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Command Performances: Black Storytellers in Stuart's "Blink" and Chesnutt's "The Dumb Witness"

by Peter Schmidt

In one of many notorious scenes near the end of Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* (1885), Tom Sawyer tries to persuade Jim to tame a rattlesnake during his imprisonment in order to give his ordeal more style and "glory":

> "Why, Mars Tom, I doan' *want* no sich glory. Snake take 'n bite Jim's chin off, den *whah* is de glory? No, sah, I doan' want no sich doin's. . . . Ef you en Huck fetches a rattlesnake in heah for me to tame, I's gwyne to *leave*, dat's *shore*."
>
> "Well, then, let it go, let it go, if you're so bullheaded about it. We can get you some garter-snakes and you can tie some buttons on their tails, and let on they're rattlesnakes, and I reckon that'll have to do." (235)

This dialogue from Chapter 38 exemplifies a basic feature of comedy—one character with enough power over another to make the comic victim do just about anything. The fact that race is at the center of this unequal power relation, however, introduces complications—at least, for many

contemporary readers, if not for most of Twain's white contemporaries. Tom's treatment of Jim has been be linked by much recent Twain criticism to the rise of Jim Crow culture and racial politics of the late nineteenth-century U.S.—including but not limited to the racist humor frequent in blackface minstrel shows. Some have argued that Tom's torturous freeing of an already free black man should be read as Twain's satire of whites' treatment of blacks during the Reconstruction and, especially, the post-Reconstruction period after 1877. Others, more cautious, have stressed the ways in which Twain's text may critique but also is complicit in the cultural violence of the times.

Tom Sawyer's performance requests of Jim are usually read in isolation, but they are hardly unique. Southern postwar fiction by authors other than Twain frequently replays scenes in which a white person "requests" a black to perform for him or her; indeed, this motif appears so often it is not unreasonable to claim that New South fiction was rather obsessed with this scenario and its dangerous possibilities. These scenes have generally not received the sustained attention that cultural historians have given to *Huckleberry Finn* or minstrel show performances.

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. The fact that racial difference is at the heart of many such scenes, of course, means that the exchanges are never 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 and to have them 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. Jim understands the danger underneath Tom's "tame" requests only too well. For him they are even worse than a rattlesnake.

Scenes featuring whites requesting or commanding blacks to perform are particularly prominent in New South short stories. Consider the following plot synopses of 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 is arguably still a central issue for interpretation:

- Loyal black servants are called upon to testify to both the evils of "freedom" and Reconstruction and the nobility of a white aristocrat who was or is their master, in stories by Sherwood Bonner [Katherine Sherwood Bonner McDowell], Thomas Nelson Page, Grace King, Kate Chopin, and Paul Laurence Dunbar.
- 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 (Bonner, "The Gentleman of Sarsar," *Dialect Tales*, 1883).
- A freed slave lives a miserable existence that is closer to social death than freedom: "Having no owner, every man was his master." Unable to speak much for himself, the ex-slave's loneliness is anxiously allegorized by the narrator as a parable for why blacks are unhappy in the postwar period unless linked to a white benefactor. Working to undermine the narrator's confident paternalism, however, are many anomalies. Prophecies hint they conceal as much as reveal, and the narrator's own arguments that slaves were happier than free blacks suddenly admits that for whites "across the serene and smiling front of safety the pale outlines of the awful shadow of insurrection sometimes fell." Such a turn inevitably exposes the story's sentimental rhetoric of reconciliation as a shadowed "front of safety" (Joel Chandler Harris, "Free Joe," *Free Joe and Other Georgian Sketches*, 1887).
- A colonel and war hero can't let his daughter be married unless his Negro man-servant agrees to return "home" (Page, "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 praise of Massa so satisfies him (Page, "Marse Chan," *In Ole Virginia*).
- A black female storyteller regales a plantation owner's daughter about the goings-on in the Negro quarters—and her tale-telling so inspires the white girl that she takes over to narrate one of those tales herself (Bonner, "Coming Home to Roost," *Suwanee River Tales*, 1884).
- A white narrator uses her black mammy's autobiographical narrative, plus her "soft black hand . . . rubbing out aches and frets and nervousness," to soothe herself to sleep (King, "A Crippled Hope," *Balcony Stories*, 1893).
- A loyal black servant not only helps her impoverished mistress set up a household in postwar New Orleans and provides the

household with a small income by taking in laundry, but also she helps her white mistress by helping her revise a tale that becomes the white woman's first paid publication (Ruth McEnery Stuart, "Blink," *A Golden Wedding*, 1893).

There are also in New South short fiction some overt acts of rebellion, or at least parodies and revisions of whites' performance requests:

- A black servant is requested to tell stories of black women's woes so her white mistress can sleep, but the tale the servant tells on one particular night is of a mistress's abuses of power as she tries to help a favorite servant (Kate Chopin, "La Belle Zoraïde," *Bayou Folk*, 1894).
- A black servant refuses to pose for a portrait artist seeking "local color" unless she can dress up and get away from her ironing board. Her refusal to follow the script affects others in the village who are not black (Chopin, "The Gentleman of Bayou Teche," *Bayou Folk*).
- The sales-song of a "praline woman" begins to make some of her New Orleans customers treat her as a person, not just a vendor (Alice Dunbar-Nelson, *The Goodness of St. Rocque and Other Stories*, 1899).
- A mammy's overly enthusiastic testimonials about how perfectly her mistress embodies the ideals of the white southern lady almost frighten her mistress's suitor away (Paul Laurence Dunbar, "Mammy Peggy's Pride," *The Strength of Gideon and Other Stories*, 1900).
- Five mixed-race (native-black) women are commanded to tell stories by a white girl, in a collection of animal tales that significantly 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 more immature, thus shifting the basic way in which Harris "framed" and contained the Negro folklore he retold.
- 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 (two different stories by Charles W. Chesnutt, both 1899). In the former story, "Her Virginia Mammy," the woman testifies compassionately, possibly protecting the white woman from a discovery 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.

New South fiction is often classed by literary historians as a southern variant of the national phenomenon of "local color" fiction especially popular in the post-Reconstruction era, from 1880 to World War I. Published in national magazines such as *Century*, such fiction usually featured scenes of rural life and dialects in New England, the Midwest, California, or the South. Local color fiction at first may seem incompatible with the ideological issues about power I am suggesting are central to "command performance" scenes. Local color fiction may be a literature of memory, not modernity, as Eric Sundquist has argued in his essay "Realism and Regionalism," but its nostalgic turn is always counterbalanced by fears of eviction or decay, an acute sense of a vanishing culture under stress. Such doubleness also marks the larger literary genre, the pastoral, as Raymond Williams has eloquently shown; regionalist or local color prose must be considered a subset of the pastoral.[1]

With the rise of postcolonial criticism, another critical take is possible on the paradoxes at the heart of "regionalist" literature produced primarily for a national, metropolitan audience. Judith Fetterley, critiquing Sundquist, has argued that "memory" cannot be the key term in studying such fiction; "power" must be. She argues for a sharp distinction between "local color" and "regionalist" modes: "In local color writing, genteel narrators present regional characters to urban readers as instances of the quaint or queer. . . . Despite the gesture toward the local, then, local color writing in effect ratifies the hegemony of the 'national' as a standard against which the local can be measured and found wanting. Regionalism, however, deconstructs the 'national,' revealing its presumed universality to be in fact the position of a certain, albeit privileged, group of locals" (26–27). We need not adopt Fetterley's strict separation of "local color" and "regional" (she erases how these terms have historically been intermingled) in order to see the usefulness of her distinction between two different kinds of cultural work that such fiction may perform.

Fetterley's and Sundquist's focus was on U.S. writers, but key figures in postcolonial criticism have urged analogous distinctions. The conventions of U.S. local color fiction were parallel to (and may reflect) premises about "primitive" cultures and the proper relations between the metropolitan center and the provinces that constitute colonial discourse. As

Mary Louise Pratt, Renato Rosaldo, and others have shown, colonial travel narratives assumed that a properly primordial culture should exist in its own world of mythical or cyclical time, homogeneous and continually self-reinforcing. Pratt has shown that the "modern" and urban is dependent upon such a notion of primitive time to define its own modernity.

> While the imperial metropolis tends to understand itself as determining the periphery (in the emanating glow of the civilizing mission or the cash flow of development, for example), it habitually blinds itself to the ways in which the periphery determines the metropolis—beginning, perhaps, with the latter's obsessive need to present and re-present its peripheries and its others continually to itself. (6)

U.S. local color writing gains new significance when we conceive of it as "contact zone" literature. For it too commonly features complicated interactions between a traveling outsider and a "local" in which the outsider's authority is sometimes destabilized, not reinforced—even when, as if often though not always the case, the outsider is the one representing the encounter in writing. Homi Bhabha, for his part, has stressed that mimicry and ambivalence mark the contact-zone interchange of colonial representations, and his terms too are useful for studying the city/country dynamics in U.S. regional literature.[2]

Scenes in New South fiction that center on whites requesting performances from blacks seem to me to be quintessential examples of the kinds of dynamics between performer and chronicler explored by Fetterley, Pratt, Bhabha and others. While not strictly speaking a form of colonial narrative, New South fiction partakes of many of the binary oppositions that mark colonial discourse. Like the "primitive" in colonial discourse, the South has often been used by the North to define by contrast its own civilized modernity and Americanness. As historians such as C. Vann Woodward and others have argued, both southern and northern postwar commentators used the analogy of colonization to try to understand not just Reconstruction but the South's economic dependence upon the North fueling New South development.

A different but also valid approach to the study of command performances in fiction would utilize the insights of contemporary racial formation theory drawn from fields such as history and sociology. Several such theories, most notably Pierre L. van der Berghe's, were cogently evaluated by C. Vann Woodward in "The Strange Career of an Histori-

cal Controversy" in *American Counterpoint* (1971). Van der Berghe distinguished between two kinds of racial dictatorship, that is, societies structured around sharply defined racial hierarchies. The first is "paternalistic" and features unequal but intimate relations between the races where racial difference defined a sharp social distance but not physical separation in day-to-day life. Such a racial formation is often, though not necessarily, associated with slavery. The second most common form of racial dictatorship van der Berghe calls "competitive," to stress the way in which different racial groups are seen as struggling with each other to define their places in a changing racial hierarchy. Such a struggle usually occurs at some point after slavery has been abolished, but theorists and historians do not have a consensus about how this transition occurs. It is characterized by aggression and withdrawal by the dominant racial group, as signified by acts of terrorism and codified rules for physical segregation and separation, not just distinct social roles. A competitive racial system is also often characterized by a new alignment—a sense of racial solidarity—between the working and middle classes of the dominant racial group and its upper class. Such racial alignments transcending class in the dominant group are much less evident in "paternal" race systems. Plantation slavery in the Old South in the U.S. is one classic example of a paternalistic racial formation as defined by van der Berghe (others include Brazil). The Jim Crow New South especially after 1896 is a classic example of a racial dictatorship that was competitive.

Woodward was drawn to such typologies of racial systems as a way of trying to explain contradictory responses by historians to his own investigations of the origins of Jim Crow segregation. Woodward's well-known thesis in *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* is summarized in his "Historical Controversy" as follows: "First, racial segregation in the South in the rigid and universal form it had taken did not appear with the end of slavery, but toward the latter years of the [nineteenth] century and later; second, before it appeared in this form there transpired an era of experiment and variety in race relations in the South in which segregation was not the invariable rule" (237).[3] The role that literature plays in racial formation and change has not been well defined. Fiction may present narratives that powerfully model "proper" race relations as well as justify them. Moreover, fiction's emphasis on intimate relations and the dynamics of social space make it arguably indispensable—at least in an age when fiction was widely read, as it was in the postwar South—for charting the new forms social interaction among the races might or should take.

When considering whether New South fiction by whites helped shape Jim Crow, however, we must note several paradoxes. First, as New South progressives unified whites and instituted Jim Crow, they stressed not terrorist threats so much as paternalism. That is, they made arguments in fiction and non-fiction that the new racial order would treat good blacks as if they spiritually still belonged "to the family," a phrase crucial to Sherwood Bonner's story "Coming Home to Roost," for instance (133). Idealized, interdependent racial relations in the private sphere were used to justify violent separation of blacks and whites in other areas of public life. As Woodward conceded, typologies of paternal vs. competitive race systems, while useful, are also too simplistic, since "segregation of itself might be regarded as in some measure a modification or extension rather than an end of the paternalistic order" (259).

A second paradox also suggests itself, inspired by Hegel's so-called Master-Slave parable. Refuting social theorists like Rousseau to argue that societies were formed via dominance hierarchies, not social contracts among free and equal agents, Hegel also argued that freedom itself required the discipline learned during subjugation. To become free meant to acquire the capacity for self-control, which for both individuals and nations Hegel claimed could only be learned through the severe discipline created by subjection to a master. Yet such arguments had a paradox, which Hegel touched on and later Marxist interpreters of Hegel, such as C. L. R. James, fully developed: bondage inevitably created a stronger will to freedom among the bondsman, not the master. The master, furthermore, was as dependent upon the bondsman as the latter was subjected to the master.[4]

When a dominant group is dependent upon social "inferiors" to maintain its social status, that dominance is rarely untroubled: it must be reaffirmed by daily social rituals and interactions. Even so, such performances of hierarchy may easily expose how dependent, and therefore vulnerable, the dominant group is. The Master-Slave or Master-Ex-Slave relation gets even more unstable if the dominant party needs to feel that this social arrangement is not normally coercive but voluntary; that is, if in order to be at peace the dominant party needs to have the subordinate give the appearance of free consent.

Such a scenario is at the heart of much New South fiction. The scene is here dubbed the "command performance," which occurs when blacks testify to the honor of their masters or mistresses and, by implication, to the rightness of the new forms of white supremacy emerging during and after Reconstruction. Since all fiction has subtexts, we can if we hunt for

them find moments when, as in Hegel's Master/Slave paradox, the power relations reverse and the "inferior" is revealed to be dominant in limited but crucial ways. This paradox becomes even more powerful when the "inferior" possesses the powers of eloquent speech or silence. Scholars have studied a number of New South fictions that contain black testimonials to the validity of paternalistic white rule—including relatively well-known stories such as Joel Chandler Harris' "Free Joe," Thomas Nelson Page's "Marse Chan," and novels such as Page's *Red Rock* (1898) and Thomas Dixon's *The Leopard's Spots* and *The Clansman* (1902 and 1905)—discovering ways in which each has undercurrents threatening to undo the racial hierarchies it appears to affirm.[5]

There remain many New South narratives mostly ignored by literary critics that attempted to represent idealized postwar relations between the races via tropes of performance, testimony, and writing. One of these unjustly neglected texts is Ruth McEnery Stuart's short story "Blink." Kate Chopin's "La Belle Zoraïde" has received some attention recently for its fascinating investigation of the ways in which its mistress/slave power hierarchy appears much less stable than that between master and man in Thomas Nelson Page's "Marse Chan."[6] Stuart's portrait of the mistress/mammy dynamic is arguably as complex as Chopin's, perhaps more so. The story purports to present the interaction between its mistress and mammy as fully collaborative, voluntary, and innocent. To my knowledge, "Blink" is the only story of the period by a white author in which the issue of representation is not only foregrounded but the black character actively participates in shaping how her life story is written by the white narrator (who also happens to be her mistress). But as we will see, there is more to "Blink" than a quick glance might detect. Stuart's tale is rife with just the kind of ambiguities and power struggles that characterize Bhabha's concept of colonial mimesis—and this post-Reconstruction tale even uses the trope of ventriloquism to open the possibility of reading its representations not as "natural" but as acts of mimicry and performance.

Under the guise of being a very simple tale, Stuart's "Blink" gives us a formula of some complexity for reconceptualizing the relationship between black voices and white authority in postwar southern fiction. Helen Taylor, the author of the best overview of Stuart's life and work, notes that "Blink" is Stuart's only story to feature a woman writer like herself, and that it contains hidden elements critiquing the methods of representing blacks that had gained her a national audience by the early 1890s (107).

"Blink" is set in Louisiana during Reconstruction, as the Bruce family loses its ancient family seat, Oakland Plantation, to creditors. The patriarch has declined into melancholy passivity and the family's survival is now in the hands of the young daughter, Evelyn, who makes the decision to sell the plantation and move her father, herself, and their "Mammy" to a modest apartment in New Orleans. Determined to find a new way of supporting the family, Evelyn takes up writing and by the end of the story has received first prize and five hundred dollars from a New York magazine for a story about postwar southern life, thus saving her family's future and launching her career.[7]

Read as a chronicle of Evelyn's discovery of her own voice as a woman writer, Stuart's "Blink" can be placed in a long tradition in women's writing, especially those authors (such as Catherine Sedgwick, Fanny Fern, or E. D. E. N. Southworth) who dramatize the complexities of a nineteenth-century woman aspiring to fame and a career by counterbalancing such "selfish" or overly masculine ambition with needs that are defined in quite maternal terms. In short, the women at first take up their pens only in the necessity to keep their families together. Stuart's heroine has a scene early in "Blink" in which she meditates on the family portrait gallery and the responsibility she feels to her dead brothers, sister, and mother: "She felt so keenly that her own decision must be the pivot upon which their future lives must turn." As Evelyn takes over the decision-making for the household from her father, she imagines she receives a necessary "benediction" from her mother's portrait (161) for seeking a paying career.

Evelyn Bruce also receives crucial support from the household's only black servant, "Mammy" (she is given no other name). Although terrified about losing her "home" and moving to an unknown city, Mammy proves resourceful and intelligent. Stuart takes great pains to emphasize both mutual affection and reciprocal sharing between mistress and Mammy, thus seeming to bring this portrait of a mammy figure very much within the conventions of the one-of-the-family stereotype. "Dey warn't nothin' on top o' dis roun' wor' what fetched me 'long wid y'all [after Mammy gained her freedom] but 'cep' 'caze I des *nachelly love yer*" (174). In New Orleans, Mammy does others' laundry for pay, earning five dollars a basket. Her financial resourcefulness puts her in line with a number of other such mammy figures by white authors, such as Joel Chandler Harris' Aunt Minervy Ann. Evelyn is embarrassed, however, that Mammy has to work outside the "home" and resolves to share the labors with her while pursuing her own schemes for earning money via

writing. Mammy resists—"Is you gwine *meck* me whup yer, . . . baby?" (179)—but then eventually strikes a bargain with her mistress: Mammy will work at the washboard, Evelyn at her desk, and in the evening she can read her writing to Mammy and receive comments.

Evelyn finds Mammy's criticisms shrewd and insightful, and Stuart's story purports to give us the rather unusual scene in which a white and a black woman work collaboratively together: Evelyn revises her story taking Mammy's suggestions and cries on her shoulder in relief and thanks when the sale of her first story saves them from poverty. If this were all there were to the story, there would not be much more to say about it. But there is a fascinating degree of self-reflectiveness between Evelyn's tale and Stuart's own: both chronicle one year's worth of the Bruce household's travails, and both feature a little chicken named "Blink" rescued by Mammy from the old plantation.

For Mammy, this chicken represents all the anxiety and spunk that she and her mistress have. Stuart uses Mammy's various comic translations of what the chicken might be thinking and feeling in a rather obvious but still effective way of celebrating her own two heroines' determination to survive. Like the chick, they must leave their old shell behind and learn to fend for themselves in a difficult, larger world: "dis heah aig was pipped out, an' de little resideter look like he eyed me so berseechin' I des nachelly couldn't leave 'im. Look like he knowed he warn't righteously in de morgans, an' 'e crave ter clair out an' trabble" [167; translation: "This here egg was hatching and the little resident looked like he was eyeing me so beseechingly that I just naturally couldn't leave him. It looks like he knew he wasn't legally included in the mortgage sale, and he wanted to clear out and travel."]. Mammy worries, however, that the chick won't find its proper identity as a rooster in the city, as it will have no other roosters as role models, only French-speaking parrots (176)! By the end of the story, however, "Blink" crows loudly, perfectly timing his discovery of his own voice to match Evelyn's, who has just received her congratulatory letter from a New York publisher.

Though charmingly contrived, both Stuart's portrait of Mammy and Evelyn's relationship, and Mammy's advice about how to write, are worth examining more skeptically. Consider, for instance, Mammy's comments when Evelyn's drafts are read aloud:

> "Law, baby, I don't crave ter on'erstan' all dat granjer" [grandeur] . . .
>
> Here was valuable hint. She must simplify her style. The tide of popular writing was, she knew, in the other direction, but the *best*

writing was *simple*. . . . She rewrote the "story of big words" in the simplest English she could command, bidding mammy tell her if there was one word she could not understand. . . .

"But, baby," she protested, with a troubled face, "look like *hit don't stan' no mo'*; all its granjer done gone . . . . Ef you'd des write down some *truly truth* what is ac-*chilly* happened, an' glorify it wid educatiom, hit'd des nachelly stan' in a book."

"I've been thinking of that," said Evelyn, reflectively. (172–173)

Mammy seems here to be an advocate for realism and honesty in storytelling. But what she actually promotes is idealization and grandeur: a few pages later she advises Evelyn to change her portrait of the tale's mammy figure, "dat ole 'oman wha' stan' fur me." "She glorifies de story a heap better'n my nachell se'f could do it. I been a-thinkin' 'bout it, an' *de finer that ole 'oman ac', an' de mo' granjer yer lay on 'er, de better yer gwine meck de book*" (180–181). Stuart's paradox is meant to make us focus on Mammy's goodness of heart—that she is too modest to see that the mammy in the story is not idealized at all but is her, drawn from "real" life. Yet the aesthetic that Mammy promotes—one that both Evelyn's and Stuart's stories consciously embody—remains inveterately divided or contradictory. Both Mammy and Stuart claim to seek mimesis, the imitation of the "real," but both are irresistibly drawn to glorifying and grandeur.

There is another way to approach the complexities of Stuart's little tale, through a different set of contradictions: those between voice and ventriloquism. Stuart introduces the idea of ventriloquism in an amusing set-piece: on the train the New Orleans Mammy has stashed "Blink" the chick between her breasts to keep it quiet. (Thereby, perhaps inadvertently on Stuart's part, giving us a concise version of the Mammy cliché as supreme mother-figure and blustery setting hen.) The chick begins to chirp, but "Mammy was equal to the emergency. After glancing inquiringly up and down the coach, she exclaimed aloud, 'Some'h'n' in dis heah kyar soun' des like a vintrilloquer' "—and soon everyone in the train car is asking "Who can the ventriloquist be?," suspecting various gentlemen and never, apparently, Mammy herself (167). A reader can legitimately ask such a question about the story itself and its various play of voices. After the Bruces, Mammy, and Blink settle in New Orleans, the meaning of Blink's silences and squawks are repeatedly paraphrased by Mammy, as a kind of surrogate voice for them all: "Blink know he's a Bruce. An' he know he's folks is in tribulatiom, an' hilar'ty ain't bercome 'im—dat's huccome Blink 'ain't crowed none" (176). Blink "finds" his cock-crow at

the story's end, just as Evelyn has her "own" voice as a writer first recognized by the outside world. But Evelyn's new professional writerly voice, of course, is inextricably intertwined with Mammy's; Evelyn's first published story includes not just topics Mammy has recommended but often Mammy's own language, mixed in with Evelyn's "educated" language to give it style. It is not too much of an exaggeration to say that illiterate Mammy is the ventriloquist of Evelyn's budding literary career. Stuart's "Blink" thus proves not to be "simple" at all, though it espouses an aesthetics of simplicity. It offers us no simple way of distinguishing clearly between one being's individual "voice" and another's, or between what is "true" and what is revised with added grandeur so that it can "stand in a book."

There is a further, fascinating twist. Mammy, of course, is hardly the ventriloquist-author of "Blink"; Ruth McEnery Stuart is. Even more than Joel Chandler Harris, Stuart made a career out of "doing" black voices. Black voices figure centrally in the majority of the stories in *A Golden Wedding* and in other representative books of hers such as *Napoleon Jackson: The Gentleman of Plush Rocker* (1902), which addresses some of the tensions between blacks and whites during Jim Crow but focuses on the "comic" tale of how postwar freedom has overly masculinized black women and made black men feminized leisure-seekers. Stuart's writerly identity was inseparable from blackface, from her selling imitations of "black" dialect to predominately white audiences. The majority of her portraits of blacks conforms quite well to the stereotypes promoted by other New South writers, minstrel shows, magazine illustrations, and other representations. Indeed, whatever individual nuances Stuart built into her portraits of blacks—and "Blink" demonstrates that her sense of characterization was hardly just two-dimensional—those inflections arguably make her stereotypes more powerful by giving them the illusion of variety. Overall, her blackface portraits never threaten the white gaze but remain comfortingly reassuring, like Mammy choosing "voluntarily" to leave the feather-bed Evelyn gives her in New Orleans to sleep at the foot of Evelyn's own bed, just like in the prewar days.

Evelyn's goal as a writer is to make the Bruce household self-sufficient solely on the basis of her own, not Mammy's, wages. But the self-sufficiency that Evelyn and Mammy work toward is of course illusory; Evelyn is entirely dependent for income upon a national magazine readers' market and its tastes, including its taste for Mammy stereotypes. Stuart tries to finesse this paradox by hinting that Evelyn's story bucks "the tide of popular writing" by being true rather than conventional (172). But

of course Evelyn's sentimental portrait of a friendship in adversity shared by a black and a white woman is precisely what wins her the publisher's prize, and precisely the kind of sentimental ideology about proper postwar race relations that was associated with most New South fiction by whites published in national magazines like *Century* and *Harper's*.

So where is the ventriloquist in Ruth McEnery Stuart's "Blink," and in Stuart's literary career as a whole? Just here: Stuart's "voice," like Evelyn Bruce's, is less her own than it is a projection of the white national market's demands for sentimental stories of friendly black-white relations based on prewar social relations that thankfully survived the war, or "comic" stories about blacks' various attempts to cope with the pressures of post-slavery life. Remember the model for the rooster-crow that the story "Blink" offers us. Blink cannot learn to crow in the city, according to Mammy's theory of mimesis, because he has no grown rooster for a model—until one conveniently shows up on a fence on the story's last page. Stuart's theory of art appears to work similarly. That is, it seems to offer us a straightforward kind of mimesis, suggesting that it is merely a "*truly truth*" account of what "ac-*chilly* happened" (173; Mammy's dialect and inflections here are meant to serve as indisputable markers of the true, the oral, and the non-literary rendered into writing without paradox). But what the story "Blink" actually offers us is another kind of mimesis, the imitation of literary conventions that sell in the marketplace because they seem true, not false. Just as the most powerful ventriloquist "outside" Evelyn's story is not Mammy but Ruth McEnery Stuart, so the ventriloquist governing Stuart's tale is ultimately not Stuart herself but the national market for plantation-school fiction, including Mammy-figures, selling tropes as truth. To use Bhabha's terms, the story's acts of mimicry by both ex-slave and mistress produce unresolvable ambivalence.

Stuart's "Blink" intrigues today because it has the audacity to "out" the very conventions—the acts of ventriloquism—that project the "black" voices in commercial fiction by whites. Now, surely, Stuart did not mean to have her story about a rooster be a wake-up call to the tenuous artificiality of the literary traditions that gave her and so many other white "blackface" authors their careers. Stuart's other stories never really deconstruct their own conventions in a way comparable to "Blink." For instance, another story in *A Golden Wedding*, "Uncle Mingo's 'Speculations,'" is replete with minstrel-like routines about black poverty and linguistic extravagance, in which garbage-pail scavenging is discussed using malapropisms borrowed from high-finance capitalism (69–91). Uncle

Mingo is befriended by a sympathetic white, and this tale of the trauma that came to blacks with freedom ends as conventionally as Joel Chandler Harris's story "Free Joe": "As, in the old days, Mingo slept outside his mistress's door, so, in a little grave all his own, in the corner of the family lot, he sleeps now at her feet" (91). (Perhaps it is not an overstatement to say that the "place" whites wanted for blacks in the New South was under their feet.) But in "Blink" Stuart so highlights various kinds of power relationships, conflicting "voices," and sublimations that go into the writing of fiction by whites that the story's sleights of hand to achieve reassurance cannot survive untroubled.

In contrast to "Blink," Charles W. Chesnutt's "The Dumb Witness" presents inter-racial relations as a site of violent struggle. Chesnutt's tale gains additional interest from the fact that, of all the stories originally intended for *The Conjure Woman*, its inset tale is the only one primarily narrated by John, the white master in the story cycle, rather than Julius, his servant. Chesnutt scholars have not ignored this tale, but they have not explored fully enough why "The Dumb Witness" might have been the one tale given to the white man to tell and try to decode.

Charles W. Chesnutt's fiction was first published because the *Atlantic* magazine was struggling to compete with rivals like the *Century* that had gained huge success with Civil War memoirs and "local color" fiction by southerners. "The Dumb Witness," Richard Brodhead tells us, was never published in a magazine, however, and was removed from the *Conjure Woman* collection at the request of Chesnutt's New York editor, North Carolina-born Walter Hines Page. Page reasoned that "Witness" did not fit into the collection because it was not a dialect tale featuring conjure, but rather a tale about a white man's inheritance lost because a black ex-slave could not be forced to reveal a secret. Brodhead is quite right to suggest there may have been other reasons that Page might have been uneasy with the tale, given that it contains "one of [*The Conjure Woman*'s] darkest, most accusatory social messages" (18). I would like here to consider more fully a suggestion first made by Robert Stepto and cited by Brodhead—namely, that the story's importance is linked to the fact that of all the original *Conjure* tales it is the only one not told primarily in Julius' voice, but in the voice of John, a white landowner. Stepto provocatively suggested that John has his understanding of southern history and of racial relations transformed by Julius, and that "the tales excluded from *The Conjure Woman* show John growing into a fuller understanding of Julius, a growth marked by his emerging ability to become the narrator of the story, as he is in 'The Dumb Witness'" (20).[8]

More recently, Eric Sundquist in *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature* has given a rather contrary reading, the fullest interpretation of "The Dumb Witness" to date. Sundquist makes the case that there are ironic parallels between John's appropriation of Julius' tale and Chesnutt's own attempts to distinguish between his authorial voice and Julius's storytelling dialect: each, Sundquist asserts, amounts to a kind of silencing.

> John's telling of Julius' tale and his orderly improvement of it with information that he says was not available to Julius constitute his own silencing of Julius' voice and Viney's story. . . . One must judge that John's voice is also the voice of cultural suppression—or, from the middle-class, light-skinned Chesnutt's point of view, the voice of cultural miscegenation and assimilation. Dialect is stripped away from the tale and with it the sound of Julius' voice—the very sound that was . . . commercially valuable to Chesnutt. (391–392)

Sundquist's approach has merit, since silences are structuring absences in "The Dumb Witness" as a whole. But Sundquist's approach also rests on questionable assumptions. First, it turns on binary oppositions assumed to be absolute: there is either one's proper voice, or silencing; cultural expression or cultural suppression. In conjunction with this, Sundquist also claims that Chesnutt's decision to jettison the frame-inset tale structure and explore more fully the dynamics of John's narrative voice amounts to a kind of sellout of his authentic African American folk material. An especially provocative sentence: "John's appropriation of Julius' voice converts the property of African American culture into a literary commodity even as it erases that voice from the page" (392). Sundquist rightly dwells on the irony that Chesnutt's commercial transaction, if that is what it is, was hardly as successful as John's, for "The Dumb Witness" was rejected for publication. But Sundquist's arguments also suggest that Chesnutt did not have a *right* to investigate John's voice, just as in earlier tales he had incisively explored the signifying possibilities of Julius' voice. Ironically, Sundquist's assumptions here about Chesnutt's proper material parallel those made by Chesnutt's editor Walter Hines Page, and overall they contradict the incisive portrait of Chesnutt's revisionary strategies and bordercrossings in Sundquist's *To Wake the Nations* as a whole.

What if we return to Robert Stepto's insight and assume that the central drama of "The Dumb Witness" is how a white man during Reconstruction tries to cope with the dangerous meanings of a black servant's

refusal to perform? Such an approach gives us a hypothesis to test. In this late *The Conjure Woman* tale, did Chesnutt use John's voice to engage more thoroughly the generic conventions and interpretive strategies of New South fiction by whites? In particular, could "The Dumb Witness" be read as an intervention into how such New South fiction links "proper" black behavior to whites' ability to reclaim what they lost in the Civil War?

First, a quick plot sketch, since "The Dumb Witness" is still less well known than other tales in *The Conjure Woman*. The main white character in the tale, Malcolm Murchison, has been named heir to his uncle's plantation after running the plantation (in effect, being its overseer and manager) for over a decade in his uncle's absence. Unknown to Malcolm, however, the papers proving his ownership are hidden on the estate in a place known only to his quadroon housekeeper Viney, due to circumstances too complicated to relate here. In addition to the will, these hidden items include "notes" and mortgages on several plantations nearby, which would therefore give Malcolm claims on those plantations as well if their loans are not repaid, plus various other "bonds and securities" (166). Malcolm never married, and indeed there was a period when a white woman did not set foot in the place for fifteen years. As John narrates his story, he speculates that Malcolm's reluctance was caused by "avarice"—it was cheaper not to have a wife but to have the household run by his quadroon ex-slave. Left unspoken is the strong possibility that Malcolm kept Viney as his mistress: she is described as "tall, comely [and] young" by John (163–164).

When Viney destroys Malcolm's chance to marry the one white woman he becomes interested in, he takes his revenge on her in ways that John stresses are representative of how masters punished slaves: "all the worst passions of weak humanity, clad with irresponsible power, flaming in his eyes" (165). What Malcolm does to Viney is not clear, as the text is both melodramatic and evasive. At first, readers may conclude that he cuts out her tongue—"I will put it out of your power to dip your tongue in where you are not concerned," he threatens—and afterwards Viney first is mute and then speaks only in sounds that John calls a "meaningless cacophony" that could be "no language or dialect, at least none of European origin" (160). (Brodhead correctly notes that Viney's "babble" may be "a non-European language that sounds like babble to white folk, an issue that the tale leaves wholly enigmatic" [18].) John witnesses firsthand the effects of Malcolm's confrontation with Viney. Although John's visit takes place after the Civil War, Malcolm is still living in the past and

threatening Viney as if she were his slave: "You take liberties that cannot be permitted. . . . I shall have you whipped." But when threatened Viney responds with a torrent of sounds, causing Malcolm suddenly to become like a slave pleading for mercy: the old man bends and "began to expostulate, accompanying his words with deprecatory gestures" (160).

The story's title clearly refers to Viney, who until the very end of the story appears unable to speak English after her punishment. Viney's role in "The Dumb Witness" obviously does not conform to the conventional New South script: she undoes its formulas with both silence and black noise. But in what way is Viney a "witness"? Malcolm is obsessed with wringing out of her information on the whereabouts of the valuable papers that will legally establish his ascension from mere overseer/caretaker to membership in the South's land-owning aristocracy. For Malcolm, Viney is a witness of his true class status, and he is intent on making her testify. In this sense, therefore, Chesnutt has constructed an extreme example of how in scenes of command performance whites are not mere spectators but have central aspects of their class and racial identities linked to black performance. Viney, however, rejects these demands in ways that are similarly more extreme than any of the other examples considered in this essay. She literally performs the power-relations reversal intimated by Hegel in his Master/Slave meditation. As Brodhead comments, "Like Babo in Melville's 'Benito Cereno,' Viney shows the slave become her master's master by play-acting a lack of power that is in fact only feigned" (18). Ambivalent mimesis is not only unsettling to the master, it is dangerous. Using silence and torrents of noise, she not only deprived Malcolm of the key to his desired identity and status, but also she was able to watch and torture him daily for decades, imitating and returning his own mutilation of her.

The heart of the drama of "The Dumb Witness" lies not just in the struggle between Viney and her former slave master but also in the voice of John, the story's narrator. Drawn to the Murchison plantation because of a walnut timber deal, John feels a mysterious fascination with the family's decline. John casts his telling of the Murchison tale as a new, improved version of Julius's: "Some of the facts in this strange story—circumstances of which Julius was ignorant, though he had the main facts correct—I learned afterwards from other sources, but I have woven them all together here in orderly sequence." John is also confident—at least, so he claims—that this tale of decadence and revenge belongs solely to the past, calling it "a story of things possible only in an era which, happily, has passed from our history" (162). In the *Conjure Woman*

tales, John appears to gain only the slightest knowledge of how Julius uses tale-telling to undo many of John's plans for "development" on his own newly bought plantation—as exemplified by the famous ending of "The Goophered Grapevine" tale, in which John gives up his plans to buy a nearby "haunted" vineyard and concedes to Julius the right to earn good revenue from it; or the ending of "Po' Sandy," in which an old schoolhouse whose lumber John had planned to recycle is given instead to Julius for use by his congregation. But in "The Dumb Witness"—which was apparently written after these two early stories—John has to confront firsthand an example of a black servant openly subverting a white person's claims of "ownership."[9]

When John analyzes the causes for the Murchison family decline, at first he makes the typical northern entrepreneur's conclusions about southern decadence, stressing the long-term consequences of not controlling one's vices: "In Roger Murchison the family may be said to have begun to decline . . . . In the first place, Roger Murchison did not marry, thus seemingly indicating a lack of family pride" (163)—and, John implies, a bad example for his nephew Malcolm, who also doesn't marry but sets up his household run by the quadroon Viney. John's empathy with Malcolm is quite pronounced, however. Although he does not approve of his torture of Viney, in recreating the scene John first presents it from Malcolm's guilty point of view: "He felt remorseful . . . for, after all, she was a woman, and there had been excuses for what she had done; and he had begun to feel, in some measure, that there was no sufficient excuse for what he had done" (166). Elsewhere John describes Malcolm's obsession with the hidden papers as understandable, for without them he would lose "what is rightfully his" (169).

As Viney begins to take her revenge on Malcolm, a startling shift occurs in John's narration:

> A closer observer than Malcolm Murchison might have detected at this moment another change in the woman's expression. Perhaps it was in her eyes more than elsewhere; for into their black depths there sprang a sudden fire. Beyond this, however, and a sight quickening of her pulse, of which there was no visible manifestation, she gave no sign of special feeling. (167)

John here presents the action from Viney's point of view, trying to represent what is invisible to Malcolm—her pulse and her anger. Even more importantly, John begins to waffle about the behavior of Viney's that he had earlier called "meaningless" (160). Now, reimagining these

events through Viney's eyes, he is able to translate her silence, at least, as "a mute reproach for his [Malcolm's] cruelty" (169). John has recreated entire scenes of struggle and dialogue from his own imagination. The fire in Viney's eyes could hardly have been in John's unnamed "other sources," which he says gave merely "some of the facts" (162).

The violent events on the Murchison plantation have their source before the Civil War; they come to represent for John the lasting evil of that earlier, pre-modern time. To explain Malcolm's torture of Viney, John resorts both to a "universal" explanation—that is, an example of "the worst passions of weak humanity"—and a historically specific one: it is a result of the "irresponsible power" that slavery gave masters over slaves (165). To describe Viney's anger, on the other hand, John revealingly does not use similar reasoning. Rather, he begins by suggesting specific historical causes (Viney "had been in power too long to yield gracefully") but then resorts to explanations rooted in her gender and mixed race: "Some passionate strain of the mixed blood in her veins—a very human blood—broke out in a scene of hysterical violence" (164). Crucially, "blood" is not a factor for John in Malcolm's anger, only Viney's. Yet Chesnutt plots the story so that this explanation of John's will not suffice either.

After the war Viney chose to stay working for her former master. We must note here the devastating revision that Chesnutt's tale has made of one of the central plotlines of New South fiction by whites—the loyal slave who stays to help Massa after being freed. Conventional New South narratives of Negro loyalty and natural subservience are so inadequate for John that he doesn't even attempt to use them as explanations for why Viney stays on the plantation. Chesnutt plots his tale so that John witnesses firsthand Malcolm delivering lines right out of a conventional New South narrative: "Your old master thinks a good deal of you, Viney. He is your best friend" (161). But Viney remains unmoved. John must improvise new explanations for Viney's silent presence. At first, Viney's behavior can be explained only as a manifestation of her "stupidity" or addiction to power (168). Slightly later in his telling of the tale, John tries to explain it in other (comically inadequate) terms: perhaps "some gruesome attraction to the scene of her suffering, or perhaps it was the home instinct," or paralyzing shame because she is deprived of speech (170). Just as Viney withholds the papers that will give Malcolm peace, so Chesnutt refuses to let his white narrator deploy without problems the usual means for narrating blacks' behavior. These explanations come late in the story, and appear to end John's thinking on the matter of Viney's mo-

tives. But Chesnutt's plot has one more surprise in store: Viney can speak English after all.

Most intriguing about this ending is the way John claims he was "never more surprised in my life" than by Viney suddenly finding her voice. He also affects indifference while admitting that Julius laughs at his bewilderment. "What does this mean, Julius?" he says helplessly (171). Julius has apparently long guessed Viney was playing dumb about where she hid the papers—and the last secret of the plot is given in Julius's words, not as translated and "improved" by John. This concluding moment is filled with conundrums, though. If John truly believed Viney was speechless, why did he address her in the final scene? John suggests that he did so because suddenly "she seemed intelligent enough" (171), but does not John's behavior suggest that at least unconsciously he *did* suspect she could speak? If so, this means that John's earlier imaginative recreation of Viney's anger has caused him to intuit that she may have been refusing rather than unable to speak. John has nothing to say about the shrewdness, or the justice, of Viney's revenge. But perhaps he lets Julius's laughing approval of Viney's victory speak for his own hidden feelings. John's silence may be witness to hidden feelings he cannot acknowledge in the postwar South.

In *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, C. Vann Woodward argued that the particular forms of terrorist violence by whites that characterized the New South, especially lynching, did not have their equivalents in slavery, but were results of postwar anxieties and resentments caused by needing to invent a new social structure for white supremacy. Woodward did not downplay the violence that was an everyday part of the institution of slavery, but he asserted that the Jim Crow era produced violence of a different kind: The historical circumstances had shifted and therefore violence's social functions had as well. Chesnutt's 1899 story "The Dumb Witness" is not a portrait of lynching or other acts of white terrorism central to the New South's racial formation, though Chesnutt would explore the causes and effects of such violence (and their link to paternalism) in his later novels, including *The Marrow of Tradition* and *The Colonel's Dream*. But "The Dumb Witness" should be understood as a tale about antebellum violence coming home to roost in the postwar South. And in this version it is the former master, not a former slave, who is subjected to punishment for "taking liberties that cannot be permitted," to use Malcolm's words. Chesnutt's brilliant and haunting tale may have been muted by his New York publishers because it seemed so powerfully a fable about the passions of the postwar period. Viney's methods of

"conjuring" Malcolm were too close and too real: her methods involved not roots and other paraphernalia that Chesnutt's white readers could safely think were part of the premodern exotica of southern Negro folklore, but legal papers without which any claims of white ownership in the New South would be mute. "Competitive" race relations indeed!

In short, Viney's refusal to perform to her former master's commands strikes to the heart of a central obsession driving much postwar writing by white southerners, who sought through fiction to justify the eviction of usurpers white and black and reclaim ownership of both land and Anglo-Saxon cultural supremacy. In "The Dumb Witness" the violence done against Viney happens out of sight and indeed cannot even be named by the narrator. But Viney's revenge is one of Chesnutt's most devastating salvos against New South fiction attempting to promote its synthesis between "paternal" and "competitive" racial systems as the solution to the national race problem.

We must not, however, overstate the effects of Viney's revenge. To a large degree it is only a personal grudge against Malcolm, not a veto of white supremacy. When Viney finally speaks English, her words are those of a proper servant, and as soon as Malcolm dies she reveals the papers' hiding place to Malcolm's nephew Roger, who thereby legally claims the Murchison estate. For John, young Roger's ascension to legitimacy affirms, not negates, his generally optimistic view of the New South and its racial as well as economic order. Roger fixes up the mansion and is a "frank and manly young fellow" (161) with whom John is pleased to do business. He tries to assure himself that Viney's vendetta belongs to the past. But John's shift in empathy from Malcolm to Viney as he narrates the Murchison story—a shift demonstrated not just by John's vision of her anger, but also by his intuition that she might have sought revenge—signifies that the ghosts of slavery's atrocities are not mute in the New South. John cannot really speak this dark truth in his own voice. Chesnutt's final irony is that John indeed follows his aesthetic of placing the story's details in their proper "orderly sequence" (162). The last words are Julius's laughing description of the power of bondswoman over master.

"The Dumb Witness" was not published until 1993. But it contained within itself a (silenced) veto of the white New South's claims to legitimacy. Chesnutt's story is a kind of demonic culmination of a tradition that I have tried to sketch here: short stories by southern writers in which blacks are requested or commanded to perform for whites. "The Dumb Witness" is a fitting conclusion to this essay because, of all the stories here considered, it is the most searching investigation of a white story-

teller trying his best to come to terms with the ambivalent and unstable power dynamic indigenous to the "command performance" scene—and doing so in part inspired by Julius, that most consummate of all black storytellers in nineteenth-century U.S. fiction. Let the hidden counter-statements of Chesnutt's "Dumb Witness" and Stuart's "Blink" be an anatomy of and postmortem on how many white New South writers combined with northern magazines to ventriloquize the "proper" form of race relations for the entire nation as it entered the twentieth century.

NOTES

1. For studies historicizing the appeal of "local color" fiction in the post-Civil War U.S., see Donovan, Richardson, Skaggs, Sundquist ("Realism and Regionalism"), Taylor (16–27), and Fetterley. For the baseline discussion of the complex relations between southern writers and northern magazines, see Hubbell 726–733.

2. Pratt urges several key terms for conceptualizing dialectical rather than simply dictatorial relations between colonial centers and peripheries, including "contact zone" and "autoethnography," in which "colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that *engage with* the colonizer's own terms" (6). Pratt's emphasis thus has parallels to what Fetterley has called the dynamics of "regionalist" literature. For Bhabha's relevance to the study of U.S. regionalist writing, see in particular his essay "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse" in *The Location of Culture*, 85–92. Ultimately this paper is urging that "regionalist" is a misnomer because it begs the question of how such literature constitutes national and metropolitan identity.

3. Woodward and other historians found that the origins of Jim Crow segregation could not be explained by a single phenomenon, nor did they discern a single paradigm followed by all states as the South made the transition from a paternal or slave-based to a segregated system of race relations. Segregation in the South made its first appearance in the cities during the slave regime and, according to *Strange Career*, had its origins in the North, not the South. Different southern states after the Civil War evidently made the transition to the new form of racial dictatorship in different ways and at different speeds, but between 1896 and 1906 all the major cities of the South instituted specific laws supporting rules for racial apartheid in public places ("Historical Controversy," in *American Counterpoint* 251–259). For a more recent and equally influential study of typologies of racial relations, see Omi and Winant's *Racial Formation in the U.S.*—in particular, their distinction 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 inclusion of other racial groups). Their analyses of cooptative hegemony are relevant for developing interpretive strategies for New South fiction.

4. Hegel's discussion, now often called the Master-Slave dialectic, was originally entitled "Interdependence and Dependence of Self-Consciousness:

Lordship and Bondage." See in particular paragraphs 189–196 in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind.* Hegel's dialectics of power here are also pertinent to thinking about the complex power dynamics between ex-slaves and masters. A host of post-Emancipation tracts, echoing Hegel, sought to argue that freedom, especially during Reconstruction, brought a degeneration in the black race, or perhaps the emergence of traits that made the race inherently inferior, once the disciplinary regime of slavery was abolished. In effect, they implied that only a new system of subjugation, Jim Crow or van der Berghe's "competitive" and terroristic system of race hierarchy, would provide the necessary bondage needed for blacks to make limited progress in the U.S. For a history of postwar black degeneracy theories and the role they played in shaping alliances between white segregationists and New South progressivists, see Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race*, particularly 111–223.

5. For an influential reading of Harris's "Free Joe" that stresses its pathos in ways that now seem rather uncritical, see Louis D. Rubin's, "Uncle Remus and the Ubiquitous Rabbit" (168–169). For Page's "Marse Chan," it is still worth consulting Edmund Wilson's discussion emphasizing how the story salved northern guilt (*Patriotic Gore* 615). But Caroline Gebhard's "Reconstructing Southern Manhood: Race, Sentimentality, and Camp in the Plantation Myth" must now be taken as the starting point for future commentary on "Marse Chan." Woodward's sharp contrast in *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (93–94) between the New South writers Joel Chandler Harris and Thomas Dixon—that is, between "patronizing, sentimentalizing, and paternalistic" race relations and the violence of competitive or terroristic race system—has proven too simplistic. Two invigorating recent readings of Page's *Red Rock* that take their analyses in very different directions are Karen Keely's and Walter Benn Michaels (both "Race into Culture" and the condensed reading in *Our America* 16–19). For Dixon, see not only Williamson (140–176) but also Fossett.

6. 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).

7. Neither Ruth McEnery Stuart's writing as a whole nor "Blink" itself has received much commentary. Fortunate exceptions are Joan Wylie Hall's thoughtful "'White Mamma . . . Black Mammy': Replacing the Absent Mother in the Works of Ruth McEnery Stuart," and Helen Taylor's excellent chapter on Stuart in *Gender, Race, and Region.* Taylor's discussion includes a brief reading of "Blink" arguing that Mammy "assents to the distortion of her own experience" (114–116) and that in this story Stuart "comes close to parodying and even condemning her own literary practice" (107). I concur with Hall and Taylor that it is simplistic to cast Stuart as a racist in blackface, and that the black female characters in a number of Stuart's other stories deserve more attention from contemporary literary historians. One indication of Stuart's widespread popularity in the North: Swarthmore College's McCabe Library has a 1903 reprinting of *The Golden Wedding* autographed by the author in Swarthmore, Pennsylvania, 15 March 1907.

8. For a recent analysis of the cultural work played by Civil War memoirs, including providing narratives of reconciliation and increasing magazine

circulation, see David Blight, *Race and Reunion*, especially Chapter 5. *Conjure Woman* criticism is now too extensive to survey here, but see Stepto (1984), Brodhead (including his Selected Bibliography, 27–28), Callahan 39–57; and Sundquist 271–454. My quotation here is Brodhead's paraphrase of Stepto's argument, which is cited in "typescript" form and to my knowledge has not been published in full (Brodhead 20, note 9). Many other readings of Chesnutt's *Conjure Woman* tales, including Eric Sundquist's, stress the ironic contrasts between John's world view and Julius's responses. For a relatively recent article that stresses how their relations reproduce colonial power relations, see Ellen Goldner, who helpfully documents Chesnutt's wide reading in the history of imperialism, including *The Life and Letters of Lord Macaulay*, published in the U.S. in 1875. Readings of "The Dumb Witness" are relatively rare in Chesnutt criticism, but see Sundquist, *To Wake the Nations* 389–392. Chesnutt never published "The Dumb Witness" but did rework significant portions of it for inclusion as a subplot in the novel *The Colonel's Dream* (1905). For an expert appraisal of what was gained and lost when Chesnutt incorporated a revised "Dumb Witness" into the novel, see Sundquist 390.

9. See Brodhead's "Chronology of Composition" (23), which reveals that "Goophered Grapevine" was published in 1887, "Po' Sandy" in 1888, whereas the first record of "The Dumb Witness" is 1897.

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