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(UN)DECIDABLE STEREOTYPES: ANTI-RACIST SATIRE IN POPULAR AMERICAN LITERATURE FROM THE LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY TO THE MID-TWENTIETH CENTURY

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(UN)DECIDABLE STEREOTYPES: ANTI-RACIST SATIRE IN POPULAR AMERICAN LITERATURE FROM THE LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY TO THE MID-TWENTIETH CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

(UN)DECIDABLE STEREOTYPES: ANTI-RACIST SATIRE IN POPULAR AMERICAN LITERATURE FROM THE LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY TO THE MID-TWENTIETH CENTURY

Takahiro Seto

This dissertation examines the satirical strategy that employs racial stereotypes to critique racism. I read the work of Mark Twain, Bret Harte, Charles W. Chesnutt, Dorothy Parker, and Langston Hughes and explore how this strategy effectively functioned in specific situations. The satirical pieces I selected represent racial others in a seemingly stereotypical manner. However, their stereotypical characters often contradict the public's images of racial minorities. Thus, by using (un)familiar stereotypes, anti-racist satire reveals the contradictory nature of racist stereotypes and encourages its audience to unlearn racial biases. This strategy can be particularly effective in the realm of popular literature which helped produce and circulate stereotypical images of racial others. The selected satirists, who were typically deemed popular writers, published their work in popular literary venues such as literary magazines, theaters, and newspapers. Their work might have disrupted the chain of racist stereotypes from within the literary industry. To infer how they were read by their contemporary readers, I also explore contextual and relevant materials such as magazines and contemporary reviews and reconstruct the specific reading situations. By doing so, I discover how the satirical texts are designed to effectively address the specific audiences. Such specificity helped mitigate the risk of backfiring and teach the audiences how the racial issues illustrated in the texts were relevant to them. At the same time, the contemporary audiences did not necessarily acknowledge the ironies in the satirical pieces. As a result, the stereotypes that were meant to be ironic possibly circulated as racist entertainment. This finding provides insights into how the ironic stereotype could also be an unstable means to satirize racism. Therefore, even if an anti-racist text only mentions or ironizes racial stereotypes for a critical purpose, there remains the risk of backfiring. This is the dilemma this dissertation repeatedly encounters: Is the ironic stereotype an effective tool for anti-racist purposes? Or is it just another racist stereotype?

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(Un)decidable Stereotypes: Anti-Racist Satire in Popular American Literature from the Late Nineteenth Century to the Mid-Twentieth Century

Introduction

(Un)decidable Stereotypes studies American satirists from the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century and their uses of racial stereotypes to combat racism and educate their readers. Dustin Griffin writes that "Most satire . . . tends to lose referential power over time," implying how satire is often specific rather than universal (122). Griffin's insight helps to illustrate the goal of this dissertation. I do not intend to study what the satirical texts mean to *us*. Rather, I am particularly interested in what the satirical texts signified to their contemporary audiences in their specific rhetorical situations. That these texts ironically portray racist stereotypes for satirical purposes makes the exploration into this topic difficult yet interesting. For the sake of argument, I call such a satirical portrayal of a racist stereotype an "ironic stereotype." Since irony is not always visible to an audience, satire could backfire and misguide. Furthermore, by using ironic stereotypes, satire could result in reinforcing racial prejudice instead of critiquing it. Given these risks, one may fairly raise the question: Why do some of the anti-racist satires have to use racial stereotypes? This is the question I examine throughout the dissertation.

I call this dissertation *(Un)decidable Stereotypes* for two reasons. Stereotypes are typically used to forcefully define what a group of people or individual should do and be like based on their affiliations. These affiliations include, just to name a few, cultural, racial, historical, religious, and sexual ones. This dissertation examines how anti-racist satire could undo such stereotypes, which are produced and circulated in popular culture as determining signifiers of identity. Stuart Hall's insight into popular culture as a "battlefield" which is continuously dynamic is relevant to my point: "This provides us with a warning against those self-enclosed approaches to popular culture which, valuing 'tradition' for its own sake, and treating it in an a-historical manner, analyse popular cultural forms as if they contained within themselves, from their moment of origin, some fixed and unchanging meaning or value" (237). Indeed, stereotypes can never be ahistorical signs which independently or definitively signify their meanings. My analysis shows how political and social situations necessitate and employ racial stereotypes for sustaining the status quo. Hall's view also helps us to see how anti-racist satire could disallow racist stereotypes to dominate popular culture: Anti-racist satire appropriates, parodies, and destabilize racist stereotypes and their meanings to show that they are neither authentic nor fixed in the first place.

At the same time, as I have mentioned, I am keenly aware of the risk of this strategy. We shall soon see how some of the satirical texts backfired as their readers and audiences received them as not ironic. The popular authors I examine in this chapter were within the literary industry which was responsible for producing and

circulating stereotypes. These authors published their anti-racist satires in popular venues such as magazines and newspapers. On one hand, it seems like a subversive act: By doing so, it allowed the satirical texts to directly address readers who would ignorantly consume and enjoy racist stereotypes. On the other hand, there would be no guarantee that the reader would distinguish their ironic stereotypes from racist ones which were abundant and dominant. Throughout the dissertation, I explore such cases in which it is difficult to know what those ironic stereotypes meant to actual readers. This is the paradox inherent in the polysemic nature of the ironic stereotype.

Models of Interpreting Satire

In the mid-twentieth century, the dominant model of reading satire saw it as a mode, genre, or expression to conserve the preexisting morals and norms of a community. To cite one example, Robert C. Elliott writes that "the satirist's avowed purpose is . . . to try to stimulate in his reader . . . the appropriate negative response which prepares the way to positive action" (111). Jonathan Greenberg aptly calls this model "The Canonical Model," which was developed by influential critics such as Northrop Frye, Alvin Kernan, and Elliott. As Greenberg writes, this model defines satire as follows: "Satire's purpose is to exercise moral judgment [and] urges the reader or viewer to participate in the censure" (13). However, there is a limit to and danger in this conservative model of understanding satire. Greenberg

continues: "Justified and emboldened by the pretext of improving public morals, a writer or reader can enjoy the scolding and ridiculing of satiric targets, the vicarious participation in violations and vices" (17). In this sense, satire can be used as a tool to harm and discriminate against the weaker and maintain the status quo which is supported by conservative morals and norms for the sake of the ruling class.

However, over the last half-century, the canonical model has been challenged by subsequent critics of satire. Darryl Dickson-Carr is one such critic who proposes a model of reading satire as a mode of subversion. Dickson-Carr writes that "African American satire tends to follow the degenerative model in its iconoclasm, with the icons subverted ranging from oppressive individuals or systems to the very culture that allows for systematic racism to obtain" (4). As seen in the quote, Dickson-Carr is specifically discussing African American satire's degenerative and subversive qualities. Since the American norms have been mostly dehumanizing to African Americans, satirical expressions to fight against anti-black racism should naturally be anti-normative. Dickson-Carr's argument is relevant to my dissertation, for I similarly observe how anti-racist writings about racial minorities attempt to subvert racist stereotypes and help unlearn racial biases. It cannot be too stressed that the norms and morals of the periods during which the selected authors were active were largely racist. Indeed, when the morals and norms of a community are wrong, anti-racist satire should subvert them rather than conserve them. Yet the racist norms and morals of each period also suggest how hard it was for anti-racist satire to achieve its goal. W. H. Auden wrote that "Satire flourishes in a

homogeneous society where satirist and audience share the same view as to how normal people can be expected to behave, and in times of relative stability and contentment" (13). If this assertion is true, it means that the satirists were tasked with a difficult job of addressing the audiences who did not share the same view about race. In fact, the satirists I examine mostly addressed their white audiences, who would be ignorant about racial minorities and comfortable with the status quo. We shall soon see how their satirical texts could function to enlighten such readers.

Stereotypes as Fixed and Fluid Objects

Racial stereotypes are used to undermine minority groups and solidify a social hierarchy by symbolically and collectively affixing them to demeaning images. Slavery was one such social system supported by racist ideologies, which often found expressions in African American stereotypes. To name a few, African American slaves were illogically labeled as unintellectual, criminal, sexual, lazy, and obedient. These stereotypes justified slaveholders' control over and mistreatment of their bodies and psyches. Even after slavery officially ended, the subsequent history of racial minorities in the United States painfully illustrates how the racial stereotyping has been an effective way of maintaining the racist social order. Indeed, as Michael Omi and Howard Winant rightly point out in *Racial Formation in the United States,* "They are, we think, too essential, too integral, to the maintenance of the US social order. . . the presence of a *system* of racial

meanings and stereotypes, of racial ideology, seems to be a permanent feature of US culture" (63). A recent example of this "US culture" is the series of police brutality which even victimized an unarmed teenager. Such misguided actions of the police are performed under a misconception that African American subjects are highly threatening and need to be subdued to maintain order, even in a violent way. From such examples, we know how these ever-lasting stereotypes are not just cognitive distortions but have been the drive for collective and personal actions of racism toward minority groups. This dissertation notes some of the historical moments when the racist sentiments took the forms of racist stereotypes, which served to maintain the social order.

Popular literature, one of the main subjects of this dissertation, has certainly been responsible for spreading racial stereotypes. Interestingly, print culture and the word "stereotype" have the etymological link which is highly suggestive of how print culture inevitably came to assume the role of producing and circulating stereotypes. As Mrinalini Chakravorty points out in *In Stereotype*, print is what enabled stereotypes to spread quickly, broadly, and precisely for the first time: "The effective achievement of stereotypical printing was its capacity for accelerated mass reproduction of images and the printed word that, in terms of its valence for cultural production, signaled a unique kind of reproducibility as the very condition of modernity" (14). Here, one can find an interesting example of reverse phenomena. As Chakravorty writes, stereotypes were only a means to rapidly and precisely mass-produce the same content. Yet, at some point, the term "stereotype" came to

signify a standardized and fixed image of a group of people. In other words, stereotypes transformed from the means to the purpose of printing, implying the high demand for reproducible and circulatable images which help know and understand others.

The role of print culture as a mass-producer of stereotypes became more significant as nation-states began to appear. As Benedict Anderson argues, printed materials such as novels and newspapers had an important role in shaping what came to be known as national consciousness. While fiction helps conjure up "a sociological landscape of a fixity that fuses the world inside the novel with the world outside," periodicals help the reader be assured of the existence of "thousands (or millions) of others . . . of whose identity he has not the slightest notion" (34-35). Indeed, an imagined nation-state is based upon abstracted images of our fellow citizens mass-produced in print and other media which, one can argue, are stereotypes. Stereotypes were even thought to be a necessity for a modern society where one had to coexist with numerous others whose identities were unfamiliar and even mysterious. In 1922, political commentator Walter Lippman published *Public Opinion*, in which he examines what he believes to be the key function of stereotypes:

> They are an ordered, more or less consistent picture of the world, to which our habits, our tastes, our capacities, our comforts and our hopes have adjusted themselves. . . . We feel at home there. We fit in. We are members. We know the way around. There we find the charm of the

> familiar, the normal, the dependable; its grooves and shapes are where we are accustomed to find them. (95)

> For the most part we do not first see, and then define, we define first and then see. In the great blooming, buzzing confusion of the outer world we pick out what our culture has already defined for us, and we tend to perceive that which we have picked out in the form stereotyped for us by our culture. (96)

His definition of stereotypes helps see how they could be used to maintain a social order in a conservative way. On one hand, members of a majority group can find commonalities between one another through their own stereotypical images even when they do not practically know each other. On the other hand, the majority group could also use stereotypes to turn racial minorities into familiar, predictable objects, thus bringing order to the chaotic world inhabited by mysterious others. In the modern world, Lippman suggests, stereotypes are the default lenses through which we recognize each other.

STEREOTYPE IN SATIRE

Now we are aware that the conservative model of satire and the typical usage of stereotypes in society are interestingly analogous to each other: Both of them are means to preserve the already existing social order and morals of a community. In

fact, stereotyping is one weapon which satire often utilizes. Northrop Frye writes that "Two things, then, are essential to satire; one is wit or humor founded on fantasy or a sense of the *grotesque or absurd*, the other is an object of attack" (224, emphasis added). Therefore, when racial minorities are represented by stereotypes in satire, the reader most likely sees them as the targets of satire. This is particularly true in the context of the United States, where racial minorities have often been portrayed as "grotesque" and "absurd" objects. Having introduced these obvious negative effects and risks, I have to come back to the question I brought up earlier: Why do some of the anti-racist satires have to use racial stereotypes?

Some critics might be able to give answers to this question. According to Dickson-Carr, it is a fallacy to say that satire often results in "confusion of the representation of an offensive stereotype with advocacy of that stereotype" (4). Indeed, the ironic stereotypes I examine in this dissertation are not mere quotations or mentions of racist stereotypes. Rather, they are parodies and reappropriations of racist stereotypes. Matthias Pauwels offers a useful description of how racial stereotypes undo racism when they are ironically used:

> By applying such procedures, commonly perceived racial features are presented in an unfamiliar, weird, and absurd way, creating a distance between the subject and the stereotypical racial features that the subject usually, and often unconsciously, subscribes to. The usual hold of such features on the subject is thereby loosened, enabling a more critical appraisal of racial stereotypes. (92)

While Pauwels's interest is in contemporary stand-up comedies, his argument here is closely relevant to my project. In the selected satirical works, it is often the case that they carefully reappropriate racist stereotypes to give the reader shocking effects and to mock their ignorance about racial minorities. The way in which ironic stereotypes in satire can be simultaneously similar to and different from racist stereotypes suggests that the latter in fact stand on very tenuous ground. Homi K. Bhabha's insight is helpful to prove this point: "Likewise the stereotype, which is its [colonial discourse's] major discursive strategy, is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always 'in place', already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated" (66). Even if the stereotype seems to offer a fixed and knowable image of the racial other, it still has to be repeated with anxiety due to its contradictory meanings. Indeed, the ironic usage of stereotypes causes this anxiety within the audience by representing racial minorities in both familiar and unfamiliar manners. In this sense, racial stereotypes can be a weapon to criticize racism.

But still, the success of such a strategy is not always guaranteed. When using a stereotype for satire, they have to resemble the original to some degree so that it can cause revealing effects. Pauwels acknowledges this risk by stating: "This is attributed to the already mentioned fact that in attempting to subvert racial stereotypes, the latter have to be enacted in some way or form, thereby inevitably creating the possibility of critical and uncritical readings" (96). One can argue that the success of satire ultimately depends on the reader, not on the text. For an

extreme example, even if the anti-racist text is carefully designed to deliver its irony, it will be fruitless when the reader is simply outright racist. They will only recognize similarities between the ironic stereotype and the original stereotype while ignoring differences. It is also important to think about how racial minorities represented in anti-racist satire would react to its ironic stereotypes. John Morreall writes that "The objectionableness of jokes based on stereotypes, I suggest, is not all-or-nothing, but is proportional to the harm those stereotypes are likely to cause" while mentioning the tremendous harm that has been done to African Americans by racist stereotypes (108, 110) (this is why I have figuratively referred to the ironic stereotype as a weapon. It is a weapon that is never free from the risk of hurting someone). Therefore, what really matters is not the way it satirizes racism. Rather, it is what anti-racist satire actually causes within the reader's mind and in the physical world. Did the selected satirical texts succeed in changing their readers' fixed concept about race? Or did they join racist stereotypes and do actual harm?

How to Evaluate Anti-Racist Satire: Reconstruct Reader and Situation

In order to evaluate how and whether the selected writings were successful in promoting anti-racism, I do the following process in each chapter: simply describe the mechanism of the chosen satirical work (how its elements such as structure, characters, and tone are designed to deliver irony); determine the targeted

audience; reconstruct the actual rhetorical situation.[1] One can understand what a text generally means when one reads it. Yet one can understand what a text particularly *meant* at a specific time in history only by learning its historical context and its implied reader.

Scholars of reception studies offer great insights relevant to my analysis of how the specific anti-racist texts and their readers interacted with one another. Steven Mailloux writes: "As a participant, literature can take up the ideological rhetoric of its historical moment—the rhetoric of political speeches, newspaper editorials, book reviews, scholarly treatises, and so forth—and place it on a fictional stage. Readers thus become spectators at a rhetorical performance, and sometimes, . . . they also become actors in the drama they are watching" (61). In the case of anti-racist satire, the rhetoric that is referenced is that of racist stereotypes. Thus, the satirical text presents an ironic performance of racial stereotypes which is completed by the audience's interpretation of it. It is needless to say that anti-racist satire navigates the reader, if not explicitly, through its structure, characters, and tone, which all are designed to communicate its irony. As Linda Hutcheon writes, "there are often both contextual signals and specific textual markers that work to lead the interpreter to recognize or to attribute (but either way, to intend) irony" (136). In a different but relevant vein, Wolfgang Iser writes that "if communication

[1] It is possible to acknowledge a resemblance between my reading of satire and surface reading, a recent critical trend. In an introduction to the issue of *Representations* which was published in Fall 2009, Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus write: "In the last decade or so, we have been drawn to modes of reading that attend to the surfaces of texts rather than plumb their depths. Perhaps this is because, at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, so much seems to be on the surface" (1-2). Similarly, I try not to dig out hidden meanings behind the text.

between text and reader is to be successful, clearly the reader's activity must also be controlled in some way by the text" (1526). My readings of the anti-racist satires aim at simply recognizing such textual and contextual markers that control the readers to make interpretative moves in certain directions (indeed, in some of the chapters, I examine how the target reader is implied and their reaction is already predicted by the text).

Due to satire's collaborative nature, which makes its success dependent on the reader's interpretation, it is equally important to determine who the reader is and in what context the text is read. To do so, I acknowledge some of the important historical events which must have reflected and influenced the readers' views and opinions. Moreover, to reconstruct the actual reader and the reading situation of the time, each chapter explores contextual, sub-literary materials. These include magazines, newspapers, flyers, illustrations, and contemporary reviews. For instance, surveying content in a magazine offers great insights into who its target readers are and what kind of political view it promotes. Also, a magazine functions as a context that influences the way the reader reads its content. The same piece of writing can give a different impression when it is published in a humor magazine than when it is in a serious literary magazine. Through such reconstructive efforts, it is possible to infer how the actual reader interpreted the text, a crucial act of evaluating how and whether it was successful or not as an anti-racist satire.

In other words, what I reconstruct is the original context where the satirical text performed its speech act for the first time. To borrow J. L. Austin's words, "It is

important to take the speech-situation as a whole" (143). Nevertheless, as Jacques Derrida claims, "a written sign carries with it a force that breaks with its context, that is, with the collectivity of presences organizing the moment of its inscription. This breaking force [*force de rupture*] is not an accidental predicate but the very structure of the written text" (9). In this dissertation, I occasionally examine how the satirical authors reworked their works so that they would fit into a new context they were placed in. Nevertheless, my examination of such cases is obviously not thorough: After all, literary texts have been repeatedly read and published at different times and in different locations. Yet I hope that my dissertation helps reenact the certain situations in which the satirical texts and the readers first met.

THE RANGE OF THIS DISSERTATION

In addition to examining how the selected satires employ ironic stereotypes for critical purposes, these chapters explore different sub-topics that are relevant to how anti-racist satire functions. These topics include genre, readership, humor, and (counter)publics. Each chapter has its own focal topic. At the same time, these topics are not necessarily exclusive of one another. Rather, they keep resurfacing in the different chapters since they all are important factors to keep in mind when reading satire.

The first chapter examines *Ah Sin*, a play which was born out of the collaboration between Mark Twain and Bret Harte, two leading authors of the time,

and performed in 1877. As the title suggests, the play features a Chinese character called Ah Sin. When the play was written, there were growing sentiments of hatred against Chinese immigrants, particularly in California, where the two authors spent the early years of their careers. With such a background, the play could be easily seen as a mocking portrayal of Chinese immigrants by the contemporary audience. This chapter's main focus is to explore what kind of genre the play was identified as by the contemporary audience despite its satirical structure. John Frow writes that "Genre, we might say, is a set of conventional and highly organized constraints on the production and interpretation of meaning. In using the word 'constraint' I don't mean to say that genre is simply a restriction. Rather, its structuring effects are productive of meaning; they shape and guide" (10). While the play can be read as a satire that criticizes anti-Chinese racism, it also resembles the other popular genres of the time: melodrama and minstrelsy. I suggest that this resemblance most likely caused confusion of genre and, ultimately, undermined the satiric effect of the play. By exploring this question of genre, I illustrate how the cultural context could determine the audience's reaction to satire even before they actually see or read it. Unlike the other chapters, the first chapter examines a play. Therefore, this chapter serves as a reminder that stereotypes are not exclusive to print culture. The play is based on Bret Harte's "Plain Language from Truthful James," which was published in 1870. The fact that the Chinese character, who was originally a character in a poem, came to be illustrated and then enacted live on stage implies how visuality is important for stereotypes to thrive. In fact, in the

other chapters, I introduce some visual caricatures that portray racial minorities in a demeaning manner. As to how visual differences function in discrimination against racial others, Bhabha writes that "The difference of the object of discrimination is at once visible and natural—color as the natural/political *sign* of inferiority or degeneracy, skin as its natural *identity*" (80). Although this dissertation does not thoroughly explore visual culture, let it suffice to say that racist stereotypes are multi-layered representations that are designed to make racial differences as symbolically and visually conspicuous as possible.

The second chapter focuses on Charles W. Chesnutt's short stories, which are typically known as "conjure tales." In these stories, Chesnutt portrays different types of African American characters in the antebellum era. These stories thematically resemble their predecessors such as the Uncle Remus series, which portray the antebellum South in a nostalgic manner. Yet Chesnutt's antebellum tales parody them and mock the racial images of African Americans fabricated by white authors' one-dimensional literary productions. This chapter is particularly focused on how the author prepared his satirical stories based on the insights into his readers. Chesnutt often wrote for literary magazines whose readers were mainly white intellectuals. As an African American author, writing to a white readership was a challenge. Yet Chesnutt's precise understanding of his readers enabled him to make politically progressive statements through his stories and even to ironically mock his white readership.

In the third chapter, I read anti-racist short stories of Dorothy Parker. The author is typically seen as a middlebrow writer who often wrote funny stories about gender issues. This chapter is to uncover some of her fictional writings that address race issues. The importance of this chapter as part of the whole project lies in its insight into the role of humor in anti-racist satire. After publishing humorous yet ironic stories about race, Parker tried to publish a completely unhumorous and critical satire in the *New Yorker* magazine. The magazine rejected the story, and Parker lost the access to many readers. This episode illustrates a dilemma of anti-racist satire. Humor is often necessary in anti-racist satire as an introduction to the sensitive topic of race. At the same time, humor could obscure the critical message and tempt the reader to ridicule the wrong targets. Parker's decision to publish an unfunny satire was most likely to avoid such uncritical reactions. Nevertheless, what a mass audience often wants is entertainment, not biting criticism.

The last chapter discusses Langston Hughes's "Jesse B. Semple" series, which is one of his literary successes as a popular writer. Simple is certainly stereotypical. But he is also a proud portrayal of lower-class African American males which defies demeaning racist stereotypes. Similarly to the chapter on Chesnutt, this chapter is interested in Hughes's efforts to address his white readers and enlighten them. This time, I emphasize the relationship between the notion of the counterpublic and satire. As previously mentioned, satire often thrives in a homogeneous society. Yet Hughes was keenly aware that there were the two different worlds in the United States that were separated by the color line: the

black public and the white public. By examining Hughes's Simple stories, I suggest that anti-racist satire could still be possible even when the satirist addresses the reader who belongs to a different world than his. This chapter also closely follows how Hughes revised his Simple stories when they were transferred from the *Chicago Defender,* where they were originally published, to *Simple Speaks His Mind*, a book which was designed for a wider audience. I argue that these revisions helped the stories be tailored to his white audience and to represent the black public's needs while skillfully avoiding unnecessary antagonism.

Chapter 1

Was it Satire or Melodrama?: Mark Twain and Bret Harte's *Ah Sin*

Bret Harte's "Plain Language from Truthful James," which was first published in 1870, was so popular that it resulted in many unauthorized publications. Cited below are part of the illustrations attached to one such unauthorized edition of the popular poem. The first image portrays two white men and one Asian man who are playing cards. While each figure in the illustrations is caricatural, the most conspicuous is the Asian man. One can easily tell that he is Asian (more specifically, Chinese) thanks to his exaggeratedly portrayed visual features: the slant eyes, the pigtail (it looks like it pulls his scalp so strongly that it deforms his head), and the plain oriental clothes. The evil-looking facial expression also denotes the Chinese man's cunning. Just a glance at this expression could cause a feeling of disgust within the viewer. In the second illustration, as you can see, the Chinese man is tossed up in the air by a mob of angry men. Each man raises his hand furiously. Many of them carry a bottle and brandish it at the Chinese man. One white man, who is probably one of the figures who are playing cards with the Chinese man in the previous image, even fires a gun at him. Just the two images sufficiently narrate the whole story: the Chinese man becomes a target of the violent mob as a consequence of an evil scheme of his own.

Fig. 1.

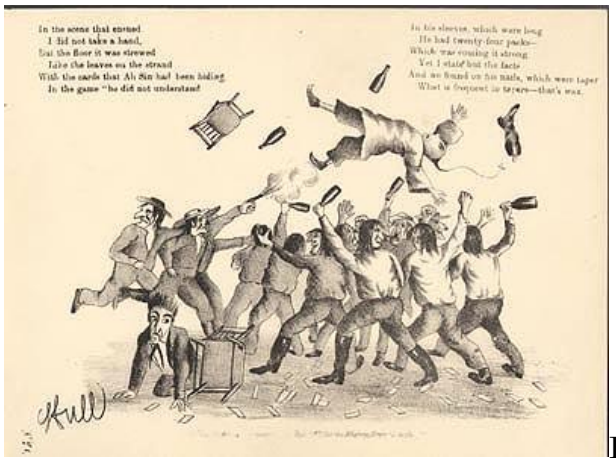

Fig.2.

Illustrations for the unauthorized version of "The Heathen Chinee" published in 1870 by Western News Company of Chicago.

By just looking at these illustrations, one would expect the original poem to be racist as well. In fact, the poem was successful due to its portrayal of the Chinese character as "heathen" and cunning in a stereotypical manner. Truthful James, the narrator in the poem, portrays how Ah Sin attempts to fool his opponents in euchre by pretending not to know the game and hiding cards up in his sleeve. Such a

malignant portrayal of the Chinese character must have led the contemporary reader to see the poetry as a satire against Chinese immigrants. The anti-Chinese sentiments of the time must have further reinforced such an impression; the late nineteenth century saw many anti-Chinese events such as the Page Law being put into effect in 1875 and Denis Kearney's agitating "Chinese Must Go" declaration in 1877. As Daphne Lei points out, writings about Chinese people helped Americans to solidify their national identity by offering portrayals of Chinese culture to be compared, contrasted, and looked down on (292). Since the poem was very popular at the time, it is no wonder these caricatural illustrations helped further reinforce the Chinese stereotypes and even agitated race hatred against Chinese immigrants who flowed in from their own country. As if to reflect such sentiments of hatred, one of the men in the poem claims: "We are ruined by Chinese cheap labor" (Harte 6).

Nevertheless, the poem was not intended to criticize the Chinese character or immigrants. As James narrates, Bill Nye, the other white character in the poem, is also cheating. The poem subtly implies that the white characters are equally as cunning as Ah Sin. Literary critics read the poem as a satire with which the author intended to criticize the public's prejudiced view on Chinese immigrants. Margaret Duckett writes:

> The language of the unintentionally truthful "Truthful James" plainly revealed more prejudice and hypocrisy in himself and the notorious Nye than peculiarity in Ah Sin. . . . [Harte] developed for "The Heathen

> Chinee" an inordinate hatred, especially when it was cited to support that very race prejudice which all his life Harte fought. (38-39)

As Duckett mentions, the author's strategy backfired and helped reinforce the anti-Chinese sentiments as opposed to the original intention. Symbolic of the missed irony is the illustration of the lynch mob we have seen. While the original poem illustrates how Bill Nye "went for that heathen Chinee" (Harte 7), it does not indicate a mass lynching at all. This fact implies how the publisher was keenly aware of and responded to the public's anti-Chinese sentiments while overlooking the irony of the poem. More importantly, this unauthorized edition shows how the poem was easily appropriated for racist ends such as justifying racial violence.

However, Harte did not immediately cut ties with this unintended success of "Plain Language." Rather, he even decided to leverage the popularity of the poem. In 1877, Harte and his friend Mark Twain co-wrote a play titled *Ah Sin* based on "Plain Language." Their obvious motivation to write the play was to have financial success. Ben Tarnoff illustrates how Harte's writer's block and financial problem motivated him to collaborate with Twain, who was also becoming a celebrated writer, and to write the Chinese play (240-242). Whether they willingly exploited the anti-Chinese sentiments is not clear. Nevertheless, the play can be easily seen as racist in some respects. As in the poem, Ah Sin is characterized by his cunning. The play further highlights the main character as a caricatural "Chinaman" by having him speak heavily accented English. The acting of Charles Parsloe, a famous white actor who had previously played a Chinese character in Harte's play, must

have helped present the character as such. In this sense, *Ah Sin* could be seen as a yellowface minstrel show.

At the same time, we can also recognize in the play some satirical tactics and irony as in "Plain Language." Ah Sin's role in the play resembles that of the traditional trickster, and its ending obviously portrays him as a hero, not a comic relief. The play also seems to offer a social commentary when it illustrates how Chinese immigrants were disallowed to testify in court. Given these factors, the caricatural portrayal of Ah Sin can be seen as a deception tactic aimed at the audience who naively believes in racist stereotypes of Chinese people.

These two conflicting yet simultaneously possible interpretations of the play motivated me to explore how the contemporary audience actually interpreted *Ah Sin*. Was it seen as a satire? Or was it simply consumed as racist entertainment? To answer these questions, I examine the preconceptions that arguably shaped the audience's expectation about and reaction to the play. Such preconceptions are not limited to racial ones but include cultural ones. Therefore, this chapter examines the play's relative position among other theatrical expressions and how the contemporary audience compared the play with what had been already familiar to them. This process inevitably leads me to the question of genre. I have already implied that *Ah Sin* resembles minstrelsy in some respects even though it can be read as a satire. In addition, the play is thematically similar to another popular genre of theatrical performance: melodrama. This chapter illustrates how it was easy for the theater audience who customarily enjoyed melodramas to associate the

play with the genre and suggests that this confusion could delimit the audience's perception of the play.

It is necessary to mention that the play was short-lived and only performed in Washington, D.C. and New York. Because of its poor reception in the two cities, it could not make it to touring nationally. The remaining version of the play is said to be the one that Mark Twain had greatly revised before it was played in New York (Duckett 144). Therefore, this chapter specifically focuses on exploring how the New York audience reacted to the play.[2] In the course of exploration, I read some of the contemporary reviews to shed light on how the play was perceived by them. Many of the New York reviews are negative about the play and point to its incoherence, lack of character development, and caricatural portrayal of the Chinese character played by Parsloe as its flaws. On the other hand, a review in the *New York Times* favorably writes about the reaction of the audience as follows: "But it is certain that there was much laughter and applause heard as 'Ah Sin' progressed, and the causes of the merriment and plaudits appeared sufficiently numerous to give some vitality to the composition of which they are the principal element." The question is: What did the New York audience laugh at? Did they laugh at the absurdity of anti-Chinese racism portrayed in the play? Or did they simply laugh at Ah Sin?

[2] New York is an important state in terms of understanding the anti-immigration sentiment that spread all over the United States in the late nineteenth century. As Hidetaka Hirota argues, the state of New York played a significant role in advancing the nation-wide anti-immigration restrictions (190). For details, see his *Expelling the Poor*.

PREVIOUS CRITICISMS OF *AH SIN* AS A SOCIAL COMMENTARY AND YELLOWFACE MINSTRELSY

Critics argue over whether *Ah Sin* was critical or supportive of the anti-Chinese sentiments of the late nineteenth century. Hsin-Yun Ou acknowledges the layered, complicated nature of the stereotypical representation that he argues contributes to counteracting the racist stereotypes. Ou writes: "Ah Sin creates a transgressive figure that refuses to freeze or fix contemporary stereotypes of the 'Chinaman,' a man who masks his clever, performative moral fibre under the guise of the silly Chinaman" (147). Ou's argument helps to see how the play can be read as an anti-racist one that is designed to challenge the audience's stereotypical view of Chinese immigrants. Ou is not alone in arguing for *Ah Sin* as an anti-racist play. Hsuan L. Hsu shows how the play criticizes the unjust legal system of the time that disallowed Chinese immigrants to testify in court. Hsu writes: "I argue that the Chinese laundryman's motives and strategies—along with the formal incoherence of the text as a whole—represent historically informed responses to the debates precipitated by *People v. Hall*" (43). To critics like Ou and Hsu, Ah Sin is a complex figure who represents the play's anti-racist message, and the obvious faults are, in fact, part of the critical strategy.

On the other hand, critics like Peter Kearly Kim and Caroline H. Yang do not condone those faults. Yang sees a significant influence of blackface minstrelsy on the characterization of Ah Sin and writes that "the play depicts Ah Sin speaking in a caricatured language reminiscent of minstrel speech" (101). Later in the

chapter, we shall see that Yang has made a fair argument, for the resemblance between the play and minstrelsy is not dismissible. Kim discusses the political and cultural effects of the play: "the Chinaman became the butt of many jokes, and the repeated hints of his deception of the white miners, as portrayed in the play, arguably contributed to the passage of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act" (26). Kim also criticizes the cultural effect of *Ah Sin* on Chinese immigrants: "In other words, despite obtaining legal means to become American and the command of the language to say so, Asian Americans still find their 'authentic' identity defined by the slanted eyes and broken English of Ah Sin" (31). These critics fairly recognize how the play could promote anti-Chinese racism and define the Chinese American's identity in the narrowest way possible.

My analysis contributes to both sides of the argument, if from a slightly different perspective: It explores how the external factors—the audience, the theater, the trend of melodrama—could interfere with the play's satirical scheme. In other words, while the previous criticisms explore the cultural and political impact *of* the play on the public, this chapter discusses the cultural impact *on* the play and its reception.

READING *AH SIN* AS A SATIRICAL PLAY

Firstly, I illustrate how reading *Ah Sin* as a satire is possible while drawing from the previous criticisms that carefully delineate the critical capabilities of the play.

The play repeatedly stresses how Ah Sin is socially, culturally, and legally outside the fabric of society. Yet this position gives Ah Sin an observer's position from which he manipulates the white characters and observes their follies as a satirical trickster. The play's ending shockingly reveals that it is Ah Sin who has been behind the plot all the time, thus betraying the audience's expectation. At the same time, representing Ah Sin as an outsider could result in only stressing his foreignness. The foreign, "heathen" position would be compatible with the racist scheme of the time which rejected Chinese Americans. This inherent flaw is further magnified when examining the external factors later.

Before analyzing *Ah Sin* as a satire, I would like to draw a brief sketch of the two authors who came to co-write a Chinese play. I am not interested in using their biographical facts as proof of the play's satirical quality. After all, the contemporary audience probably did not know about the obscure biographical facts about their political views I introduce below. At the same time, the two authors' biographies may suggest that *Ah Sin* was certainly written for a critical purpose. These facts should be helpful and kept in mind when thinking about how the play backfired on itself as a satire.

Harte and Twain's interest in Chinese immigrants as a literary and journalistic subject is apparent in some of their early writings. When Twain was still a journalist in the West, he wrote several articles concerning Chinese immigrants. Critics often note the sympathy the young journalist shows toward the minority group in these writings. Noting Twain's liberal attitude toward Chinese

immigrants shown in his early writings, Martin Zehr claims that "During Twain's lifetime, it is doubtful that his attitudes toward the Chinese ever represented anything more than a distinctly minority opinion in the United States." One such example is "The Treaty with China," which was written by Twain and published in the *New York Tribune* in 1868. In "The Treaty with China," Twain breaks down the 8 articles included in it and explains how they should benefit both China and the United States. More importantly, the reporter also looks back on his own encounter with Chinese immigrants: "I have seen Chinamen abused and maltreated in all the mean, cowardly ways possible to the invention of a degraded nature, but I never saw a policeman interfere in the matter and I never saw a Chinaman righted in a court of justice for wrongs thus done him" ("The Treaty with China"). The quote shows that Twain already had an awareness of how Chinese immigrants were unfairly treated in court before he wrote *Ah Sin*.[3]

Similarly, Harte was liberal and sympathetic when it came to the matter of Chinese immigrants although this fact is often blurred by his infamous "The Heathen Chinee." The poem is not the only piece of writing about Chinese immigrants that Harte produced in his career. In some of his short fiction, the local color author chose Chinese immigrants as his subject. For instance, Harte wrote "Wan Lee, the Pagan" in 1874. In this story, the author portrays a character named Hop Sing, who is not only "a clear break from the coolie stereotype, but also

[3] This is not to say that Twain was against anti-Chinese racism throughout his life. See *Clemens of the Call: Mark Twain in San Francisco* edited by Edgar M. Branch. This book contains articles about Chinese immigrants written by Twain in his early career, many of which employ racial stereotypes and crudities (Branch 69).

suggests in more detail what kind of stereotype of the Chinese he was encountering" (Wu 14). The story offers a sympathetic view of Chinese immigrants and sharp criticism of racism: it depicts the short life of Wan Lee, who is murdered by white Christian boys in a riot at the end. "Wan Lee" was perhaps Harte's counterargument against the contemporary reader who read "Plain Language" to justify racism and violence.

Now, let us start examining *Ah Sin*. The play takes place in a mine located near San Francisco. The main plot concerns the murder that happens in this setting. One day, two miners Broderick and Bill Plunkett (Ah Sin's friend) are playing a game of cards. To help his friend win, Ah Sin secretly changes his card. However, Broderick becomes suspicious about Plunkett's victory, and it causes a quarrel, which results in Broderick's murder of Plunkett. Ah Sin has been closely witnessing the whole event, and the villain offers Ah Sin a deal: if the Chinese laundryman helps him discard his blood-stained jacket, the physical evidence of his crime, he will get a share in a mine. Ah Sin accepts this deal. Toward the end of the play, Broderick also attempts to frame York (Ah Sin's employer) in court. The climax of the play, an analysis of which I reserve for later, takes place in the court where all of the main characters including Ah Sin are present.

On the way to its conclusion, the play repeatedly illustrates how Ah Sin is excluded from the fabric of Californian society in many respects. First and foremost, he is legally a racial other and therefore cannot enjoy the same legal benefits American citizens do. When Ah Sin is considered a suspect who committed the

murder of Plunkett, miners try to deal with the case without taking necessary legal processes:

> *1st Miner*. We can 'tend to his case ourselves.
>
> *York.* There is no occasion. It is the law's business--leave him to the law.
>
> *1st Miner*. But don't I tell you, we ain't *going* to leave him to the law. (59)

Although Ah Sin escapes from the miners with the help of York, the scene functions to signify his legal defenselessness. The court scene at the end, in which Ah Sin is told by the court that "A Chinaman cannot testify," also implies how he has no say in court (94). These scenes are obviously references to the *People v. Hall* decision, which disallowed Chinese people to testify in court. The representation of Ah Sin as a legal nobody in California shows the audience how Chinese immigrants were disallowed to legally receive democratic benefits in the nineteenth century.

While Ah Sin is legally nonexistent in the Californian court, he is present only as a racial other in the eyes of the Californians. In the play, Ah Sin is repeatedly mocked and despised by the other characters. Broderick is the most hateful character toward the laundryman. The derogatory terms he uses to call Ah Sin such as "moral cancer" and "unsolvable political problem" apparently reflect the strong anti-Chinese sentiments of the time. The entry of cheap Chinese contract laborers into the American continent supported the country's rapid modernization

and economic growth. Nevertheless, there arose conflicts between Chinese laborers and American natives for several reasons. Because Chinese laborers worked for exceptionally cheap wages, they were often equated with slaves. In the mid-nineteenth century, "The regimented Chinese miners conflicted with California's stand against slavery and posed an obstacle to the building of the true American state" (Barth 130-131). By deeming Chinese laborers enemies of democracy, it justified Californians' racism against them. In addition, as Iris Chang writes, Chinese immigrants were used as scapegoats for a variety of social problems such as overpopulated prisons, illnesses, and economic depression (116,122). Broderick's racist slander is a crystallization of the anti-Chinese sentiments that were prevailing in the late nineteenth century.

Ah Sin's sociocultural otherness is also symbolized by the way he is seen by the other characters as a "heathen" person, an inscrutable figure who does not share the same moral principles with Americans. In Act I, when Broderick looks at Miss Tempest's picture, he says that "Pictures nor thing else safe while that heathen's around," implying the stereotypical image of immoral Chinese immigrants (45). The term is also used to describe the inscrutability of the character. When Ah Sin's employer York tells the laundryman that he has sent for the wife and the daughter of Plunkett, he finds Ah Sin's face enigmatically blank for him to read: "(*Aside*) His face is as unintelligible as a tea chest. . . . No delight, no satisfaction, and yet his poor old benefactor would have *fought* for him. Well, it is the gratitude of the heathen" (57). Here, the word "heathen" is used alongside the

description of the enigmatic character that is commonly associated with Asians. Notable is York's description of him as "unintelligible as a tea chest," which implies how he sees Chinese immigrants more as objects than as live human beings. Given his role as a trickster, which I examine soon, the "heathen" look of Ah Sin could be a pretense to deceive others. Nevertheless, it would signify the baffling, inhuman characteristics of Chinese immigrants in the eyes of the contemporary audience.

While the play highlights Ah Sin's position and status as legally, racially, and culturally outside the mainstream of American society, it implies how he is not simply a victim. That is, behind his "heathen" mask is the highly intellectual ability that he utilizes to gain benefits and observe the white characters' follies. Ironically, it is Broderick who best understands Ah Sin.

> *Broderick*. You here yet--you moral cancer, you unsolvable political problem--a what's up now?
>
> *Ah Sin*. Waitee tellee Plunkee you drink whiskey, so me no stealee him.
>
> *Broderick*. Look here, my lad, there's a smell of sarcasm about that remark, perhaps there's more *satire* in your system (46, italic mine)

Broderick is aware that Ah Sin is more than the public persona he usually exhibits to people and therefore can be *satirical*. (Broderick is also right about his guess, for Ah Sin has actually stolen whiskey). This scene may reinforce the stereotypical image of Chinese immigrants as larcenous. Yet the whole scheme Ah Sin prepares to entrap Broderick cannot be described as simply cunning or malicious. Indeed, it

takes more effort and thought than just hiding cards up in the sleeve does. This scene offers a glimpse of Ah Sin's capabilities as a trickster.

The first example of Ah Sin's skill to outsmart appears when Plunkett and Broderick play poker for the right to the mine. To help his friend Plunkett win the game, "AH SIN *betrays an intelligent purpose, shows revolver, slips out just as* PLUNKETT *has got the hands dealt out.* AH SIN *fires a shot outside*" (51). While Plunkett and Broderick are outside to see what has just happened, Ah Sin gives the former the cards to win. What Ah Sin does in this scene can be interpreted as an act of friendship and of smart retaliation for Broderick, who treats him in a racist way. This scene should give the audience the impression that Ah Sin is the unseen hand that manipulates the plot from the beginning, which the other characters are not aware of.

Similarly, Ah Sin's acute moral judgment occasionally finds expressions in his subtle remarks and gestures. For instance, when Broderick proposes that he will offer extra money to Ah Sin if he helps him produce false evidence of York's murder, the play directs the actor of the Chinese character to do the following gesture: "AH SIN *surreptitiously wipes his hand on blouse, with the faintest perceptible show of disgust, which* BRODERICK *does not see*" (70). Although this gesture is supposed to be subtle on the stage, it shows the audience the humane and intelligent sides of the expressionless Chinese laundryman. Ou's insight is very helpful to see this point: "The fact that Ah Sin acts as an observer of almost every situation in the play humanizes this Chinese character, by linking his gaze to that of the spectator" (147).

Thus, the play is designed to share the secret about Ah Sin with its audience. The characters on the stage see him only as a Chinese laundryman who does not understand things. Yet the subtle markers we have examined allow the audience to suspect that Ah Sin is more than what the characters can observe from his "heathen" expressions. This observer position is associated with solitude. There is no character who can detect Ah Sin's intellect and humanity; they all see him as inscrutable and foolish. Plunket is the only character who befriends Ah Sin, but the friendship of the two is not portrayed in detail on the stage. We have already seen that this solitude is representative of how Chinese immigrants were treated in the United States. With the satirical scheme in mind, Ah Sin's solitude takes on a different meaning: His liminality and detachment from the other characters emphasize his moral and intellectual superiority. To summarize, Ah Sin's seemingly alienated position and inscrutable characteristics are inextricably linked to his trickster qualities.

Having been implying that Ah Sin is a trickster figure who controls everything behind the curtain, the play finally reaches its conclusion in the court scene. To frame York, Broderick asks the court to let him introduce Ah Sin as a witness even though a Chinese man cannot usually legally testify. Exceptionally being permitted to be a witness, Ah Sin shows to the court the blood-stained jacket of Broderick, which he has been secretly keeping. Being caught as a liar and murderer, Broderick is now in danger of being hanged. Ah Sin ironically asks the villain:

Ah Sin. How muchee you give suppose Shellif no hangee you.

Broderick. All--everything I've got in the world.

Ah Sin. You givee half rich mine.

Broderick. Yes, and you $10,000 to boot. (95)

This is when Ah Sin suddenly reveals Plunkett, the very victim of the murder who has been alive and hiding all the time. The play closes with celebratory cries of "Hurrah for Ah Sin," giving credit to the hero who has restored peace to the mining community. The ending, in which the Chinese laundryman becomes a hero of the day, seems to be pro-Chinese enough. More importantly, the ending symbolically portrays Ah Sin's ascension from the socially liminal position to the central one by placing him in the center of the play. The contrast between the Ah Sin before the ending and the Ah Sin at the ending is striking. As Hsu claims, Ah Sin "proves to be the most perceptive witness in the play" despite the *People V. Hall* decision, thus successfully claiming his legal rights and proving the legal system insufficient (44). He also proves to be humane and intellectual in that he can organize this whole project to punish the villain and save his friend and employer. The heathen mask disappears with this shocking revealment.

This surprising ending is an essential part of portraying the Chinese character as a satirical trickster. Mikhail Bakhtin discusses the three literary types of the Renaissance era that embody the laughter of the time: the Rogue, the Fool,

and the Clown. Bakhtin writes about the feature that is both common and essential to these characters:

> a distinctive feature that is as well a privilege—the right to be 'other' in this world, the right not to make common cause with any single one of the existing categories that life makes available; none of these categories quite suits them, they see the underside and the falseness of every situation. (159)

Jonathan Greenberg says that this kind of character typically is in a "liminal position on the edge of the socially acceptable" (77). It is this right to be "other" that enables Ah Sin to triumph in the end. Because Broderick never suspects that Ah Sin has had the upper hand all the time, he asks the Chinese man to reveal the falsified jacket. If Broderick were keenly aware that Ah Sin is more than just a thief, he would never make him an accomplice of his crime. Ah Sin's unexpected intellect shows that he is not just a racialized other. He is an "other" in a Bakhtinian sense who assumes a mask of a stereotypical "heathen" person to disrupt the "existing categories" applied to Chinese immigrants and to reveal the underside of the social situation. Critics have commented on the possibility of the play strategically employing minstrel-like Chinese stereotypes. Randal Knoper writes: "Ah Sin's expressions hinge on the distinction between 'aping' and 'jabbering' as objects of ridicule and as tactics of ridicule, as exemplifications of racist attitudes and as undermining mimicries of such racist projections" (47). Jacqueline Romeo argues that Ah Sin is an "eiron," a Euro-American trickster who can open new possibilities

with his skills to lie and imitate. Thus, the ending scene dramatically reveals Ah Sin's true identity as a trickster as it suddenly brings him from his liminal position to the center of the stage.

Nevertheless, *Ah Sin* as satire has an obvious fault. We have seen how portraying Ah Sin as a figure disconnected from the mainstream of society is necessary to prepare the shocking revealment. Yet what if the audience does not recognize his trickster characteristics and only focuses on his racial, cultural, and social difference from themselves? After all, Ah Sin is the only Chinese character in the play. It is easily predicted that when his difference is combined with his solitude in the community, the audience is tempted to see him only as a racist stereotype, a target of ridicule. James Moy precisely describes the trap the play falls into:

> This constitution of the Chinese as a marginal Other mirrors the identity that the American public created for and enforced upon the Chinese. (27)

> Represented as absent and yet subject to the audience's desire to see the Chinese, Ah Sin exists within an ideologically enforced space of absence that invites political manipulation. (34)

Moy's insight shows how the play's satirical structure itself can invite the audience to ridicule Ah Sin. So far, we have examined how the play is abundant with satirical

and ironic strategies. The questions is: Did these strategies actually work for the contemporary audience of *Ah Sin*?

NEW YORK AUDIENCE, MELODRAMA, AND MINSTRELSY

Ah Sin was performed for about five weeks at the Fifth Avenue Theater in New York. The theater was managed by Augustin Daly, who was famously known as the author of *Under the Gaslight* (1867), until 1877 and later by John T. Ford.[4] The Fifth Avenue Theater featured melodramas, comic operas, and comedies written by authors such as Dion Boucicault, W. S. Gilbert, and Daly himself. *Under the Gaslight* was also staged at the same theater in its original form in 1873 (Reid 83). Therefore, it is likely that those who came to the theater to watch *Ah Sin* expected something melodramatic. In fact, the *New York Times* writes: "Most of the characters do not indeed differ in any essential traits from the everyday heroes and heroines of melodrama, . . . but the charm of local color is of great weight in dealing with Messrs. Harte and Twain's joint production." The review suggests that some audiences saw *Ah Sin* as a melodrama with a tinge of a western, local-color taste.

Melodrama is typically characterized by its simplified view of the world as divided between good and evil, which are represented by the hero and the villain respectively. In addition, melodramatic plays often include sensational scenes to

[4] What made *Under the Gaslight* nationally popular was its climactic scene where the heroine saves the male character who is tied to the railroad. This scene was so iconic that the play was not only performed around the United States but also was imitated by many vaudevillians, sketch artists, variety performers, and minstrel troupes (Pate 11).

highlight the hero's virtue and the villain's evil (the train rescue scene from *Under the Gaslight* is the most famous example). Peter Brooks offers insights into the characteristics of melodrama as follows: "Good and evil can be named as persons are named—and melodramas tend in fact to move toward a clear nomination of the moral universe. The ritual of melodrama involves the confrontation of clearly identified antagonists and the expulsion of one of them" (17). Melodrama originally refers to a stage play that is accompanied by live music. Yet, as Brooks writes, the term more broadly refers to the mode of literary and dramatic expressions that seek to establish what is good and evil by presenting plot and characters in an exaggerated manner. Some critics argue that melodrama is conservative in its nature. Sarah Meer points out how the melodramatic cliché of restoring justice and punishing the villain tends to undermine the critical message the play potentially has: When the villain disappears, so does the social question (112). In this sense, *Ah Sin*'s ending is particularly melodramatic. The play's ending can be seen as portraying Broderick as the villain who represents evil and therefore must perish and Ah Sin as the hero who restores order. This happy ending can result in obscuring the critical message about anti-Chinese racism and the systemic failure of the law.

There is no need to rush to the conclusion that *Ah Sin* failed as satire because it was seen as melodrama. Rather, by presenting a Chinese figure as a hero of a melodrama in an unexpected manner, the play might have positively influenced the audience's view on Chinese immigrants. Moreover, the view that all melodramas

are necessarily apolitical or conservative is not accurate. According to Amy Hughes, sensations used in melodramas of the late nineteenth century could assert positive influences on audiences. For instance, she argues that *Under the Gaslight* may have helped promote the cause of the suffragists by presenting heroine Laura, whose "out-of-space," "unfeminine" action of saving a veteran embodied a progressive, feminist message. Would it be possible for the audience to identify Ah Sin as a hero who represents some kind of American virtue?

To explore whether the contemporary audience saw Ah Sin as a hero or not, it is important to take his racial identity into consideration. Usually, melodramas feature white characters as their heroes and heroines. On the other hand, characters of color are often portrayed as secondary and even villainous. As Basuki Ribut writes, "Stereotypical as it might sound, the aliens in American melodrama are those who are not white, not Christian, not gentlemen, and not propertied. It is hard to find in American melodrama a character who is Christian (Protestant), a gentleman, and propertied, but not white" (162). As in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, American melodramas present whiteness as virtuous and white characters as role models of society. Ah Sin, a "heathen Chinee," seem to be completely antithetical to this notion. Moreover, in melodrama, characters of color often symbolize un-American qualities. Jeffrey Mason writes:

> The myth [represented by the American melodrama] defines evil as Un-American, located entirely outside of the American space; to defeat evil is to expunge it from the American space and return it to

> the Beyond where it belongs. Such a construction completely avoids the question of whether evil or sin derives from society, situation, or character, for evil is a force from outside. (194).

Mason's argument takes us back to the point that melodrama is often conservative and suggests that it is particularly true when race comes into play. To the contemporary audience, Ah Sin's racial identity would be a hindrance to seeing him as an agent of social reform. His racial difference is repeatedly highlighted in the play. It is also true that Ah Sin is immoral to some degree: he steals, lies, and deceives. Even if these are just part of the whole satirical scheme, it would help the audience see the character and his traits as un-American and therefore evil.

It is worth noting that *Ah Sin* was not the only Chinese melodrama staged in New York. Before the arrival of *Ah Sin*, to exploit the success of "The Heathen Chinee," several playwrights wrote plays that shamelessly featured Ah Sin-like characters. Daly wrote *Horizon*, a play which was staged at the Olympic Theater in 1871. The play includes the scene where a drunkard, Indian, and "Chinee" character play a game of euchre. In the following year, *California; or the Heathen Chinee*, which was written by J.H. Warwick, was staged at the Bowery Theater. Finally, Harte himself wrote *Two Men of Sandy Bar*, which features a comic Chinese character like *Ah Sin*, in 1876 (Romeo 124-126).[5] These imitative performances imply that the audience who came to see *Ah Sin* at the Fifth Avenue

[5] Harte did not necessarily intend to make the same mistake of offering a racist Chinese caricature to the public. As Romeo writes, "Harte had not intended to exploit, yet again, the Chinese identity he helped to create. By his own admission, the character was only meant as a brief comic interlude between the overly dramatic elements of the play" (126).

Theater could be accustomed to seeing a Chinese character not as a hero, but as a comic relief of melodrama.

A comparison between *Ah Sin* and *Under the Gaslight* helps see why the Chinese laundryman would not qualify as a hero of melodrama. The New York audiences who frequented Daly's theater might have made this comparison, too. It is probable that in the eyes of the contemporary theatergoer, Laura would look much more virtuous than Ah Sin would. This is not only because the contemporary audience was potentially biased against Chinese immigrants but also because Laura's achievement would be considered much more heroic than Ah Sin's. There are striking similarities between what these two characters achieve in the plays: Laura and Ah Sin save ex-soldiers Snorkey and Plunkett respectively. Snorkey is a veteran of the Civil War whose lost arm symbolizes his heroic achievement in the war, and Laura's reckless rescue of the veteran bolsters her courageous, selfless, and patriotic image. On the other hand, the relationship between Ah Sin and Plunkett would be seen as, if not entirely meaningless, less significant than that of Laura and Snorkey. As Hsu argues, the friendship between Ah Sin and Plunkett can be seen as a symbol of interracial friendship that was still something exceptional to see in the late nineteenth century (47). Yet, unlike Laura, Ah Sin is not entirely selfless. As the ending shows, one of Ah Sin's motivations for saving Plunkett is a monetary one. Ah Sin's intellect that enables him to plot the whole scheme would certainly be seen as exceptional for a Chinese man to have. Yet the ending could perhaps reinforce the stereotypical image of Chinese immigrants as

cunning. As Twain himself once wrote, "[the Chinese] appreciate 'good' and 'bad,' but it is only in reference to business, to finance, to trade, etc" (*Clemens of the Call* 70). It is also worth noting what kind of character Plunkett is. It is an interesting coincidence that Plunkett and Snorkey are both veterans who fought in wars. Yet they are clearly distinguished from one another when comparing how trustworthy they are. As the play suggests, Plunkett is "the champion liar of Calaveras," and the heroic deeds he claims he accomplished in different wars are subject to suspicion of being false. The final remark of Plunkett also marks him as a liar: "No more lying, boys--I've reformed. As George Washington said to me--" (95). While Snorkey's lost arm is unequivocal evidence of his contribution to the country, Plunkett has nothing to prove his grandiose war stories. Therefore, the rescue of Plunkett would not invoke a sense of national pride within the audience as that of Snorkey most certainly did.

A simpler explanation about why Ah Sin would not qualify as a melodramatic agent of social reform is possible: His stage time would be too short to subvert the stereotypical images of himself and Chinese immigrants. The *New York Herald* review rightly notes Ah Sin's significant absence in the play: "The Heathen Chinee is ingeniously connected with the plot in the beginning, but drops out of it in the middle, and only re-enters at the end." Therefore, it is no wonder some of the audience would think that the Chinese character was just a comic relief or a stereotype to be ridiculed. Also, the ending could be too sudden and brief to subvert the stereotypical image Ah Sin has been playing. The climax where Ah Sin reveals

the proof and the victim only takes about two pages, which would be worth a few minutes on the stage. Compared to Ah Sin, Laura's exceptionality as a woman is highlighted much earlier in the play. As Hughes writes, her dignity and poise are portrayed throughout the play (127). While the heroine has ample time to imprint her unfeminine traits on the audience, the Chinese character only has a few minutes to show that he has been just performing the stereotype. Ironically, the satirical scheme of the play is what necessitates the very brief appearance of Ah Sin as a hero. To make the ending as shocking as possible, the play has to portray Ah Sin as a heathen character most of the time and imprint such an impression on the audience. Therefore, even when the ending finally presented him as a hero and trickster, it could only be baffling to the contemporary audience who believed that they had been watching a melodrama.

In addition, the play probably reminded the contemporary audience of minstrelsy. As already mentioned, critics have pointed out that the play obviously draws from minstrelsy to portray the Chinese character. Probably the most minstrel moment of *Ah Sin* is when the Chinese character is asked by York to sing and entertain Miss and Mrs. Plunkett:

> *York*. He will be a little diffident, maybe, but-- (AH SIN *enters*) Ah Sin, these ladies want to see what you picked when you used to go to the theatres in San Francisco. (AH SIN *smiles largely and exits--York exchanges wondering looks with ladies*) Why--what does he mean by going off? Ah, here he comes again. (*enter* Ah Sin *with carpet sack*--

opens smilingly and takes out gorgeous costume, and odds and ends of dramatic properties.) Well?

Ah Sin. Me pickee him up at theatre! (*general laugh*)

York. Oh, you are too literal by half--

Ah Sin. Too little--Mellican man say I fat enough to kill.

York. --too literal. Now the ladies would like to hear you do some of the things you've seen at the shows.

Ah Sin. (*shyly*) Me no kin do such ting--too muchee people here. (82)

The humor of this scene arises from the miscommunication between Ah Sin and York: While York wants Ah Sin to perform like an actor, Ah Sin thinks that he is asked to show them what he "picked up" at theaters. This scene seems like another example of how the play is prone to uncritically reproducing Chinese stereotypes. As Yang points out, "In fact, in addition to the black minstrel actor Parsloe, the portrayal of Ah Sin draws from common jokes from the minstrel stage about end men who take everything literally" (101). By acknowledging these cues, the contemporary audiences must have easily identified Ah Sin as a minstrel figure. As the *Spirit of the Times* writes, "It is a reflection of the American burlesque of the Chinaman. Nothing more. It is not intended to be true or to be typical—only to be funny, and Mr. Parsloe knows very well how to be funny without being correct." While the review is rather critical of the burlesque in the play, it is possible that some of the audience simply liked it. Recall the review in the *New York Times*

which describes the "laughter and applause" heard in the theater. It is a plausible argument to make that the play's minstrel jokes are the catalysts for such merry moments.

The combination of minstrelsy and melodrama was not unique to *Ah Sin*. Meer discusses how some stage adaptations of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* employed minstrel representations of African Americans to make themselves light and funny: "Such audience expectations were not always disappointed, however. [Charles Western] Taylor's production made the conjunction of *Uncle Tom* and minstrelsy seem automatic, since it opened with a blackface spectacle, a 'Negro celebration,' that included a chorus of 'Nigga in de Cornfield' and 'Kentucky Breakdown Dance'" (122). Stage adaptations of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* must have been familiar to New York theatergoers, for they were popular as staged melodramas in the nineteenth century.[6] In this sense, melodrama and minstrelsy were closely linked to one another. Therefore, when the audience saw *Ah Sin*, they would not find the minstrel and melodramatic elements of the play incongruous. Rather, they probably thought that these two elements had good chemistry to heighten the comicality of the play.

The *Chicago Inter Ocean's* contemporary review helps summarize what I have been discussing in terms of the audience's expectation and reception: "Perhaps

[6]The Charles Western Taylor version of Uncle Tom's Cabin was also staged in New York in 1852. The *New York Clipper* magazine wrote about the stage in 1877: "His drama was purposely but a feeble reflex of the novel. He even changed the names of some of the characters. It could disappoint the anti-slavery man, but it certainly could not seriously offend the most radical Democrat." The Taylor version is obviously less progressive and more entertaining in a racist sense than the original novel.

anything so commonplace, so trite, and so fustian as Ah Sin has never been offered New York, even at Daly's Theatre." Perhaps the play was a disaster to the reviewer. However, it most likely was what the New York audiences who made frequent visits to Daly's theater expected: To them, *Ah Sin* was commonplace like the popular melodramatic genre and fustian like minstrelsy. They wanted a laugh-filled melodrama, not political irony.

CONCLUSION

The resemblance between Ah Sin and the trickster figure in satire cannot be overlooked. The caricatural representation of Ah Sin as a deceptive and untrustworthy other functions to deceive the audience and enhances the satirical effect of the ending. Nevertheless, examining the cultural context along with the play's obvious faults has led us to doubt that the audience properly got the message. The contributing factors to such a misinterpretation were both inherent and external: the satirical structure and the popularity of melodrama (and minstrelsy). The satirical scheme and the genre confusion possibly worked in tandem to, ironically, present the play as an entertaining, comedic, melodramatic, and racist one to the contemporary audience.

Cited below is the flyer for the performances of the play staged in Washington, D.C. Although whether there was a similar flyer for the New York performances is unclear, this illustration gives us a clue about what the general

public expected to see in *Ah Sin*, a stage adaptation of the famous "anti-Chinese" poem. Several years after the publication of the poem, the Chinese character was still portrayed in the same caricatural manner as in the unauthorized illustrations. From what we have examined so far, it is plausible to say that the Ah Sin the New York audience saw on the stage was a close resemblance of the Ah Sin on this playbill, not a satirical trickster.

Fig. 3: Playbill for the Washington, D.C. run of *Ah Sin* at the National Theatre, May 1877.

Chapter 2

Conjuring Racial Stereotypes and White Readers: Charles W. Chesnutt's Conjure Stories

Charles W. Chesnutt gained recognition as a literary author when "The Goophered Grapevine" and the other short stories were published in notable literary magazines including the *Atlantic Monthly* in the late nineteenth century. The *Atlantic* was one of the most prestigious literary magazines during the nineteenth century, whose circulation amounted to more than 30,000 copies two years after its foundation (Cullen). Although the editors did not know Chesnutt's racial identity when they published "The Goophered Grapevine," the *Atlantic Monthly* was the first magazine to publish a story that was written by an African American author (Tirado-Gilligan 17). This fact shows that Chesnutt was able to address and entertain his white readers as a literary author when African Americans had significantly limited opportunities in the literary industry. Yet his goal was not only to be accepted by the white world as an author but also to enlighten his readers through his stories. As many critics have pointed out, Chesnutt's conjure stories are in truth social criticisms about slavery, the antebellum South, and the United States in the Reconstruction Era. In 1880, Chesnutt himself wrote about how he hoped his work to be an agent of social progress:

> The object of my writings would not be so much the elevation of the colored people as the elevation of the whites—for I consider the unjust spirit of caste which is so insidious as to pervade a whole nation, and so powerful as to subject a whole race and all connected with it to scorn and social ostracism—I consider this a moral barrier to the moral progress of the American people; and I would be one of the first to head a determined, organized crusade against it. (qtd. in Andrews 13)

As critics, we are able to recognize such an authorial intention embedded in the stories by associating biographical materials such as the statement quoted above with them. Was the contemporary reader able to interpret Chesnutt's stories as social criticisms rather than as literary entertainment? Did the author's stories become an agent of moral progress before being classified by scholarly critics as such? How did the stories deliver the author's anti-racist message to their target readers?

To answer these questions, it is important to understand in what context and by whom Chesnutt's stories were read. In other words, why did people think that Chesnutt's conjure stories were so desirable? As we shall see soon, what drove literary magazines such as the *Atlantic Monthly* to publish Chesnutt was the demand for nostalgic regionalist writings about the antebellum South. As Richard H. Brodhead writes, Chesnutt had to use the form of regionalist literature to enter the literary circle of the elites (209). As a result, Chesnutt was often seen as a successor of white regionalist authors such as Joel Chandler Harris who portrayed

the South with humor and nostalgia. Nevertheless, Chesnutt's stories are not literary products that are equivalent to those regionalist writings. Rather, they are ironic parodies of those predecessors and criticize the racial stereotypes fabricated by them. Therefore, writing in the style of regionalism allowed Chesnutt to address and criticize a wide white audience who would innocently consume those racist writings by authors like Harris. Nevertheless, Chesnutt's irony was not always apparent to his white readers. In the course of exploring how Chesnutt's stories were perceived by the public when they were first published, we shall look into some of the contemporary reviews that imply how they were unfortunately consumed as regionalist entertainment. As Matthew Wilson writes, "the racist imaginary, like other totalizing systems, is capable of transforming both actions and arguments against racism into support for racism" (25). Such reviews serve as a reminder of how difficult it was for the author to achieve his goal through literary means.

Yet I discover that Chesnutt's conjure stories are not completely defenseless against such misinterpretations. Rather, they anticipate certain reactions from certain readers. It is important to note that Chesnutt's stories seem to imply the audience they target in a very specific manner: the reader of the *Atlantic Monthly* and *The Conjure Woman* (1899), a book collection of the conjure stories, both of which were published by Houghton Mifflin. I suggest that the white readership of these publications is represented by John and Annie, the two usual white characters in the conjure stories. The gender roles assigned to these characters

serve to illustrate how the magazine distinguished the male readership—its primary customer—from the female readership—its secondary customer. While the *Atlantic* considered male writers and readers as producers and consumers of high literature, it subjugated female writers and readers by associating them with popular literature. This distinction most likely influenced the way Chesnutt's stories were perceived by the magazine's readers, for they would be classified as literary products for its female readers. I illustrate how the selected stories ironized such a literary hierarchy and bias when they were published.

The stories this chapter examines include "Dave's Neckliss," "Sis' Becky's Pickaninny," and "Po' Sandy," which were published in the *Atlantic Monthly* and/or included in *The Conjure Woman*. I selected these tales mainly for two reasons. Firstly, stories like "Dave's Neckliss" best present the way in which Chesnutt reappropriates racial stereotypes to portray their dehumanizing effects. As Evi Taylor and other researchers write, "For slave owners, their strong stereotypical beliefs governed how African-Americans were to be treated, never as individuals, but always collectively" (214). I examine how Chesnutt's stereotypical representations are in truth so complex that they reveal the inherent contradictions in such racist stereotypes and require the reader to unlearn their own racial biases. Secondly, I selected these tales because they best present John and Annie in a contrasting manner. After closely looking into the *Atlantic* in the late nineteenth century, we will be able to see how the husband and wife differently represent its readers. By projecting the contemporary public's racist biases onto John, the

character who is seemingly the most intelligent and best represents the readership of the magazine, Chesnutt gave the actual reader an opportunity to reflect on their ignorance.

CHARLES CHESNUTT AS A MASTER OF IRONIC STEREOTYPES

Recent scholarly criticisms have already shown how Chesnutt combated racism by using ironic stereotypes. Glenda Carpio rightly claims that the seemingly stereotypical representations in the tales are in truth used for satirical purposes: "The strategy of appropriating racist caricatures in order to redefine their purpose is familiar to Chesnutt's readers, for it is a strategy that characterizes all of his tales of conjure and transformation" (54). Similarly, Russel Ames writes that "Among his characters there was more than a 'fair' share of well-meaning and liberal white Southerners, of disreputable Negroes. His method was first to disarm his readers with conventional scenes and seeming stereotypes . . . and then in lightning flashes to reveal the underlying facts of injustice and rebellion" (201). These critics' arguments warn us not to simply take Chesnutt's stereotypical representations for what they seem to be. While drawing insights from these previous criticisms about Chesnutt's strategic use of black stereotypes, my analysis of the two white characters shows that the author is also a master of appropriating white stereotypes.

In the beginning, it should be helpful for us to lay out the basic pattern of how Chesnutt's conjure stories encourage the reader to criticize racism and be aware of their racial biases. This pattern can be broken into the following steps: Uncle Julius sets up a situation in which he delivers his conjure story from the antebellum South to John and Annie; his story often contains stereotypical portrayals of African American slaves and supernatural elements; after listening to the tale, John scoffs at how absurd it is and guesses at Uncle Julius's ulterior motive; the *actual* reader may notice the moral of Julius's tale, which John overlooks. "The Goophered Grapevine" (1887) best exemplifies this pattern. In the story, John braggingly draws a conclusion about Julius's true motivation for telling such a fantastical tale about the cursed grapevine: "I found, when I bought the vineyard, that Uncle Julius had occupied a cabin on the place for many years, and derived a respectable revenue from the product of the neglected grapevines. This, doubtless, accounted for his advice to me not to buy the vineyard, though whether it inspired the goopher story I am unable to state" ("The Goophered Grapevine" 13-14). As John remarks, Julius certainly has had attempted to scare off John from buying the grapevine so that he could continue his control over the land. Nevertheless, it might not be his sole motivation. Indeed, there is a social criticism that is embedded in Julius's tale: the ex-slave warns his new employer not to play the role of the exploitive slave owner.[7] Yet John is unable to look deeper than the surface because

[7] Theodore Hovet, for instance, writes about how Julius's tale functions as a criticism about the industrialization of the South, which would exploit African American workers as in the pre-Civil War Era: "Thus the appearance of Northern entrepreneurs after the war is not, as most readers of the *Atlantic* must have assumed, a sign of progress and enlightenment in a dark land. Julius intuitively

his judgment is likely to be clouded by his bias and stereotypical view; to John, Uncle Julius is just a miser, and his tale a lie. By revealing how stereotypes can cloud one's judgment, the conjure tales satirized the contemporary white audience of the nineteenth century who would innocently consume racist caricatures and reinforce racism.

"Dave's Neckliss," which was published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1889, is one such story which uses racial stereotypes to criticize the Northerner's hypocrisy. Here is a brief summary of the story: In the afternoon, John and Annie are having lunch and let Julius eat with them. Julius seems glad to share food with the couple at first. However, Julius suddenly loses his appetite as if he is affected by something. To John's inquiry, Julius tells the story of Dave, a devout Christian who used to preach the Bible to his fellow slaves. One day, Dave was falsely accused of stealing a ham, and his overseer forces him to put on a chain to which a ham was attached. Because of this false accusation, he was forsaken by his girlfriend and started to lose his mind. Even after the ham was removed, Dave could never mentally recover. Finally, his madness led him to think that he would be turning into a ham, and he committed suicide in a smokehouse. After Julius's tale is told, "Dave's Neckliss" concludes as follows:

> At breakfast, next morning, it occurred to me that I should like a slice of ham. I said as much to my wife.

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grasps that the cycle of exploitation will begin again with the appearance of the Yankee. Julius tells his tale of the goophered grapevine in order to warn the Northerner of the consequences of industrial development" (87). Hovet's argument is also important in that it suggests how the actual reader of the magazine must have been able to understand the message.

"Oh, no, John," she responded, "you shouldn't eat anything so heavy for breakfast."

I insisted.

"The fact is," she said, pensively, "I couldn't have eaten any more of that ham, and so I gave it to Julius." ("Dave's Neckliss" 42)

Although the ending passages are rather brief when compared to the other stories (I am going to explain the significance of this difference later), it follows the basic pattern of the conjure stories. Even after listening to the gruesome story, John still wants a slice of ham. This signifies that the tale does not strike him as a meaningful one. Nevertheless, the tale itself certainly communicates the dark realities of slavery to the actual reader.

Dave can be seen as a typical black character in Chesnutt's conjure world. In the conjure stories, African American slaves often experience extraordinary things, which are mostly caused by conjuring. Dave's delusion can be seen as such a fantastical experience to some degree, but not quite. His religion is Christianity, not voodoo. Dave turns into a ham not because of the power of conjure but because of the mental disorder. By being devoid of supernatural elements, which would make the story look like a fantastical or humorous one, it increases the likelihood of

having the reader's serious attention to its critical message about racist stereotypes.[8]

At first, the story presents Dave as an obedient slave. As the tale progresses, the reader will see how Dave's character is portrayed as an Uncle Tom figure. Dave is responsible for preaching the Bible to his fellow slaves. It is needless to say that the ability to read English was rare and forbidden for a slave to have due to the lack of education and the anti-literacy laws. Nevertheless, when Master Dugal finds out about Dave's literacy, he allows him to continue reading the Bible and even to teach it to others. This is because Master Dugal believes Dave can also teach other slaves that stealing and lying are sinful acts. ("Dave's Neckliss" 34). Thus, the story presents Dave as a model slave who shows others that they can be reformed if they are Christianized.

Dave's obedience to the master is best exemplified when, ironically, he is accused of being a thief and starts to have a mental disorder. Julius describes the peculiar behavior of Dave as follows: "He got ter gwine roun' talkin' ter hisse'f, en singin' corn-shuckin' songs, en laffin' fit ter kill 'bout nuffin. En one day he tole one er de niggers he had 'skivered a noo way fer ter raise hams,—gwine ter pick 'em off'n trees, en save de expense er smoke-'ouses by kyoin' 'em in de sun" ("Dave's Neckliss" 39). In his maniacal delusion, he proposes a new way of getting more hams: to collect them from ham-trees. While this idea is nothing but preposterous,

[8] When Chesnutt was writing "Dave's Neckliss," he was trying to steer away from the conjure tales and venture into a new realm. As the author himself writes, he hoped "to get out of the realm of superstition into the realm of feeling and passion" (*To Be an Author* 23).

it is indicative of his willingness to repent and make up for the stolen ham even though he is not the one who stole it.

At the same time, the story associates the image of another black stereotype with Dave: that of the thief. Wherever he goes or whatever he does, the chained ham around his neck always reminds him of the "fact" that he committed the sin of stealing. When his fellows see him, they always mention the necklace and heartlessly mock him by saying things like "Is yer stole any mo' hams lately" and "W'at yer take fer yo' neckliss, Dave?" ("Dave's Neckliss" 38). Similarly, the slave masters naively believe the false accusation and label him as a thief. Master Dugal claims that: "he wuz might'ly 'ceived en disapp'inted in Dave. He say he would n' nebber hab no mo' conferdence in no nigger" ("Dave's Neckliss 37). After all, if the masters did not decide to put the chain on Dave, he would not be called a thief. But now, in the eyes of his fellows and masters, he is nothing but a stereotypical slave who steals. As to the representation of Dave, Carpio rightly claims that "Chesnutt brilliantly underscores both the burden of stereotype as experienced from within and its absurdity. The ham not only haunts Dave in his private moments, but it threatens to usurp his identity" (76). The irony is further highlighted by acknowledging how contradictory the two stereotypical images are. Dave symbolizes the two conflicting stereotypes: the thief and the Uncle Tom. If we think logically, it is obvious that these two stereotypes cannot coexist when they are referring to one ethnic or racial group. Nevertheless, the masters easily forsake one stereotypical image and jump to another in order to maintain the order of their plantation. While

the two stereotypes contradict each other, they complete each other to create the whole image of African Americans as a threat to society who need to be reformed.[9]

The ending of the tale further satirizes racist stereotypes by showing how they resulted in thousands of deaths of African Americans. In addition to the stereotypical images such as the ham, the thief, and the Uncle Tom, Julius's tale offers another striking image that was widely seen during and after the period of slavery. Stepto and Greeson note that the ending of the tale, where Dave commits suicide by hanging himself in the smokehouse, is indicative of lynches of African American people done by white Americans (41). If we see Dave's hanging body as representing the victims, it offers a biting criticism of the ways in which white Americans lynched and killed African Americans based upon false accusations.[10] By ironically depicting Dave as a ham and representing him as a stereotypical figure, the story illustrates how racist stereotypes deprive the majority group of the ability to see humanity and individuality in African Americans.

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[9] A more contemporary example of how the contradictory nature of African American stereotypes helps sustain the social power of the dominating class can be found in portrayals of "sassy mammies." David Pilgrim writes about one popular example of sassy mammies: "A well-known example of a Sassy Mammy was Hattie McDaniel, a black actress who played feisty, quick-tempered mammies in many movies . . . In these roles she was sassy (borderline impertinent) but always loyal. She was not a threat to the existing social order" ("The Sapphire Caricature"). As Pilgrim points out, the Sassy Mammy stereotype represents the two qualities which seem to contradict each other but in truth fabricate the image of nonthreatening African American women.

[10] For instance, one of the most common justifications for lynching African Americans was to accuse them of rape. Nevertheless, many victims of lynching who were accused of rape were innocent. According to the Tuskegee Institute's data of the lynching cases from 1882 to 1951, about 25% of the victims who were accused of rape were in fact not guilty and were killed without being trialed (cited in Pilgrim, "The Brute Caricature"). It is not hard to imagine how the stereotypical image of hypersexual African American men helped lynch mobs to justify their violence. Although "Dave's Neckliss" does not have a sexual overtone, the way in which Dave is falsely accused, stereotyped, and forced to commit suicide is eerily overlapping with the way African Americans were stereotyped as sexual brutes and victimized.

ANALYSIS OF THE RHETORICAL SITUATION: WHO (MIS)READ CHESNUTT?

"Dave's Neckliss" is a good example of how Chesnutt's conjure stories have timeless value as a critical portrayal of racism during the antebellum era: Any person from any background can understand the harsh realities of slavery by reading it. Yet, keeping in mind Chesnutt's position as a literary author in the late nineteenth century, the story specifically reads as a criticism of the contemporary literary industry and its readers that produced and consumed regionalist writings which beautified the antebellum era.

Chesnutt's African American folk tales were read as part of regionalist writings which illustrated different lives in different regions. There are several reasons why regionalist writings were in high demand in the late nineteenth century. As Brodhead writes, regionalism is "definable as the literature that posits that someone else's way of living and talking is more 'colorful' than one's own (culturally superior) way " (205). Similarly, Joseph Church writes that "In late-nineteenth-century America, widespread social strife—industrial and political corruption, labor wars, urban and sectional discord, racial conflict—greatly increased the demand for literary forms that would enable readers to imagine better times and places" (121). In short, to read regionalist writings was a way of fulfilling one's escapist desire in the disturbing environment.

More specifically, Chesnutt's conjure stories thematically resemble regionalist writings about the South which were written by authors like Joel Chandler Harris. Harris was popular among both Southern and Northern audiences. For Northerners, the image of the South and the dialect Harris fabricated were curious objects and "real" representations of the region. For Southerners, the nostalgic stories helped "reshape" the past in favor of themselves (Ritterhouse 589, 611). Chesnutt's stories would similarly appeal to Northern and Southern audiences as Harris's did. On the surface, Chesnutt's conjure stories well match the definition of regionalist literature given above; they illustrate the life of African American slaves in a humorous and imaginative manner. In fact, contemporary readers often compared Chesnutt with authors like Harris. One contemporary review writes about Chesnutt's conjure stories as follows: "Uncle Julius is really own brother to Uncle Remus and indeed stands shoulder to shoulder with him for charm and originality" (*Portland Transcripts,* qtd. in the promotional flier). As this review suggests, Chesnutt's Uncle Julius stories were most likely consumed as nostalgic windows to the antebellum South.

One can easily imagine how those regionalist writings served to beautify the harshness of slavery and appease the majority group's desire for racial superiority. Harris's Uncle Remus series became quite popular after he published the first collection which was titled *Uncle Remus: His Songs and His Sayings* in 1880 (this was 7 years before Chesnutt's first conjure story appeared in the *Atlantic*). Harris's writings were then published in different leading magazines including *Harper's*,

Century, *Scribner's*, and the *Atlantic* (Strickland 207). As a folklorist, Harris claimed he sought to "preserve in permanent shape those curious mementoes of a period that will no doubt be sadly misrepresented by historians of the future" and to record the dialect of the Old South which he believed possessed "the really poetic imagination" and the "quaint and rugged humor." (qtd. in Bickley 38). Nevertheless, his folk tales have often been criticized for appropriating and disgracing the African American culture. One prominent critic of Harris's folk tales is African American novelist Alice Walker. In an essay titled "Uncle Remus, No Friend of Mine," she writes: "As far as I'm concerned, [Harris] stole a good part of my heritage. How did he steal it? By making me feel ashamed of it. In creating Uncle Remus, he created an effective barrier between me and the stories that meant so much to me, the stories that could have meant so much to all of our children" (637). As Walker's severe criticism shows, Harris's folktales are not truthful portrayals but mocking caricatures of African Americans. From the day of publication, Harris's stories functioned to dishonor African Americans and promote the white supremacist ideology. As Valerie Babb writes, "The joining of negative stereotypes to a language form readily associated with them in his readers' minds enables Harris to manipulate a racist ideology and to promote a mythic southern pastoral that ignored the harsh realities of slavery" (2). Harris was not the only author who beautified the antebellum South and demeaned African Americans. Sylvia Lyons Render claims that Thomas Nelson Page, who also one of the popular regionalist authors, "portrayed Negroes as being very limited in either aspiration or capacity,

and incapable of self-government" (12).[11] Of course, these southern regionalist writings were exclusively written for white audiences by white authors. Michael North points out that the survey of "Negro Dialect" conducted in the 1918 Cambridge History of American Literature exclusively focuses on white authors while ignoring African American authors like Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. DuBois (32). These pieces of evidence clearly show that the demand for tales about the antebellum South was driven by white writers and audiences' desire to see African Americans as eternally bound to racist stereotypes.

Let us return to "Dave's Neckliss." Thematically, the story qualifies as a Southern regionalist story. It certainly portrays the life and culture of slaves during the antebellum era and is rich in colloquial representations of the black dialect. Dave is presented as a stereotype which the contemporary audience of the time must have been able to easily envision. At the same time, these are false descriptions which only scratch the surface of the story. There is nothing poetic or nostalgic about the ways in which the story portrays the realities of the antebellum South. Dave is not presented as an entertaining stereotype but as a victim of forceful stereotyping. It is also significant that Chesnutt chose the *Atlantic*, which published Harris's story, to publish his own story. Indeed, like the other conjure

[11] Chesnutt was aware of how white authors represented African Americans only to hide the dark realities of slavery. As Chesnutt writes in his essay "Post-Bellum—Pre-Harlem," "Thomas Dixon was writing the Negro down industriously and with marked popular success. Thomas Nelson Page was disguising the harshness of slavery under the mask of sentiment" (223). Indeed, Chesnutt's goal as an author was to reveal the harshness of slavery, not to conceal it.

stories, "Dave's Neckliss" is a meta-criticism of how the contemporary reader of nostalgic Southern writings consumed racist stereotypes.

NARROWING DOWN A TARGET TO THE *ATLANTIC* READERS

Chesnutt's target readers can be more specified by looking at the venues in which the author published many of his conjure stories. Houghton Mifflin unquestionably made the biggest contribution to the author in terms of circulating his stories among the public: It published both the *Atlantic Monthly,* whose issues included some of the conjure stories, and *The Conjure Woman*, a collection of the previously published and newly written ones. And both the magazine and the publisher were deeply involved in the trend of regionalist writings and in shaping the contemporary readership's literary taste. From here, I examine how Chesnutt's conjure stories specifically imply and target the actual reader of the magazine. To do so, it is necessary to have insights into the magazine and the publisher in the late nineteenth century.

When Chesnutt was publishing his stories in the *Atlantic Monthly*, the magazine was rather politically conservative. As Nancy Glazener writes: "Like most of its kindred magazines, [the *Atlantic Monthly*] registered a gradual disenchantment with Reconstruction; participated in the subsequent redemption of the white South; . . . At the end of the century, the *Atlantic* group magazines were suffused with imperialist zeal and sympathy for the goals and problems of 'Anglo-

Saxons'" (5-6). This political shift was probably caused by its editor. During the 1880s and 1890s, the magazine was led by Thomas Hailey Aldrich, William Dean Howell's successive editor. After he became the chief editor, the magazine took a different path from Howell's. Ellery Sedgwick writes: "Under Aldrich's editorship, there was a further narrowing of the magazine's focus to the more purely belletristic, increased separation between the life of the mind and the political life of the nation, and growing resistance to aesthetic and social change" (162). It is also worth mentioning that Aldrich was known for his bourgeois tastes which, secluded him from racial minorities. According to Sedgwick, "during the eighties Aldrich grew progressively more bigoted and misanthropic toward those outside the pale of his own social circle," and "Aldrich's only political association was a lifetime membership in the Immigration Restriction League" (338). Under Aldrich's influence, it was inevitable the magazine would be politically disinterested and even conservative.

We can see how Aldrich's position as the chief editor influenced the magazine by looking at some of the content during the period. Rebecca Harding Davis published an essay titled "Some Testimony in the Case" in July 1885—two years before "The Goophered Grapevine" appeared in the same magazine. [12] Davis was a journalist from Pennsylvania who was known as one of the prominent female contributors to the *Atlantic*. The essay mostly consists of interviews with ordinary

[12] According to Sharon M. Harris, while Davis was a critic of slavery for sure, she had a liking for the old South. As Harris writes, "Even when calling for African American rights, Davis used racialized rhetoric and at the turn of the twentieth century revealed xenophobic attitudes" (315).

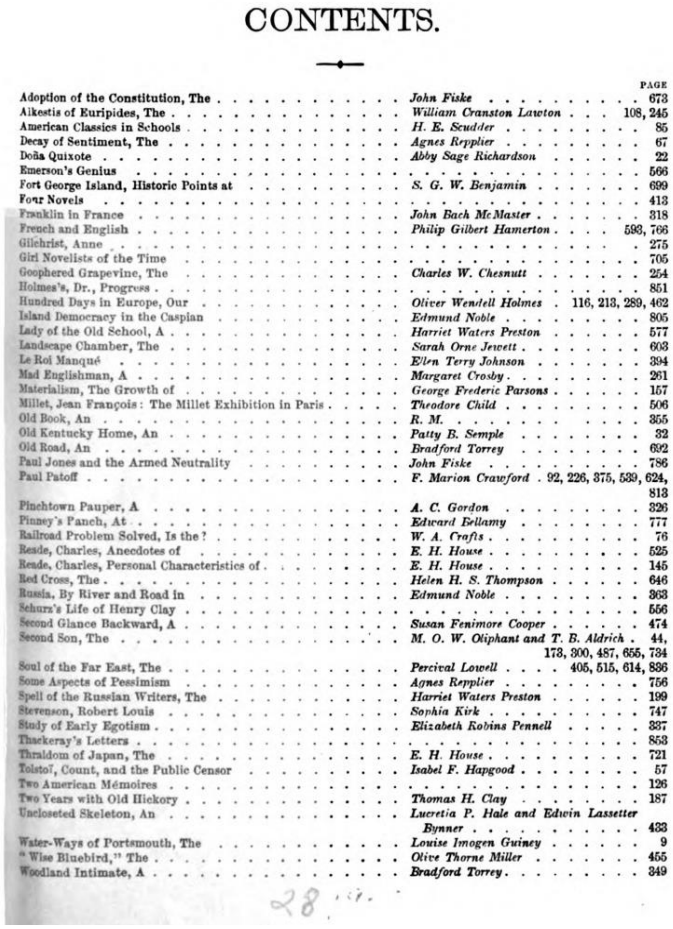
citizens who were asked to talk about "the case" about freed African Americans. Davis's intention was to provide "this conflicting testimony from actual witnesses in the case" to Southerners (603). While the author seemingly remains neutral when presenting statements from those people, some of the opinions expressed by them are apparently conservative. For instance, an Alabama planter responds to a question about African American laborers as follows: "Laziness is inborn in him; it is part of his flesh and his blood" (608). In another interview, "a Northerner plantation owner in one of the Gulf States" speaks as follows: "I was no believer in slavery. . . . But I am totally discouraged. An industrious negro always has a load of lazy kinfolk to carry, and he carries without grumbling" (606). Some of the other interviewees similarly argue that freed African Americans are still lazy and unproductive. Disguised as testimony of actual white Americans of the time, the article reintroduces the stereotypical image of African American slaves as lazy workers.

Chesnutt's "The Goophered Grapevine" appeared in the *Atlantic*'s August issue in 1887. The issue also includes an essay titled "The Growth of Materialism." As the title suggests, the author criticizes the symptoms of materialism that could be seen everywhere on the eve of full-blown modernity. For instance, the author touches on how modern society urges people to show off and look better than others. To describe the hideousness of such a desire, the author writes:

> Everywhere are seen persons who, possessing ample means for natural and wholesome life, throw away their opportunities of comfort and

> happiness, and exist in a sort of haze of pretenses, for no better object than the gratification of a vanity as purely as animal as that which prompts the Central African savage to plaster his hair with mud and to smear his body with bullock-fat. (Parsons 165)

The seemingly progressive commentary about the evil of modernity reveals the author's racial bigotry when he links people's vanity to the African culture. While the author criticizes the modern form of vanity, his attitude itself represents modernity differently; he sees a clear hierarchy of developed and primitive cultures. It is a striking and meaningful coincidence that this essay and "The Goophered Grapevine," which illustrates the African American folk culture, appeared in the same issue. How did the audience interpret the short story after reading the essay which includes such racist language? It is even possible that the reader took "The Goophered Grapevine" for an illustration of "savage" and "animal" culture.



CONTENTS.

Fig.4: Table of Contents of the *Atlantic* issue.

The magazine's conservative politics and its decision to publish Chesnutt seem to be relevant. At first, the *Atlantic* was rather reluctant to publish regionalist stories due to its self-awareness of its elite status as a literary magazine. Nevertheless, it was obliged to accept this popular trend to remain commercially competitive with other magazines (Tirado-Gilligan 45-46). Brodhead offers insights into how the magazine saw localist writings as second-class literature: While

writers such as William Dean Howells and Henry James were already considered "greats" in the nineteenth century, stories of regionalist authors such as Sarah Orne Jewett "could only appear as the point-by-point converse of major writing." (165-166). The *Atlantic*'s decision to publish Chesnutt's first conjure story probably was to meet the demand of the market. The literary hierarchy within the magazine offers a great hint about how Chesnutt's stories were read. Chesnutt would easily fit into the regionalist group when judged against the literary standards of the magazine. His secondary status within the magazine could give the reader of the magazine a sense of superiority in two ways. The reader who understood the literary hierarchy within the magazine would simply consider Chesnutt's stories and the author secondary. Moreover, given the magazine's conservative politics, the reader might have seen his writing as an illustration of the black inferiority.[13]

The way the publisher promoted the author further illustrates how his writings were seen as providing racist entertainment. The magazine's view of Chesnutt as a regionalist writer was a persisting one. When *The Conjure Woman* was published by Houghton Mifflin in 1899, it compiled a pamphlet, which consists of excerpts from 13 different favorable reviews and puts them into categories such as "The Story Teller," "Humor," "Dialect," and "Literary Skill." [14] On its front cover is a photo of the author as if to make him better known.

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[13] To be clear, I am not discussing Chesnutt's racial identity. As mentioned, it was rather an unknown fact to his readers.

[14] The cover illustration of his first book *The Conjure Woman* further served to fix the author's image as such. The illustration features a stereotypically depicted African American man and two rabbits; it obviously shows that Houghton Muffling was still obsessed with the idea of selling

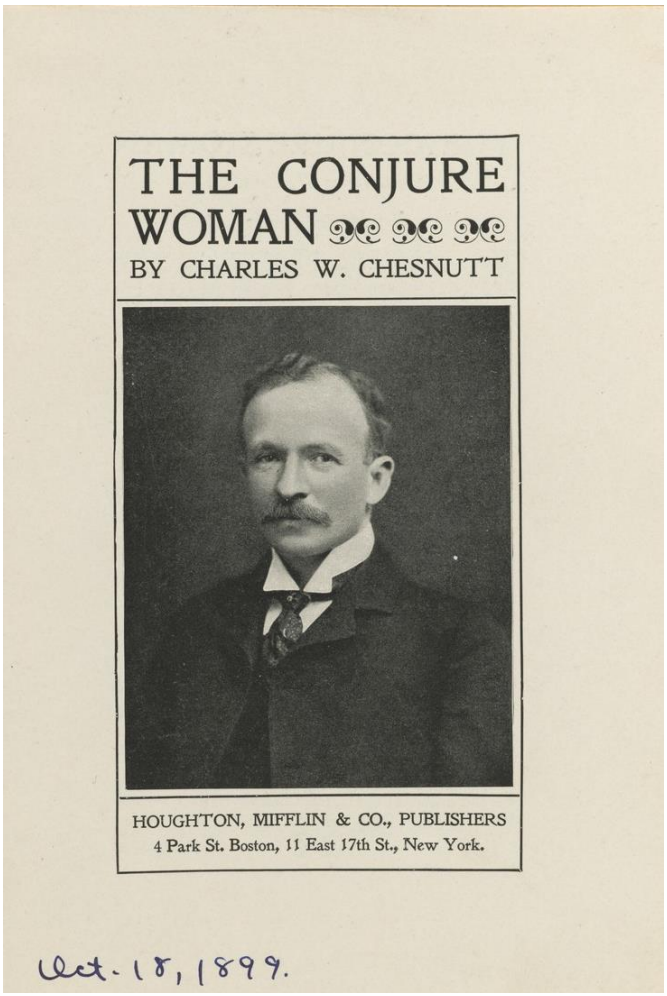

Fig. 5: Front cover of the promotional pamphlet.

As we can easily predict, the reviews collected in the brochure stress Chesnutt's literary status as Harris's successor. For instance, an excerpt from *The Outlook* says that "The humor is contagious and genial. The dialect is as soft and smooth as

---

Chesnutt's tales as if they were a spiritual successor of the Uncle Remus series. As to the pamphlet and advertisements of the book, Lucas Dietrich argues that the "fliers and advertisements for *The Conjure Woman* and the design of the book itself allowed the text to be read according to the norms of plantation fiction and even as a white-authored text" (168). Since the publisher obviously hoped to promote the author as a successor of Harris, it would be reasonable to highlight his whiteness instead of blackness. Although Chesnutt himself occasionally took advantage of his light complexion to keep his stenographic business going when he was young, he "ultimately rejected passing as a racial strategy and refused to disappear into the white community" (Tunc 678).

is Mr. Joel Chandler Harris's." In the "Dialect" section, the pamphlet refers to an excerpt from *Globe Democrat,* which reads as follows:

> Mr. Chesnutt has caught the negro dialect perfectly, and seems to have an intuitive understanding of the Ethiopian character, with its strange mixtures of American civilization, and barbaric instinct inherited from African ancestors in the not very remote past. Humor is the prevailing tone of these tales, but underneath is a note of weirdness and tragedy.

Like the other reviews, *Globe Democrat* notes the mixed humor and tragedy of the tales. I do not object to the review's argument that such a mixed tone is the conjure stories' key feature. Yet what I find particularly interesting and problematic in this review is how it represents the public desire to consume the exotic life of Southern slaves. Overall, the reviews collected in the flier encourage the reader to see the stories as rich sources of the African American culture and humor, not as ironic criticism of racism.[15] Did the publisher at least consider including an "Irony" section instead of the "Humor" one? Certainly not.

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[15] However, if we look outside this promotional flier, we are able to find proof of how Chesnutt's conjure stories succeeded in offering the reader an opportunity of having reflexive moments which could lead them to be aware of the racial biases. Consider this review from the *Philadelphia City and State*. It is relatively longer than many of the contemporary reviews. Nevertheless, its close reading of Julius's character seems to be precise and is worth mentioning: "The individuality of Uncle Julius is well developed. One can see the old darkey spinning his yarns, while he basks in the sun, with a seriousness which leaves doubt in one's mind whether belief in his own story inspires it or shrewdness as to its effect upon his audience." The quoted passage seems to capture well the subtlety in Julius's character. As the reviewer writes, the tales of Julius often make the reader wonder whether he is merely superstitious or putting on a performance to gain benefits from his master. This complexity is the key to Chesnutt's strategy. On one hand, if the reader simply dismisses Julius's tales as merely superstitious or manipulative, the reader will miss the tragic feeling that inevitably arises from the narratives about the realities of slavery. On the other hand, to

In sum, the reader who would subscribe to the *Atlantic Monthly* and/or buy *The Conjure Woman* published by Houghton Mifflin would be accustomed to the magazine's conservative politics and enjoy Chesnutt's regionalist stories as a less-serious kind of literature. Now, let us explore how Chesnutt's stories imply and address such actual readers. To do so, it is important to look into John and Annie, the two white listeners of Uncle Julius's tales.

One can easily recognize the analogous relationship between the way the couple listens to Uncle Julius and the way the actual reader reads Chesnutt. Indeed, these two characters function as the actual reader's doubles. Yet they are characterized and react to Uncle Julius's tales differently. While John is always critical about the supernatural elements that Julius embeds in his tales and suspects that there might be an ulterior motive, Annie is the one who is often moved by Julius's tales, which seem to sentimentally appeal to her. It is obvious that Chesnutt portrays the husband and wife as stereotypically rational and sentimental, the traits that conform to the traditional gender norms. John F. Callahan writes: "John and his wife, Annie, represent different facets of human personality. . . . Their responses suggest a tension between . . . head and heart, will and sympathy" (40). Also, as to Annie's character, Eric Selinger rightly claims that "[Annie] seems, in fact, to have undergone the sort of emotional education we would

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ignorantly buy into Julius's tales is to ignore the shrewdness of Julius, who attempts to trick his white masters. The subtle representation of Julius's motive enables Chesnutt to present the tales as both satires which aim to trick the reader and compelling stories about slavery filled with humor and pathos. The term "its effect upon his audience" is also adequate to describe Chesnutt's fiction, for the author's goal is to "conjure" on his reader.

expect from a reader of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, or of other anti-slavery works equally concerned with a sentimental attack on the institution" (672). In fact, it seems that her sentimentality makes her an easy target for Julius to appeal to. For instance, in "Sis' Becky's Pickaninny," after listening to a tale about a slave child and mother, who were separated but finally united with help of the conjure woman, John and Annie respond to it as follows:

> "Yes," I replied, "especially the humming-bird episode, and the mocking-bird digression, to say nothing of the doings of the hornet and the sparrow."
>
> "Oh, well, I don't care," she rejoined, with delightful animation; "those are mere ornamental details and not at all essential. The story is true to nature, and might have happened half a hundred times, and no doubt did happen, in those horrid days before the war." ("Sis' Becky's Pickaninny" 110)

The story about the separation of the parent and child should certainly appeal to Annie's sentimentality. [16] As Stepto and Greeson note, it is possible that Julius tells the story about the strong bond between the mother and child in order to appeal to Annie, who might have suffered from a miscarriage or other childbirth-related problems (102). And it turns out that Julius's plan has worked well. At the end of the story, John finds a rabbit's foot, which Julius believes could have prevented the mother and child from being separated in the first place, in Annie's room. Annie's

[16] This story was exclusively written for *The Conjure Woman*.

rather sympathetic and sentimental reaction to Julius can be interpreted as a foil to John's masculine, pragmatic attitude.

I argue that this gendered division between the two characters represents the male and female readerships of the *Atlantic Monthly*. The magazine targeted both the male and female audiences as its potential customers, but in different ways. As we have seen, the *Atlantic Monthly* catered to the public's demand for regionalist writings while trying to sustain its status as a prestigious magazine for highbrow literature. The *Atlantic* further stressed the hierarchy of the two different genres by gendering them. Anne E. Boyd discusses how the *Atlantic* sold realist and regionalist stories to its male and female audiences respectively. As Boyd writes, "It was essentially these two groups—scholarly, elite men and the general (female) reader—that the *Atlantic* tried, in a delicate balancing act, to please over the years," and the magazine published sentimental stories to attract female readers (17). The *Atlantic* also put male and female authors in a hierarchy to stress the superiority of the former group. Compared to male authors of realism, female authors entered the circle of the *Atlantic Monthly* by writing local color stories only to achieve limited literary success (Boyd 17). Boyd's insights suggest how the gender bias in its editorship might have shaped the reader's literary judgment. Even though Chesnutt was a male author, his reputation as a regionalist writer could feminize his position within the magazine. How could its male elite readers pay homage to Chesnutt, whose writings would be classified as "feminine" in the magazine? On the other hand, its female readers would be more likely to view

Chesnutt's stories in a favorable light. The contrasting attitudes of John and Annie toward Julius's tales respectively represent the different readerships of the magazine.

Nevertheless, the gendered hierarchy seen between John and Annie is not simply emulating that of the *Atlantic Monthly*. Rather, the conjure stories often ironize such a hierarchical, gendered relationship. First of all, it is often Annie, not John, who understands the moral that Julius's tale conveys. Recall that Annie is able to recognize how "The story is true to nature, and might have happened half a hundred times, and no doubt did happen, in those horrid days before the war" in "Sis' Becky's Pickaninny." Annie's observation penetrates into the true meaning of Julius's tale while John is snobbishly critical about the "mere ornamental details." The contemporary reader must have known that the word "nature" occupied an important place in literature of realism. Howells wrote in *Criticisms and Fiction* in 1892: "This was perhaps because the imagination, from having been fed mostly upon gross unrealities, always responds readily to fantastic appeals. . . . Now we begin to feel that human nature is quite enough, and that the best an author can do is to show it as it is" (176-177). Annie's reaction implies that human nature can be shown even by a fantastical story and challenges the literary standards of Chesnutt's time.

"Po' Sandy," which narrates a tragic story of a slave couple, offers a striking contrast between the ways John and Annie react to Julius's tale.[17] Tenie and Sandy are forced to separate because his master decided to lend him to his uncle. To stay together, Tenie, who has been hiding her identity as a conjure woman, casts a spell on Sandy and turns him into a tree so that he does not have to go anywhere. Unfortunately, the tree is found by his master, who is looking to build a new kitchen. Sandy is cut down and used as a building material for the kitchen. The kitchen, however, turns out to be of no use: people hear moaning and groaning whenever they enter it. The master breaks down the kitchen and uses the remaining lumber to build a school. Yet the same phenomenon continues. Meanwhile, Tennie keeps wandering around the schoolhouse and eventually loses her mind. Annie and John show contrasting reactions to this tragic tale:

> Annie had listened to this gruesome narrative with strained attention.
>
> "What a system it was," she exclaimed, when Julius had finished, "under which such things were possible!"
>
> "What things?" I asked, in amazement. "Are you seriously considering the possibility of a man's being turned into a tree?"
>
> "Oh, no," she replied quickly, "not that;" and then she murmured absently, and with a dim look in her fine eyes, "Poor Tenie!" ("Po' Sandy" 20-21)

[17] "Po' Sandy" was published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1888 and later included *in The Conjure Woman*.

John shows his typically critical attitude toward Annie, who is moved by the magical tale of a man being turned into a tree. Yet remarkable is Annie's insight into the moral of the tale. Annie correctly understands that it is the system of slavery that is responsible for the tragedy of the couple. She is not interested in whether the supernatural details are real or not. In this sense, Annie is not portrayed as a stereotypically sentimental woman.

There is another example of how Chesnutt defends Annie from gender biases. As mentioned, the ending of "Dave's Neckliss" concludes as Annie gives away their ham to Julius. While the reader may think that Annie has been persuaded by a sentimental tale as usual, Chesnutt does not explicitly describe how the couple reacts to it: "There was a short silence after the old man had finished his story, and then my wife began to talk to him about the weather, on which subject he was an authority. I went into the house. When I came out, half an hour later, I saw Julius disappearing down the lane, with a basket on his arm" ("Dave's Neckliss" 42). Obviously, it is the seriousness of the tale that makes the couple utterly silent after listening to it. This silence safeguards both Julius and Annie from John's criticism. The lack of fantastical elements is the key to understanding this silence. When listening to Julius's tale, John typically criticizes its absurd and unrealistic portrayal of events. Nevertheless, as to the tale of Dave, there is no way for John to doubt its authenticity since there are no conjure elements in it. The silence also leaves no room for John to ironically remark on Annie's feminine reaction as he usually does. Recall that in "Sis' Becky's Pickaninny," Annie is literally exclamatory

by saying "Poor Tenie!" This exclamatory remark can leave some room for the reader to imagine that she is a sentimental person who is easily moved. Yet the succinct description of the couple's reactions in "Dave's Neckliss" reveals little about why Annie decides to give away the ham to Julius. This strategy makes it difficult for the reader to apply the traditional gender norms to Annie.

While the stories mentioned above make Annie look less stereotypically feminine, John is often portrayed as stereotypically masculine and intellectual to represent the actual male readership. A story titled "The Gray Wolf's Ha'nt" correctly predicts the male reader's desire to look down on the female reader. "The Gray Wolf's Ha'nt" was exclusively written for *The Conjure Woman*. While almost every tale shows John's smugness in some way, the best example of John's smug character can be found in the opening of this story. Asked by Annie to read something to her, John pedantically quotes from Herbert Spencer, in which she has no interest. Seeing her disinterest, John reminds himself that he "had never been able to interest my wife in the study of philosophy, even when presented in the simplest and most lucid form" (If I am allowed to use a contemporary term to describe John's intellectual show-off, he is simply mansplaining to Annie) ("The Gray Wolf's Ha'nt" 80). Symbolically, the act of quoting Spencer, one of the most influential philosophers in the Western world of the time, signifies John's desire for achieving masculine, intellectual authority over Annie.[18] As Sedgwick writes, the

[18] The quote from Spencer may also signify criticism against scientific racism. As is known, Spencer's idea of social Darwinism promoted scientific racism within Western societies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The term "the survival of the fittest" has a dual implication: while it supports

Atlantic Monthly envisioned such cultural elites as its main readership (5). The Spencer quote in the story is another example of how John represents the average *Atlantic* male reader.

Compared to the other stories, "The Gray Wolf's Ha'nt" is less obvious as a social commentary. The story is about the revenge of a conjure man called Uncle Jube. His son falls in love with a woman called Mahaly, who is already in a relationship with another man. One day, his son gets into a fight with Dan, the woman's boyfriend. Dan accidentally kills him. To avenge his son, Uncle Jube tricks both Dan and Mahaly and turn them into a wolf and black cat. Believing that the black cat he sees is the witch who haunts him, Dan accidentally kills Mahaly. As Nancy Ann Gidden writes, "in 'The Gray Wolfs Ha'nt,' where the nature itself, not just a social system, is the focus, Chesnutt excludes [Annie] from the concluding frame. The ironic commentary of the narrator falls flat, and, thus, Julius' moral is less pungent" (408). Yet I suggest that the frame of this story is simply focused on presenting John as an intellectual naïf as the other stories do. The aforementioned Spencer quote talks about "the difficulty of dealing with transformations so many-sided as those which all existences have undergone" ("The Gray Wolf's Ha'nt" 80). Julius's tale is actually discussing the same topic by illustrating the black slaves who turn into different forms. Gidden writes that "After the son dies, the world of

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the idea that society can thrive by having the best members, it undermines those who are deemed less advanced. Needless to say, such an idea was easily appropriated by racist Americans. As William H. Jeynes writes: "Evolutionists and social Darwinists generally believed that Black people from Africa were the lowest form of human being and consequently aimed demeaning racist insults against those of African American ancestry." (542). In other words, Spencer's idea greatly helped stereotype African Americans and fix their social status.

the tale becomes increasingly complex, predominantly evil, and continuously shifting" (410). Julius is, whether consciously or unconsciously, engaging in an intellectual conversation with his master through the story. However, John would never imagine that there is a metaphysical quality to Julius's tales. Instead, he is only interested in finding Julius's ulterior motive as usual, and he discovers it in the form of "a bee-tree in the woods" which contains "the stores of honey" ("The Gray Wolf's Ha'nt" 90). The irony is that he only sees the surface of reality. John is always triumphant whenever he finds out that Julius fabricates a fantastical tale for material benefits. What John misses is how those material benefits are significant and valuable to Julius. Julius is a black person who has just been released from slavery. Therefore, he needs to secure the means for survival as much as possible. Let us also recall when John and Uncle Julius first meet in "The Goophered Grapevine." John is satisfied with the deal he made with Julius: "I believe, however, that the wages I paid him for his services as coachman, for I gave him employment in that capacity, were more than an equivalent for anything he lost by the sale of the vineyard" ("The Goophered Grapevine"14). However, John's seemingly liberal, progressive attitude does not amount to anything: By taking the grapevine away from Julius, he crushes the possibility of the ex-slave being an economically independent person. John's intellectual ability to read Spencer does not help him understand the situation the ex-slave is placed in. It is also worth mentioning that the story is placed in the penultimate position of *The Conjure Woman*. After reading the stories like "The Goophered Grapevine," "Po' Sandy," and

"Sis' Becky's Pickaninny," the reader should know the basic pattern and acknowledge John as a stock character. While the black characters keep shifting their forms and Annie betrays the female stereotype, John is permanently static.

In short, John is a mirror to the typical male reader of Chesnutt's stories. By appropriating the gender stereotypes fostered by the magazine, the stories make this strategy explicit. The actual reader would want to identify with John, a character who should resemble themselves in some respects: he is cultural and intelligent. However, John is in fact a poor reader who cannot read both fiction and reality well. In order to avoid being like John, the contemporary reader would have to unlearn the reading habit promoted by the *Atlantic Monthly*. Annie's presence offers guidance for the reader to reach this conclusion. This complicated disidentification process allows the reader to observe their own racial biases. Houston A. Baker's argument about how Chesnutt's use of dialect aims to transform a slave world is relative to this complex process of changing the reader's habit of consuming stereotypes:

> The *difference* is conjure. For conjure is a power of transformation that dissolves definition of "form" as fixed and comprehensible 'thing' to dissolve. . . . The fluidity of *The Conjure Woman*'s world, symbolized by such metamorphoses, is a function of the black narrator's mastery of form. . . . The power of Julius and Chesnutt resides in the change they work on their audiences. (45-46)

It is important to note that Baker stresses Julius's mastery of "form." In the same essay, Baker touches on the fact that Chesnutt's conjure tales were seen as belonging to the genre of oral dialect narratives cultivated by authors such as Harris and Page. Reappropriating this form to change the reader's perspective is exactly what Chesnutt's conjure stories aim to do.

CONCLUSION

This circuitous way of both educating and satirizing the white audience was probably necessitated by the circumstances at the time. As Raymond Hedin writes, "the dominant black voice of the period was Booker T. Washington's, and there was no market, as there had been in the abolitionist era, for overt expressions of black anger" (192). Chesnutt needed to camouflage his critical messages of anger as entertaining stories which the white audience would jump to. Rather than outwardly decry the audience, Chesnutt's conjure stories function as a rhetorical device that could allow them to be aware of their own biases and see how their judgment is clouded by racist stereotypes. This is made possible by representing the black and white characters in a seemingly stereotypical yet complex manner. The degree of specificity with which the stories envision their target readers is also the key to this satirical strategy. The actual reader of the time would know that they were also invited to the discussion of race and racism when they found themselves in John and Annie. The conjure tales were a commercial success, and this fact

means that the author was able to at least deliver his anti-racist message to many readers.

However, Chesnutt's literary career after the conjure tales shows how difficult it was for the black author to write an anti-racist piece. As I mentioned earlier, Uncle Julius was often seen as Uncle Remus's brother, and the anti-racist criticism he embodies was probably overlooked by some readers. To deliver his anti-racist message more clearly to his readers, Chesnutt wrote novels that are more realistic than the conjure tales. For instance, *The Marrow of Tradition*, which was published in 1901, is a politically charged novel about white supremacy and race riots. Nevertheless, the novel did not succeed commercially. It is imaginable that the contemporary reader who was expecting more conjure tales was baffled at the political message of the novel. Yet, when his irony—the source of his rhetorical conjuring—was lost on the reader who only saw Julius as a stereotypical figure, what else could he do?

Chapter 3

Dorothy Parker's Anti-Racist Short Stories and the Dilemma of Humor

During her lifetime, Dorothy Parker was mostly known for her humorous yet sardonic writings including poetry, prose, and reviews. She wrote for some of the popular magazines of the time including *Vanity Fair*, the *Smart Set*, *Vogue*, and the *New Yorker*. During the 1920s, the number of poems and free verses she published amounted to nearly three hundred, implying the high popularity the author enjoyed (Silverstein 62). Nevertheless, as opposed to her public image as a popular writer, she involved herself in politically progressive causes. A less known fact is that she was dedicated to fighting against racism. She designated that her copyrights and loyalties should be passed to Martin Luther King Jr. and to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People upon his death. As early as the late 1930s, Parker "railed against poverty and unemployment, the segregation of blacks in the United States, and the glowing clamor of anti-Semitism in Germany" (Barranger 9). Also, as a drama critic, Parker complained about limited opportunities for black actors who often had to play caricatural roles on the stage in 1921 (Fox 285). As these biographical facts show, Parker's personal life was tinged with her progressive anti-racist politics. Nevertheless, with a few exceptions, Parker seldom publicly expressed her sympathy toward African Americans or criticized racism in her writing. As a result, she was largely remembered as a humorous writer. The obituary for Parker which was published in the *New York Times* in 1967 calls her a "Sentimentalist at Heart" who "was . . . at bottom a disillusioned

romantic, all the fiercer because the world spun against her sentimental nature." In the public's imagination, Parker's image was frozen as a writer whose topics were always the battle of the sexes, the author herself, or a combination of both. Very few people including her friends recognized her as an anti-racist writer. [19]

This chapter's first and foremost purpose is to rightly give credit to the anti-racist commitment of Parker through her literary work. When doing so, it is important to specifically understand whom she hoped to educate about race issues: Parker's anti-racist satire specifically addressed her target readers: white middle-class subscribers of popular magazines such as the *New Yorker*. As Catherine Keyser writes, "Modern New York humor magazines like *Vanity Fair* and the *New Yorker* have been dubbed the 'smart magazines' by historian George H. Douglas. These publications targeted a middle-class audience and presumed that this readership longed for luxury and elite social status" (5). We shall soon see that her anti-racist stories address specific racial issues that would be relevant to such middle-class readers. However, writing in popular magazines would be a restrictive factor to the author. While she could reach many readers by publishing in such venues, it was not guaranteed that they would welcome her political messages. Moreover, her literary status as a female author in the popular magazine market would further restrict her political speech. Angela Weaver writes: "It isn't

[19] Lillian Hellman, the literary executor of Parker's work after her death, strongly opposed the idea of allowing the NAACP to own the rights to her work, saying: "but to have the kind of blind sentimentality about the NAACP, a group so conservative that even many blacks now don't have any respect for, is something else. She must have been drunk when she did it." (Meade 416).

surprising that Parker took her critique directly to the magazine market. . . . To be successful, female writers had to walk a fine line between expectations of femininity and the renunciation of strict gender roles that their status as paid writers implied" (26). Weaver's insight into how Parker tackled gender issues in the magazine market which was often misogynist is greatly relevant to my argument.[20] I suggest that she did the same with race. Indeed, even if she was not expected to be political about race in the popular magazines which were designed to entertain readers, she dared to do so. Her anti-racist stories seemingly resemble racist and misogynist contents published in the *New Yorker*. Yet such resemblances served to deliver her anti-racist messages from within the magazine to its readers.

This chapter examines the four stories that include African American characters: "Big Blonde" (1929), "Arrangement in Black and White" (1927), "Mrs. Hofstadter on Josephine Street" (1934), and "Clothe the Naked" (1938). These stories critique the ways in which wealthy white people molded their African American domestic workers into stereotypes and treated them as such for the sake of their comfort in the early twentieth century. Here, it is important to note that Parker herself was hiring black house servants (Pettit 74). Even if this fact makes her anti-racist stories look hypocritical to us, it serves as a reminder that hiring black domestic servants was one prevalent way for white people, particularly upper-

[20] Thomas Grant names Harold Ross, Robert Benchley, and James Thurber as responsible for making the magazine misogynist and presumes that "Perhaps the misogynist streak down the back of New Yorker humor was provoked, if only indirectly, by women's push for political empowerment that followed the passage of the nineteenth amendment in 1920" (158). Yet Grant differs from the pro-Parker critics mentioned in this chapter as he argues that Parker was "rather comfortably entrenched in the enemy camp" (158).

class ones, to interact with black people. Then, Parker's anti-racist stories can be seen as warnings against the middle-class reader who desired to join the upper class and to have the same luxury, for such a desire must require stereotyping and dehumanizing racial others.

It is important to note here that "Clothe the Naked" is rather an exception among these stories. It was published in *Scribner's Magazine* after "Arrangement in Black and White" and "Mrs. Hofstadter on Josephine Street" appeared in the *New Yorker*. While the *New Yorker* stories are satirical yet humorous, "Clothe the Naked" apparently refuses to be read as such. In fact, Parker attempted to publish the story in the *New Yorker* at first, but it was rejected. This fact suggests that Parker tried to intentionally ignore the norms of the magazine and take a more vocal stance about race. Reading these selected stories in this chapter shows how Parker's strategy for critiquing racism shifted from ironically yet humorously discussing it to straightforwardly decrying it.

Critical Overview of Dorothy Parker as a Satirist of Gender and Racial Relations

There are abundant criticisms that help establish Parker's status as a modern satirist who utilizes stereotypes for satirical purposes. Suzanne L. Bunkers rightly describes Parker's ability to satirize gender norms by appropriating stereotypical representations of men and women: "Her poems and short stories are not simply

'cute' or 'funny'; they embody Parker's use of stereotypical female characters to satirize, more bitterly than playfully, the limited roles available to American women during the 1920s and 1930s" (153). Bunker's argument reflects the trend of rediscovering Parker, who had been thought to be a middlebrow author, as a social critic. One of the goals of this chapter is to acknowledge that Parker's interest as a satirist is not limited to gender but includes race.

There are a few but significant criticisms that address how some of Parker's work illustrate race issues. Rhonda Pettit offers holistic insights into the racial stereotypes seen in Parker's stories such as "Mrs. Hofstadter on Josephine Street" and "Clothe the Naked." Pettit points out how Parker's racially stereotypical representations were possibly perceived as sentimental and offensive portrayals of African Americans even though the stories were intended as social criticisms. As she writes, "Parker presents an unflattering portrait of one race serving another, and touches on the importance of cultural identity in a way that prefigures the late-twentieth-century attention to multicultural issues. Yet by using a stereotype, she teeters uncomfortably in her efforts to explore racial issues" (71-72). Pettit's claim is important, for it points to the limitation of Parker's satire due to the use of racial stereotypes. Building on Pettit's great insights, I further explore what the racial representations in the selected stories actually signified by exploring the contextual materials such as illustrations and essays published in the *New Yorker*. Also, I interpret the racial stereotypes seen in the stories as helpful tools for satire and suggest that they do not necessarily signify the limitation Parker faced. Amelia

Simpson is also worth mentioning as she pays close attention to racial issues portrayed in "Big Blonde," which is typically discussed from a gender perspective: "The blackness in 'Big Blonde' brings race into the story of gender oppression, but the oblique approach leaves unexamined their interdependence and the consequent possibilities for negotiating positions of otherness" (114). Simpson gives credit to the story as a commentary on race relations while rightly acknowledging its limitation. Nevertheless, using "Big Blonde" as an introduction to the discussion of Parker's anti-racist satires, I intend to show how race is treated as a central topic in each story I selected.

READING "BIG BLONDE:" RACE IN A STORY OF GENDER

"Big Blonde" was published in the *Bookman* in 1929 and later included in *Laments for the Living*, which was published in 1930. The story was a huge literary success for the author, for it won the prize in O. Henry Memorial Prizes for the best short fiction published in magazines that year (Kinney, "Big Blonde" 763). To offer a brief but illuminative description, "Big Blonde" is very Parkeresque. The theme—a white woman's fragility and her secondary position in a male-dominant society—is repeated in many other stories of hers such as "A Telephone Call" (1930) and "The Waltz" (1933). In these stories, a woman is trapped in a situation where she has to be responsive to a man's requests, which are mentally and physically crucifying. Also, that the protagonist of "Big Blonde" attempts to commit suicide is reminiscent

of Parker's neurotic sense of humor. It can be best seen in "Enough Rope," (1926) in which the narrator humorously contemplates various ways to commit suicide to decide which is the most painless way. Indeed, "Big Blonde" is a classic Parker in the sense that it humorously yet pathetically portrays the average white woman of the time.

The "Big Blonde" of the story is called Hazel Morse. She used to work as a model in a wholesale dress establishment in her twenties. In her youth, she spent many evenings with many men. As the title suggests, Parker portrays Hazel in her youth as a complete trophy girl for men: She is a stereotypical blonde woman. Yet it is not only her physical features that attract men. Men are attracted to her because "She was a good sport. Men like a good sport" ("Big Blonde" 639). Her flirtatious period ends when Hazel, who is nearing thirty, meets and marries Herbie Morse. It is important to note how this marriage makes Hazel aware of the burden she has been carrying: "She had not realized how tired she was. It was a delight, a new game, a holiday, to give up being a sport. . . . If her mood was quiet, she did not talk. If tears came to her eyes, she let them fall" ("Big Blonde" 630). However, her husband Herbie is not happy about his wife's new habit of freely displaying her true feelings: "Crabbing again. All right, sit here and crab your head off. I'm going out" ("Big Blonde" 630). Dissatisfied with the marriage, Herbie starts drinking heavily and becomes gloomier. In turn, Hazel also starts relying on alcohol to be gay and get along with Herbie again, but only for a little while. During this unhappy period of their marriage, she meets Ed, a frequenter of Mrs. Martin's room, which is right

across from Hazel's. Hazel soon starts a romantic relationship with Ed, and the marriage came to an end. Ironically, this new relationship follows the same path; Ed certainly meets Hazel's material demands by buying her things, but not her emotional needs. As Ed would say, "I got worries of my own, and plenty. . . . What you got to do, you got to be a good sport and forget it" ("Big Blonde" 635). After the relationship with Ed is over, Charley fills in the gap, and then Sydney, and finally Art. While different men come and go, her alcoholism becomes worse. Killing herself as an option to get out of this situation comes to her as no surprise. She finally attempts to commit suicide by overdosing on veronal tablets. As this plot overview shows, the story is mainly concerned with the gender norms of the time. As Scott Ortolano rightly points out, "Hazel only gains her independence by adhering to patriarchal norms and successfully becoming a pleasing object" (234). Hazel's enforced role as a "sport" for men and her failed suicide attempt illustrate her as a victim of the sexist norms of the time: white women were only expected to "cheer up" and disallowed to act like human beings with emotions.

Hazel's attempt to commit suicide coincides with when the presence of Nettie, an African American maid who serves her, becomes significant. Nettie has two important roles to play in the story: to save Hazel's life and to bring situational ironies to the story. After finding her employer unconscious, Nettie rushes out of the room and goes to an African American elevator boy for help. Together, they decide to ask for help from a doctor who lives downstairs. After the doctor performed an emergency procedure, "For two days [Nettie] had done the ugly, incessant tasks in

the nursing of the unconscious, for two nights she had caught broken bits of sleep on the living-room couch" ("Big Blonde" 650). When Hazel comes back to consciousness, she has a conversation with her maid Nettie as follows:

> "Oh, I'm sorry, Nettie," She said. "You're a peach. I'm sorry I've given you so much trouble. I couldn't help it. I just got sunk. Didn't you ever feel like doing it? When everything looks just lousy to you?"
>
> "I wouldn't think o' no such thing," declared Nettie. "You got to cheer up. Tha's what you got to do. Everybody's got their troubles."
>
> "Yeah," said Mrs. Morse. "I know." ("Big Blonde" 650)

Here, Nettie unknowingly repeats what Hazel's boyfriends have said to her many times: "Cheer up." Nettie's motivation to say so can be interpreted in different ways that do not necessarily refute each other: She has told her employer to cheer up out of pure compassion; committing suicide is simply an unthinkable option for her; she cannot lose Hazel, one of her precious employers who offer her a job to survive on. Nettie's "cheer up" suggests that her livelihood insecurely depends on Hazel's mental condition. Hazel has to cheer up not only for her men but also for her maid.

The conclusion also delivers this kind of situational irony. Right after Hazel returns to consciousness, Nettie shows her a card from Art, which reads: "Hope you have lost that gloom. Cheer up and don’t take any rubber nickels" (Art does not know Hazel has tried to commit suicide) ("Big Blonde" 650). This card makes Hazel

wallow in misery again and leads her to rely on her old friend, alcohol. Hazel asks Nettie to bring in a bottle. The story concludes as follows:

> Mrs. Morse looked into the liquor and shuddered back from its odor. Maybe it would help. Maybe, when you had been knocked cold for a few days, your very first drink would give you a lift. Maybe whisky could be her friend again. She prayed without addressing a God, without knowing a God. Oh, please, please, let her be able to get drunk, please keep her always drunk.
>
> She lifted the glass.
>
> "Thanks Nettie," she said. "Here's mud in your eye."
>
> The maid giggled. "That's the way, Mis' Morse," she said. "You cheer up, now."
>
> "Yeah," said Mrs. Morse. "Sure." ("Big Blonde" 650)

The uncanny ambiguity in this ending suggests that this one drink will most likely save her only for a moment and then leave her in endless melancholy again. Ironically, it is Nettie who aids in drowning Hazel in alcohol. In fact, in one of the few other scenes where Nettie appears, it is implied that her role is to keep alcoholic drinks, which help Hazel sleep at night, in stock: "The colored maid was busy in the living room. 'Hey, Nettie,' Mrs. Morse called. "Be an angel, will you?" Run around to Jimmy's and get me a quart of Scotch" ("Big Blonde" 647). Indeed, Nettie is an angel who brings alcohol and a momentary relief that comes along with it. Nettie

innocently thinks that this one drink will cheer up her employer, not knowing that it might cause the same situation of life and death in which she will have to take on the ugly job of nursing her employer for days and nights again. When being ordered by the employer, Nettie must follow the order and bring more alcohol as long as she is her maid. She might even willingly do so since she thinks that alcohol will cheer Hazel up. While Hazel is trapped by her dominant boyfriends, Nettie is trapped by Hazel.

As opposed to the expectation of the reader who typically sees Parker as a writer who writes about white women and men, "Big Blonde" concludes with a white and black woman. The story portrays a white middle-class woman who is subjugated to men in a stereotypical manner. In addition, it represents a stereotypical image of African American maids in the form of Nettie. Indeed, the two characters are stereotypical portrayals of how white middle-class women and black lower-class women were similarly subjugated to subsidiary positions in the male-centered society. Of course, stressing the similarities between the two results in slighting the substantial gap between them which arises from their racial and class differences. Simpson rightly notes the danger of such a literary move which ends up in conserving the oppressor-oppressed relationship: "The association of the condition of women with that of slaves in 'Big Blonde' unfolds virtually exclusively through the story of a white woman" (114). While "Big Blonde" may be failing at critically presenting the unfair nature of their relationship as an employer and employee, it still serves as a great introduction to the three other stories which

illustrate the same problem. In each of these stories, the white employer's responsibility for sustaining and reinforcing such an unfair and even exploitive employer-employee relationship is more ironically yet clearly shown.

PARKER'S ANTI-RACIST STORIES IN THE *NEW YORKER*

Before and after "Big Blonde," Parker published two anti-racist stories in the *New Yorker*, whose readers constituted her readership. Parker contributed many writings such as reviews and short stories to the *New Yorker* magazine as one of its main editors. Her contribution to the magazine was significant. When *Laments for the Living* was published, the *New Statesman*'s review wrote that "Miss Dorothy Parker belongs to the group of the story-writers and satirists who, in a surprisingly short period, made for the *New Yorker* a place entirely by itself among American weeklies" (218). It is worth noting that Parker is introduced as a satirist. The review sees the author as satirical in that she has "only one manner. It is that of ruthless exposure, applied to various heart-breaking examples of the New York social system" (218). Overall, the review implies that Parker's satires were viewed as limited to criticizing the "New York social system" in the narrowest sense. Given that Parker was mostly known for being a famous humorist of the middlebrow magazine, the reviewer's view of Parker is reasonable. Yet I argue that "Arrangement in Black and White" and "Mrs. Hofstadter on Josephine Street" were

intended to be social satires in a broader sense that considered the *New Yorker* reader as their target audience.

"Arrangement in Black and White" was first published in the *New Yorker* in 1927. The story takes place at a party for white upper-class persons which features a black singer as its highlight. The central character of the story is, however, not the black singer but a wealthy white woman, who claims to be liberal toward African Americans. Most of the story consists of the white woman's one-way speech to her conversation partners. The host and the singer can only give simple replies such as "Ah," "Yes," and "No" to this tiresome speaker. The white woman repeatedly stresses how she does not have "any feeling" about African American people in these conversations. Ironically, each time the woman claims that she is not racist, she unknowingly confirms her racist view toward African Americans. For instance, the woman innocently praises African Americans' musicalness by saying: "Isn't it marvelous, the way they all have music in them? ("Arrangement" 23). This is just one example of the racial biases the woman exhibits throughout the story. The story presents an interesting twist: The woman who stereotypes African Americans *is* a stereotype of the liberal white woman who belongs to the upper class. Quite the contrary, the black singer who is stereotyped by the woman is not portrayed as a stereotype as he remains silent throughout the story. Thus, the story obviously tells the reader that the target of the story is the white woman, not the black singer.

Although briefly, the story also brings the issue of the relationship between the white employer and the black domestic worker to the front as "Big Blonde" does.

The story implies that the white woman's husband is equally a racist person. She insists that she is more liberal toward African Americans than her husband, saying: "he comes from Virginia, and you know how they are" ("Arrangement" 22). The way she typifies Virginians as intolerant toward African Americans implies that she is from somewhere other than the Southern states. It seems that her belief in her own liberal view arises from her background. Nevertheless, she also tells her host that her husband is friendlier toward African Americans than most Southerners are. She says:

> But I must say for Burton, he's heaps broader-minded than lots of these Southerners. He's really awfully fond of colored people. Well, he says himself, he wouldn't have white servants. And you know, he had this old colored nurse, this regular old nigger mammy, and he just simply loves her. Why, every time he goes home, he goes out in the kitchen to see her. He does, really, to this day. He's always doing things for them—giving them clothes and I don't know what all. The only thing he says, he says he wouldn't sit down at the table with one for a million dollars . . . All he says is, he says he hasn't got a word to say against colored people as long as they keep their place. ("Arrangement" 22)

The female servant mentioned in this quote is apparently a reference to the common "mammy" stereotype. The white woman is not aware of the anachronism of calling a domestic worker a "mammy." The husband probably believes that calling

her a "mammy" is possibly the best way of acknowledging her as part of the family. But this is exactly the way antebellum slaveholders justified enslaving African Americans:

> Southern whites used the mammy figure to project the idea that the plantation was an extended family comprising happy slaves and whites. This myth helped to convince slaveholders themselves and outsiders that slavery was beneficial to society because it trained and sheltered blacks, who would revert to savagery without the civilizing influence of whites. (Tucker 185)

Thus, in this passage, the story clearly shows that this household is not much different from the average plantation in the Old South. The wife's "liberalness" toward African Americans cannot nullify this fact. The husband can be fond of African Americans and even give them clothes (interestingly, in "Clothe the Naked," the act of giving clothes is portrayed as the symbol of the white upper class's hypocrisy), but it is only when they play the given stereotypical roles such as the mammy. The presence of the female servant in this quote portrays how, to white upper-class persons like this couple, the racist stereotypes were the "place" African Americans should belong to. Those who read urban magazines like the *New Yorker* must have been able to detect that the couple is a political anachronism.

Parker's "Arrangement in Black and White" specifically targets the affluent white New Yorkers' patronage of Black arts. Given that the Harlem Renaissance was

already ripe in the 1920s, it is no wonder many white New Yorkers became fascinated with African American music. Rudolph Fisher, one of the prominent writers of the Harlem Renaissance, wrote about when he returned to Harlem after an interval of five years and found his favorite clubs being taken over by white people in his essay, "The Caucasian Storms Harlem," which was published in 1927: "'What a lot of fays!' I thought, as I noticed the number of white guests. . . . I suddenly became aware that, except for waiters and members of the orchestra, I was the only Negro in the place" (96). The magazine occasionally published miscellaneous writings about black entertainments in the city, which correspond to Fisher's account of white people's enthusiasm about black culture. "Tables for Two," which is included in the issue published on April 17, 1926, is a short essay about restaurants and clubs in New York. The author recalls when he went to see a show called "Creole Follies" as follows: "And honestly, I didn't like it very well. . . . it was because I am devoted to the genuine negro entertainment, and get no pleasure out of the white-washed versions, presenting self-conscious people trying to imitate our worse vaudevillians that are too often presented to you downtown" (44-45). The author's boastful statement of "being devoted to the genuine negro entertainment" hints at his sense of cultural superiority and sophistication. In a different issue of the magazine, there is an article which praises African Americans for their innate musical talent. This article is titled "Black Bottom." To describe African Americans' musicalness, the author writes as follows: "Four or five generations ago, the wild chants of grandfathers dancing before some hideous god along the Congo had put

rhythms in their blood. And a bitter voyage across the Atlantic . . . had driven melancholy into their souls" (36). These authors might have aimed to genuinely pay tribute to what they found to be blackness in African Americans' music. Nevertheless, these writings end up reproducing the stereotype of African Americans by naively claiming that there is some kind of genuine blackness found in their musical expressions. "Arrangement in Black and White" can be read as criticizing such naivete of praising blackness which found expressions in the *New Yorker*. Aesthetically praising and consuming African American culture does not necessarily assure that one is politically or personally progressive. As Fisher's observation suggests, the black entertainment industry in the 1920s in Harlem became more reliant on white consumers because of their love of African American culture. The black singer's muteness and the white woman's verbosity (the irony is that the white woman is louder than the singer is) represent how the black cultural movement which helped African Americans claim their place in society was in danger of being turned into mere entertainment for those members of the bourgeois class who could only see them as "singers."[21] The white lady in the story claims at the end of the story: "You know, so many colored people, you give them an inch, and they walk all over you. But [the singer] doesn't try any of that" ("Arrangement" 24). To the white lady, the singer is an ideal black entertainer who knows his place and does not try to be anything more than that. By mentioning some of the black

[21] The origin story of "Arrangement in Black and White" is worth mentioning. Before writing the story, Parker met Paul Robeson, an important singer and activist of the Harlem Renaissance, at a party. This encounter gave the author the germ for the story" (Kinney, *Dorothy Parker* 38). Knowing this, the singer's silence in the story becomes further ironic.

stereotypes such as "the mammy" and "the entertainer," the story criticizes the white upper class's desire to dominate and control black people.

However, "Arrangement in Black and White" is not faultless as a satire. By using the stereotypical image of women as verbose and silly to criticize racism, the story may misdirect the reader's critical attention to the female character, not to the issue of racism exhibited through her. This risk is perhaps a result of a trade-off between the author and chief editor Harold Ross. Marion Meade describes how Parker succeeded in publishing "Arrangement" in the magazine: "In 1927, Ross had made no objection to printing 'Arrangement in Black and White,' a story that dealt with racial prejudice, but the reason he had done so was not to his credit. He 'thought it was a scream,' Dorothy recalled. . . . she refused to acknowledge his policy that the magazine should not take political stands" (318). As this episode shows, Ross's personal views were largely conservative: "Talking with Ross in the thirties and forties of this century, one had to remember that if the topic was sex, or black people, or Jews, or Catholics, his attitudes and much of his information had been the ugly commonplaces of almost a hundred years before" (Gill 43).[22] Ross thought "Arrangement" was publishable in his magazine probably because it suited

[22] This is not to say that all of the magazine's contents reflected Ross's conservatism. The *New Yorker*'s political attitude was a mixed one. Judith Yaross Lee's *Defining New Yorker Humor* meticulously examines the materials published in the magazine that imply its political views in terms of race, gender, and class. Lee writes that "On issue of race and class the *New Yorker* was much less liberal, and somewhat less explicit [than issue of gender]. None of the writers of the Harlem Renaissance found their way into the *New Yorker*'s pages" (51). Lee also points out that "Talk of the Town," a regular column about miscellaneous topics, was dominated by conservative politics in 1925 (124). On the other hand, the magazine's liberal politics found expressions in cartoons that satirize racial prejudice (Lee 215).

his political views. The story must have seemed to him to be a misogynist one as Parker's other writings would.[23]

"Arrangement in Black and White" is not the only content in the magazine that potentially promoted misogynist humor. Cartoonist Reginald Marsh published an illustration that satirized the hypocrisy of white upper-class women similarly to "Arrangement." This illustration features a white woman and her black house servant. The luxuries of the room they are in all signify the employer's wealth. On a table between the two sits an Africanist wooden statue. The caption to this illustration reads: "Miranda, I thought you'd be interested in this. . . by your people, you know—such significant solidity. . . such a surface. . . how do you do it?"

[23] Emily Toth points out that "While her short stories do tend to be more sympathetic, her verbal barbs and her poems—most of them from the 1920s—were composed for a mostly male audience, the other members of the Algonquin Round Table" (138).

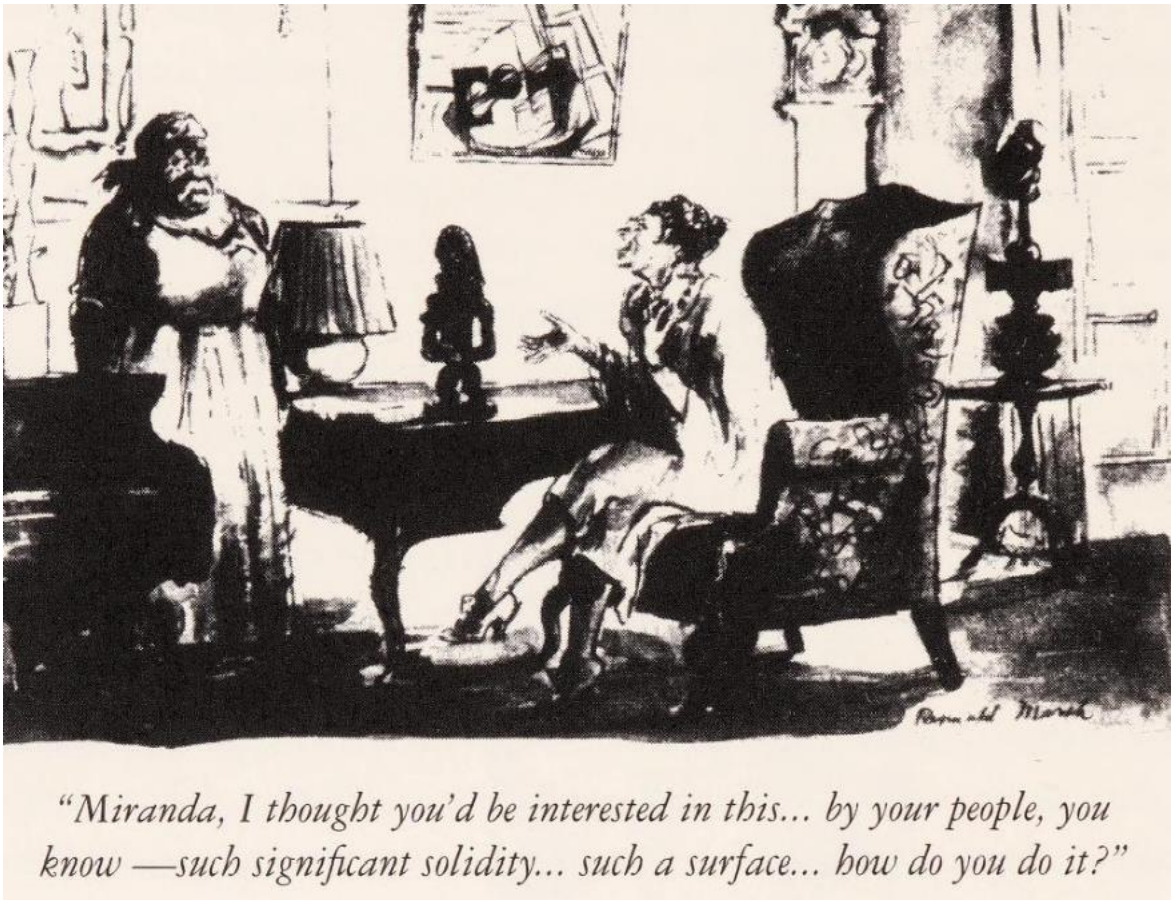

Fig.6: Reginald Marsh's caricature included in the *New Yorker* issue published on December 4, 1926.

The lady in this caricature innocently asks her maid how Africans and their descendants are able to produce such beautiful sculptures. The irony is that she is just a maid, not a sculptor: She has not done it. The caricature thus criticizes the upper class's xenophilia and ignorance.

Fig. 7: Peter Arno's caricature included in the *New Yorker* issue published on May 12, 1928.

Cited above is an illustration that was drawn by cartoonist Peter Arno for the *New Yorker* in 1928. In the center of the illustration stands a black maid in an awkward posture. The way her hair is portrayed—sticking out in different directions and tied with ribbons—reminds one of Topsy, a character from Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. In the story, Topsy is portrayed as an example of how a slave child in a depraved environment can reform herself and strive for good if she is loved by someone (and "someone" has to be white like Eva). Yet the Topsy in the caricature seems to be in a worse place than the original Topsy: She is still working

for white people in a position of servitude. In fact, the Topsy in the caricature is captivated as an object. The caption which reads "She's a perfect tr-r-easure" implies that the white woman innocently praises her maid for her aptitude for accomplishing house duties. Perhaps hiring a black girl—a virtuous act that approximates the lady to Eva—adds to her pride in her aristocratic patronage. Yet, by calling the black maid a "treasure," she unconsciously reveals the idea that she is a possession of hers, not an employee. Indeed, the caricature shows that African American domestic workers were seen as possessions of white people as slaves were during the antebellum era. In this sense, these caricatures critique the employer-employee relationship between the white upper-class person and the black domestic worker as "Arrangement" does.

Yet, more importantly, we notice that the same pattern repeats in the two illustrations and Parker's story: It is always a white woman who is mocked for unconscious racism and silliness. These caricatures do criticize racism, but they do so to criticize white women and reinforce sexism as well. In this respect, it is worth mentioning that in the 1920s, the *New Yorker* was targeting women as its main readers. As Lee writes, "Many [of its readers], apparently, were women. . . . By August of 1926, Ross considered the *New Yorker*'s female readership strong enough to suggest that the Advertising Department use it to help clients develop new markets" (49). Indeed, each issue of the *New Yorker* of this period is loaded with advertisements for feminine goods such as clothes and perfumes which feature female models. Regarding the commercial culture of the popular magazines of the

time, Simone Weil Davis makes an important observation: "To an extent, then, this commercial project is blanketed by an artificially universal, imposed whiteness, experienced by many Americans of color . . . as either displacement or insult" (4). Given that the *New Yorker*'s ads during its early period were disproportionately targeting female readers, they most likely portrayed only white women as agents of such structural racism. The coexistence of such ads and sexist contents in the same magazine would certainly help the reader visually associate the image of the white woman with ignorance and racism. If the *New Yorker* reader was deeply accustomed to consuming such sexist contents, "Arrangement in Black and White" could be misinterpreted as an attack on femininity, not on racism. Yet the next *New Yorker* story we examine avoids this failure by featuring a female narrator whose intellect is nothing like that of the female stereotype.

"Mrs. Hofstadter on Josephine Street" was published in the *New Yorker* in 1934. The story is based on Parker's personal experience but fictionalized.[24] The protagonist is a white woman who is a professional writer like Parker. Although her current name is not revealed, it is mentioned that her maiden name is "Kallikak," most likely a reference to the studies of the Kallikak family. She is married to a man from the South, whom she jokingly calls "the Colonel." The husband and wife lease a bungalow during the summer and look for a house servant to hire. As this opening suggests, the story is mainly concerned with the issue of hiring a house

[24] Parker was married to Alan Campbell, a young actor and screenwriter from Virginia. According to Meade, Parker affectionately referred to him as "the Colonel." The newly married couple leased a bungalow in Denver. During the first week, they hired and fired three servants, one of whom turned out to be an endless talker (228).

servant. At the office of the agency, the Colonel makes many requests about the new servant they are going to hire. First of all, they want a male servant, for they suffered from having female servants who were too chatty. The couple's request is best summarized by the following passage: "We asked only someone to stand between us and the telephone, someone to flick from the doorstep young gentlemen soliciting subscriptions to magazines, someone to keep, at other times and in so far as possible, his face shut" ("Mrs. Hofstadter" 20). To honor their requests, the agency proudly introduces Horace, who is known for his stellar service to Mrs. Hofstadter on Josephine Street. Thus, the couple seems to have finally found a perfect servant who meets their expectations. The Colonel's request quoted above is worth keeping in mind: Even in the early twentieth century, he still believes that he can have a black servant who is perfectly fit for a position of ultimate servitude and without a personality. Thus, at the beginning of the story, Parker exposes the Colonel's unconscious yet deep racism. Later in the story, the couple pays for not learning a lesson from the previous failures by having the most nightmarish servant they have ever had.

This story is unfolded with irony by a first-person narration of the Colonel's wife. When the couple is at the office to hire a new servant, it is the Colonel who does "the talking for our team" and solely decides to hire Horace ("Mrs. Hofstadter" 20). This first scene leaves the impression that the wife is rather reserved while the Colonel is responsible for making important decisions. The narrator then objectively observes the situation and ironizes the way she looks in the public eye:

> "My wife," said the Colonel—the lady and I waited for him to add, "the former Miss Kallikak"—"my wife must never be disturbed."
>
> "I see," the lady said. She sighed a little.
>
> "She writes," the Colonel said.
>
> "And pretty soon now," the lady and I inferred, "we must look around for someone to come in a couple of hours a week and teach her to read." ("Mrs. Hofstadter" 20).

Here, the Colonel and lady collaboratively activate the sexist norms. The Colonel does so by keeping his wife silent, and the lady by taking the silence and her maiden name for signs of her intellectual inferiority. Because the name evokes the image of the mentally handicapped woman who was infamously and wrongly identified by Henry H. Goddard's study as the origin of the "feeble-minded" and "criminal" side of the Kallikak family, the lady would not dream of the possibility that the narrator is actually a professional writer. The narrator's ironic thought shows that she has the intellect to observe the sexist norms that were prevalent and functioned to stereotype women as less intelligent in the early twentieth century. The irony is doubled by the fact that the narrator is an alter-ego of Parker, one of the most successful professional writers of the time. Many readers must have identified the keen witticism of Parker in the narrator. This is not to say that the narrator is completely exonerated from blame for her racism because of her intellect. As we shall soon see, she is also a recipient of the benefits of hiring a black house

servant. At the same time, it is the narrator who illustrates her own experience of being racist and turns it into an ironic cautionary tale.

It soon turns out that Horace, as opposed to the couple's request, is a wordy man. Yet his wordiness is to prove that he is the best servant the couple could ever have. One of the excellent qualities he claims he has as a servant is his non-blackness. He mentions that he has a daughter who almost looks like a white girl and a sister who never deals with African Americans in her hairdressing job. Horace also stresses how he "just doesn't mix up with [African Americans]" even if he does not "hold nothing against the race" ("Mrs. Hofstadter" 22). Horace also visually presents himself as a perfect servant. When Horace is asked if he has a white coat, he replies: "Has he got a white coat! Why, when you see Horace in that white coat of his, you're going to say, just like Mrs. Hofstadter on Josephine Street says, 'Horace,' you're going to say, 'I never seen anybody look any nicer'" ("Mrs. Hofstadter" 22). When he puts on the white coat, the narrator recalls Pullman dining cars without a pleasure, associating Horace with the black waiters. According to Lawrence Tye, George Pullman, the founder of the Pullman Company, hired the first black porter because "This new improved porter was an ex-slave who embodied servility more than humanity, an ever-obliging manservant with an ever-present smile who was there when a jacket needed dusting or a child tending or a beverage refreshing." Although the Pullman Company economically helped many African Americans to achieve middle-class status, it also promoted the stereotypical

view of the black race as eternally determined to serve the white one. Yet Horace is proud of presenting himself as such.

In reality, it was probably a requirement for domestic workers of color to show such a humbling and submissive attitude. Historically, the black house servant had a more important role than freeing the white employers from domestic duties: to signify their racial superiority. As Enobong Hannah Branch and Melissa E. Wooten write, "a more sinister secondary function was filled by her presence; the employers' racial superiority was reaffirmed by the nature of the work and her relationship to the worker." (184). The demand for submissive African American workers dates back to the days of slavery. In the antebellum South, for instance, the white woman—the symbol of racial purity, class, and beauty—was exempted from all the domestic duties, which were instead assigned to African American house slaves. (Aniagolu 94). This is not to say that the couple in "Mrs. Hofstadter" is portrayed like old Southern plantation owners. Yet, hiring a black house servant certainly approximates the couple to them. The irony is that Horace might have actually taken them for a Southern gentleman and lady. Horace attempts to gratify the Colonel by serving him in a traditionally Southern manner:

> "Now Horace is all ready to try and make you happy. Do you know what Horace is going to do for you, some of these days? . . . Well, he's just going to make you one of those mint juleps of his."

> The Colonel is from the old South. He left the room. ("Mrs. Hofstadter" 23)

Horace's idea to serve mint juleps to the Colonel is most likely triggered by his nickname "the Colonel." Pettit claims that these signifiers of the South link Horace and his work to slavery (70). As a matter of fact, the couple is not really a typical Southern gentleman and lady. Unlike the typical Southern belle of the nineteenth century, the narrator works as a professional writer and lives in New York with her husband. And the Colonel is supportive of her professional career. Yet, in the eyes of Horace, they are masters to serve and gratify. He demeans himself and his own race in order to meet the imaginary demand of the couple. Using these references to the South, the story shows how the couple has an indirect hand in vitalizing the old stereotype and not knowingly claims racial superiority. Overall, the story suggests that there is something inherently racist and dehumanizing in the relationship between the white employer and the house servant which was often seen in upper-class households in the early twentieth century.

The narrator ironically unfolds how the couple's plan for having the luxury of not having to do domestic duties totally backfires. When Horace first introduces himself to the couple, he tells them that "I am going to think of this as my home. This is the way I will think of it. I always try to do the right thing" ("Mrs. Hofstadter" 22). Although this is Horace's statement of committing the best possible service to the couple, it is fulfilled in an ironic way. While Horace is always ready to serve them and make them happy, his excessive talkativeness greatly annoys them:

Whenever they ask Horace for some help, his speech to assure its fulfillment continues forever. The reader can intuitively understand how dominating his speech is, for it typically amounts to around 10-15 sentences and literally takes over the narrative. Thus, Horace's presence becomes a disturbance rather than a helping hand, particularly to the narrator who wants to concentrate on her writing: "Horace was always there. . . I sat at my typewriter, and Horace stood across from it and spoke to me" ("Mrs. Hofstadter" 25). In short, Horace's presence ironically dominates the household as opposed to his position as an employed house servant. Being overwhelmed by Horace, the narrator ironically writes: "We had no thoughts, no spirits, no actions. We ceased to move from room to room, even from chair to chair. We stayed where we were, two vile dead things, slowly drowned in warmish, sweetish oil. There we were, for eternity, world without an end, with Horace" (163). This situation continues until the Colonel furiously expels Horace and regains his freedom. Remarkable is how the narrator ironically presents the Colonel and herself as objects to be laughed at. Typically, by hiring a house servant, one should be physically freer. Yet Horace turns the couple into the "two vile dead things" which are locked in the bungalow with no private time for themselves. They originally wanted a house servant with no personality. Now, it is the couple who are "two vile dead things" without any intellectual activities.[25] One may fairly argue that the

[25] Henri Bergson's theory of the comic precisely explains how the couple is a laughable object: "in every human form it sees the effort of a soul which is shaping matter, a soul which is infinitely supple and perpetually in motion, subject to no law of gravitation . . . Where matter thus succeeds in dulling the outward life of the soul, in petrifying its movements and thwarting its gracefulness, it achieves, at the expense of the body, an effect that is comic" (14). Bergson helps us see how a comic effect occurs when a living person acts like an inanimate object.

story tempts the reader to laugh at the black stereotype. Yet the narrator's irony suggests that the white employers are equally laughable objects.

It is also interesting to further explore whether Horace is completely stereotypical. In addition to presenting Horace as a stereotype, the story discloses some details about him. He has a twelve-year-old daughter to raise but is likely to be divorced (Horace complains: "I never could get on with her mother. . . I never could live with her mother more than fifteen minutes at a time" ("Mrs. Hofstadter" 22). This detail may invite the reader to ponder why Horace plays the stereotype. It is worth recalling that the couple has fired several maids and mentions it at the office; this implies how difficult it is to meet their expectations and easy it is to be fired by them. In order to support the livelihood of the daughter and himself, he must meet the expectations of the couple. Horace is also physically handicapped. When the narrator meets Horace for the first time, she notices: "He advanced and gave to each of us one of his hands. I received the left, the middle finger of which was missing, leaving in its stead a big, square gap" ("Mrs. Hofstadter" 21-22). This missing middle finger may make him unfit for more strenuous physical labor (it may also signify hardships Horace went through, although the way he lost it is left to the reader's imagination). These details imply the past and individuality of Horace, thus inviting the reader to doubt that he is just a stereotype.

Here, it is worth recalling that the two *New Yorker* stories we have examined associate the employment of domestic workers with the images of slavery and the Old South. What did these implications mean to the actual reader of the time?

Hiring a house servant must have been a matter of interest and even a goal of the *New Yorker* reader who aspired to join the upper class of the New York society. According to Danielle Taylor Phillips, "Between 1930 and 1940, more than 145,000 Black migrants entered New York City, including growing numbers of women from the West Indies. In 1930, the U. S. Department of Commerce census reported that of 79,221 Black women in the labor force, the largest proportion worked as domestic servants" (23). This number suggests that there was an emergence of new bourgeois people during this period who demanded more house servants. Many middle-class readers of the *New Yorker* were probably not financially allowed to have this luxury of physical freedom. Nevertheless, to be able to do so must have been a dream of theirs. The stories we have read can be seen as warnings against such readers. "Arrangement" and "Mrs. Hofstadter" certainly portray the ways of the upper-class people from the East which the reader would desire. Nevertheless, they do not portray them as desirable. No matter how the reader would aspire to be culturally sophisticated or politically progressive, hiring a black servant would revert them back to the time of slavery and approximate them to Southerners.

Nevertheless, Parker's irony in "Mrs. Hofstadter" was perhaps unstable when it appeared in the *New Yorker*. It is because of the magazine's ambiguous attitude concerning house servants. There is an interesting essay which talks about the same issue of house servants. The essay, "How We Solved the Servant Problem," was published in 1928 in the *New Yorker*. The author is Donald Ogden Stewart, a renowned member of the Algonquin Round Table and of the Hollywood Anti-Nazi

League. This essay humorously talks about how the employer must act as humbly as possible to hire and keep a house servant. The author argues that "there is hardly a household in New York today which has not suffered, at one time or another, from this complaint" since it is difficult to secure a house servant due to "the abolition of slavery and the consequent opening up of the west" (21). Stewart makes a hypothesis that it is because ex-African American servants, "under the influence of Mr. H. L. Mencken, have gone in for literature and are making a more than comfortable living" (21). Since the supply of house servants is small, the employer must make his home as comfortable as possible to keep one. For instance, if his servant is Japanese, the employer should "Learn a few Japanese phrases like 'Banzai'" to make the servant "feel that he is back in 'Nippon'" (21) ("Banzai" in Japanese means "hurray," which should never be applicable to any occasion in the employer-servant relationship). Likewise, the essay exaggeratedly introduces the ways in which the employer can flatter the servant. Stewart even claims that the employer must hold a ceremony to welcome the newly hired house servant. Yet Stewart ironically concludes the essay by writing: "The following Wednesday will be time enough to begin to prepare to get your next cook" (22). Given his political progressiveness exemplified by his commitment to anti-fascism, it may be that Stewart's essay mocks the upper class's excessive demand for servants. Nevertheless, due to the racial jokes, the essay can be interpreted as genuinely complaining about the short supply of domestic laborers that was caused by African Americans who chose literary careers to have better social positions. In fact, the

New Yorker never published any literary work of the Harlem Renaissance writers (Lee 51). The passage about foreign house servants can be also seen as racist as it obviously stereotypes them. The irony in this essay—if there is any—is undermined by these racist jokes. Furthermore, there is a more apparently racist essay about house servants that was published in the magazine. James Thurber, one of the most significant writers and cartoonists in the *New Yorker*, contributed a very brief piece of writing titled "Portent" to "Talk of the Town" on August 11, 1928. Thurber talks about a white lady and her black maid who did not come to work without notifying the employer about it. To the lady's question about why she did not show up, the black maid replies: "doan you 'member how it thundered an' lightened that day? Couldn't you tell by that, somebuddy had died?" (12). Thurber obviously mocks the black maid's supernatural belief. In addition, the short story is accompanied by the caricature that presumably portrays the black maid.

Felicia, a laundress, failed to show up one day at the apartment of a lady who, as a result, was considerably put out. Later she chided the servant for not advising her in advance when she was prevented from coming. "A friend ob mine died dat day!" exclaimed the maid. Her mistress replied that she could scarcely have known about that. This surprised the colored girl. "But," she said, "doan you 'member how it thundered an' lightened dat day? Couldn't you tell by dat, somebuddy had died?"

Fig.8: Caricature for "Portent" by James Thurber.

On one hand, Parker's "Mrs. Hofstadter" is a critical response to these racist jokes that flourished in the same magazine. On the other hand, the story could be seen as one of these house servant jokes since it employs humor and portrays Horace in a caricatural manner similarly to these essays.

Yet more symbolic of the story's unstableness as a satire is the fact that the original version which appeared in the *New Yorker* was later revised. In the original version, there is a part that reads as follows:

> Before Horace, I had fostered quondam hatreds—fragile, fragrant wood anemones, they seemed—for those always of my own color and mainly for those richer than I. Horace's design and status were no matter; black, white, or polka-dotted, cook or ambassador to the Court of St. James, I should have hated him. I had thought that obsessing hatred was a fine, tough emotion, conductive to sung deeds of violence. Well, it is not; hate enough; and your hate stuns you, dumbs you, renders you sick and silent. ("Mrs. Hofstadter" 25)

The original version has several passages in which the narrator expresses her hatred of the servant (she, in fact, expresses her hatred at the moment when they first meet). Pettit mentions these removed passages, claiming that Parker herself was possibly aware of the risk of backfiring (71). Yet the quote above can be interpreted as ironizing the narrator's class status and identity. Ultimately, Horace

irritates the narrator because he poses a threat to her independence as an individual. The narrator is a professional writer who can probably financially stand on her feet: She is a New Woman, not a Southern belle or a Kallikak. Therefore, she will hate anyone who undermines her sense of agency and independence regardless of who they are. It is also possible to say that she hates him simply because he symbolizes the servitude to someone, which Parker's writings often criticize. The narrator agrees to hire Horace because she wants to write—an "unfemale" act that forms the core of her identity as a modern independent woman. Nevertheless, hiring Horace ironically disables her to do so. But, of course, she has been responsible for trapping herself in this situation, for she also desires to hire a perfect servant. The narrator's misdirected anger and the consequent result ironically suggest that the professional woman of the early twentieth century would not be truly independent as long as she should desire a servant as a means for achieving it. On the other hand, to the reader who does not interpret this line in a brainy, critical manner as I have performed, it should simply look like Parker's expression of her personal hatred of the black servant.[26]

RETREAT FROM HUMOR

[26] Pettit also suggests that the name Horace Wrenn is a reference to the Latin satirist who greatly influenced Parker and Sir Christopher Wren, "whose life spanned the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, a period in which Horace's work greatly influenced British culture" (71). Naming the black house servant after her favorite satirist, Parker seems to suggest that Horace must be seen as different from mere racist caricatures. How many readers were actually able to detect this intellectual reference is not known.

Three years after "Mrs. Hofstadter," Parker published another story about racism. The story is titled "Clothe the Naked." Unlike her previous anti-racist satires, "Clothe the Naked" features an African American female domestic laborer as its main character. Big Lannie is a guardian of her daughter's orphaned son Raymond. The two live in poverty and need help from their neighbors to survive. Raymond's eye-blindness makes their life harder. It is Mrs. Ewing, a wealthy personage known for her contribution to many public projects in the town, who offers some help to Big Lannie. Big Lannie used to work for Mrs. Ewing before Raymond was born, and the employer decides to reemploy her. Still, their livelihood does not become much different. Raymond's biggest and only amusement is to walk to the end of the street outside while guiding himself by touching the fences and to talk about the adventure to Big Lannie. Nevertheless, the winter cold makes it physically impossible for Raymond to walk outside, for he does not have winter clothes to shelter himself. The pity for her grandson urges Big Lannie to do something exceptional: She begs her employer for her husband's old clothes. Mrs. Ewing responds to her employee's request with a package of her husband's clothes. Although the clothes given by Mrs. Ewing are rather large and unsuitably gorgeous for a poor black boy to wear outside, Lannie has never seen her grandson so happy when she brings the package to him. Wearing the new clothes, Big Lannie happily goes outside. However, he hears insulting laughter targeting him. The clothes are too big for him to move easily, and he falls many times (it is also implied that he is physically assaulted). The story ends when Big Lannie comes home and finds her

grandson covered in dust and bleeding. She gently holds him and takes Mr. Ewing's old coat off him. Overall, the story represents the racial and class divide that cannot be amended because of white hypocrisy.

To critique the racial and economic inequality, the story employs stereotypes of African Americans as the other stories discussed above do, but in a different manner. Pettit argues that the story "explores the intersection of gender, race, and capitalist economics, but does so through the use of Aunt Jemima and Sambo stereotypes" and that it "unfortunately helps to perpetuate them" (72, 137). However, I argue that the story does not necessarily present the racial stereotypes to perpetuate them. Big Lannie is portrayed as a hardworking servant who has served many white ladies and won acclaim from them. Raymond is, despite his physical handicap, a sunshine and laughs often. Indeed, Big Lannie's aptitude for serving white households and Raymond's innocent manner match the Aunt Jemima and Sambo stereotypes, but not completely. The story opens with introducing Big Lannie's career and the physical burden it arguably put on her: "She was slow because of her size, and because the big veins in her legs hurt her, and her back ached much of the time. She neither cursed her ills nor sought remedies for them" ("Clothe the Naked" 31). It is often the case that a "mammy" stereotype is portrayed as a plump woman. Parker adds irony to her use of the stereotype by portraying how the big body is the cause of her pains and illnesses. These symptoms do not only show how hard she has been working for her employers but also contradict the carefree image of the Aunt Jemima stereotype.

The story also shows how racist stereotypes are essentially dehumanizing and hindering social progress. In the story, there is the scene that highlights Big Lannie's deviation from the social norms and expectations imposed on the black lower class:

> Big Lannie did something she had never done before; she begged of her employer. She asked Mrs. Ewing to give her some of Mr. Ewing's old clothes for Raymond. She looked at the floor and mumbled so that Mrs. Ewing requested her to talk *up*. When Mrs. Ewing understood, she was, she said, surprised. She had, she said, a great, great many demands on her charity, and she would have supposed that Big Lannie, of all people, might have known that she did everything she could, and, in fact, a good deal more. ("Clothe the Naked" 34)

In this scene, she breaks out of the mold of the stereotype by doing something exceptional: asking for more than what she gets from her employer. Big Lannie's faltering tone clearly indicates that she knows she is doing something forbidden. The scene also reveals Mrs. Ewing's inattentiveness to her own employee. She might have spent a great deal of money on charity projects, but she is not aware that the amount of wages she gives to Big Lannie is not enough to even sustain the minimum standard of living. Mrs. Ewing's astonishment implies that begging for more is an act of taking advantage of her graciousness. Overall, this scene suggests that the employment relationship between the two women functions on the condition of Big Lannie knowing her place, playing a loyal Aunt Jemima. The tragic

ending represents the consequence of not keeping one's place in a racially divided society. That Raymond wears a full-dress coat of Mr. Ewing is also an important detail. Raymond has never experienced violence until he wears Mr. Ewing's old full-dress coat and goes outside. By having him wear the clothes that are far beyond his means and portraying the consequent violence, the story symbolically illustrates how the American society of Parker's time still strongly resisted African Americans' efforts to climb up the social ladder and sought to perpetuate the racist stereotypes for its own sake.

Unlike "Arrangement" and "Mrs. Hofstadter," "Clothe the Naked" was rejected by the *New Yorker*. It was the first time the magazine did not accept a submission from Parker, who had greatly contributed to its reputation, and chief editor Harold Ross started to suspect that the author was trying to sneak Red propaganda into his magazine (Meade 317-318). Parker also brought the story to *Harper's* only to meet the second rejection. The story was finally published in the *Scribner's Magazine* in 1938. The literary magazine was known for publishing literature, literary criticisms, and cultural and social studies (Bond). For "Clothe the Naked," Parker had to settle for a magazine that was much less prominent than the *New Yorker* and would cease publication a year later.

"Clothe the Naked" is thematically similar to "Arrangement in Black and White" and "Mrs. Hofstadter." What distinguishes "Clothe the Naked" from the *New Yorker* stories is the lack of comedy and laughter. "Clothe the Naked" highlights the upper-class lady's hypocrisy as "Arrangement in Black and White" does. As in

"Arrangement," Parker is focused on portraying the verbosity of Mrs. Ewing when she brags about her liberalness. However, Mrs. Ewing is not funny like the society lady from "Arrangement." The black characters in "Clothe the Naked" are certainly stereotypical in some respects. However, Big Lannie and Raymond are apparently not mere caricatures to be laughed at. While "Mrs. Hofstadter" ridicules the stereotypical image of the average African American servant by exaggerating it to its extremity, "Clothe the Naked" slips subtle yet poignant realism in when it portrays the black characters. In short, Parker leaves very little room to interpret "Clothe the Naked" as a joke as opposed to the two previous stories. Symbolic of this change of course is the way laughter is portrayed in "Clothe the Naked." Even though the previous stories are criticisms of racism, they are still entertaining to read: They encourage the reader to be anti-racist by laughing at the follies of the white characters. Nevertheless, a reader of satire often aims at the wrong targets. In "Clothe the Naked," it is laughter that symbolizes the harsh reality lower-class African Americans faced during the period. The invisible laughter at the climactic scene assaults Raymond in a full-dress coat, a figure which uncannily resembles a blackface actor in a minstrel show.

CONCLUSION

Reading Parker's anti-racist stories helps us understand the dilemma the author was facing. As a female humorist of middlebrow popular magazines, Parker was

expected to provide humorous sketches. Yet her inclination toward progressive politics conflicted with her readers' expectations. Writing humorous satires about race was the temporary solution she chose. Nevertheless, by using caricatures, her satires become prone to be interpreted as only mocking certain types of individuals, not the problem of racism. The *New Yorker*'s racist and misogynist contents would most likely further promote such an interpretation since Parker's anti-racist stories shared the key elements with them: stereotype and humor. As if to battle against such misguided laughter, "Clothe the Naked" is devoid of humor. Parker's satirical strategy's shift from using humorous stereotypes to using unfunny stereotypes suggests that anti-racist satire does not have to be funny. Without being funny, a satirist can still critique the systematic and personal discrimination supported by racist stereotypes. At the same time, this freedom comes with the risk of losing readers.

Chapter 4

Representation of the Black Public and Critique of Racial Liberalism in Langston Hughes's *Simple Speaks His Mind*

Langston Hughes established his reputation as a social poet in his early career. Yet, in his later career, what enabled the author to achieve further success was not his poetry but the series of comedic sketches. It is the "Jesse B. Semple" series. The series, which started in the *Chicago Defender* in the 1940s, features the main character called Simple and the narrator, who represented the author himself at first but later became an independent character called Boyd. The two characters represent certain *types* of African Americans—lower-class, less educated males who are always conscious of race matters and middle-class, educated ones who are rather integrationist. The two discuss many topical matters including art, politics, food, women, and, of course, race, and offer the reader great insights into what African Americans thought and felt in the mid-twentieth century. Yet, more importantly, the stories often include sharp criticism of racism in America. Leveraging the popularity of the stories among African American readers, Hughes published five Simple books: *Simple Speaks His Mind* (1950), *Simple Takes a Wife* (1953), *Simple Stakes a Claim* (1957), *The Best of Simple* (1961), and *Simple's Uncle Sam* (1965). The series which had originally been part of a black newspaper delivered its anti-racist message nationwide.

The popularity of the series also posed the problem which many African American writers faced: how to address white readers. The *Chicago Defender* was, without a doubt, a safe zone for Hughes as its black readers generally supported the author and liked to read the columns that criticized anti-black racism in the United States. Yet there was no guarantee that his new readers would welcome his critical messages about racism as his black readers did. In fact, when publishing *Simple Speaks His Mind*, the first Simple book, Hughes made many revisions to them. Were these revisions made in order to water down the sharp criticism? Or were they necessary to further sharpen the criticism?

I examine the Simple stories which were published during and after World War II and later collected in *Simple Speaks His Mind*. In the course of examining these stories, I also look into how the revisions made to them serve to better deliver the anti-racist criticism to the book's readers. By reading the stories and revisions, I argue that the book is designed to specifically critique racial liberalism and the official anti-racist policies during the Cold War era. Jodi Melamed defines racial liberalism as follows:

> [The United States] had to signify that racial domination (past and present) was not constitutive of liberal freedoms but in contradiction with them. Racial liberalism, the first official U.S. antiracism, achieved this through a framework that conceived of racism as prejudice and promised to release liberal freedoms from racial restrictions by

> extending equal opportunity, possessive individualism, and cultural citizenship to African Americans. (21)

Racial liberalism saw racism as a matter of "prejudice" that arose from one's biased view of African Americans, thus trivializing the racial issues. Melamed further writes that "Liberal antiracisms have both disconnected race from material conditions and linked antiracism to the expansion of U.S.-led global capitalism" (21). In short, racial liberalism during the Cold War period was only designed to promote *de jure* desegregation for the United States to dominate the world as the leading democratic country but not to end *de facto* segregation within. Similarly, Nikhil Pal Singh argues that racial liberalism undermined the democratic efforts made by African Americans:

> And few ponder the compelling question posed by Langston Hughes: "What happens to a dream deferred"? Unilateral decrees of American universalism did not only force us to dispose of questions of racial inequality permanently, but they also required us to misread the innovative, politically productive dynamic in which black publics have asserted their own racial particularity in the name of wider struggles for justice. (42)

Liberal antiracism undervalued the importance and presence of the black public and its efforts to improve the material conditions African Americans were forced to live in. Hughes's *Simple Speaks His Mind* was published in 1950. Examining some

of the stories collected in the book, I hope to show how they anticipated the rise of racial liberalism and stood for the black public's needs during the early period of the Cold War.

As I have been implying, *Simple Speaks His Mind* is a satire that was addressed from one public to another. The *Chicago Defender* and its readers, writers, and editors represented the black public. The newspaper contributed to the growth of the Simple series as it became popular and came to represent the black voice. Nancy Fraser discusses what she calls "subaltern counterpublics" that give voices to oppressed groups of people as opposed to the single public sphere: "members of subordinated social groups—women, workers, peoples of color, and gays and lesbians—have repeatedly found it advantageous to constitute alternative publics" (67). Equally important is the point that "[counterpublics] also function as bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed toward wider publics" (Fraser 68). The transition of the Simple series from the black newspaper to the wider audience matches Fraser's description of how a counterpublic functions as a launchpad for critically addressing a wider public.

The dialogical structure of the Simple stories is crucial to consider whenever discussing them. Generally, Simple represents the black public's needs in a straightforward way that often employs militant and provocative language while the narrator takes a moderate stance and values harmony with the white public. Through the narrator, the stories often represent the opinions which must have been widely shared by the white public. Thus, this dialogic structure encourages the

reader to participate in the conversation with Simple, having the narrator as their proxy. By having the two different voices, the stories also avoid being seen as mere propaganda and present a variety of opinions and positions within the black public to its white counterpart. I hope to illustrate how the two characters complete and balance one another when they are put together as the important pieces of Hughes's satire.

This chapter specifically examines four stories from *Simple Speaks His Mind*. These are titled "A Toast to Harlem," "Question Period," "When A Man Sees Red," and "High Bed." I picked these stories because they best use the presence of the black public and reappropriate some of the black stereotypes to make a counterargument against racial liberalism. "A Toast to Harlem" is, as obvious from the title, praise for Harlem as a public for African Americans. "Question Period" takes into consideration how the foreign policy based upon the Truman Doctrine is in contradiction to the ideal of American democracy. "When A Man Sees Red" mocks the anticommunist hysteria of the Cold War era, which equated African Americans with communists, and validates the struggles of the African American community. I suggest that "High Bed" anticipated how the anti-communist campaign would contradict itself when it was conjoined with anti-black racism. In each story, Hughes portrays Simple in a caricatural manner to represent some of the black stereotypes. These stereotypes imply how they were employed to maintain the status quo in which African Americans were tied to the lower strata of society during the Cold War era. At the same time, Simple's typical "race-man" attitude

often betrays the reader's expectation and connotes racial pride in a positive manner. We shall see how such a strategy must have effectively functioned to critique racial liberalism which undermined the black public and its people.

THE RECEPTION OF HUGHES AT MIDCENTURY AND THE SIMPLE STORIES

Since I examine the political significance of *Simple Speaks His Mind* when it was first published, it is helpful to look into how critics have evaluated the author's work written during the mid-twentieth century. There has been a debate over whether Hughes remained a radical author throughout his career. Some critics undervalue Hughes's radical work and see his whole career as a trajectory of an African American author who once was radical but gradually became moderate over time. Arnold Rampersad's two-volume biography about the author is influential in shaping such a view. The biography repeatedly stresses how the author gradually became less attached to the leftist causes over time. Daniel Wong-gu Kim points to "a persistent tendency among critics to dismiss and occlude his radical work" and "the common perception that Hughes's revolutionary work only belongs to youthful phase of Hughes's career" and identifies Rampersad's biography as a prominent example of the trend (419).

Yet there is another view from critics who argue for the presence of Hughes's radicalism throughout his career. As Gary Edward Holcomb states, "Starting in the late 1980s, however, scholars began reclaiming the writings of leftist modernist

period black authors [including Hughes], and by the late 1990s several significant studies had reassessed the Harlem Renaissance author's 1930s poetry" (423). In addition, some critics discover the radical side of Hughes in his later career. Kim argues that the "body of work from 1954-1960. . . reveals a black writer finding an immediate and growing renewal of revolutionary commitment and energy" (419). Similarly, Brian Dolinar argues that the author never cut ties with his career as a "social poet." Even when the McCarthy Committee summoned him to testify on his radical poetry, the author outwitted the committee by skillfully avoiding publicly announcing that he was no longer radical (47, 50). My analysis of *Simple Speaks* aligns with these recent views of Hughes as a radical author even in his later career. By reading *Simple Speaks*, I argue that the author was still committed to the black public during the time when racial liberalism made it difficult for African Americans to claim more democracy and criticize the white public.

Critics have already pointed to the satirical nature of the Simple stories. Darryl Dickson-Carr writes that "Hughes's 'Jesse B. Semple' stories are among the most notable, artistically successful examples of progressive debate on black issues in a satirical context to emerge from the 1940s and 1950s" (89). Dickson-Carr is correct to point out that Hughes's Simple series is contextual and specifically discusses the race issues of the 1940s and 1950s. Ali Brox stresses the importance of seeing the Simple series as a satire that utilizes its dialogical structure: "If satire requires an identifiable and stable target, then one could claim that Hughes's fluctuation between two satiric positions results in ineffective satire. I argue

against that assertion and claim that Hughes is actually a very effective satirist "(25). Indeed, the two characters' different positions are necessary to address the white public, the true target of Hughes's satire. Donna Akiba Sullivan Harper's *Not So Simple: The "Simple" Stories by Langston Hughes*, a detailed exploration into the (re)publication and revision history of the Simple stories, is also worth mentioning. Harper's close look into the communications between Hughes and the book publisher and the revisions made to the newspaper columns reveals how the author made them relevant not only to the black audience but also to the general public. At the same time, these revisions served to present Simple as a more complex, appealing character. Dickson-Carr's claim that the Simple series is highly contextual, Brox's analysis of the different roles assigned to the two characters, and Harper's exploration into the revisions made to the original stories are all relevant to my argument. While taking cues from these critics, my argument aims to contribute to the previous discussion of Hughes's satire by specifically examining how the stories and the revisions responded to the Cold War atmosphere and criticized the official anti-racist policies.

FROM THE BLACK PUBLIC TO THE WHITE PUBLIC

Hughes started writing a series of columns titled "Here to Yonder" in the *Chicago Defender* in 1942. To become one of the regular columnists in the *Chicago Defender* was a great pleasure for Hughes, who was an ardent reader of the newspaper when

he was growing up in Kansas. As the author wrote in the *Chicago Defender* in 1955: "Its flaming headlines and indignant editorials did a great deal to make me the 'race man' which I later became, as expressed in my own attitude and in my writing." In 1943, the newspaper gave him the opportunity to introduce a "race man" character, Jesse B. Semple, who would later become a national folk hero for black Americans.

When thinking about the development of the series and its main character Simple, one cannot dismiss how much contribution the *Chicago Defender* made to them. The *Chicago Defender* was one of the most prominent black papers that delivered the black public's opinions nationwide. The newspaper gained national prominence by publishing brutal stories of racism and attracting urban African Americans who moved from the South, and its circulation amounted to about 160,000 by 1945 (Botkin 454). The newspaper was the symbolic place where the discourse of African Americans bloomed. As Singh writes, by the 1930s, the black newspapers such as the *Chicago Defender* and the *Pittsburg Courier* saw their "golden age" (69). With great support from the black mass, the newspaper and its writers promoted racial progress for African Americans and criticized American democracy for not fulfilling its promise.

World War II was a huge catalyst for the black public to realize the need for a more vocal stance. And black literary venues played a key role in this realization. For instance, the war sparked the movement called Double-V Campaign which was aimed at achieving a double victory by defeating fascism and racism within and

without the United States. The campaign involved African American newspapers to have a better chance of success. For instance, *Pittsburg Courier* promoted the campaign to demand more publicity of black soldiers fighting in the war and abolishment of segregation within the troops (Boehm 24). Similarly, James Zeigler writes that "Their prominent circulation in key publications and institutions helped cultivate in the black public sphere an ethos of American nationalism in which civil rights priorities of African Americans were portrayed to be in accordance with US military objectives" (9). The sentiment that the United States had the two wars to win was also shared by the *Chicago Defender*. As the newspaper's editors stated during the war, "In pledging our allegiance to the flag and what it symbolizes we are not unmindful of the broken promises of the past. We ask that America give the Negro citizen the full measure of the democracy he is called upon to defend" (qtd. in Botkin 454). The war helped the black public and its literary institutions to be more aware of their responsibility for standing for fellow black Americans and critiquing the betrayed promise of American democracy when necessary.

While the black public sought to represent itself more vocally, the larger public came to realize that it needed more insights into African Americans. Yet its goal was to mold African Americans into a knowable object for its liberal democratic purposes. The popular demand for African American literature coincided with the rise of racial liberalism. The ideology sought black writings as textbooks for white liberal Americans to understand the psyche of the black race. As Melamed writes:

> First, race novel discourse secured the enduring trope of the damaged Black psyche, of African Americans as victims psychically wounded by racism. . . . Second, for racial liberals race novels testified to the Americanness of African Americans and their underlying cultural sameness with white Americans.
>
> Along with these normative models, African Americans were directed to internalize limits for acceptable antiracist politics that are referred to as the Cold War civil rights compromise. (33)

As Melamed argues, racial liberalism used black literature to perpetuate the stereotype of the tortured African American psyche and to undermine anti-racist politics. An interesting coincidence is that it was World War II that first propelled the need for black literature as proof of the sameness shared by white and black people. Stephanie Brown writes that "The need for interpretation [of black experiences], it was argued, received additional urgency from World War II, as victory over the Axis powers was deemed impossible if the United States, black and white, could not present a united front to the world" (19). The black and white publics sought black representations at the same time, but for different reasons: The former needed them to represent itself while the latter to manipulate the other. The most popular "textbook" about African Americans was probably Richard Wright's work: "Wright's work galvanized readers with a new genre, the gritty

social realist novel, which redefined African American literature and accordingly provided a template for 'authentic' work by black writers for the next twenty years" (Brown 8). And such a demand resulted in many publications of Bigger Thomas imitations, reproducing and circulating the stereotype.

Hughes's Simple series became more popular during this early period of the Cold War. In 1946, Hughes expressed his interest in the idea of publishing the Simple columns collected in a book to the editor of *the Chicago Defender* and began searching for publishers (Harper 97). In 1949, the author landed a publisher called Simon and Schuster, which was cooperative with the author in terms of materializing the first Simple book in an ideal form. By contracting with the well-respected publisher, Hughes gained the opportunity to spread his ideas and address a wider audience. Simple was a folk hero of a black newspaper. But now he was ready to become a national presence.[27] Yet publishing a Simple book during this period would mean that it could be seen as one of those African American textbook novels such as *Native Son.*[28]

I shall soon examine how the book could avoid being appropriated by the scheme of racial liberalism. Meanwhile, a brief look at the contemporary reviews of the book gives us a clue about how it remained true to and stood for the black public. *Virginia Kirkus Bulletin* writes: "Langston Hughes, a Harlemite himself, has

[27] After Simple appeared in a book form, the series came to be published in more periodicals including *New York Post* and the *Sunday Review* (Riley 68). The Simple series rekindled the public's interest in Hughes as an author through the 1940s, 50s, and 60s without a doubt.
[28] Hughes himself was critical of representing African Americans as the victim of society. As to Bigger Thomas, the author once wrote that "It would be a shame if that written word in its creative form were to consist largely of defeat and Death" (qtd. in Rampersad 14).

captured the idiom, the pattern of thinking, the personality of not only his character, 'Simple,' but many of his fellows" (qtd. in *Contemporary Reviews* 347). Some of the reviews like this one see the book as a textbook about African American culture and life, echoing the racial liberalist scheme. Yet the other reviews show how the life and culture exhibited in the book were so distinctively black that they were not easily assimilated into the stereotypical understanding of African Americans. *Milwaukee Journal*, for instance, writes that "What makes it different from other books by and about Negroes is that *Simple Speaks His Mind* was originally written for a Negro audience" (qtd. in *Contemporary Reviews* 347). Similarly, *Cincinnati Enquirer* writes: "These stories were published originally in the *Chicago Defender* and were meant for Negro readers. I found them embarrassing, interesting and sad, for the Negro viewpoint is exposed nakedly" (qtd. in Contemporary Reviews 348). *Sacramento Union* writes that "Written for a Negro paper and Negro readers, it is revealing far beyond the average book" (qtd. in Contemporary Reviews 360). It is interesting how these reviewers see the *Chicago Defender* and its audience as the source of the book's revealing nature. Worth noting are some of the words used to describe the book such as "embarrassing," "nakedly," and "revealing." These words imply how the reviewers, who could be expecting a book that would allow them to easily digest the black psyche and culture, were baffled at how frankly African Americans' opinions were portrayed. These reviews show how *Simple Speaks* vividly presented the black public's voice and avoided being read like a textbook that would be subject to the racial liberalist interpretation.

STEREOTYPE AS PRIDE: READING OF *SIMPLE SPEAKS HIS MIND*

From here, I examine the chosen stories from *Simple Speaks His Mind* to show how it resisted racial liberalist interpretations, represented the black public, and critiqued anti-black racism during the Cold War era. When doing so, it often portrays Simple in a stereotypical manner. This strategy may sound contradictory given that white liberals were looking for racial stereotypes they could easily apply to actual African Americans. Yet the book ironically utilizes stereotypes to avoid stereotyping Simple as such.

As the reader will soon find out, one stereotypical feature of Simple is his extreme race-consciousness.

> "Well, holler. Nobody is stopping you," I said. "But if Jackie were not good you would stop hollering. I bet you that."
>
> "I holler because I am a race man," said Simple.
>
> "In other words, you are cheering yourself then," I said.
>
> "And anybody connected with me! I want my race to hit home all the time." ("Matter for a Book" 59-60)

In the story, the two talk about the achievements of African American baseball player Jackie Robinson. The way the narrator calls Simple a "race man" is ironic, for the term traditionally referred to African American activists and intellectuals

who worked hard to promote social progress, not to a man like Simple who is hollering just because one of his fellow African Americans is a great baseball player.[29] However, such an ironic description of Simple as a "race man" serves to stress the importance of being proud of one's race in a casual way. Simple's unfounded confidence in himself seems to suggest that for African Americans to be aware and proud of their own racial identity, they do not need to be like intellectual leaders or civil rights activists. When racial liberalism downplayed the importance of racial politics, Simple's innocent way of being proud of himself and his race could be an antithesis to it.

In addition, the portrayal of Simple as a verbally loud person is possibly a reappropriation of the black stereotype which associates the minority group with loudness. Mark M. Smith notes that white southerners typically thought of African Americans as loud neighbors and that such stereotyping was possible simply because white people typically stayed inside air-conditioned houses or drove cars while black people often had to walk outside (79-80). In other words, it was the difference between the material conditions they lived in which fostered such a stereotype. The story seems to purposedly portray Simple in accordance with this stereotype. "Matter for a Book" associates a sense of pride with Simple's hollering praise of his own race, thus altering the meaning of the stereotype. In the following

[29] In 1945, St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton published a book called *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City*, in which they offer an analysis of the three African American archetypes that were born out of race consciousness. They write that "People try to draw a line between 'sincere Race Leaders' and those Race Men who 'are always clamoring everything for The Race, just for the glory of being known.'" (Drake and Carton 393). By the time Hughes published these Simple stories, the term "race man" already had a negative connotation.

sections, we are going to see how Hughes tackles the topics specific to the Cold War era and satirizes racial liberalism while reappropriating some of the black stereotypes.

"A Toast to Harlem" was originally published as "Simple and Harlem" in the *Chicago Defender* in 1946. The story portrays Harlem as an independent public for African Americans that safeguards them from white people's violence and intrusion. In addition, it shows Hughes's nuanced understanding of the black public's opinions represented by the two main characters, Simple and the narrator. Their opinions concerning the independence of the black public show how Hughes understood the oppressive nature of the white public.

Firstly, take a look at how Simple argues for a public that exists exclusively for black Americans. Simple speaks of Harlem as follows:

> "It's so full of Negroes," said Simple. "I feel like I got protection."
>
> "From what?"
>
> "From white folks," said Simple. "Furthermore, I like Harlem because it belongs to me." ("A Toast to Harlem" 39)

As seen above, the story depicts Harlem as a place where African Americans can have a safe, independent life. To further highlight the fact that Harlem is a black public, the story lets Simple talk about the life in Harlem in detail: In Harlem, they elect black leaders by their own vote, are running subway trains, and are fortunate to have some of the African American cultural greats such as Duke Ellington and

Lena Horne. The story vividly illustrates the ways of African American life that prospered in Harlem to confirm and praise the presence of the independent public.

The story then critically points out how building a black public came to be a necessity to African Americans. Simple talks about an encounter with a white woman he had when he lived in his hometown. The following passage was added to the book version:

> "I am sorry white folks is scared to come to Harlem, but I am scared to go around some of them. Why, for instant, in my home town once before I came North to live, I was walking down the street when a white woman jumped out of her door and said, 'Boy, get away from here because I am scared of you.'
>
> "I said, 'Why?'
>
> "She said, 'Because you are black.'
>
> "I said, 'Lady, I am scared of you because you are white.' ("A Toast to Harlem" 40)

The white woman's fear is apparently based on the long-standing myth of sexually threatening African American males. As Mattias Smångs writes, "the attribution of collective racial sexual danger to African American men served as one defensive perimeter around which southern white men sought to reassert their racial and gender status in the postbellum period" (619). To white men in the postbellum south, African American men's desire to assault white women symbolized their intrusion

into the sphere of the white public. This false stereotype was often invoked to rationalize lynching as a justifiable act. The short conversation between the white lady and Simple flips the imaginary narrative of sexually threatening black males: When there is an apparent risk of being lynched, no African American man will approach a white woman (this is also a point that I will revisit later). Rather, as Simple claims, he will stay in his public where there is protection from possible harm done by white people. Most importantly, "A Toast to Harlem" criticizes the premise of racial liberalism by humorously yet symbolically showing that racism is a physical threat, not just someone's bias. The addition shown above must have served to highlight this point more clearly for the actual reader in 1950.

The conversation continues to a point where the narrator and Simple have a significant disagreement. As mentioned in the quote above, while the white lady stereotypes African Americans as threatening, Simple stereotypes white people as such. The narrator points to the danger that lies in such a view:

> "You talk just like a Negro nationalist," I said.
>
> "What's that?"
>
> "Someone who wants Negroes to be on top."
>
> "When everybody else keeps me on the *bottom,* I don't see why I shouldn't want to be on top. I will, too, someday."
>
> "That's the spirit that causes wars," I said.

> "I would not mind a war if I could win it," said Simple. ("A Toast to Harlem" 41)

The humorous routine the series often employs is easy to spot in this scene. Simple sees things too simply, is conclusively proud of himself and his race, and imagines a situation like a race war that is far beyond reality. The comic conversation also highlights the different opinions and positions the two characters have. Although Simple does not exactly know what being a black nationalist would mean in the 1940s, he is apparently attracted to the idea. It must have been quite risky for Hughes to portray Simple's sympathizing attitude toward race-nationalist militancy, particularly when addressing the general reader. Yet the story dares to imply that there is such a faction within the black public.

The sketch moves on to validate, if not the idea of race wars itself, Simple's interest in race militancy as a means to protect his own public. To do so, Hughes added the following statement to the book version:

> "The white race drug me over here from Africa, slaved me, freed me, lynched me, starved me during the depression, Jim Crowed me during the war—then they come talking about they is scared of me! Which is why I am glad I have got one spot to call my own where I hold sway—Harlem. Harlem, where I can thumb my nose at the world!" ("A Toast to Harlem" 40)

The long record of enslavement, violence, segregation, and economic torture done to black people by white people from the colonial period to World War II validates Simple's fear of them and Harlem as a source of his pride. The painful history of African Americans would be so obvious that African American readers of the *Chicago Defender* needed not to be reminded of it. Nevertheless, the fact that this speech was added to the revised version eloquently speaks about how Hughes took the general reader into consideration. Also, the fluent, impressive speech emanating from the character, who is typically deemed a simpleton, would further complicate the reader's understanding of him. He is not simply carefree like the prevalent black stereotypes. He is clearly aware of how the socioeconomic situation surrounding him is a result of systemic racism. Similarly, Simple's triumphant attitude must have offered a new kind of representation of African Americans to the white reader who only knew the minority group through Bigger Thomas.

At the same time, the story stresses that it does not entirely tolerate Simple's extreme view. To do so, the story balances Simple's argument with the narrator's moderate political view. In both the original and the book versions, the narrator sharply checks on Simple's militant statements: "I refuse to argue with you anymore . . . What Harlem ought to hold out to the world from its windows is a friendly hand, not a belligerent attitude" ("Simple and Harlem" 14, "A Toast to Harlem" 40). The narrator's strong opposition against the idea of having a race war would make complete sense to and must have been shared by many readers of the time including black and white Americans. While it is often Simple who makes a

stinging, satirical point against the white public, the dialogical structure makes it possible to show how the black public is not monolithic but rather diverse in its opinions. In other words, the narrator functions for the reader as a cushion against Simple's radical view. Utilizing these two different voices, Hughes could simultaneously stand for the black public and seek a middle ground for the two publics.

"Question Period" was originally titled "Simple on Commentators" and published in the *Chicago Defender* in 1946, a year after the war ended. Simple talks to the narrator about when Joyce, his black girlfriend (and wife in the later series), took him to a town hall lecture to see a famous radio commentator speak on "The World Situation." Simple is not satisfied with what the commentator talked about because he seemed to be only concerned about foreign affairs and did not talk about domestic race issues such as lynching. During the question period after the lecture, Simple "told him that if Negroes' being mistreated right under his nose didn't stir his consciousness, then he must be unconscious" ("Question Period" 106). The comment Simple made caused a great disturbance in the audience and embarrassed Joyce, who just asked her partner to read a question she prepared.

The story is obviously a criticism of the American international policy that prioritized securing its position as the leading democratic country in the world over the African Americans' domestic struggles during the Cold War era. By being republished as a part of the book in 1950, the story's criticism gained a more

satirical edge.[30] After World War II ended, the United States began aiding European countries in efforts to make its presence prominent and to build bulwarks against communism in the region. In 1947, Secretary of State George C. Marshall made a speech at Harvard University, in which he explained the plan to reinforce economic support for some of the European countries which were struggling from poverty and hunger. Marshall stated: "It is logical that the United States should do whatever it is able to do to assist in the return of normal economic health in the world, without which there can be no political stability and no assured peace." Marshall's argument is apparently based upon the Truman Doctrine, in which Harry Truman, the Democratic president of the time, argued for the importance of supporting the Greece government to contain the Soviet Union and its communist allies. Racial liberalism was closely knitted into the United States' scheme of becoming a globally dominant power in the Cold War era. As Melamed writes: "Insofar as racial liberalism successfully managed internal racial dynamics for U.S. Cold War leadership, it became an organizing discourse of the U.S. state and society. Insofar as the United States became a hegemonic global power, racial liberalism came to structure its fields of global intervention" (21). In other words, the U.S. domestic democratic policies were at best pretenses to achieve globally dominant power.

[30] Hughes himself was indignant about the foreign policy of the United States. As Rampersad writes, "He had continued to attack racism and aspects of foreign policy he saw as ludicrous—such as government leaders giving away billions of dollars to foreign countries" (143-144).

As in "A Toast to Harlem," the author seems careful not to present the black public's opinions as monolithic. "Question Period" suggests that racial liberalism was so successful that it influenced some African Americans like Joyce and the narrator, who are part of the black middle class. Judging from the topic of the session, the audience members are largely white liberals. While Simple seems to be in a minority group of the audience, Joyce's political view should be in accordance with that of white liberals. The question Joyce has prepared clearly illustrates her view: "If the United Nations took over Trieste, would they also internationalize the suburbs or would the outskirts of town still belong to Yugoslavia, and if so, how far?" ("Question Period" 106). This question shows how Joyce is interested in the United States' role as an international leader whose goal is to spread the benefits of Americanness and democracy globally. As Singh writes, the United Nations symbolized one of the United States' democratic achievements on a global scale in the post-war era (136). Interesting is how Joyce's comment does not seem to be concerned about democracy at all; it simply sounds like a question of militaristic expansion. The question ironically exposes how racial liberalism on both the global and local scale was just an excuse for the United States to expand into other territories and capitalistically dominate them.

The two liberal black characters in this story, Joyce and the narrator, also serve to represent the opinion that the contemporary white reader could easily relate to. This is especially true for the narrator. In "Question Period," the narrator talks about the importance of having knowledge about international affairs:

"'What's wrong with that?' I asked. 'I think it was a good idea for Joyce to take you. You need an awareness of world affairs'" (125). Here, it is important to note that he originally represented Hughes himself. In the original version of "Question Period," when the narrator hears from Simple about the lecture, he says that "I've traveled quite a bit myself" (14). This remark is obviously a reference to Hughes himself, who had been to many countries including the Soviet Union and Japan by the time he started writing "Here to Yonder" columns. When Hughes collected stories for *Simple Speaks*, he made revisions to make the narrator into a character, thus distinguishing him from himself. In fact, the line quoted above from "Question Period" is deleted in the revised version as if to avoid confusion of the author with the character. By being disassociated from the author, who was known for his radical work and politics in the past, the narrator became a character to whom the reader could relate. Thus, the story emphasizes the commonality between the two black liberal characters and the reader. The narrator's opinion—"You need an awareness of world affairs"—is a common-sense idea any individual in these modern days could relate to.

Given that the narrator and Joyce shared the political opinion with the general public, would Simple be considered merely representing a minority opinion in the mid-twentieth century? That is not necessarily the case. A keen reader should be aware that Simple is not alone in arguing for ending racism within the United States before supporting European countries. W.E.B. Du Bois was one such person who shared Simple's view on domestic racism during the Cold War era. As

Manfred Berg writes, "the NAACP and other African American organizations made every effort to exploit World War II to improve the material condition and civil rights of the black community" (80-81). In the Cold War period, the situation was not much different to the black community. As portrayed in "Question Period," the United States' main concern was how to defend itself from the communist counterpart's military and ideological threats. Yet, to raise awareness of the other big threat within—anti-black racism—, W.E.B. Du Bois and the other coauthors submitted an appeal titled *Appeal to the World: A Statement on the Denial of Human Rights to Minorities in the Case of Citizens of Negro Descent in the United States of America and an Appeal to the United Nations for Redress* to the United Nations in 1947. The appeal sharply denounces racism within America by claiming that "it is not Russia that threatens the United States but Mississippi," pointing to the racist practices that were prevalent in the South (Du Bois 524). Thus, Simple in "Question Period" is a race man in the true sense of the term as he shares his wisdom with one of the greatest African American intellectuals. The traditional form of satire is apparent here: the clown who is seemingly a fool actually makes the smartest argument.

Examining the revisions made to this story helps show how the new version is designed to further represent the black public's interests and avoid antagonizing the white public. For instance, there is a minor yet significant revision in a passage in which Simple recalls the commentator's comment: "He hemmed and hawed and said what was happening in other countries stirred the consciousness of the world

more than what went on here at home and that *we* had to take a long view" ("Simple on Commentators" 14, italics mine). In the book version, "we" is replaced with "Negroes." The revised version more clearly shows that it is African Americans who had to carry a burden for much longer and were required to "take a long view" on the issue which needed an immediate solution. At the same time, another revision shows that the revised version does not intend to antagonize the white reader. The original version specifically identifies the commentator's ethnicity by having Simple say "I am sick and tired of white commentators" (14). But such identifiers of race are erased from the book version. This revision shows that the revised version's goal is not to antagonize white readers but to teach them about the black public's desperate needs.

"When A Man Sees Red" is a humorous yet satirical portrayal of the anti-communist hysteria and racism during the Cold War period. The original column, which is titled "Simple Sees Red," was published in the *Chicago Defender* in 1947. Hughes made revisions to this story as he did to the others. For instance, in the original version, when Simple points out that the plant he works for barely employs African Americans, he makes the following comment which is edited out in the revised version: "What is it you want in your plant, 100 percent Nordics like Hitler?" ("Simple Sees Red" 14). Hughes removed this line probably because the association of Nazism with Jim Crowism, which was a shared understanding within the black community, would be too provocative to the general public. As in "Question Period," it seems that Hughes decided to avoid unnecessary antagonism.

Nevertheless, I shall soon examine the newly added section which further reinforces the satirical edge of the story.

Firstly, the sketch illustrates how African Americans and communism were illogically associated with one another in the era of the anti-communist hysteria. Simple talks to the narrator about when his boss complained that he was recently acting like a "red," doing things like claiming a raise in wage. Simple recalls the conversation with his boss as follows:

> "[The boss] said, 'You talk like a red.'
>
> "I said, 'What do you mean, red?'
>
> "He said, 'You know what I mean—red, communist. After all this country has done for you Negroes, I didn't think you'd turn out to be a red.' ("When A Man Sees Red" 156)

As apparent from the conversation, the boss represents a typical American of the time who thought that racism had disappeared and that African Americans were ungratefully turning to communism because of their personal dissatisfactions with the status quo. Of course, requesting a raise in wages is not communist. The right to do so must be protected, especially in a democratic, capitalist country. The boss symbolizes how African Americans' efforts to end segregation in every form, including a financial one, were often absurdly labeled as "communist." Singh writes that in the 1940s, the association of red-scare with African American communities

was already part of the rhetoric employed by both liberals and conservatives to secure white supremacy (164-165). Similarly, Dudziak notes that "segregationists argued that efforts to abandon racial segregation were communist-inspired, and would undermine the fabric of American society" ("Desegregation" 75). It might be true that some African Americans were inclined toward communism as a tool for making racial progress toward equality. In fact, African American intellectuals like Du Bois and Hughes himself were often seen as aids of the Soviet Union.[31] The image of African Americans as communist sympathizers and threats against their own country was a commonly shared stereotype.

The story reappropriates this stereotype for a critical purpose. In the heated discussion with the boss, Simple claims: "You getting ready to fire me right now. Well, if you fire me, I will be a red for sure, because I see red this morning. I will see the union, if you fire me" ("When A Man Sees Red" 157). One may argue that Simple's reaction only reinforces the stereotypical image of African Americans as communists. Yet Simple is not really a communist sympathizer. Simple's reaction to the boss is rather a knee-jerk one. Keep in mind that he did not even know what "a red" means until the boss called him so. Simple claims to be a red only after the boss brings up communism and Russians. Simple's ignorance about communism

[31] As to the aforementioned plead to the United Nations, Du Bois received negative reactions from some presses, one of which claimed that he was "furnishing Soviet Russia with new ammunition to use against us" (Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights* 57). Even before World War II, Hughes was already a target of federal agencies' surveillance due to his radical politics. It is known that the FBI used to make files on African American artists, intellectuals, and those whom they considered disruptive individuals. As far back as 1925, Hughes was filed by the FBI for his poems. For details about the surveillance of leftist African American authors, see Mary Helen Washington's *The Other Blacklist: The African American Literary and Cultural Left of the 1950s*.

must have betrayed the popular imagination that African American communists were penetrating into the fabric of American society.

"When A Man Sees Red" makes a point that African Americans were drawn to communism not because they wanted to help the Soviet Union but simply because democracy and capitalism did not offer a solution to their financial struggles. Here, Melamed's insight into racial liberalism is relevant and useful to understand how Simple's request for a raise can be seen as part of African Americans' efforts to achieve democracy for themselves:

> This privileged literary register has been consistent with liberal antiracist frameworks that portray race as a cultural, psychological, or social problem—as a matter of ignorance, irrationality, feeling, or habit—to be corrected in the name of liberal-capitalist modernity rather than as internal to its political and economic structures. (25)

As Melamed points out, the official anti-racist policies trivialized the economic sides of racial issues. The boss's reluctance to raise wages for African American laborers echoes racial liberalism's scheme. Financial independence is, needless to say, one fundamental part of achieving the basic human rights. "When A Man Sees Red" suggests that as long as financial inequalities are seen as distinct from systemic racism, there will be more minority people like Simple who might turn to communism as a solution. In other words, it was not the Soviet Union which was

turning American minorities into communists; it was the United States and its liberal antiracist scheme.

To further stress that racial inequality is an economic issue, Hughes added a new section that depicts Simple's imaginative dialogue between the Un-American Committee and the character. The added part mounts to about a page, which is a significant amount compared to the other revisions. In this newly added section, Simple decries how the anti-communist hysteria disallows African Americans to achieve professionally and economically higher positions:

> "Then I would say, 'It must also be un-American to run a train, because I do not see any colored engineers running trains. All I see Negroes doing on the railroads is sweeping out coaches and making beds. Is that American?'
>
> "Old Chairman Georgia would say, 'Yes! Sweeping is American.'
>
> "Then I would say, 'Well, I want to be un-American so I can run a train.'
>
> "Old Chairman would say, 'You must be one of them Red Russians.' ("When A Man Sees Red" 157).

The funny yet satirical dialogue added to the book version further highlights that racial liberalism only accepted African Americans when they were tethered to economically lower positions.

Yet the reader might still fall into a trap of thinking that Hughes is simply praising communism as an alternative to democracy. Hughes's efforts to make his satire acceptable to the reader can be seen in how the endings are different in the original and book versions. The original ending reads as follows:

> "I think you are too race-conscious."
>
> "I am black," said Simple. "and I will also be red if things get any worse! But one thing sure, I will not be yellow! I will stand up for my rights till kingdom come."
>
> "You are not as simple as you look," I said.
>
> "Not quite," said Simple. ("Simple Sees Red" 14)

Now, consider the revised version's ending:

> "'Contempt of court!' bangs the Chairman."
>
> Just then the bartender flashed the lights off and on three times, indicating that it was time to close the bar, so I interrupted my friend's imaginary session of the Un-American Committee.
>
> "Listen," I said, "you're intoxicated, and when you are intoxicated, you talk right simple. Things are not that simple."
>
> "Neither am I," said Simple. ("When A Man Sees Red" 177)

A significant difference between the two versions can be found in how the narrator reacts to Simple. The narrator in the original version thinks that Simple is too race-

conscious as usual. At the same time, he shows some understanding of Simple's argument by saying "You are not so simple as you look" (the narrator is also possibly making a subtle joke about the different colors Simple mentions and can be). Yet, in the revised version, he uses the term "intoxicated" to straightforwardly decry Simple's absurd imagination. The revision suggests that Hughes anticipated how the reader would react to Simple's argument. The general public would think: One must be really drunk to make such horrifyingly un-American statements. At the same time, Hughes allows Simple to conclude the sketch by actually having him say that he is not so simple as he looks, thus encouraging the reader to go beyond the surface.

"High Bed" consists of two columns, which were previously published in the *Chicago Defender*. "Simple in the Hospital" was published in 1944, and "Simple Rocks a Rocket" was published in 1948. "Simple in the Hospital" humorously illustrates Simple's complaint about inconveniences in a hospital. Simple, who has caught pneumonia by walking in a cold rain and now is in hospital, complains: "In a place where people have to stay in bed, they ought to have a feather mattress like Grandma used to have" ("Simple in the Hospital" 14). "Simple Rocks a Rocket" humorously sketches Simple's wild imagination about what rocket engines will enable him to do in the near future. Simple claims that "No place will be far-fetched when them rocket planes gets perfected" ("Simple Rocks a Rocket" 14). These are the stories that were revised and emerged to make "High Bed." As it is obvious from the dates of publication, the two columns originally had no connection with one

another. It was not unusual for Hughes to put different stories together to make a new one, and the two columns are naturally connected together: It is no wonder Simple weaves his wild imagination about rocket planes while being tied to the hospital bed and bored.

"High Bed," especially in its latter part where Simple talks about rockets, employs the African American stereotype as sexually active and unruly to tackle the sexual norms of the Cold War era. In the story, Simple freely talks about miscegenation:

> "But listen, daddy-o, such another scrambling of races as there is going to be when they gets that rocket plane perfected! Why, when a man can shoot from Athens, Georgia, to Athens, Greece, in less than an hour, you know there is going to be intermarriage. I am liable to marry a Greek myself."
>
> "Are there any colored Greeks?"
>
> "I would not be prejudiced toward color," said Simple. ("High Bed" 89)

Simple's hypothetical story of rockets increasing interracial marriages could be provocative to some readers of the time. The narrator's reply is suggestive of the sexual and racial norms; Simple must marry within his own race because interracial marriage was seen as morally, socially, and legally wrong. The antipathy to miscegenation between white and black people has been persistent in the United States. The anti-miscegenation statutes, which were backed by the "scientific

knowledge" of the time, were effective in many states for a long time. Some of the racist statutes remained effective until they were finally considered to be unconstitutional in *Loving v. Virginia* in 1967 (Sealing 561, 607). The fear of miscegenation is often furthered by the stereotype of African Americans as hypersexual. I have already talked about how African American males were often stereotypically portrayed as sexual beasts. The association of African Americans with, if not threatening, abundant and disorderly sexuality was also common. Smith talks about an interesting 1941 sociological study. This study is titled *Deep South* and discusses white people's stereotypical view of African Americans' sexuality:

> white people often think of the negro as completely free from all irksome social controls and obligations, especially with regard to "enjoying to the fullest all physical satisfactions. The Negro can . . . seek and enjoy his sexual experiences completely free from external restraints or personal inhibitions. (90)

Similarly, Roderick Ferguson writes that many white people in the 1940s believed that African Americans were "wholly sexual beings whose sexuality deviated from the model of rational heterosexual expressions and domestic forms" and would bring "sexual chaos" when social equality would make the two racial groups physically proximate to one another (93). In other words, African Americans' sexual activities were often seen as a fundamental threat against the fabric of society which was based upon the white norms. Like the other stories we have examined, "High Bed"

poses a topic that would be deemed highly sensitive to talk about in the mid-twentieth century when racial segregation was still prevalent.

It is worth mentioning that this fear of miscegenation only became worse after *Simple Speaks His Mind* was published. During the Cold War period, the United States *publicly* progressed toward racial equality by ending segregation. One symbol of such progress is the decision made in *Brown v. Board of Education*, which put an end to Jim Crowism in schools in 1954. However, as Dudziak points out, the decision was made in the interest of disproving the Soviet Union's propaganda about the United States' racial inequality ("Desegregation" 113). The backlash against the official democratic movements for integration and the fear of miscegenation gained a new momentum when they were united with the anti-communist hysteria during the Cold War era. In the late 1950s, in Arkansas, white citizens protested against the desegregation of Central High School ("Central High School").

Fig. 9: A white crowd protesting against the desegregation of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas.

In the image, the protestors hold boards that read " RACE MIXING IS COMMUNISM" as if to say that the integration was planned by the Soviet Union. Also, the term "race mixing" is indicative of their fear of physical proximity between black and white people which would result in miscegenation. The image implies how white supremacists illogically merged the two stereotypical images of African Americans as hypersexual and communist for the sake of maintaining their racial purity and the social order. The protest also symbolically shows how racial liberalism backfired on itself. The official campaigns of democracy were supposed to at least publicly end segregation. What the federal authorities probably did not consider was how some white Americans would be intolerant even to democracy in

its most superficial form. The result was a very undemocratic display as shown in the picture above.[32]

"High Bed" criticizes the sexual stereotype of African Americans similarly to how "A Toast to Harlem" does. Simple certainly wishes to date with women outside of his race despite the social norms. At the same time, he would not take the risk within the United States:

> "Why, man, I would rock so far away from this color line in the U.S.A., till it wouldn't be funny. . . . No, buddy-o! The sky would be my roadway and the stars my stopping place. Man, if I had a rocket plane, I would rock off into space and be solid gone. Gone. Real gone! I mean gone!" ("High Bed" 89-90).

As long as the United States preserves the color line, it should pose a danger to African Americans in many respects. Even just dating someone is a risky thing to do. Simple is clearly aware of this fact. Therefore, Simple can never be a sexual threat as the public would imagine him to be. Overall, Simple's imaginary tale of the rocket in the sketch serves both as a safeguard and playful provocation. The unlikeliness of Simple's imagination—having a personal rocket to date many women—assures the reader that interracial marriages are not going to increase in reality. At the same time, it certainly poses the topic to the reader. By mentioning

[32] This may be, however, what the federal authorities intended. As Melamed writes: "Thus the real victories that came from official, state-recognized antiracism in Cold War America—the breaking of Jim Crow, support for integration, civil rights acts—also stabilized political limits, interpretative tendencies, and economic forces that readjusted and inevitably extended American and transnational capitalist structures of racial domination" (34). The official antiracist policies were designed to support, if not overtly, white supremacy on which the social structure was built.

the presence of the color line—another Du Bois reference—, Simple suggests that his sexual freedom is not just a personal matter, but a political one. When the United States was supposedly moving toward a more mature democracy as opposed to the Soviet Union, would the color line that could disallow interracial relationships be deemed appropriate? Presented with this question, the contemporary reader might have thought about the inconvenience of having to have a personal rocket to date with whomever they would like and realized how absurd and undemocratic it would be.

Like the other stories, "High Bed" encourages the reader not to simply disregard Simple's imagination.[33] The narrator in "High Bed" is more of a listener than a devil's advocate. Yet he still functions to represent the general public's reaction. In the revised version, right after Simple claims to be "Real gone," the story concludes as follows:

> "I think you are gone now," I said. "Out of your head."
>
> "Not quite," said Simple. ("High Bed" 90)

In the original version, the narrator concludes the sketch by saying "I might be out in my rocket, too," showing some understanding of Simple's imagination (14). This

[33] It is worth recalling that "High Bed" also contains another sketch about Simple's uncomfortable, restricted hospital life. In the hospital, Simple complains that they do not have a stocking cap to comb his hair. Simple asks the narrator: "But say, boy, if you want to do me a favor, when you come back bring me a stocking-cap to make my hair lay down. That is one thing these white folks do not have in this hospital" ("High Bed" 88). Hughes was aware that how even a small thing like a stocking cap would reveal white people's ignorance (Harper 129). This revision was, therefore, intended to be both a kind gesture to and subtle criticism of the white audience who was ignorant of African Americans' culture and life.

line is included in the revised version as well. Yet, since it is not placed in the ending line, the impressions the two endings make are quite different. The revised version's ending represents the narrator as a more rational figure than the original one, making him more relatable to the general reader; the idea of flying on rockets would be too far-fetched to the reader in 1950 (but maybe not so in the late Cold War period). To the narrator, Simple returns an affirmative answer of "no," which in turn poses the following question to the reader: Is it really absurd for an African American person to imagine what it would be like to completely leave the color line behind?

CONCLUSION

Hughes revised the four collected stories in *Simple Speaks His Mind* to make them more relevant as anti-racist criticisms while taking his new readers into consideration. The caricatural representations of Simple reveal how the African American stereotypes were contradictorily fabricated for the purpose of maintaining the "racially liberal" status quo during that period. At the same time, Hughes makes sure that his satire is more like a dialogue the reader can join than propaganda. While the book often discusses the issues of race, which would be highly sensitive at the time, it is careful to avoid unnecessary antagonization. In such balancing efforts, the book utilizes the two voices—Simple and the narrator—to invite the reader to the discussion. Through the dialogues between the two,

Hughes aimed to praise and stand for the black public while seeking a common ground between the two publics. Of course, this is not to say that Hughes was completely free from the risk of perpetuating racial stereotypes. As Harper writes: "Hughes remains best known as a poet, and many who love his poetry find the Simple tales excessively earthy, obvious, or prone to perpetuate stereotypes with demeaning dialect and unattractive behavior. Such readers wonder why Hughes ever put the character into print, and wonder even more why publishers have continued to reproduce the error Hughes made" (16). Indeed, Simple can be seen as simple in some respects. Yet I hope that this chapter has shed light on the (non-)stereotypical sides of this simple character which functioned as an effective strategy for fighting against the standardizing force of racial liberalism at the specific moments in history.

Conclusion

The anti-racist satires I have examined destabilize and criticize preconceptions about minorities by humorously yet ironically reappropriating racist stereotypes. In this dissertation, I have often used the terms such as "ironic stereotypes" to distinguish between critique and use of racist stereotypes. Ironic stereotypes resemble racist stereotypes in some respects. At the same time, ironic stereotypes significantly contradict racist stereotypes, thus betraying the audience's expectation of what and how the minority groups should be. Leveraging such contradictory moments, anti-racist satire offers its audience an opportunity to be aware of how racist stereotypes are incorrect and even dehumanizing. Let us recap how the anti-racist satires we have examined present and critique stereotypical portrayals of racial minorities. Drawing from theories of humour and irony, which are some of the basic tools of satire, is helpful for us to do so.

Humor is often necessary to satire. It is particularly true to anti-racist satire, for it helps one to introduce a sensitive topic such as race into a discussion (Barnes 327). Noël Carroll helpfully explains the role of humor in fiction: "Invented humour deploys various external and internal conventions in order to assure that its incongruities will not be anxiety-producing" (31). Most of the satirical works we have witnessed are, if to different degrees, humorous. *Ah Sin* is thematically and structurally a comedic play. The conjure stories are sad yet entertaining. Parker's caricatures are mostly laughable. And the congruities between Simple and the narrator are both insights into African Americans' different opinions and a great

source of humor. These anti-racist texts certainly delivered critical messages that could even hurt their audiences. Yet they delivered the bitter pills which were sugarcoated by humor. There are more roles humor plays in anti-racist satire. Terry Eagleton offers a useful summary of what humor can do: It can help us loosen up our routine conceptual categories, reveal the arbitrariness of social meanings, and transgress authority (137-138).[34] It should be easy for us to recall how the anti-racist satires examined in this dissertation must have helped their audiences to unlearn the fixed stereotypes and dare to identify as political progressives when the racist norms were, if not dominant, still largely prevalent.

Irony plays a similar role to the humorous sugarcoating as it serves to both conceal and indirectly reveal the critical message of the satirical text. George Test writes:

> By acting out those emotions that are potentially socially disruptive and therefore often strongly frowned upon, satire risks being rejected, causing retaliation, misunderstanding or bewilderment. . . . As in actual social relationships, the venting of such emotions, or the pose of venting these emotions, as in satire, tends to generate more of the emotion being vented, and, what is more obvious, creates an adverse reaction in the audience. (17)

[34] Here, Eagleton refers to different theorists of humor such as Jonathan Miller and Mary Douglas. For details, see "The Politics of Humour" in his *Humour*.

If the satirists had straightforwardly denounced their audiences, who were largely white, and promoted the social rights of the minorities, their arguments would have met resistance. Hughes's Simple series is a good example of how a satire can deflect antagonism by ironically presenting its message to the audience. If the reader only sees Simple, the voice of anger, they will identify the character with the author himself. Nevertheless, by having the narrator as a character who contrasts with Simple in many respects, the stories avoid having the reader believe that either one of them represents the author himself. Rather, the stories often seemingly direct the reader to laugh at the simple black man. At the same time, Simple's customary "Not so quite" statements are subtle yet tempting invitations for the reader to look into the critical messages embedded in the stories. Similarly, Chesnutt's conjure tales can be read as funny ones as they portray fantastical characters and events. But the author's political statement is revealed through irony when the reader does some mental labor to decode it. In short, the satirical texts we have read do not sound like propaganda. Their critical messages are, if to different degrees, revealed with irony.

Irony is also crucial for anti-racist satire to employ racial stereotypes. Dan Sperber and Deidre Wilson offer helpful insights: "It might be suggested that there are two distinct types of irony: 'echoic' irony . . . whose interpretation involves a recognition of its status as mention, and 'standard irony," whose interpretation involves a recovery of its figurative meaning" (309). We have seen that ironic stereotypes are exactly the key device that signifies anti-racist satire's message ironically. Anti-racist satire mentions a racial stereotype just for reference. To

further stress that the racist ideology associated with the stereotype is not endorsed in any way, anti-racist satire ironically reconstructs the stereotypical image while retaining its key elements. This process enables anti-racist satire to both introduce and critique the racist stereotype from a safe distance. For instance, Dave from "Dave's Neckliss" is certainly a reference to the stereotypes of the ideal slave and the thief. At the same time, it is obvious that the story does not endorse these stereotypes when it portrays his tragic death. Thus, the story as a whole invites the reader to explore its figurative message.

While both humor and irony seem to be necessary to anti-racist satire and its use of racial stereotypes, we have seen how they do not necessarily work in tandem. The contemporary reviews which compare Uncle Julius to Uncle Remus are the best example: The reviewers certainly enjoyed the humor of the conjure stories while ignoring the fact they were also meant to be ironic parodies of the Uncle Remus series. In such cases, the useful functions humor provides—destabilizing meanings, self-reflection, transcending authority—are overlooked. Instead, humor comes into play only when the audience finds laughable similarities between a racial character portrayed in an anti-racist satire and "actual" characteristics which are associated with minorities in the real world. In anti-racist satire, why is irony, if not always, superseded by humor?

Firstly, irony is inherently unstable: it is a means of indirect communication and does not clearly indicate what it means. Secondly, since irony is inherently unstable, it can be easily subject to influences of external factors. To be more precise,

it is the interpreter who is simultaneously one of such external factors and is influenced by them. In the course of examining the satirical texts, I have explored such external factors that destabilize the satirical text's irony and disproportionately boost its humor in the eyes of the interpreter.

When the receiver is deeply accustomed to a certain habit of reading or viewing things, it can significantly limit their perception of anti-racist satire. The audiences at the Fifth Avenue Theater laughed at *Ah Sin* probably because they thought that it was just another melodrama with a bit of minstrelsy. The contemporary reviewers of Chesnutt's stories used the Uncle Remus-Julius comparison to describe them because the similarities were more striking to them than the differences were. If the audience knows familiar labels, terminology, or texts to describe a certain text, they will feel tempted to use them.

In relation to the topic of reading habits, it is important to examine where and how the text is published. All of the satirical texts I have examined were published or performed in venues that were periodical. Even a theater is not an exception, for it can choose to enact a specific kind of content and shape its frequenters' taste in a certain way. It is worth recalling that the satirists this dissertation examined were popular authors. These authors chose the channels of popular culture that could access a wider audience. This is also the reason why they had to use irony and humor. Imagine if their satirical texts had been given labels like "Political Satire" or "Indignant Criticism of Racism;" the popular reader would not accept them. The external frames around the satirical text can shape the

audience's reaction to it beforehand. The case of Parker probably best exemplifies this point. Her anti-racist stories were possibly read as racist caricatures along with other humorous yet racist contents. When buried among contents that promote political conservatism rather than progress, could satire be read as satire?

The author's racial identity can be also counted as one factor that can influence the way the receiver perceives the satirical piece. I did not talk about this topic thoroughly because I was focused on how anti-racist satire works and how the receiver reads or views it. Yet the author's identity certainly is a substantial marker that can be a clue for the reader when interpreting the text. What if the actual reader had known that Chesnutt was a black author when "The Goophered Grapevine" was first published? Could it have changed the contemporary view that he was a successor to Harris and Page? What if it had been a Chinese author who wrote *Ah Sin*? Would the audience rather have thought that the play was a praise of Chinese immigrants and criticism of racism against them? If Parker had been a black author, would "Clothe the Naked" have looked less paternalistic? If Hughes had been a non-black person, would *Simple Speaks His Mind* still have been read as genuine insights into the black culture and public? These hypothetical questions show how the author's identity can drastically influence the receiver's judgment as to whether the satire is punching *up* or *down* the racial minority.

Finally, ironic stereotypes are essentially what make anti-racist satire polysemic. As I have argued, ironic stereotypes have to resemble racist stereotypes to some degree for shocking, revealing, and educating effects. But the resemblance is

not the only reason why ironic stereotypes are unstable. The problem is that stereotypes fundamentally are objects to laugh at. Carroll's insight into comedic devices greatly helps illustrate this point:

> That is, these devices alert us to the proposition that now is the time to adopt comic distance. . . In short, these framing devices tell us that the imaginary beings in jokes and other comic forms are not quite like us ontologically and, therefore, what happens to them should not be a matter of our concern. (31)

Stereotypes are formulaic representations of a group of people and follow certain conventions. Therefore, stereotypes function as a conventional device that cues us to laugh. This theory can be easily applied to how someone laughs at a racist stereotype without anxiety: The racial character presented to them looks quite different from them, distant from them, and therefore does not really matter to them. Even if the racial character is treated cruelly, the audience can laugh at them from a safe distance. In this sense, a stereotype is an autonomous system that offers you the motivation to laugh and is an object to laugh at in itself. It is not too difficult to imagine that the irony in the ironic stereotype is easily destabilized by this convention. In short, the ironic stereotype might even end up activating this racist system by itself.

At the same time, this is the system of stereotypes that the anti-racist texts we have seen try to appropriate, manipulate, and finally subvert. The

aforementioned risk factors of anti-racist satire are also what the satirists needed to address: In the realms of popular culture, racist stereotypes have been produced, reproduced, and widely circulated, and the public is accustomed to innocently consuming them while ignoring the harsh realities hidden behind them. Anti-racist satire introduces ironic stereotypes to these venues and their consumers to show that racial stereotypes are indeed a matter of concern. Anti-racist satire uses humor to have the audience come close to the racial issues, not to distance them. It also tries to alter the audience's routinized pattern of consuming stereotypes by using ironic stereotypes. In short, the anti-racist satires this dissertation has discussed took the necessary risk—ironically using racial stereotypes in the realms of popular culture—to address the issues of race. Of course, the dilemma I have examined could never be solved. By just mentioning a racist stereotype, anti-racist satire could become racist. Sometimes, humor and irony in anti-racist satire could collaborate well. At other times, they could also never be reconciled with one another. But still, there is, if an ambiguous one, a sense of hope that these continuous battles between anti-racist satire and racist stereotypes have helped keep the domain of popular culture dynamic, disabling the racist preconceptions to dominate our imagination.

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