Hopkins' novel that performs the equivalent function of Roxy's speech in *Pudd'nhead* is given by Hopkins to a white character, the secretary Elise Bradford, who suggests that social ostracism as much as biology contributed to Aurelia's desperate dishonesty (159). Hopkins' *Hagar* also multiplies the number of detective heroes to three—and two are black, one female. Hopkins employs cross-dressing disguises in her novel, as Twain did, but in her case it is not the villain but one of her heroines, the dark-skinned Venus, who is featured in this subplot, and it is given a comic, not tragic, twist. The most important inspiration that Hopkins drew from Twain's novel for *Hagar*, though, is that it sardonically reverses traditional correlations between skin color and character. Hopkins' *Of One Blood* also contains reworkings of *Pudd'nhead* motifs.

35. Of course, we should not overstate the revolutionary potential of this parlor scene in *Hagar's Daughter*. Mrs. Bowen's/Hagar's graciousness toward Henny and Venus, daring as it is, hardly erases class boundaries and the workings of the color-line, neither within the black community nor in the nation. But Hopkins shows us that it is a *start*.



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