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**DIALOGUE AND “DIALECT”: CHARACTER SPEECH IN
AMERICAN FICTION**

A Dissertation Presented

by

CARLY HOUSTON OVERFELT

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

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Department of English

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Approved as to style and content by:

Emily J. Lordi, Chair

Randall Knoper, Member

Jonathan Rosa, Member

Randall Knoper, Department Chair
Department of English

DEDICATION

For my sisters, here and beyond

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ABSTRACT

DIALOGUE AND “DIALECT”: CHARACTER SPEECH IN AMERICAN FICTION

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CARLY HOUSTON OVERFELT

B.A., ARKANSAS TECH UNIVERSITY

M.A., PURDUE UNIVERSITY

M.A., PURDUE UNIVERSITY

Ph.D., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST

Directed by: Professor Emily J. Lordi

This dissertation investigates the linguistic construction of race and place in turn-of-the-century American novels and short stories. Literary analyses of character speech continue to reinforce the old dichotomy of Standard versus nonstandard/dialectal English. I challenge the ideology of Standard English in my readings of works by Mark Twain, Charles Chesnutt, Sarah Orne Jewett, and little-known Cherokee author, Ora V. Eddleman Reed, among others. I argue that these texts create their own standards that interact with (and sometimes resist) the language ideology of their time. By analyzing all variation, rather than only what has been traditionally viewed as “dialect,” I reveal the nuanced ways in which texts construct race, region, class, and gender. I argue for the significance of spelling and punctuation—orthography—in character speech, a key technology for creating and sustaining language ideology in fiction.

CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	v
ABSTRACT	vii
LIST OF TABLES	x
CHAPTER	
INTRODUCTION	1
A. Background	3
B. Overview of Chapters	11
1. HEARING JIM: THE POLITICS OF SOUND IN MARK TWAIN'S <i>THE ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN</i>	14
A. <i>Huck Finn</i> and the "Language of Speech"	15
B. Dialect Authenticity in <i>Huck Finn</i> and the Rhetoric of "Care"	18
C. <i>Was Huck Black?</i>	21
D. "The shadings have not been done in haphazard fashion": An Alternative Linguistic Analysis of Jim's Speech	24
E. Conclusion	34
2. "ORTHOGRAPHIC CONFLICT": IMAGINED SPEECH COMMUNITIES IN EDWARD EGGLESTON'S <i>THE HOOSIER SCHOOL-MASTER</i> AND SARAH ORNE JEWETT'S <i>THE COUNTRY OF THE POINTED FIRS</i>	36
A. The "Misspelling Bee": Eggleston's <i>The Hoosier School-master</i>	37
B. "A Happy, Rural Seat of Various View" in Sarah Orne Jewett's <i>The Country of the Pointed Firs</i>	47
C. Conclusion	53

3. PRONOUNCED DIFFERENCES: GENDER, CLASS, AND THE COLOR LINE IN CHARLES CHESNUTT’S LONG FICTION	56
A. Reading Rena in <i>The House Behind the Cedars</i>	59
B. The Dialect of Racism in <i>The Marrow of Tradition</i>	68
C. An Uncertain Future in <i>The Colonel’s Dream</i>	75
4. (NON) NATIVE SPEAKERS: ABRAHAM CAHAN’S <i>YEKL: A TALE OF THE NEW YORK GHETTO</i> AND ORA V. EDDLEMAN REED’S “INDIAN TALES BETWEEN PIPES”	81
A. Abraham Cahan’s <i>Yekl: A Tale of the New York Ghetto</i>	82
B. The Languages of <i>Yekl</i>	84
C. English in the Jewish Ghetto	87
D. Women’s Language in <i>Yekl</i>	94
E. Ora V. Eddleman Relocates Local Color in “Indian Tales”	99
CONCLUSION	109
BIBLIOGRAPHY	113

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
2.1 Examples of words with two to four spelling variants in <i>The Hoosier School-master</i>	41
2.2 Examples of consonant reduction and word contraction strategies in <i>The Country of the Pointed Firs</i>	52

INTRODUCTION

The language “must not sweat,” Toni Morrison explained in a 1981 interview; it must “appear effortless.” Summing up perhaps the most salient way in which the appearance of character speech in American fiction has changed between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Morrison elaborates, “[t]he part of the writing process that I fret is getting the sound without some mechanics that would direct the reader’s attention to the sound.” Morrison’s commitment to sound without sound “mechanics” is clear in the dialogue of *Beloved* (1987). When the main character, Sethe, for example, suggests moving out of the house to escape the haunting presence of her baby’s spirit, Sethe’s mother-in-law responds: “Not a house in the country ain’t packed to the rafters with some dead Negro’s grief. We lucky this ghost is a baby. My husband’s spirit was to come back in here? or yours? Don’t talk to me. You lucky” (6). Word choice like *ain’t* and syntax like *You lucky* allow Baby Suggs’s voice to resound without being phonetic.

The language *did* sweat in the long nineteenth century; character dialogue conventionally including innovative spelling techniques and the use of apostrophes for missing sounds, their curves like tiny drops of typographic perspiration. Mechanics like these are an important aspect of “literary dialect,” popular in the regionalist, realist, and local color genres. Spelling and punctuation is not neutral, but political; Morrison situates her comments about character voices within the tension between “standard” versus “nonstandard” English, lamenting the status of African American Englishes in schools and texts:

It's terrible to think that a child with five different present tenses comes to school to be faced with those books that are less than his own language. And then to be told things about his language, which is him, that are sometimes permanently damaging. He may never know the etymology of Africanisms in his language, not even know that "hip" is a real word or that "the dozens" meant something. This is a really cruel fallout of racism.

In the phrase, "five different present tenses," Morrison points to the rich verbal system of African American English that is often misunderstood in American classrooms. The language of American education and canonical literature has traditionally upheld an ideal "standard English," to the exclusion of other languages, part of the legacy of American racism. Morrison explains that her purpose is "to restore the language that black people spoke to its original power." Morrison's formal choices in dialogue are among the strategies she uses to restore Black language in literature, moving away from the visually prominent markers of Black speech in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Studies of the way African American language and other American varieties of English appear in fiction have explored their role in American politics, especially the way these literary dialects register displaced anxieties about ethnic, racial, and class difference. Another long tradition of linguistic approaches to these texts explore the relationship between real and fictional language variation. But the role that small-scale linguistic choices—like spelling and punctuation—play in the larger picture of American textual politics of the turn of the century is not fully understood. This study analyzes linguistic variation between and among characters and narrators, analyzing the role of orthography in the construction and deconstruction of racial, gender, class, and regional character identities in turn-of-the-century fiction. My close readings of dialogue within and among characters reveals a complex linguistic construction of race, class, and gender; I find that orthography plays a key role in creating and dismantling literary-linguistic hierarchies.

A. Background

This is a study of “literary dialect”—depictions of speech variation in quoted character speech. Or, as Sumner Ives classically defined it, literary dialect is “a stylized representation of speech by means of nonstandard, regional, social, or even individual features” (Williamson and Burke 146). Literary dialect is not exclusive to the turn of the century, but it was a time for peak popularity of realist, regionalist, and local color works, genres which relied on detailed representations of character language. Earlier, in the eighteenth century, literary dialect was associated with political critique, beginning with John Adams’s “Humphrey Ploughjogger” letters, which depicted rural New England speech in order to articulate the political criticism levelled by plain, honest (white) folks.¹ The use of dialect for the purposes of political satire remained popular in the nineteenth century, with characters like George Washington Harris’s Sut Luvingood and David Ross Locke’s *Petroleum V. Nasby*.² In the mid nineteenth century, between the 1830s and 1860s, the Southern humorists³ were popular, including Augustus Baldwin Longstreet and his *Georgia Scenes* (1835). See the example below from *Georgia Scenes*, uttered by a young man who just emerged victorious from a fistfight:

“Now, blast your corn-shucking soul,” said the victor (a youth about eighteen years old) as he rose from the ground, “come cutt’n your shines ’bout me agin, next time I come to the Courthouse, will you! Get your owl-eye in agin if you can!” (5)

Post-bellum writers tended to move away from political satire and humor, producing works in the “realist,” “regionalist” genres. Writers like George Washington Cable and the infa-

¹See David Simpson’s *The Politics of American English, 1776–1850* (1986).

²See Kenneth Lynn’s *Mark Twain and Southwestern Humor* (1972), Neil Schmitz’s “Tall Tale, Tall Talk: Pursuing the Lie in Jacksonian Literature” in *American Literature* (1977), and James C. Austin’s *Petroleum V. Nasby* (*David Ross Locke*) (1965).

³The setting for these tales include the frontier regions of Georgia, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Missouri. The defining characteristics of Southern humor stories include, according to Thomas Inge and Ed Piacentino’s introduction to *Southern Frontier Humor: An Anthology* (2010), an emphasis on “plain folk,” “vernacular discourse,” and “exaggeration” for the purposes of entertainment (2).

mous champion of the philosophy of literary realism⁴, William Dean Howells, showcased “authentic” speech from everyday people in an effort to capture the life and language of ordinary Americans. A classic example of this type of text is Howells’s *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885), as in the dialogue below. In this excerpt, the main character, Lapham, is relating the hardships his family faced when he was a child:

”I tell you,” said Lapham, jabbing the point of his penknife into the writing-pad on the desk before him, “when I hear women complaining nowadays that their lives are stunted and empty, I want to tell ’em about my MOTHER’S life. I could paint it out for ’em.” (4)

The representation of *them* as *’em* and the capitalization of *mother* to invoke vocal stress illustrate Howell’s commitment to realistic character speech.

Writers that focused outside the urban centers, in rural areas, are associated with regionalism.⁵ These writers include Hamlin Garland, Mary Murfree, Mary Wilkins Freeman, and Sarah Orne Jewett. These works tended to depict regionally-bound varieties of English varieties, and often relate a sense that the language being documented is part of a quickly fading rural America. The following is a sample of dialogue from Mary Wilkins Freeman’s

⁴It is difficult to define and characterize precisely what literary realism is, and the scholarship on it continues to complicate our understanding of it, but a basic definition should suffice for our purposes. Steven R. Serafin and Alfred Bendixen’s *Encyclopedia of American Literature* (1999) describes “realism” as “an international movement that emphasized a fidelity to literary representation of the actual experience and consequences of everyday life” (935); the movement began in France, but the American authors most associated with it are Howells, Henry James, and Mark Twain. These works “emphasized characterization” over “high drama and tragic implication,” reacting against “what was perceived as the falseness and sentimentality of romanticism” (935). See also Michael Bell’s *The Problem of American Realism: Studies in the Cultural History of a Literary Idea* (1993), Katherine Kearns’s *Nineteenth-Century Literary Realism* (1996), and Brook Thomas’s *American Literary Realism and the Failed Promise of Contract* (1997), among many others.

⁵Regionalism (also “local color”) as a genre overlaps with realism, with extra emphasis on “describing what was singular about the nation’s different geographical regions—their inhabitants’ languages, customs, and preoccupations” (939). What counts as regionalist rather than realist is a function of a gendered division of cultural labor and a hierarchy of the genres, which often results in the work of women being considered regional while men’s writings garner status as American realist works. For more, see Emily Toth’s *Regionalism and the Female Imagination: A Collection of Essays* (1985), Richard Brodhead’s *Cultures of Letters: Scenes of Reading and Writing in Nineteenth-Century America* (1993), Donna Campbell’s *Resisting Regionalism: Gender and Naturalism in American Fiction, 1885-1915* (1997), and Stephanie Foote’s *Regional Fictions: Culture and Identity in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (2000), among many others.

“The Revolt of ‘Mother’” (1891), in which “Mother” argues with her husband, “Father,” over delayed plans to build a new home for the family:

“I want to know what them men are diggin’ over there in that field for.”
“They’re diggin’ a cellar, I s’pose, if you’ve got to know.”
“A cellar for what?”
“A barn.”
“A barn? You ain’t goin’ to build a barn over there where we was goin’ to have a house, father?”” (209)

In each sample of character dialogue, there are cues to indicate the pronunciation particularities of the speakers, including spelling cues (*agin*) and apostrophes (*’em*), and sometimes both (*cutt’n*). Literary dialect can also be signaled through sentence structures and vocabulary items, or (presumably) regional sayings like, “blast your corn-shucking soul.”

Critical discussions of literary dialect generally gather around two topics. First is the relationship between literary dialect and the speech of the groups of people in the culture that are being targeted in the author’s representations. These approaches ask, how realistic is the character speech? The second topic is the function of the presence of literary dialect in the text. The first topic—the question of perceived dialect authenticity—is favored by literary linguists who compare facts from descriptive linguistics—ethnographic studies of American dialects, including data collection—to literary dialects that target those speech communities. This linguistic comparative approach, or “authenticity approach,” is dealt with in more depth in Chapter 1, but can be usefully previewed here. Scholars point to George Phillip Krapp’s “The Psychology of Dialect Writing” (1926) as the inaugurating moment in the debate about the relationship between fictional speech and real-world dialects; Krapp argues that literary dialect is an invention created by writers and dismisses much of dialect literature as elitist and condescending towards the communities it represents (Williamson and Burke 23). Krapp asserts that it is generally fruitless to pursue “authenticity” checks in this literature, but reluctantly admits that some of these attempts at authenticity have been minimally successful (Williamson and Burke 23, 26). The first influential response

to Krapp comes from Sumner Ives in his “A Theory of Literary Dialect” (1950). Ives argues that, while writers have artistic aims that shape their representation—which includes a limitation on how densely to represent dialect features—authenticity can be determined in these works, through a measure of the *combination* of “real” features, not *density* of “real” features. He concludes that Joel Chandler Harris’s Uncle Remus stories are, indeed, authentic. Ives’s essay has been used to justify linguistic authenticity approaches to dialect in fiction ever since, and this “authenticity approach” remains the most popular approach to assessing the merit and effectiveness of literary dialect.

The second major topic in literary dialect studies is the question of function: why does the dialect appear, and what are its effects? Realism’s champions, like William Dean Howells and Hamlin Garland, explicated the function of dialect as democratizing American literature. But Krapp’s view that much of dialect literature of the turn of the century was patronizing and elitist has been influential and longstanding. The leading view in the mid and late twentieth century towards long nineteenth-century dialect literature is that character language represents a fading rural past being replaced by industrialization, or functions to help work out those anxieties about the racial and ethnic “other”⁶ during a period of rapid industrialization and heightened immigration. Gavin Jones’s *Strange Talk: The Politics of Dialect Literature in Gilded Age America* (1999) complicates earlier accounts of the functions of dialect by arguing that dialect was often used for multiple functions at once, at times within the same text, reflecting the ambivalence in the U. S. towards nonstandard speech. Jones explains:

[Dialect] could seem rooted in Anglo-American culture while also registering the effects of ethnic intermixture; it could evoke the ideal stability of America’s

⁶Different versions of this basic view can be found in portions of Alan Trachtenberg’s *The Incorporation America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (1982), Amy Kaplan’s *The Social Construction of American Realism* (1988), Richard H. Brodhead’s *Cultures of Letters: Scenes of Reading and Writing in Nineteenth-Century America* (1993), and Stephanie Foote’s *Regional Fictions: Culture and Identity in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (2000).

regional past while also signifying concern over an increasingly unfamiliar and fragmented society. (13)

The two issues around literary dialect I have reviewed here—authenticity and function—are interrelated and this dissertation seeks to speak to both questions by focusing on the surface representation of linguistic features. This study is, in part, a continuation of Jones’s project to uncover the multiple valences of literary dialect between and within texts, arguing that the ambivalence Jones’s discusses can be located in the orthography. Furthermore, attention to the surface representation illuminates the complex linguistic intersections of race, gender, class, and region among these characters.

Finally, very recent studies on literary dialect have begun to describe the process by which dialects are imagined in fiction as enregisterment.⁷ Enregisterment is a process by which distinct forms of speech comes to be socially recognized (or enregistered) as indexical of speaker attributes by a population of language users (“Voice, Footing, Enregisterment” 38). In literary studies, this is manifest as attention to the way the idea of an already enregistered variety of speech becomes recognizable in a literary text. This approach is found in Jane Hodson’s *Dialect and Literature in the Long Nineteenth Century* (2017),⁸ a collection of essays that chart new territory in the study of literary dialect, influenced by sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology. This dissertation draws from and adds to these approaches, arguing for the role of orthography as a primary way in which dialects are enregistered in fiction, and that close reading subtle orthographic shifts complicates our understanding of the process of enregisterment in fiction, and reveals the extent to which characters code switch and code shift. Before previewing the chapters, I would like to discuss terms and methodology.

⁷This term originates in linguistic anthropology. See Asif Agha’s *The Social Life of Cultural Value* (2003), *Voice, Footing, Enregisterment* (2005), and *Language and Social Relations* (2007); Barbara Johnstone, Jennifer Andrus, and Andrew Danielson’s *Mobility, Indexicality, and the Enregisterment of Pittsburghese* (2006).

⁸Hodson’s volume focuses specifically on British literature.

I have put the word “dialect” in quotation marks in the title of my study to call attention to the necessarily constructed nature of this concept; we can consider this a troubled term, even as we rely upon it to delineate real and imagined speech communities. I use the word “dialect” in this study to point to distinct, although idealized, varieties of English, but without intending any connotations surrounding the word as it is used in the mainstream, as if a dialect is a simpler, inferior, or less educated form of language. (At times I use the word “variety” in this same way.) Some of the dialects, or varieties, of English in this study include African American English, Southern English, American Indian English, and other regional varieties of English from the Midwest and Northeast. In all of these discussions, I intend to acknowledge the reality of speakers of social and regional dialects, while remaining aware of the differences within and among speech communities, and that language changes over time.

In this study, I generally use the term “Standard English” to point to the version of American English that exists in the minds of speakers and readers as “correct,” “proper,” or “educated” English.⁹ That is, there is a set of structures, pronunciations, and lexical items that more or less are taken for granted as correct. For scholars of standard English, Jim Milroy, this is not a variety in the same respect that other varieties of English can be distinguished and linked to speech communities; rather, standard varieties of languages are “idealisations that exist at a high level of abstraction” (11). Standard languages are a “process” rather than a real state, because they are always “in progress” (11) through suppression of variation, rewarding uniformity (13). As Milroy explains, “these idealisations are finite-state and internally almost invariant, and they do not conform exactly to the usage of any particular speaker. Indeed the most palpable manifestation of the standard is not in the speech community at all, but in the writing system” (11). The ideology of Standard English is also a racial ideology, helps maintain white supremacy in the U.S., as “standard” is

⁹Some linguists use “General American English” to point to the same ideal, but without the added connotations of “correct” or “official.”

often equated with the speech patterns of whites.¹⁰ With this concept of Standard English in mind, I use the term “nonstandard” to point to features that are likely salient to most readers as deviations, or in other words, variations traditionally suppressed by the ideology of the standard.

Literary analyses of character speech usually work within a dichotomy of standard versus nonstandard/dialectal English without inquiry into how these metalinguistic notions interact with specific texts. In my study, I assume an implied standard or “correct” English always outside the text as an ideal in individual readers’ minds, largely guided by knowledge of standard orthography, as Milroy points out. Within the texts, standards are created through the use of a narrator (sometimes a character-narrator), the characterization of whom tends to establish a linguistic background, or norm, which creates a hierarchical relationship with the quoted speech of other characters.¹¹ I look for nonstandard spelling and punctuation choices in quoted characters speech, which reveals linguistic hierarchies between characters (some of which are unconnected to “real” dialect alternations) and moments of code switching (alternating between varieties), code meshing (mixing varieties), and code shifting (changing varieties over time) that would otherwise go undetected.¹²

Inspired by transcription and translation studies, I categorize nonstandard spelling into three types: “eye dialect,” “allegro forms,” and “dialect respellings.” Eye dialect is a non-standard spelling that does not represent nonstandard pronunciation, but rather offers a unique spelling of a standard pronunciation, like *wuz* for *was*, *uh* for *a*, and *enuff* for

¹⁰For more on the ideology of Standard English, see Einar Haugen’s “Dialect, Language, Nation” (1966), Pierre Bourdieu’s *Language and Symbolic Power* (1991), Michael Silverstein’s “Monoglot ‘Standard’ in America: Standardization and Metaphors of Linguistic-Hegemony” (1996), James and Leslie Milroy’s *Authority in Language: Investigating Standard English* (1999), Tony Bex and Richard Watts’s *Standard English: The Widening Debate* (1999), Tony Crowley’s *Standard English and the Politics of Language* (2003), and Sally Johnson and Tommaso Milani’s *Language Ideologies and Media Discourse* (2010), among others.

¹¹My analysis of the literary-linguistic hierarchies owes much to Erving Goffman’s *Frame Analysis* (1974), Mikhail Bakhtin’s *The Dialogic Imagination* (1991), and Alexandra Jaffe’s *Stance* (2009).

¹²My use of these terms is heavily indebted to Vershawn Ashanti Young, et. al., for whom code switching is using either one or another variety at a time, moving between them; code meshing is a blend or mix of more than one variety; code shifting is an alternation over the course of a lifetime.

enough. (Johnson et al. 165). “Allegro” spellings capture the way English sounds in real time, often associated with casual or informal speaking: *gonna* for *going to*, *en* or *'n* for *and*, and *ol'* for *old* (165). “Dialect respellings” are nonstandard spellings of words that capture some pronunciation variation associated with nonstandard pronunciation. These might include *dis* for *this* and *wint* for *went* (166). There is a misconception that literary dialect is made up of the third type of nonstandard spelling—dialect respellings—and considered legitimate uses of modified spelling. “Eye dialect,” on the other hand, is viewed as less legitimate since it manufactures visual difference not reflected in dialect features acknowledged by linguists. Eye dialect signals linguistic deviation, but does not represent an “authentic” linguistic difference. The other type, allegro spellings, is rarely discussed at all, instead lumped with dialect respellings. Yet, these distinctions help me examine authenticity arguments and make judgements about what nonstandard spelling indexes in Chapters 1 and 2.

Nonstandard spelling does not inherently indicate inferior linguistic status, but authorial spelling choices are political, as I hope to demonstrate in this dissertation, because they become associated with particular character traits, especially when language becomes equated with mental faculties. Jones describes nineteenth-century attitudes on the topic this way: “language was the incarnation, not the dress, of thought” (19); “Bad” English was a sign of “the moral and intellectual degeneration of man” (21). Earlier American sources for this idea include Walt Whitman’s *An American Primer* (463, 466).¹³ Sociolinguist Alexandra Jaffe explains that using nonstandard orthography has a dual meaning possibility. Jaffe explains that, on the one hand:

non-standard orthographies have the potential to challenge linguistic hierarchies, for they can make non-standard voices visible/audible in a medium that habitually does not recognize them ... On the other hand, non-standard or-

¹³Thomas Bonfiglio’s *Race and the Rise of Standard American* (2002) offers an excellent discussion of the way language patterns get associated with character traits and identity groups; he describes a “signifying matrix” by which identities and values get placed and displaced. See especially pages 9–16.

thographies also always dramatize power and status differentials between language varieties and their speakers. (*Orthography as Social Action* 498)

It is the framing of these nonstandard orthographies in relation to other characters' speech, and the other ways that these characters are depicted that come together to determine what nonstandard spelling indexes.

B. Overview of Chapters

Like earlier studies of long nineteenth-century fiction, the chapters focus on the transition from the nineteenth to the twentieth century as a special moment, including events like the aftermath of Reconstruction, industrialization, immigrations, the "closing" of the frontier as Native people are being displaced, and race-motivated standardization efforts. The dissertation is arranged in two parts, each part containing two chapters. Part I focuses on the politics of spelling in the construction of character speech, while Part II highlights code switching, code meshing, and code shifting among and between characters. In Chapter 1 I illustrate the limitations of linguistic authenticity approaches, especially as they concern representations of African American speech. I resurrect an old debate about Jim's representation in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885) as a case study for how linguistic approaches that close read orthography can illuminate the politics of characterization. While some studies show that Jim uses "authentic" African American English, I show that his speech is saturated with phonetic spellings, especially in contrast with other characters, which pairs with other characterizations of his mental faculties to suggest his stereotypical inferiority.

In Chapter 2, I juxtapose orthographic strategies in Edward Eggleston's *The Hoosier School-master* (1871) and Sarah Orne Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs* (1896). I show that Eggleston's dense and shifting nonstandard spelling works alongside the characters' own emphasis on the practice of spelling (via spelling bees) to activate precisely the ambivalence towards nonstandard language Jones discusses. Eggleston's work is trapped

between a desire to value nonstandard, rural speech on the one hand, and his white supremacist views about linguistic contamination on the other. By contrast, the rural speech of Jewett's characters consists of a few phonological reductions to which the reader becomes accustomed, and seems to signal predictable, safe rhythmic life of the seaside village—a more classic representation of the orthographic maintenance of literary-linguistic difference, and the displaced fears of ethnic and racial contamination literary dialect often represents.

Part II, which includes Chapters 3 and 4, takes a higher-level view of the ways characters move between Englishes, or between English and other languages. Chapter 3 is an analysis of Charles W. Chesnutt's long fiction, including *The Marrow of Tradition* (1901), *The House Behind the Cedars* (1900), and *The Colonel's Dream* (1905). I show that Chesnutt's characters' speech is spelled phonetically at key moments in *The House Behind the Cedars* to suggest code switching and code shifting, and the mutability of African American English, leveraging Chesnutt's critique of long nineteenth-century ideologies of language and race. By juxtaposing *House* and *Marrow*, I show that these speech representations necessarily intersect with gender and class, and that Chesnutt moves to a more traditional model of language as corruption by the time he writes *The Colonel's Dream*.

Finally, Chapter 4 contrasts Abraham Cahan's *Yekl: A Tale of the New York Ghetto* (1896) and Ora V. Eddleman Reed's "Indian Tales Between Pipes" (1906). I bring Cahan, a Russian Jewish immigrant, and Reed, a Cherokee woman, together in this final chapter to expand the conversation of literary Englishes to include "non-native" English as well as the multiple Englishes spoken by Native Americans. Cahan uses a mix of italics, spelling, and apostrophes to signal the multiple inter-ethnic identities within the Jewish immigrant community, dramatizing standard and nonstandard articulations of Jewish immigrant identity that intersect with gender to suggest that these characters struggle not to assimilate as "American" but rather to a particular type of Jewish-American. Reed uses character dialogue to signal intra-ethnic tensions that arise from the dominant white settler-colonialist misinterpretations and linguistic stereotypes about Native Americans' English, using hu-

morous vignettes of challenged expectations to critique U.S. government imperialist and land-stealing policies.

CHAPTER 1

HEARING JIM: THE POLITICS OF SOUND IN MARK TWAIN'S *THE ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN*

Before the precocious Huck runs away from Miss Watson, before he meets up with Jim, and long before the unlikely pair's harrowing raft ride down the Mississippi, American readers encounter, on a single page by itself, the following:

EXPLANATORY

In this book a number of dialects are used, to wit: the Missouri Negro dialect; the extremest form of the backwoods South-Western dialect; the ordinary 'Pike County' dialect; and four modified varieties of this last. The shadings have not been done in a haphazard fashion or by guess-work; but painstakingly, and with the trustworthy guidance and support of personal familiarity with these several forms of speech. I make this explanation for the reason that without it many readers would suppose that all these characters were trying to talk alike and not succeeding.

THE AUTHOR. (5)

Taken at face value, Twain's famous "Explanatory" note in the front matter of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, above, is a useful explanation of the seven dialects found in the novel. Twain has been listening carefully—readers imagine—and can distinguish and reproduce several local dialects with ease. Readers, it seems, do not have the tools to appreciate the fine "shadings" and need to be prepared lest they interpret linguistic difference as inconsistency. However, the best way to read this explanatory note, like all of Twain's writing, is with a healthy dose of irony. Twain's dialect explanation satirizes the turn-of-the-century culture of production and consumption of realist and regionalist fiction and that genre's hallmark—literary dialect. Every generation of Twain scholars makes its own attempt at linguistic fact-checking in which critics quantify character speech in sets

and types of features and then compare those features to data of existing American speech communities in Missouri. These studies usually result in a conclusion about the author's meticulous attention to the nuance of language. Since the 1980s, during which time scholars raised increasingly more questions about the racial politics of Twain's fiction, these linguistic studies have focused on Jim's speech. Scholars generally conclude that Twain, clearly a careful listener to African American language, had good intentions (in the worst-case scenario); or, they claim that Twain's representations were purposeful and accurate, and therefore neutral (in the best-case scenario). Although Twain was acutely aware of the artifice of literary dialect, and despite the open commitment of realist writers to the illusion of the real (rather than the "real" itself), there persists a belief that truly skilled writers, like Twain, indeed accurately captured authentic dialect in fiction. This chapter begins with a critical review of the rhetoric that drives these linguistic authenticity analyses which, I argue, conjure the image of "the careful listener" who produces ostensibly accurate representations which are therefore neutral (or even anti-racist). I then offer an alternative analysis which focuses on the strategic visual cues that highlight Jim's speech as unique. I analyze the type and density—rather than the "accuracy"—of details that place him within a linguistic and racial hierarchy. I find that Jim's speech becomes a marker of inferiority chiefly (though not solely) through exaggerated pronunciation cues found in his dialogue.

A. *Huck Finn* and the "Language of Speech"

What made *Huck Finn* innovative, general consensus has it, is the use of "colloquial" American English in the main narrative text, which is clear from the first lines of the novel: "You don't know about me without you have read a book by the name of 'The Adventures of Tom Sawyer,' but that ain't no matter" (13). The use of *ain't* is a hallmark signal for "nonstandard" English as country folks are assumed to speak it, and there is the classic multiple negation in *ain't* plus *no matter*. Finally, Huck uses the *without* as an alternation for *unless*. These features are more closely associated with spoken language in Twain's

time, and evoke the phenomenon of speech. Or, as literary critics like Thomas Cooley put it, Twain made “spoken language do everything a literary language alone could do before him;” Huck’s language is “the language of speech” (Twain and Cooley viii). “The language of speech” in Huck’s narrative characterizes his innocent nature; Huck’s “seeing beyond conventional prejudices required an unconventional way of speaking” (viii). The language of speech also lends a sense of immediacy. “Huck asks to be heard, as if he faced a live audience from a stage,” Alan Trachtenberg argues, and “appears to us, at least in part, within the conventions of an oral tradition” (Champion 89). The orality of the text suggests a “common and humble humanity” (89). The question is, common to whom?

Twain’s revolutionary style was not appreciated by everyone, however, and Huck’s language was controversial from the outset of publication. *Huck Finn* was banned from the shelves of the public library in Concord, Massachusetts because, as one of the library committee members explained to the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* of March 17, 1885, “. . . it is couched in the language of a rough, ignorant dialect, and all through its pages there is a systematic use of bad grammar and an employment of rough, course, inelegant expressions . . . it is trash of the veriest sort” (Champion 13). What was so “course” was presumably not the dialect itself; this kind of language had been presented in dialogue for decades. For example, the Southwestern Humorists, like Thomas Bangs Thorpes and George Washington Harris, featured rustic American speakers before *Huck Finn*. However, “the language of speech” was typically restrained in quotation marks and therefore subordinated to the main narrative language. In *Huck Finn*, however, Huck’s distinctive linguistic features are found in the narrative text, thereby giving regional language an authority and literary legitimacy it had not had before. Twain’s uplifting of “bad grammar” presumably set a bad example and provoked the disdain of the library committee members, who were afraid the language might spread. Twain was predictably delighted at the Concord library’s criticism and wrote to his nephew and publisher, “That will sell 25,000 copies for us, sure” (Twain and Paine 452–453).

While the Concord library dismissed Huck's language as "rough" and "course," literary critics like William Dean Howells praised it for exemplifying what realist texts should do: "Let [them] speak the dialect, the language that most Americans know—the language of unaffected people everywhere" (qtd. in Messent and Budd 187). In "Truth and Fiction," Howells explains that the realist:

... cannot look upon human life and declare this thing or that thing unworthy of notice, any more than the scientist can declare a fact of the material world beneath the dignity of his inquiry. He feels in every nerve the equality of things and the unity of men; his soul is exalted, not by vain shows and shadows and ideals, but by realities, in which alone the truth lives. (136)

For Howells and others in his circle, the project of realism was to undermine hierarchies and foreground "real," unadorned American language and the honesty and truth such language was thought to engender.

By representing the "real," of course, writers evoked a sense of reality—details that allow the reader to set the "real" stage for themselves. In this sense, realistic representation was important to Twain, but only to the extent that readers got the impression of listening to a speaker. Walter Blair explains in his humorous "Was *Huckleberry Finn* Written?", that Twain wrote in a "talk like style, one modified to give the impression of talk—literary dialect. Twain, as he himself said, knew that 'the best and most telling speech [in print] is not the actual impromptu one, but the counterfeit of it, [speech that] will seem impromptu'" ("Was *Huckleberry Finn* Written?" 3). Twain declared that "[w]ritten things have to be limbered up, broken up, colloquialized, and turned into the common form of unpremeditated talk" (qtd. in Blair, "Was *Huckleberry Finn* Written?" 3). For Twain, "literary dialect" is a process of linguistic mediation that seeks to appear unmediated.

Many critics have taken Twain's explanatory note more literally, though, as if it indicates an empirically confirmable authenticity or accuracy. There has been a debate for decades about whether or not the dialects Twain purported to include in *Huck Finn* are actually there and how closely the character speech correlates with real speakers from the

specific areas the explanatory note outlines. In the following, I review some of the highlights of this tradition of Twain scholarship, focusing on how the rhetoric of these studies an attempt to rescue *Huck Finn* from critiques of racist and/or stereotypical representation of Jim.

B. Dialect Authenticity in *Huck Finn* and the Rhetoric of “Care”

Early twentieth-century studies of Twain’s literary dialect checked for consistency within *Huck Finn*. In the 1920s, Katherine Buxbaum spotted inconsistencies in Huck’s language; he says *creek* in some places, but *crick* in others. Buxbaum attributes this to “carelessness,” but then suggests a purpose to this carelessness; it creates an “unconscious air that lends charm to Huck’s narrative” (236). When James Tidwell (1942) found spelling inconsistency in Jim’s speech, he surmised that some words are pronounced differently in different environments and Twain was accurately reflecting these alternatives; Twain was a “sincere and competent” dialect writer who captured the “nuance” of Jim’s pronunciation (176). Advances in linguistics and the study of American English language varieties in the 1960s and 1970s led to a corresponding emphasis on literary dialect analysis rooted in dialectology. Perhaps the most well-known scholar of this school is Lee Pederson. To help settle the debate about whether or not Twain was serious, Pederson did a phonological inventory of speakers in Pike County, Missouri. Pederson’s aim was not to weigh in on the debate, but rather to “state the phonological equivalents for all dialect spellings in the speech of the Northeastern Missourians in the novel. These include the speakers of the ‘Missouri Negro dialect,’ ‘the ordinary Pike County dialect,’ and, at least, some of those ‘four modified varieties of this last’” (262). Nevertheless, the debate continued. Curt M. Rulon, a “linguistic geographer” of the 1960s, only identifies two dialects. He finds that while the language was “authentic and genuine to a certain degree,” there is no evidence in the “phonology, morphology, or syntax” that Twain sincerely meant to represent several varieties of English (Williamson and Burke 221). However, David Carkeet’s “The Dialects

in *Huckleberry Finn*" (1979) finds upwards of nine dialects among white characters alone. He even locates some inconsistencies that he attributes to Twain's forgetfulness. Carkeet concludes that there is no evidence to suggest that the note was a joke—"there is nothing rib-splitting about a list of dialects" (330)—and points to Twain's meticulous effort:

There are hundreds of corrections of dialect in the manuscript (or discrepancies between a dialect form in the manuscript and the final form in the first edition). A just might be corrected to jest in the manuscript, for example, and then end up as jist in the first edition. Such labored revision makes no sense if the "Explanatory" is frivolous. (331)

Carkeet also shows that variation among characters purported to speak the same dialect may be an important part of characterization. For example, "r-lessness" may indicate low social status or questionable moral behavior. Susan Tamasi's "Huck Doesn't Sound Like Himself: Consistency in the Literary Dialect of Mark Twain" (2001) checks for dialect consistency between Huck's language in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. She determines that there is a discrepancy between the two texts that indicates Huck's changing character.

What these studies have in common is an emphasis on "carefulness," "meticulousness," "thoughtfulness" and "skill." Even apparent inconsistencies can be interpreted as carefully planned nuance. But an interest in Twain's careful characterization is not limited to linguistic studies. The same appeal to care taken with the language is found in other Twain studies, like Terrell Dempsey's *Searching for Jim: Slavery in Sam Clemens's World* (2003):

I know that *Huckleberry Finn* is flawed. It must be. Clemens was white. He never suffered as a slave . . . But Clemens is one of the best we have. His gift is that he cared deeply and watched closely. He had a genius for nuance and language. At a time when most white people thought African Americans weren't quite as human as they, he knew better. (Dempsey 281)

In pointing to intentionality and conscious effort, critics like Dempsey and Carkeet seem to function as reactions to criticisms of Jim's representation, like those by Toni Morrison

and Eric Lott. Frederick Woodard and Donnarae MacCann's well-known "Minstrel Shackles and Nineteenth-Century 'Liberal'ity' in Huckleberry Finn" (1992) argues that, "Though Jim may reasonably be viewed as a model of goodness, generosity, and humility, he is characterized without an equally essential intelligence to buttress our claims for his humanity" (Leonard, Tenney, and Davis 142). One of the scenes Woodard and MacCann critique is the moment in which the stereotypically superstitious Jim thinks Huck is a ghost on Jackson's Island and responds in his "typical addle-brained manner": "I awluz liked dead people, en done all I could for 'em" (145).

Lisa Cohen Minnick also deals with the ghost scene in the most thorough analysis of Jim's speech thus far in *Dialect and Dichotomy: Literary Representations of African American Speech* (2004). Minnick's study compares what linguists have documented about African American language to African American character speech in works by authors like Mark Twain, Charles Chesnutt, and Zora Neale Hurston, concluding that the language is accurate, and therefore does not contribute to stereotypes of African Americans. Minnick concludes the following about Jim: "In both phonology and grammar, Twain incorporated features that have been identified with African American speakers in the scholarship, and that reveals his understanding of how these features functioned in real speech" (67). About the scene in which Jim thinks Huck is a ghost, Minnick says that the same superstitious treatment is given to Tom, who also has a scene in which he thinks Huck is a ghost. While Minnick concedes that Jim's speech seems to be more nonstandard than the other characters, she explains that these features are almost always authentic dialect features. Anything that is problematic about these representations must be, Minnick argues, something readers bring to the table:

The evidence that Twain actually uses the depiction of Jim's speech to disparage him is simply not found in the text of the novel, according to this analysis, nor in the articles produced by critics of Twain's version of AAE. A possibility is that those critics are responding negatively to the appearance of respelled dialect representations on the page. (73)

Finally, Minnick argues Tom is characterized in an equally superstitious manner when he thinks Huck is a ghost, and that the superstition that Woodard, MacCann, and others are critical of in Jim's representation is rooted in real belief systems of African Americans, citing the work of Shelly Fisher Fishkin. Fishkin's well-known *Was Huck Black?: Mark Twain and African-American Voices* (1993) argues that there are elements of African American English (AAE) in Huck's speech; some of the language that seems to be quintessentially "Huck" can actually be traced to AAE, undermining racial categories. In the process, Fishkin also relies on rhetoric of careful attention and appreciation. In the conclusion she asks, "What correlation is there between listening carefully and appreciatively to African American voices and recognizing the full humanity of the speakers to whom those voices belong?" (*Was Huck Black?: Mark Twain and African-American Voices* 143). Fishkin suggests that correlation in this influential work, which is often invoked in discussions of the racial implications of Huck Finn. Because of its longstanding influence, it is necessary to pause on *Was Huck Black?* before moving to my reading of Jim's speech. The following section outlines what I identify as serious limitations in Fishkin's analysis.

C. *Was Huck Black?*

Fishkin's study explores the influence of African American linguistic culture on Twain's work in an unexpected place. Rather than investigate AAE in relation Jim's language, she looks to Huck's. Fishkin suggests that Huck's features match features uttered by an African American character in Twain's earlier story, "Sociable Jimmy," published in 1874 in *The New York Times*. "Sociable Jimmy" is a sketch of a young boy who waited on him while he was traveling on the lecture circuit. Twain found the young boy and his loquaciousness fascinating, and recorded their conversation in "Sociable Jimmy." According to Fishkin, this story is Twain's first sustained attempt to capture African American speech in print, and it eventually became the basis for Huck's "voice." Fishkin claims that *Huck Finn* "blend[s] black voices with white" (16), probably unconsciously. Fishkin argues that, setting aside

the question of speech sounds, “the voice we have come to accept as the vernacular voice in American literature—the voice with which Twain captured our national imagination in *Huckleberry Finn*, and that empowered Hemingway, Faulkner, and countless other writers in the twentieth century—is in large measure a voice that is ‘black’” (4). “Voice” is not clearly defined, but “involves syntax and diction, the cadences and rhythms of a speaker’s sentences, the flow of the prose, the structures of the mental processes, the rapport with the audience, the characteristic stance as regards the material related” (16). An argument can be made for shared prose, stance, structure, and so forth, between Jimmy and Huck; however, Fishkin’s claim about African American English features in Huck’s voice is flawed. Below, I take up Fishkin’s argument that the specific syntax and vocabulary of Huck’s speech is rooted in African American language.

Firstly, Fishkin’s most important examples are at odds with the scholarship on African American English. Fishkin claims that Huck uses a syntactic construction called “zero copula,” a hallmark of African American language. That is, in some linguistic environments, the linking verb (or “copula”) is optional (Green 37). For example, an AAE speaker uses the copula with *I*, as in *I am tall*, but may or may not use the copula with third person subjects, like *she*, for example, *She tall* (Green 37). Fishkin’s examples of zero copula look more like omissions of auxiliary verbs. She points out that Jim says, “I ben rich wunst,” in *Huck Finn*, Sociable Jimmy says, “I ben mos’ halfway to Dockery,” and Huck says “I been there before.” The copula verb *to be* (realized here as *been*) appears in each case. What is missing in these examples is the auxiliary verb (“helping verb”) *have*. Some auxiliary deletion processes are common in AAE, and in other varieties of English. But auxiliary *have* deletions do not carry the cultural significance that zero copula carries. Zero copula is one of the most distinctive features of AAE, what linguist John R. Rickford calls a “showcase variable” that sets AAE apart from other varieties of English (Rickford et al. 104). Zero copula is the most studied grammatical feature of AAE because of its significance to the speech community as well as its possible roots in West African languages, and what those

roots suggest about the history of AAE. Although it has been around much longer, copula absence is rarely depicted in literary texts until the twentieth century.

Fishkin's examples of shared syntax between Huck and Jimmy are not associated only (nor chiefly) with AAE; all overlap with other dialects and could as well be associated with rural white identity in several regions of the U.S. For example, both Huck and Jimmy use verbs with the *a-* prefix, like *a-going*. Hamlin Garland reports a-prefixing in white Midwestern speech in his work, for example, "The Return of a Private" (1974 [1891]). The auxiliary *have* deletion discussed above is found in works like Sarah Orne Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs* (1996 [1896]), discussed in the next chapter. Other examples Fishkin uses to associate the way Jimmy speaks with the way Huck speaks include: the use of repetition, a creative lexicon, verbal imagery, onomatopoeia, etc. It may be that "Sociable Jimmy" was a character study that inspired the style of Huck's voice, but there is little evidence that Huck's syntax and vocabulary is drawn from African American English.

The greatest limitation to Fishkin's analysis is the omission of character pronunciation. Fishkin explains:

Critics have debated whether Twain did, in fact, use seven dialects, or more, or fewer; but they have generally assumed that the only "negro dialect" in the book is that spoken by African-American characters. On a phonological level, that assumption is correct: only African American characters, for example, say "dat," as opposed to "that." But phonology alone does not describe a voice. (*Was Huck Black?: Mark Twain and African-American Voices* 15–16)

To be sure, neither a voice, nor a language variety, can be encompassed by phonology alone. But Fishkin stops short of explaining why the phonological features should be totally excluded. In fact, representing character pronunciations through spelling is an integral component of literary dialect. Twain, for one, was consciously and publicly enthralled with the sounds of African American voices and particularly enjoyed trying to mimic them

during public readings of his work.¹ In a letter to Joel Chandler Harris, Twain laments how he failed to depict African American voice on the page in “The Golden Arm”: “Of course I tell it in the negro dialect—that is necessary; but I have not written it so, for I cannot spell it in your matchless way. It is marvelous the way you and Cable² spell the negro and creole dialects” (Twain and Paine 402).

Taken together, the evidence suggests it is time to set aside Fishkin’s claim “that some of the most distinctive dimensions of ‘Black English’ speech patterns linguists study today duplicate habits of speech and turns of phrase that Twain imprinted indelibly on our national consciousness as characteristic of the voice of Huck” (*Was Huck Black?: Mark Twain and African-American Voices* 47). Instead, Fishkin’s analysis might reveal something about the common form “nonstandardness” takes in the American imagination at the turn of the century and how American writers use (or create) that in their work, since so much of the grammar and vocabulary Fishkin located is common across literary dialects. Furthermore, Fishkin’s analysis may point to the important cultural role phonological representation plays in character speech. The fact that similarities between differently raced characters can be found so much more easily when we exclude sound is telling. In my reading below, I argue that pronunciation is one of the most important ways Jim’s speech is distinguished from Huck’s in *The Adventure of Huckleberry Finn*.

D. “The shadings have not been done in haphazard fashion”: An Alternative Linguistic Analysis of Jim’s Speech

The linguistic approaches above are limited by a tendency to minimize critiques of racial construction in *Huck Finn* by emphasizing Twain’s careful pursuit of accuracy. These studies use “real” and careful inclusion of African American English as evidence for anti-

¹For more on the crucial relationship between Twain’s writings and performances, see Randall Knoper’s *Acting Naturally* (1995).

²Twain is referring to George Washington Cable.

racist—or at least neutral—representation. An attempt at verisimilitude is certainly one way of respecting African American linguistic culture, but any measure of authenticity is necessarily suspect. The process of enregisterment of African American English, to borrow from Miyako Inoue, “actively constructs the very reality that it claims to be representing” (*Vicarious Language Vicarious language* 75). Even the most careful report of “real” speech is an interpretation. We can better evaluate Twain’s interpretation of African American speech by interrogating the kinds of “real” features, the manner in which those features are represented, and the relative density of “dialect” features. I argue that, relative to other characters, Twain highlights Jim’s speech sounds, stressing his pronunciation. In conjunction with Jim’s other characteristics, the emphasis on sound figures him as an inferior “other.”

Huck’s is the controlling voice that constitutes Twain’s mouthpiece for reporting the speech of other characters; it is the “authoritative presence” which “silently reports, dislocates, and, thereby, constitutes [the quoted] as other” (*Vicarious Language* 165). This status is reflected in the representation of Huck’s narrative language. Although innovative for its time in that it shows some markers of dialect in the narrative text, Huck’s narrative language is, in fact, somewhat conservative compared to quoted character speech, keeping Huck’s regional linguistic particularities in the background. Consider the excerpt of Huck’s narrative below, in which he sets eyes upon the farm in which Jim is captive:

Phelps’ was one of these little one-horse cotton plantations, and they all look alike. A rail fence round a two-acre yard; a stile made out of logs sawed off and up-ended in steps, like barrels of a different length, to climb over the fence with, and for the women to stand on when they are going to jump on to a horse; some sickly grass-patches in the big yard, but mostly it was bare and smooth, like an old hat with the nap rubbed off; big double log-house for the white folks?hewed logs, with the chinks stopped up with mud or mortar, and these mud-stripes been whitewashed some time or another; round-log kitchen, with a big broad, open but roofed passage joining it to the house; log smoke-house back of the kitchen; three little log nigger-cabins in a row t’other side the smoke-house; one little hut all by itself away down against the back fence, and some outbuildings down a piece the other side; ash-hopper and big kettle to bile soap in by the little hut; bench by the kitchen door, with bucket of

water and a gourd; hound asleep there in the sun; more hounds asleep round about; about three shade trees away off in a corner; some currant bushes and gooseberry bushes in one place by the fence; outside of the fence, a garden and a watermelon patch; then the cotton fields begins, and after the fields, the woods. (228)

I quote this long passage to illustrate the infrequency of nonstandard spelling in Huck's narrative voice. Measuredly interspersing regional or otherwise culturally marked linguistic features is classic literary dialect for this period; the philosophy is to suggest the dialectal voice (and all it might conjure in the minds of readers), but without saturating the narrative language with "dialect" characteristics; not actual "impromptu" speech, but the "counterfeit" of it (Champion 111). What makes Huck unique in the nineteenth century is his status as the narrator in *Huck Finn*. As the language of the character-narrator, Huck's language is the standard for the text, only deviating from an implied standard English that exists outside the text—the deviation that so irked the Concord librarians.

The restraint in dialect spellings in Huck's narrative language is traditionally seen as a testament to Twain's skill. Robert J. Lowenherz explains that Twain distinguished himself from previous authors who used the conventional technique of "quirky phonetic orthography" (196). He "wisely" uses dialect spelling "functionally" and "sparingly" (196, 197). "By using dialect spellings very economically," Lowenherz argues, "Twain does not force the reader through a verbal obstacle course. The printed page is not a visual barrier erected between the reader and Huck" (197). However, Huck's narrative language is more "dialectal" when his speech is quoted, as in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1982 [1876]). When Huck's speech is in quotation marks, Lowenherz notes, there are twice as many dialect spellings as we find in Huck's narrative language. In fact, Huck has few dialect spellings even in his dialogue: "Jim this is nice . . . I wouldn't want to be nowhere else but here. Pass me along another hunk of fish and some hot cornbread" (60). The indicators of Huck's nonstandard language are largely constituted by the vocabulary and syntax.

By contrast, Twain takes many more opportunities to report Jim's pronunciation particularities with spelling and punctuation innovations. In the scene below, in which Jim sees Huck for the first time since he faked his death, Huck relates the following:

He bounced up and stared at me wild. Then he drops down on his knees, and puts his hands together and says:

“Doan’ hurt me – don’t! I hain’t ever done no harm to a ghos’. I awluz liked dead people, en done all I could for ‘em. You go en git in de river agin, whah you b’longs, en doan’ do ‘nuffin to Ole Jim, ‘at ‘uz awluz yo’ fren.”

Well I warn’t long making him understand I warn’t dead. I was ever so glad to see Jim. I warn’t lonesome, now. I told him I warn’t afraid of him telling the people where I was. I talked along, but he only set there and looked at me; never said nothing. Then I says:

“It’s good daylight. Le’s get breakfast. Make up your camp-fire good.” (53)

As the authenticity approaches show, Jim’s speech includes features associated with African American English. Words like *ghos’*, *fren*, and *doan’* all reflect a characteristic reduction of consonant clusters at the ends of words.³ Another characteristic of AAE is an omission of “r” sounds after vowels (more precisely, the “r” sounds become merged with the vowel sounds that precede them), which is reflected in the spelling of Jim’s *whah* (“where”) and *yo’*.⁴ Jim’s speech also reflects a process by which “th” sounds become “f” or “d” sounds (depending upon the word) in *nuffin*, and employs the classic “g-dropping” that is characteristic of nonstandard character speech.⁵ Finally, Jim’s speech reflects a regional merger of /ɛ/ (the vowel in *bread*) and /ɪ/ (the vowel in *wit*) in some words, resulting in *git* and *agin*.⁶ Minnick also identified these five features (among others) in Jim’s speech, noting that they occur over ninety percent of the time in which their occurrence was possible, with the exception of “r” vocalization, which occurs about half the time. Minnick concluded that Twain was “sensitive (if not flawless) interpreter” of AAE phonology in Jim’s speech (66).

Critics have minimized the frequency and significance of phonetic spellings in Jim’s speech, like the combination of allegro spellings, *awluz*, *b’longs*, *’em*, *’at*, and *’uz* in

³“ghost,” “friend,” and “don’t”

⁴“where” and “your”

⁵“nothing”

⁶“get” and “again”

this conversation with “real” dialect spellings, but Jim’s speech is saturated with allegro spellings. For example, pronouncing the English word *belongs* in a sentence always results in the reduction of the first syllable. In English phonology this unstressed position of a vowel changes the vowel sound. In casual speech, the vowel /i/ (the vowel in *squeak*) in *belongs* becomes /ə/ (as in *uh*). The change in the vowel sound results in an impression that the vowel has all but disappeared. Jim’s pronunciation is hyper-specified to capture this basic spoken English process. This hyper-specification through phonetic spellings marks Jim and exaggerates his linguistic difference from the other characters. Apostrophes are used to signal the absence of a sound, in addition to the missing letters, as in *'em*. The result is a double marking of sound omissions, omissions which are not tied to any dialect and seem, instead, to reflect an interpretation of Jim as linguistically anomalous.

While Jim’s pronunciation is a significant—even essential—component of his quoted speech, Huck’s pronunciation is less closely reported. In the conversation above, the reader “hears” Huck say *warn't* and *Les'*, but there are many unspecified pronunciations. For example, readers can imagine Huck’s *your* being rendered in nonstandard orthography as *yer*, or *telling* as *tellin*, or even *and looked at me* reported as *'n lookt at me*, but standard orthography is used instead. The remaining signals of Huck’s status as a nonstandard speaker are structural. He uses classic nonstandard signals, like doubly marking his negative constructions (*never meant no harm*) and using subject-verb non-agreement (*I says*). Huck is also reported to use the word *set* instead of *sat*. While Huck is positioned as speaking a deviant form of English (compared to an ideal of standard English outside the text), his pronunciation is rarely specified, especially relative to Jim’s. This is also the case with other white characters, like Tom. In an almost identical moment to the illustration above, between Huck and Tom, Tom sees Huck and thinks he is a ghost. Tom’s reaction is portrayed with much less emphasis on how he sounds:

... [Tom's] mouth opened like a trunk, and staid so; and he swallowed two or three times like a person that's got a dry throat, and then says:

"I hain't ever done you no harm. You know that. So, then, what do you want to come back and ha'nt me for?"

I says:

"I hain't come back – I hain't been gone."

When he heard my voice, it righted him up some, but he warn't quite satisfied yet. He says: "Don't you play nothing on me, because I wouldn't on you. Honest injun, now, you ain't a ghost?"

"Honest injun, I ain't," I says.

"Well – I – I – well, that ought to settle it, of course; but I can't somehow seem to understand it, no way. Looky here, warn't you ever murdered at all?"

"No, I warn't ever murdered at all – I played it on them. You come in here and feel of me if you don't believe me."

So he done it, and it satisfied him and he was that glad to see me again, he didn't know what to do. And he wanted to know all about it right off; because it was a grand adventure, and mysterious, and so it hit him where he lived.

(234)

Tom utters around seventy words, but only has about three pronunciation reports: *Looky* (a reduction of imperative "Look ye"), *ha'nt* and *injun*.⁷ In the case of Jim, in about forty-eight words, his pronunciation is specified in nonstandard orthography twenty times. Jim's pronunciation is highlighted not only through dialect spellings, but also through the technique of eye dialect—a technique almost exclusively reserved for Jim's language. While dialect spellings refers to spellings associated with "real" dialect features, "eye dialect," as I discuss in the introduction, is used to highlight character pronunciations that reflect a pronunciation that is common to most English speakers; these pronunciations only seem nonstandard via nonstandard spelling. Eye dialect, then, is a technique to focus the reader's attention on the spoken manifestation of language. In *Huck Finn*, Jim is the main character readers are invited to listen to this closely. For example, *wuz* is used over thirty times in the text, all in Jim's speech. Jim says, "Well, I wuz dah all night. Dey wuz somebody roun' all de time" (55). Twain also uses the spelling, *uv* for *of*. For example, Jim says, "Den I swum to de stern uv it en tuck a-holt" (56). *Uv* occurs nine times in the text, and all (but

⁷"haunt" and "Indian"

one) of these occurrences are reported in Jim's speech. Another example of eye dialect in *Huck Finn* is the spelling *ben* for *been*. For example, Jim says, "You'd a ben down dah in de woods widout any dinner, en gittn' mos' drowned, too; dat you would, honey" (60). *Ben* is used dozens of times in the novel. A handful of these occurrence are attributed to poor whites (especially the villainous characters), but the rest are located in Jim's dialogue. Notably, Huck is never reported to say *wuz*, *uv*, or *ben*, even when his language is being quoted as dialogue. While the concentration of eye dialect in Jim's speech contributes to his association with orality, Huck's language is usually distinguished with syntax and vocabulary. Take the following example: "Now you think it's bad luck; but what did you say when I fetched in the snake-skin that I found on the top of the ridge day before yesterday?" (63).

The only characters that approach Jim's level of phonetic realization are immoral, poor white characters. For example, the King says *pore* and *sejested*.⁸ While the pronunciation of these white characters is still less specified than Jim's, it is important that when it is specified, it is often through the eye dialect strategy. Critics like Mark Sewell and David Carkeet have analyzed how speech marks the immorality of white characters, like Pap, but ignore or dismiss Jim's linguistic affiliation with these immoral characters. Carkeet explains that "r-lessness" in some contexts, like *befo'* (for *before*) and *yo'* (for *your*) "are—for both Blacks and whites—physical signals of low social status and—for whites only—physical signals of substandard morals. These white characters may show something of Jim's dialect, but they do not share in his goodness" (332). Carkeet points out that poor whites and Blacks shared dialect characteristics at that time, and chalks it up to "realism." But their speech does not only share dialect characteristics; they also share high levels of phonetic scrutiny. If this heavy phonetic spelling indexes immorality among white speakers, but not Jim (who is unanimously seen as "good"), then what does it index about Jim's character?

⁸"poor" and "suggested"

The emphasis on sound in Jim's speech is political. While all authors craft literary dialect, working for a balance between realistic speech, readability, and other concerns, the priority in Jim's language seems to be the very fact that it is spoken. Inoue, who studies the construction of speech in Japanese fiction modelled after Western realists, notices the "primacy [given] to 'speech' as the epistemological basis of language for its immediacy and present-ness and its presumed unmediated access to 'truth' and 'reality'" (165). The "other's" association with "primacy" is manifest through an emphasis on sound. Inoue uses, as an example, Michael Warner's study of print culture in eighteenth-century America where Warner finds "the reduction of the other to sonorous properties" (Inoue, "The listening subject of Japanese modernity and his auditory double" 166). Warner highlights the "fragmented" and "incomplete" speech of the Black enslaved women in Alexander Hamilton's writings. Hamilton's slave's conversations with other Blacks are reduced to "phonemic particularity;" they are "illiterate, frivolous, and dialectal" (qtd. in Inoue, "The listening subject of Japanese modernity and his auditory double" 166)—all adjectives that might describe the most criticized passages of Jim's characterization. Inoue explains, "[t]he key point is that this auditory construction of the racial other was the critical condition of cultural and political linkage between 'printed-ness' and whiteness" (166). The African American figures in the text become associated with language that defies print without innovation, breaking the rules of standard orthography, including spelling and punctuation.

As I show above, Minnick defends the portrayal of Jim when he thinks Huck is a ghost, pointing out that Tom reacts in a similar way. In many respects, however, this scene illustrate just how differently Jim is portrayed. For example, while Jim's language is demarcated very clearly from Huck's, Tom and Huck's language is aligned to an extent that seems to go beyond their shared dialect. Tom's *hain't* is echoed by Huck's; his *injun* is echoed by Huck's *injun*; Huck's *warn't* is echoed by Tom's *warn't*. Tom and Huck's perfect pairings of nonstandard English markers put Jim's language in even more stark relief. The two white boys are also quoted roughly equally, rather than Tom's language being more heav-

ily quoted than Huck's. Furthermore, Jim's response is portrayed as more emotional and emphatic than Tom's. An exclamation mark punctuates Jim's fearful pleading, he refers to himself deprecatingly in the third person, and his accompanying body language is submissive, as he kneels and clasps his hands together. To be sure, Tom stammers in his extreme fear, but he is a child. Finally, in Tom's conversation, he uses reasoning and empirical inquiry (touching Huck's arm) until he is satisfied that Huck is alive.

It is not the emphasis on sound alone, of course, but the way in which Jim is positioned relative to other characters in combination with his exaggerated phonetics that situate him as linguistically inferior. Recall that this is one of the scenes that Woodard and MacCann point to as evidence for Jim's lack of intelligence, which they argue cannot be outweighed by his moral character, or occasional indications of his wit and ingenuity. Woodard and MacCann maintain that Jim's moments of humanity are "undercut" by his characterization, that seems to be inspired by the "exaggerated antics of minstrelsy" (Leonard, Tenney, and Davis 146) Twain performed in public readings. In fact, David Lionel Smith has argued that Twain used the introductory explanatory note as a way to distinguish himself from his protagonist, Huck, much the way white players in blackface minstrel shows used advertising posters. Smith explains: "The performers would appear in formal attire, and opposite them in their burnt cork alter egos would appear in their buffoonish Negro stereotypicality. The message, clearly, is that the performers are white gentlemen who ought not in any way to be conflated with their social inferiors, whom they portray onstage" (432). Woodard and MacCann, and other critics, see the influence of minstrel characters in Jim's depiction. In the absence of visual cues like burnt cork and "buffoonish" dress, I would add, nineteenth-century texts may have turned to linguistic "shadings," achieving exaggeration through visual markers, like phonetic spellings and apostrophes.

E. Conclusion

Minnick argues that Jim's language is authentic, thus readers who react negatively to his speech must be reacting to something outside the dialect. I agree; readers who are critical of Jim's characterization are reacting to a *combination* of factors that include the amplification of his pronunciations, no matter how authentic they may be. Exaggeration of his speech is too close to racist stereotype to discount it, even when drawn by an author like Twain who was absolutely critical of slavery and American racism. Toni Morrison, for example, points to the "over-the-top minstrelization of Jim":

Predictable and common as the gross stereotyping of blacks was in nineteenth-century literature, here, nevertheless, Jim's portrait seems unaccountably excessive and glaring in its contradictions—like an ill-made clown suit that cannot hide the man within. Twain's black characters were most certainly based on real people. His nonfiction observations of and comments on "actual" blacks are full of references to the guilelessness, intelligence, creativity, wit, caring, etc. None is portrayed as relentlessly idiotic. Yet Jim is unlike, in many ways, the real people he must have been based on. (388)

My reading of Jim's language aims to build on Morrison's point about verisimilitude by insisting that there is much more to "literary dialect" than simply confirming the presence or consistency of "real" dialect characteristics. Close readings of character speech, especially in Twain studies, still tend to get caught up in the myth of meticulously transcribed American dialects in American fiction. It is true that Jim's language includes many characteristics of "real" AAE, but it also includes a lot of exaggerated pronunciation cues as if Jim were a hyper-oral, primitive "other." As Morrison says, the "extravagance" of Jim's representation can be interpreted in many ways. Twain may have been simply writing what a dominant racist readership would have expected; or, maybe writing Jim "so complete a buffoon" was important in order to make his and Huck's separation possible, as Morrison argues, since Jim resembles a father figure (388). While it seems clear that Twain, the man, was critical of slavery and the subjugation of African Americans, any challenge *Huck Finn* levels against nineteenth-century racism is not *levelled* through representations

of speech, but despite them. If *Huck Finn* is a text that asks us to rethink racial categories, it does so within conservative linguistic ones. The exaggerated orality of Jim's speech reproduces language ideology that, at least partly, undermines any anti-racist project Twain had. As Bauman and Briggs show, "Ways of speaking and writing make social classes, genders, races, and nations seem real and enable them to elicit feelings and justify relations of power, making subalterns seem to speak in ways that necessitate their subordination" (17). The "careful listener" of African American language is not Twain, after all, but his readers, as they are compelled to register every phonological and phonetic possibility of Jim's (and almost exclusively Jim's) language.

CHAPTER 2

“ORTHOGRAPHIC CONFLICT”: IMAGINED SPEECH COMMUNITIES IN EDWARD EGGLESTON’S *THE HOOSIER SCHOOL-MASTER* AND SARAH ORNE JEWETT’S *THE COUNTRY OF THE POINTED FIRS*

Mark Twain’s Explanatory Note on the dialect in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* mocks pretentious prefatory comments precisely like those found in Edward Eggleston’s the *The Hoosier School-master* (1897) about rural Indiana: “. . . while I have not ventured to discuss the provincialisms of the Indiana backwoods, I have been careful to preserve the true *usus loquendi* of each locution” (6). Sociolinguist Thomas Bonfiglio’s *Race and the Rise of Standard American* (2002) argues that the standardization of American English to favor “white” (mid)western pronunciation was a (largely unconscious) result of white supremacist anxieties about racial and ethnic difference at the turn of the twentieth century. Furthermore, scholars like Amy Kaplan and Stephanie Foote have shown how realist and regionalist dialect fiction at this same period worked to codify and manage racial and ethnic difference. In this chapter I draw the sociolinguistic and literary conversations in analysis of imagined linguistic communities in Edward Eggleston’s *The Hoosier School-master* (1871) and Sarah Orne Jewett’s *The Country of the Pointed Firs* (1896). Eggleston and Jewett’s enregisterment of these dialects via spelling and punctuation as experimental nonstandard orthographies that reveal (and create) popular perceptions of these target communities. “Orthographies do not merely reflect identities,” Mark Sebba explains; “they help in creating them by forming ‘imagined communities’ (Anderson 1991) based around particular sets of practices” (130). I find that Eggleston contradictorily imagines the Indiana villagers simultaneously as inheritors of a “pure” white European lineage *and* racially inferior, a

characterization that is activated through unpredictable spelling of Hoosier speech. For contrast, I then read Sarah Orne Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, in which Jewett also marks rural Maine speakers with nonstandard spelling, but her strategy of enregisterment consists predictable, systematic spelling. Jewett's spelling regularity creates a sense of familiarity and rhythm to villager speech and, therefore, village life. The Maine village community is imagined as linguistically safe, controlled, and part of a fading culture.

A. The “Misspelling Bee”: Eggleston's *The Hoosier School-master*

Walter Blair called dialect literature before the Civil War a “misspelling bee,” alluding to the way writers strive to use nonstandard spelling in competition with one another to capture just the right impression of character speech. The spelling bee metaphor is particularly appropriate for *The Hoosier School-master* because of the erratic spelling of character speech combined with the characters' fondness for spelling bees in the novel. The result is what Jones called Eggleston's “confused” “linguistic message”; Jones says the novel “hovers uncomfortably between a barbarous past dialect and a future degenerate standard” (Jones 54). These notions of “barbarism” and “degeneracy” are reinforced by the specific graphic representations of Hoosier speech, representing Eggleston's ambivalence towards rural Midwestern dialects. Eggleston himself was born in the Midwest and lived in many Midwestern states through the course of his lifetime. He was born in 1837 in Vevay, Indiana, a small town on the Ohio River near the Kentucky border. His father was a transplanted Virginian, while his mother was the daughter of a “Hoosier”—a name for a person from the rural Midwest, later specifically Indiana.¹ Eggleston nurtured dreams of being a writer from a young age, encouraged by one of his teachers, who was a poet. Eggleston briefly attempted a teaching career, but then became a circuit preacher, at various times living in Minnesota and Indiana. While in Minnesota, Eggleston married and started a family,

¹The term “Hoosier” is used by Indiana natives themselves, and is even the name of the Indiana University mascot. The etymology of “Hoosier” is unknown, but dubious theories abound.

next moving to Illinois. In Illinois Eggleston enjoyed various editing jobs, including at the *Hearth and Home*, which would launch the work that made him famous—*The Hoosier School-master*. After the serialized novel’s surprising success, Eggleston only wrote novels and made a career out of writing, though none of his works would be as popular as his first. Eggleston is now best known as a historian, at one time serving as president of the American Historical Association. He died of a stroke in 1902.

Despite his roots in the Midwest, Eggleston identified intellectually with the northeast, including strong familial, professional, and educational ties, at times living in New York, one of the centers of literary culture and American intellectual community. In this sense, Eggleston is not unlike his main character, Ralph Hartsook. Ralph is a native Hoosier who has travelled and been educated in the northeast and comes to a rural school in Flat Creek (pronounced *Crick* by the residents), Indiana to teach a group of unruly students with a history of intimidating teachers through dangerous pranks, like loosening the floor boards of the schoolhouse. Although Ralph is afraid of his pupils and their families at first, the students soon learn that Ralph is determined to stay. His intention to persevere is strengthened by his attraction to one of the locals, Hannah. While Ralph wins some of his students over through his wit and even temper, he makes many enemies. Eventually he becomes falsely accused of a crime and goes on trial, but is acquitted through the testimony of his few allies in a climactic court scene. Hannah, his love interest, learns that the servitude she’s been under with a local family is illegal, and uses her newfound freedom to become a schoolteacher herself. Ralph and Hannah’s careers commence elsewhere, however, as the Flat Creek school district dissolves in failure.

The narrator’s language represents an educated “standard” of the text, and emphasizes distance between the narrator and the community. Below is a sample of the narrative voice:

I know that explanations are always abominable to story readers, as they are to story writers, but as so many of my readers have never had the inestimable privilege of sitting under the gospel as it is ministered in enlightened neighborhoods like Flat Creek, I find myself under the necessity—need-cessity the Rev. Mr. Bosaw would call it—of rising to explain. (101)

The narrator uses a high, literary register using classical references, usually in an ironic contrast to the more mundane events of village life. Note the high register of the text in phrases like “inestimable privilege.” The narrator is clearly mocking the Hoosiers with the description of Flat Creek as an “enlightened neighborhood,” and the allusion to one character’s use of “need-cessity.” Ralph, the main character, is aligned with the narrator rather than with the people of Flat Creek, indicated by a lack of nonstandard spellings in his speech. See the sample of his speech below, from the climactic court scene, during which Ralph attempts to defend himself against wrongful accusations:

The testimony of Miss Hannah Thomson is every word true. I believe that of Mr. Pearson to be true. The rest is false. But I can not prove it. I know the men I have to deal with. I shall not escape with State prison. They will not spare my life. But the people of Clifty will one day find out who are the thieves. (199)

Ralph’s monologue to the court is a bit lofty and noble, and the conventional spelling practices used for his speech here are typical for him. On the other hand, the pronunciation of the Flat Creek people is inflected with nonstandard spelling and traditionally nonstandard syntax. Consider the sample below, from Mrs. Means’s speech, in which she discusses women and education:

But schools was skase in them air days, and, besides, book-larnin’ don’t do no good to a woman. Makes her stuck up. I never knowed but one gal in my life as had ciphered into fractions, and she was so dog-on stuck up that she turned up her nose one night at a apple-peelin’ bekase I tuck a sheet off the bed to splice out the table-cloth, which was ruther short. And the sheet was mos’ clean, too. (40)

Mrs. Means uses “double negatives,” and vocabulary like *dog on*, which are absent from the narrator and Ralph’s speech. Her pronunciation is also specified in words like *ruther*,

tuck, mos', bekase, and larnin' through the use of nonstandard spelling and apostrophes. There is also quaint reference to an event, an *apple-peelin'*, a particularly rural activity in which residents convene to peel apples from the harvest. Mrs. Means's recounts bad behavior by an educated woman who reacts rudely to a bed sheet being used for a table cloth. The irony is, of course, that Mrs. Means is actually the one who is rude for using the bed sheet in the first place. The Means family, aptly named for their ill-humor, crudeness, and financial standing, is generally characterized as dirty, crude, simple, and tough.² See the description of the family's home below, focalized through Ralph:

She had sat down on the broad hearth to have her usual morning smoke; the poplar table, adorned by no cloth, stood in the middle of the floor; the unwashed blue teacups sat in the unwashed blue saucers; the unwashed blue plates kept company with the begrimed blue pitcher. The dirty skillets by the fire were kept in countenance by the dirtier pots, and the ashes were drifted and strewn over the hearth-stones in a most picturesque way. (27–28)

The Means family is wealthier than the other villagers, but do not enjoy high social status, their wealth having been accrued via underhanded dealings. The Means family becomes Ralph's nemesis, representing everything wrong with the people of Flat Crick. This crude characterization is reflected in Hoosier speech.

Inconsistencies in the spelling and, crucially, the inconsistent *combination* of nonstandard spelling and punctuation, contribute to the distance between the villagers and the main character. In Table 2.1 I have compiled a sample of the range of spelling variations found in villagers' speech, with the standard spelling iteration in the leftmost column. Some words have only one two variations (one being the standard version), like *ain't*, which is sometimes spelled *ain't* and other times *a'n't*. The phonological phenomenon of "a-prefixing" is found in Flat Creek, but is inconsistently spelled, especially in conjunction with other

²"Means," brings to mind the "signifying matrix of race, class, and morality" in which language ideology is located, as Bonfiglio explains. Bonfiglio uses the word "mean" as an illustration of the metaphoric associations that dictate that "that which is average becomes that which is base," inspired by Nietzsche's discussion of German "schlicht" (*common*) and "schlecht" (*bad*) (15).

of	uv		
if	ef		
ain't	a'n't		
rather	ruther	'ruther	
poor	pore	poar	
certain	sartan	sartain	
just	jest	jes'	jes
going	a-going	a-goin'	agoin
learning	larnin	larnin'	l'arnin'

Table 2.1. Examples of words with two to four spelling variants in *The Hoosier Schoolmaster*.

features, like so-called “g dropping.” That is, sometimes the villagers are represented as saying *a-going*, while at other times this is represented as *agoin'* (and sometimes *a-goin'*). Furthermore *poor-house* is spelled in its standard version as well as *pore-house*. *Just* is represented in three different ways in addition to the standard: *jest*, *jes*, and *jes'*. The word *uncertain* is also spelled in three different ways, including *onsartin* and *onsartain*. *Rather* is spelled two ways, including *ruther* and *'ruther*, which begins with an apostrophe. (The function of this apostrophe is not clear.) An especially interesting example, given the novel's emphasis on Hoosier education, is the word *learning*. There is one sentence, in fact, in which *learning* is spelled two different ways, but attributed to the same character: *l'arnin'* and *larnin'*. Importantly, none of these spelling alternations seem to map onto actual pronunciation variations. For example, we can imagine *ruther* and *'ruther* are pronounced the same way, but just represented differently. These spelling variations are, instead, different ways of imagining the “nonstandardness” of the characters overall, and represents uncertainty, unpredictability, and irregularity within the community. Some of Eggleston's orthographic choices can be explained as a classic dialect literature strategy called “eye dialect,” as discussed earlier, when words are represented with nonstandard spelling even when the pronunciation is standard. For example, *wuz* for *was*, and *uv* for *of*. However, Eggleston uses a combination of eye dialect and dialect spellings in unpredictable combinations. That is, words that capture a dialect difference often also include eye dialect,

as in the word *eddication* with an extra “d.”³ Overall, Eggleston’s spelling strategies result in a compounding of visual markers of difference.

Eggleston’s inconsistent punctuation and spelling strategies in character speech are made all the more significant in light of the story’s emphasis on spelling. The Flat Creek villagers’ favorite past-time is spelling competitions. These competitions are intense and participants are expected to handle words like “theodolite” and “daguerreotype.” The main character, Ralph, calls these competitions “orthographic conflict”:

The public mind seems impressed with the difficulties of English orthography, and there is a solemn conviction that the chief end of man is to learn to spell. “ ‘Know Webster’s Elementary’ came down from heaven,” would be the backwoods version of the Greek saying but that, unfortunately for the Greeks, their fame has not reached so far. It often happens that the pupil does not know the meaning of a single word in the lesson. This is of no consequence. What do you want to know the meaning of a word for? Words were made to be spelled, and men were probably created that they might spell them. Hence the necessity for those long spelling-classes at the close of each forenoon and afternoon session of the school, to stand at the head of which is the cherished ambition of every scholar. Hence, too, the necessity for devoting the whole of the afternoon session of each Friday to a “spelling match.” In fact, spelling is the “national game” in Hoopole County. Baseball and croquet matches are as unknown as Olympian chariot-races. Spelling and shucking are the only public competitions. (24–25)

On the one hand, the spelling school seems to offer a space for the villagers to take their literacy in their own hands and learn on their own terms. It is not an intrusive schoolteacher forcing them to spell in the competition: rather, spelling is a weekend past-time and social occasion. But the potential intellectual freedom the spelling school could represent is limited by the attitude the narrator (and presumably Ralph) demonstrates towards it. The competitors’ vocabularies do not include these words, as if the words were out of reach

³Another example is *consarn* for *concern*, in which the “a” indicates pronunciation difference, but the “s” simply reflects the “s” sound that “c” would represent in the standard version of the word. This spelling strategy, ironically, is an attempt to preserve standard pronunciation after the dialect spelling of the vowel has been applied. That is, the spelling *concern* might indicate a “k” sound and make the underlying form *concern* unrecognizable to readers.

and inappropriate for the Hoosiers. The competition is divorced from literacy; students must study the “spelling-book” five times before even beginning to learn to read (25). The spelling competition is a farce, as we can see from inappropriate comparison of “Know Webster’s Elementary” with a Greek “saying,” and the juxtaposition of these competitions with “Olympian chariot-races.”

The separation of competitive spelling and literacy is evident in the Hoosiers’ letter-writing practices. While villagers pride themselves on spelling difficult, multi-syllable words, even their short letters include “incorrect” spelling. Take, for example, this line from an anonymous letter to “Squar Haukins”: “this is too Lett u no that u beter be Keerful hoo yoo an yore family tacks cides with.” In another example, Bud Means writes a letter of warning to Ralph:

deer Sur:

I Put in my best licks, taint no use. Run fer yore life. A plans on foot to tar an fether or wuss to-night. Go rite off. Things is awful juberous. [The meaning and origin of this word is not clear.]

Hannah, on the other hand, is an expert speller in any context. Her spelling skills are part of what attract Ralph to her in the first place, as she even out-spells the schoolmaster. The following is taken from one of her letters to Ralph, expressing gratitude for his help with her brother, Shocky, during the boy’s illness: “Dear Sir: Anybody who can do so good a thing as you did for our Shocky, can not be bad. I hope you will forgive me.” As the story explains, Hannah’s parents are from England, but she grew up in Flat Creek. Readers might enregisterment of U.K. English or Hoosier speech, but that it not the case; her language seems to be standard American. Hannah’s brother, however, is marked heavily with an Indiana accent just like the other Flat Creekers, using nonstandard spelling in his dialogue. I discuss the issue of young, marriageable women’s conventional linguistic purity in the following chapter.

Despite the farcical nature of the spelling competitions, ability to spell signifies a certain potential for virtue and intelligence among the Flat Creek community, but within a

discourse of race and linguistic evolution, as demonstrated in the scene in which Ralph competes against one of his students, Phillips: “Phillips was now confident that he should carry off the scalp of the fourth school-master before the evening was over. He spelled eagerly, confidently, brilliantly. Stoop-shouldered as he was, he began to straighten up” (49). The student is first a “stoop-shouldered” creature who wants to “scalp” the enemy, but he makes evolutionary progress through his spelling efforts. The scene adopts the same white supremacist discourse that, during Eggleston’s era, enabled forced removal of Native Americans from their land and the creation of assimilationist schools that banned indigenous language.

The characters’ spelling bees and the “misspelling bee” of Eggleston’s dialogue are sites of orthographic conflict rooted in anxieties about racial and ethnic difference. Jones persuasively reads the spelling bee as characteristic of the ambivalence inherent to the dialect literature genre:

Here was a writer who claimed to represent sympathetically a social class he scorned; who professed “provincial realism” yet fell back on the humorous stereotype and romanticism he eschewed; who bemoaned the influence of the “vandal school-master” in reducing the “the vulgar tongue to the monotonous propriety of what we call good English” yet chose a proper-speaking and glowingly moral schoolmaster as the hero of his novel . . . The narrator berates English orthography for its crookedness (49), yet the ability to command this crookedness in a spelling-bee is the absolute sign of virtue and intelligence. (53)

Jones is right, but for Eggleston, class difference takes on racial significance. This racial difference then is manifest linguistically. From the outset, Ralph and the narrator perceive the villagers as wild “savages” and “beasts.” In the first paragraph of the story, just as Ralph meets the villagers (which corresponds with readers meeting the villagers), he becomes despondent: “This notion of beating education into young savages in spite of themselves dashed his ardor” (*The Hoosier School-master* 12). Eggleston’s racial/linguistic anxiety (and his management of this anxiety) is clear in a preface to a later edition in which he offers linguistic background that places Hoosier speech within a lineage hearkening back

to Old English. He tracks settlers' movements from England, Ireland, and Scotland to the colonies, and then West to Midwestern states like Indiana. He explains that the rustic nature their speech acquires is explained as the result of years in rough, unsettled country and, in part, by the popularity of the Midwest among lower classes and criminals—the most depraved then going further West in search of freedom to act as they please.

Barbarism is always at the edge of the discussion in Eggleston's preface.⁴ In the following, Eggleston complains about a Danish edition in which only the translator had the politeness to ask the author's permission.

As I look at the row of my books in the unfamiliar Danish, I am reminded of that New England mother who, on recovering her children carried away by the Canadian Indians, found it impossible to communicate with a daughter who spoke only French and a son who nothing but the speech of his savage captors.
(7)

In this metaphor, it is the novel itself that acquires a new language, and then can never have the same communicative relationship with its parent/author again. The image of the Indian abductee also firmly situates the text in the wild, western lands where “savage” Indians roam. (Indeed, the word “Indiana” itself refers to the land of Indians.) Eggleston's writings as a historian maintain the same ideology. The section on language in his popular history, *The Transit of Civilization from England to America in the Seventeenth Century* (1900), Eggleston laments that today American English “borrows from barbarous sources the world over,” but that early American “home-bred” English resisted influence from non-white sources because it had “fastidious prejudices against foreign words” that are not obviously of “Latin ancestry” (*The Transit of Civilization from England to America in the Seventeenth Century*. 107). According to Eggleston, this prejudice prevented miscegenation, conceived as both linguistic and corporeal: “There have been natural selection,

⁴White supremacist discourse (and the racist discourse of “barbarism”) is also prevalent in nineteenth-century pronunciation and spelling guides, as Bonfiglio illustrates, including Lewis Sherman's *A Handbook of Pronunciation* (1885) and William Henry Phyfe's *How Should I Pronounce?* (1885), among others.

modification by intermingling, and changes of use produced by environment; English dialect has bodily survived removal” (109–110). Lower forms of English, Eggleston assures his readers, can be explained through either immorality, lack of education, or race: “Slave speech caught its first accents from the bond servants and convicts who worked alongside the negro and from illiterate overseers. It probably preserved much that was worst in the English of the seventeenth century” (112).

Eggleston manages some of this threat through a narrative in which the worst of the Hoosiers, like the Means family, move on further West. As the story comes to a close, some of the “rougher villains” “went to prison, and when their terms had expired moved to Pike County, Missouri.” (218). *The Hoosier School-master* predates *Huck Finn* by over ten years, and Tom Sawyer by a handful of years, which suggests that Pike County, like backwoods Indiana, had a reputation for rugged lawlessness for some time. Eggleston strengthens this connection in the preface to the novel, in which he explains how people moved from the Ohio River region to Pike County, Missouri:

These semi-nomadic people, descendants of the colonial bond-servants, formed, in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, the lowest rank of Hoosiers. But as early as 1845 there was a considerable exodus of these to Missouri. From Pike County, in that State, they wended their way to California, to appear in Mr. Bret Harte’s stories as “Pikes.” (10)

By imagining the low-talking, crudest of the Hoosiers as moving on to populate dialect literature set in California, Eggleston can reassure his readers of the superiority of the current white population of the region, affirming the discourse around the Midwest as the white, moral center of the U.S.—a discourse that would make standardization of (largely) Midwest pronunciations possible.

B. “A Happy, Rural Seat of Various View” in Sarah Orne Jewett’s *The Country of the Pointed Firs*

If Indiana is the lawless West and its uncertain future, then the East Coast is a quiet, respectable past. The fishing village in Sarah Orne Jewett’s *The Country of the Pointed Firs* is positioned much differently in the minds of the readers than Eggleston’s Flat Creek, Indiana. That is, rural Maine is not newly settled, but rather firmly established. It is part of New England, and therefore part of the history of that region, and can hail back to its roots as part of the union. Maine was first a district in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and then seceded. It was admitted back into the Union in 1820, but had English settlements as early as 1607. In keeping with the author’s close identification with the place and people, and also in keeping with the status of New England villages in the minds of the reading public, the Mainers are expected to be somewhat rustic, but comfortable, familiar, and predictable. These are a people readers can relate to and with whom, after a little adjustment, readers can become settled and established themselves. There is a rhythm to the life of the people, the practices of the main character’s seasonal visits, and to the language of those characters, manifest in the rhythm and predictability of their spelled speech. Stephanie Foote’s reading of *The Country of the Pointed Firs* argues that “regionalism is a set of narrative strategies that privilege an ongoing and conflicted relationship regarding the nature of peoplehood and the ongoing construction of concepts of “stranger” and “foreign,” in both the imaginary past of U.S. history and its own conflicted present” (20). One of the “narrative strategies” of regionalism, we have seen, is character speech spelling; I argue that, unlike Eggleston, Jewett’s use of limited, predictable spelling in her characters’ speech helps disguise this “conflicted relationship.” Jewett’s minimal, but regular, nonstandard orthography marks, yet minimizes, the distance between “the stranger” and the local, suggesting accessibility and making the imagined community of the Maine villagers—and the conflict their fictional community represents—legible.

Jewett is much more well-known than Eggleston, and has also enjoyed a more prestigious reputation as a talented American writer. Jewett was born in 1839 in rural South Berwick, Maine, of a family that could boast generations in New England. Her father was a country doctor and she often accompanied him on his rounds, which critics think is the source of much of her knowledge and sensibility for the local color of Maine. While she was often in Boston, she always eventually returned to the sea coast villages of Maine, enriching her literary inspiration. Jewett enjoyed some society with literary figures like William Dean Howells, who praised her work. She published her first work at only nineteen in the prestigious *Atlantic Monthly*, and *The Country of the Pointed Firs* solidified her reputation. Jewett never married and died of stroke in 1909.

The main character in the story cycle *The Country of the Pointed Firs* is a “lover of Dunnet Landing,” the fictional village the story is set in, who has returned to “the unchanged shores of the pointed firs” (377). She is a writer who occasionally spends summers in Dunnet Landing as a peaceful place to practice her craft. Yet, her commitment to writing often wanes as she finds herself caught up in local life. For example, she finds herself helping the proprietor of her rental property, Mrs. Todd, with her business or coming along with her on social outings. These adventures constitute most of the stories, while others are interludes in which characters tell embedded stories about other characters, or stories from their own lives. A coastal fishing village, Dunnet Landing is simultaneously set off from the world and an important link to the global marketplace, although this part of the village’s economy is rapidly fading, and largely gone. Each story could stand alone, but also work well together in developing the characters more deeply.

The standard language of the novel comes from the narrative text and the quoted speech of the nameless main character. The story is focalized through her, so the narrative is aligned with her thoughts and speech. Although her speech is rarely reported, her thoughts and attitudes are. There is a complete absence of nonstandard spelling to depict her lan-

guage, which contrasts her with the locals of Dunnet Landing. For example, take this conversation between Mrs. Todd and her tenant:

I expect you're goin' up to your schoolhouse to pass all this pleasant day; yes, I expect you're going to be dreadful busy," she said despairingly.
"Perhaps not," said I. "Why, what's going to be the matter with you, Mrs. Todd?" For I supposed that she was tempted by the fine weather to take one of her favorite expeditions along the shore pastures to gather herbs and simples, and would like to have me keep the house. (402)

While Mrs. Todd says *goin* repeatedly, the narrator says *going*. The narrator's nonquoted language is similarly absent of these spellings. While Mrs. Todd does seem to have dialect features signaled through nonstandard spelling, it is of a very different nature than Eggleston's characters. Like the unchanged shores and the unchanged firs and unchanged people, the rural folk speak a regularized language. It connotes stability, accessibility, predictability.

Because Mrs. Todd's language makes up most of the quoted dialogue of the villagers, and most obviously contrasted consistently with the language of the narrator's reported speech and thought, my reading focuses on her. Jewett uses only a limited number of nonstandard spelling strategies that can be easily catalogued here. The most common is the use of *o'* for *of*, for example, "I've took great advantage o' your bein' here." This *o* plus apostrophe to constitute *of* is common in many dialect literature works, and could be considered a general marker of the spoken quality of the word, or an "allegra" form, as explained in the introduction. Another hallmark of Mrs. Todd's speech is *an* for *and*. Like in *o'*, the apostrophe is used to suggest the omission of a sound, in this case the final "d" sound. This consonant cluster reduction is also quite common in dialect literature, and seems to capture the way the word is spoken in rapid, casual speech. The majority of Jewett's other nonstandard spellings for Mrs. Todd's speech come in the form of contractions, using an apostrophe, often with *will*. For example, *tide'll* is *tide will* and *Mother'll* is *Mother will*. Other contractions are made with *it*, like *'tis* for *it is*, *'twas* for *it was* and *but't* for *but it*. Mrs. Todd also forms contractions with *as*, in examples like *quick's* for *quick as* and

knows's for *knows as*. Mrs. Todd is also reported to say *'em* for *them*, which is practically a staple for dialect literature.

While the above features are not necessarily dialectal, Mrs. Todd's use of *goin'* seems to represent the phonological variation in some regions that is familiarly called "g dropping." For example, "He was above bein' a seafarin' man." The apostrophe again represents a missing sound, in this case, the "g" sound. In this very common dialect literature feature we can see politics of spelling at work. That is, linguistically speaking, there is no dropped sound. People who "drop" their "g" sounds are actually replacing one consonant sound with another. Even standard English speakers do not pronounce a true "g" sound when they say words with "ing" endings. In fact, it is quite clumsy and difficult to pronounce "g" directly after "n" in a word without extra care. Rather, there is a phonological process that solves this problem by which the /n/ sound blends with the /g/ sound and /ŋ/ results in place of both of them. To elaborate, an /n/ sound as in "no" requires the tongue to touch the front of the roof of the mouth, but /ŋ/ makes contact in the back of the mouth. These are distinct sounds. There is one consonant at the end of *going* for standard and nonstandard speakers alike. Mrs. Todd (and those like her) are simply choosing the "n" sound and omitting the "g" sound rather than blending them into one sound. Readers do not catch this for two reasons. One is that it takes a trained ear to hear and notice this linguistic fact. Secondly, writers conventionally represent this variation with an apostrophe to indicate a "dropped" sound—a convention Jewett inherits and perpetuates.

There are some indications of regional vowel variations, often signaled in form of an omitted sound and shown with an apostrophe rather than being respelled to capture that vowel sound. For example, *cert'in* for *certain* and *bo't* for *boat*. These might point to shorter vowel sounds, with the apostrophe standing in for what vowel length is lost. The use of *cert'in* for *certain* can be contrasted with Eggleston's *sartin*, which seems to require a nonstandard consonant "s" to pair well with the nonstandard vowel spellings, although "s" and "c" can denote the /s/ sound found in the onset sound of *certain*. Mrs. Todd also

says *git* for *get*, clearly indicating a regional vowel particularity, and *sca'ce* for *scarce*, which points to a very common New England r-lessness. Finally, Mrs. Todd also uses some nonstandard syntax, like double negatives.

There are some hints of code switching when Mrs. Todd brings the main character with her to visit her parents. Mrs. Todd's mother, Mrs. Blackett, says "William an' me'll" in one utterance, but then the more traditionally correct "Willian an' I" in another instance, but in the same conversation. The mixed audience may explain this variation. In both instances, Mrs. Blackett is talking, intermittently, to both the main character and her husband, William, alternating her address back and forth between the two in her explanations, and seemingly to try to induce her husband to partake in the conversation. Mrs. Blackett does not edit her English when she speaks to her husband, and says "me" in the subject position of a sentence. Next, she re-aligns her speech with her interlocutor, who is an outsider. The next chapter will further explore the significance of characters shifting between varieties of English.

The nonstandard spellings catalogued above are largely predictable and regular either because they are common in dialect literature, or because they take the shape of licensed strategies, like contraction. That is, readers already know that apostrophes are used to indicate a missing sound in show an omitting sound in canonical contractions, like *won't* or *don't*. Jewett's readers can easily generalize from standard orthography to the nonstandard orthography. Jewett makes much more use of apostrophes to manipulate her nonstandard orthography than respellings of words. This suggests a commitment to preserving the shape that readers already know so that they can easily recognize words, which not only makes the reading go more smoothly but also, perhaps, minimizes the side effect of attributing the communicative difficulty to the characters themselves, as if the characters are linguistically and mentally deficient. Overall, Jewett's nonstandard orthography strategies fall into two categories: consonant reduction and word contraction, as seen in Table 2.2 below. The repetition and of these techniques means they are easy to become accustomed to and represent

stability and a certain element of civility Jewett wants to convey about the rural northeast and that contrasts sharply with the wild unknown of the West and Midwest of Eggleston's imagination.

Strategy	Example
Word + as → __'s	knows as → knows's
Word + will → __'ll	tide will → tide'll
-ing → n'	going → goin'
-nd → n'	and → an'
of → o'	
get → git	

Table 2.2. Examples of consonant reduction and word contraction strategies in *The Country of the Pointed Firs*.

Of course, it is not the orthography alone that suggests stable, moral, rural life. Standard and nonstandard spellings index particular identities and values by way of their connections and associations with particular characters and contexts. Mrs. Todd's regular speech is associated with her predictable and familiar ways. Unlike the Means family, Mrs. Todd is hospitable, living in comfortable and "quaint little house" (421), "retired and sheltered enough from the busy world" (378). What seems strange at first to an outsider, is always soon understood. For example, Jewett's narrator describes Mrs. Todd's gardening:

It was a queer little garden and puzzling to a stranger, the few flowers being put at a disadvantage by so much greenery; but the discovery was soon made that Mrs. Todd was an ardent lover of herbs . . . You could always tell when she was stepping about there, even when you were half awake in the morning, and learned to know, in the course of a few weeks' experience, in exactly which corner of the garden she might be. (378)

This passage illustrates the admiration the narrator has for Mrs. Todd's attention to routine, and the comfort that routine bestows on her visitor, who is able to languish in the morning, knowing all is well; today the world is just as it was yesterday. Mrs. Todd's predictable speech patterns reinforce this categorization, and the sense of safety they bring.

C. Conclusion

In each of these works, the image of the schoolhouse underscores the relationships between the outsiders and villagers, while alluding to the ideology of standard English that traditional education systems reinforce. In *The Hoosier Schoolmaster*, the space of literacy—the schoolhouse itself—begins as a hostile, dangerous space for the schoolteacher. The students feel resentful of the new teacher; to drive him out like all the rest before him, they devise pranks to pull on him, which are quite physical. In one instance, a student loosens a board in the floor near the teacher’s desk so that as Ralph walks behind his desk—his seat of authority—he will step on the board and fall through the floor into a pond under the building. Ralph notices the loose board, however, carefully steps around it, and sits behind his desk as if nothing is amiss. As the school day wears on, the students forget about the board. Ralph then decides to trick the tricksters: “A plan had flashed upon him, but the punishment seemed a severe one. He gave it up once or twice, but he remembered how turbulent the Flat Creek elements were,” (*The Hoosier School-master* 34). Ralph invites Hank, the main perpetrator of the prank, to come closer for help with his arithmetic. Hank steps on the loose board and falls into the “ice-cold water beneath the school-house” (37). Ultimately, the schoolhouse is a hostile place for the students, not Ralph, and represents the conflict between villagers and outsiders, and Eggleston’s conflicting desires to both champion a discourse of “pure” Midwestern racial roots and also decry the immorality and lowliness their nonstandard dialects represent in the nineteenth-century imagination.

The schoolhouse is also an important site for the main character in Jewett’s work. The main character rents out the schoolhouse as a writing retreat, where she attempts to lose herself in her writing. The schoolhouse represents her efforts to escape the conflicts of modern, urban life via rural tourism. She soon becomes distracted, as “an hour was very long in that coast town where nothing stole away the shortest minute” (387). When Captain Littlepage, an elderly character from the village, visits her in the schoolhouse, it is a welcome change:

“Come in, sir,” I said, rising to meet him; and he entered, bowing with much courtesy. I stepped down from the desk and offered him a chair by the window, where he seated himself at once, being sadly spent by his climb. I returned to my fixed seat behind the teacher’s desk, which gave him the lower place of a scholar. (387)

Eggleston’s Ralph Hartsook uses his place behind the desk as a position of authority to subdue his students, literally during the scene in which he is seated behind his desk and beckons a student to come to him and literally fall into their own trap. Jewett’s narrator uses the space differently, temporarily to promote her own craft, the subject of which, we imagine, is the very village she looks upon. When the Captain comes to visit her, he is offered a seat for his comfort and relief after journeying uphill to see her, which seems to symbolize her importance and scholarly elevation. But this elevation is as uncomfortable to the character as it is inappropriate to Jewett, and the narrator suggests a change: “You ought to have the place of honor, Captain Littlepage,” (387). Jewett metaphorically unseats her character from linguistic authority, which is signified by the space of the schoolhouse, the traditional seat of standard English literacy and where people get the ideology of standard language and spelling.

But Captain Littlepage defers, and seems to prefer his place:

“A happy, rural seat of various views,” he quoted, as he gazed out into the sunshine and up the long wooded shore. Then he glanced at me, and looked all about him as pleased as a child.

“My quotation was from *Paradise Lost*: the greatest of poems, I suppose you know?” and I nodded.

“There’s nothing that ranks, to my mind, with *Paradise Lost*; it’s all lofty, all lofty,” he continued.

“Shakespeare was a great poet; he copied life, but you have to put up with a great deal of low talk.” (387)

The Captain’s quote from *Paradise Lost* comes from Book IV, which is told from Eve’s perspective as she enjoys heaven: “Thus was this place / A happy rural seat of various view; / Groves whose rich trees wept odorous gums and balm”. This allusion reminds us that solitary writing is certainly a paradise for this woman writer, but also connects that

pure state with the rural, natural wild that seems to make such a creative paradise possible. That Captain Littlepage recognizes the unique paradise that the schoolhouse must be for her helps make them instant friends. “Various views” comments not just on the spectacular vantage point the position of the schoolhouse offers, but also refers to the many lives she is privy to during her visit. Each short story in the cycle represents another of these views. This scene introduces Littlepage’s own contribution—his view of life at sea. Littlepage’s comment about “low talk” is ironic because when he begins his thrilling tale of his travels, it requires just the kind of language he seems to devalue. For example, he relates, “The ship’s surgeon let fall an opinion to the captain, one day, that ’twas some condition o’ the light and the magnetic currents that let them see those folks. ‘Twa’n’t a right-feeling part of the world, anyway; they had to battle with the compass to make it serve, an’ everything seemed to go wrong.” Captain Littlepage’s world, there is a sense that, like the Paradise in *Paradise Lost*, will disappear. The schoolhouse is a temporary (and limited) site of conversation between the narrator/writer and her subject.

CHAPTER 3

PRONOUNCED DIFFERENCES: GENDER, CLASS, AND THE COLOR LINE IN CHARLES CHESNUTT'S LONG FICTION

The space of the schoolhouse is one of the first contexts in which Charles Chesnutt, who would eventually become famous for his depictions of Black speech, began to listen to and record speech. In his journal, Chesnutt relates the correction of his students' pronunciation: "All the scholars say 'dō,' 'thē,' and 'äre,' &c. which I must first 'unteach' them . . ." (Chesnutt and Brodhead 71). Note the almost ethnographic depiction of the students' language, as Chesnutt uses diacritic marks to specify what sounds the students make. We can contrast that mode of speech representation with the example below, in which Chesnutt vents about the committee in charge of the details of his employment. He discusses his various challenges with teaching and his disappointment towards the promised (but withheld) money for room and board:

The "committee" said they were going around to see about my board this week, but they "haint" gone yet.

I dont want to pay Bomar anything, and wont if I can help it! But I expect I shall have to. If I do, I'll be slim¹ when I go "ter hum."² (81)

A clearly annoyed and cash-strapped Chesnutt seems to relish relating the cultural markers of uneducated English he has observed from his unorganized employers on the school board. The word *committee* in quotations marks suggests Chesnutt's view of the inappropriateness of the word for this disorganized body, and the inclusion of *haint* may

¹"Slim" here likely means "broke" as well as physically slender due to rationed resources.

²"to home"

further indicate that these men are ill-suited for the job. Chesnutt's impulse to represent speech in the conventions of literature of the day in his own journal becomes more evident as the journal evolves, and he begins using this space for story ideas. The following is a short sketch entered in his journal:

Circus.—Colored party. “Lor’ what’s dat coming long dere, with a tail on his head”? *Other colored party.*—[“]Lor’ niggah, don’ you know, da’s de elephum, he ain’t got no tail on his head; dat’s his snout.” (153)

Chesnutt material is almost certainly inspired from the communities he inhabited. In a subversion of nineteenth-century minstrel shows and plantation tales,³ which rely on racist caricature, Chesnutt imbues his characters with complexity and nuance, as the readings in the next section will show.

The first two chapters of this dissertation have chiefly dealt with the way phonetic spelling and punctuation strategies vary according to authors, texts, and target speech communities. What these texts share is that they all make use of the politics of spelling, and use orthography to aid in characterization. But orthography has no effect on its own; it is the combination of framing, prefatory material, and overall characterization alongside dialogue that colors our perceptions of these fictional speakers. Jim’s heavily phonetic rendering seems to relegate him to racist stereotype. Whites in Eggleston’s and Jewett’s work articulate varying degrees of “barbarity” via authorial processes of spelling alternation. The next two chapters investigate texts that rely just as heavily on spelling, apostrophes, and italics to construct fictional speakers, but the aim of these forthcoming analyses is to investigate the way these orthographic choices signal variation within individual characters’ speech. These chapters foreground characters’ fictional linguistic repertoires to understand how characters negotiate their identities via their multiple Englishes and/or multiple lan-

³The plantation tradition was a genre of slavery apologia literature in the late 1800s, featuring simple former slave characters who look back fondly on their antebellum years. These characters’ speech is always rendered in heavy phonetic spelling, and includes some of the conventions and features Chesnutt famously satirizes in his Conjure tales.

guages other than English, the stakes of those negotiations for the racial and gender politics of the text, and the metaphorical significance of those variations in the text as a whole. I begin with Chesnutt, a light-skinned African American man writing just at the turn of the twentieth century. Chesnutt was a teacher, stenographer, lawyer, and activist, in addition to being a writer. Born in Ohio to free parents, Chesnutt spent his formative years in North Carolina. After marrying in the 1870s, Chesnutt moved to New York City, then Cleveland, Ohio to escape extreme prejudice in the South and begin a lucrative stenography business. Chesnutt was awarded the Springarn Medal by the NAACP in 1928 for his activism and service. He died a few years later, in 1932. A resurgence in interest in Chesnutt's work began in the late 1990s, resulting in posthumous publication of much of his writing.

Chesnutt was just as strategic a listener and composer of literary speech as were Twain, Eggleston, and Jewett, but he had much more at stake. He first made a name for himself with his satire of stereotypical Black speech in his *Conjure* tales, but his relationship to African American speech in fiction was complicated, as he confided to his mentor, friend, and publisher, Walter Hines Page: "The fact is, of course, that there is no such thing as a Negro dialect; that what we call by that name is the attempt to express, with such a degree of phonetic correctness as to suggest the sound, of English pronounced as an ignorant old southern Negro would be supposed to speak it . . ." (McElrath 105). In saying there is "no such thing as Negro dialect," Chesnutt reminds us that the conventional literary speech of African Americans in fiction is an artifice constructed, in part, through phonetic spelling. Chesnutt does not deny that Blacks and whites often speak differently, but rather points to the way one image of African American English persists in the minds of readers, and is reinforced by stereotypical dialect tales which, frustratingly for him, includes his own *Conjure* stories.

Many critics have discussed Chesnutt's critiques (and limitations of those critiques) of the color line, but little attention has been paid to how the color line is largely constructed—

and complicated—via character speech.⁴ The representation of Chesnutt’s characters’ speech—the spelling and punctuation—also complicated those categories by suggesting code switching (alternating between varieties according to context) and code shifting (moving from one variety to another over time). In *Charles W. Chesnutt and The Fictions of Race* (2002), Dean McWilliams briefly discusses conventional representations of Black and white fictional speech, observing that, from the perspective of a Northerner in Chesnutt’s time, white and Black Southerners *both* speak in a way that is distinct and accented. But in literature set in the South, the white speaker’s presumably regional language is leveled and becomes a “neutral surface to set in relief the distortions of the black speaker” (64). Whose speech becomes highlighted as “other” is a powerful signifier of the color line: “black vernacular dialect was yoked in a powerful cultural binary where standard ‘white’ English was the privileged term” (64). In this chapter I close read the speech of white and mixed-race characters in Chesnutt’s long fiction, especially those places in which traditional racial/linguistic binaries break down. I argue that Chesnutt’s powerful and well-known challenge to the color line is, at times, strengthened by a challenge along linguistic lines—a challenge that stops short of dismantling constructs of gender in *The House Behind the Cedars* (2000 [1900]) and class in *The Marrow of Tradition* (1974 [1901]). I conclude with *The Colonel’s Dream* (1905) to illustrate how Chesnutt’s changing linguistic characterizations map onto his changing views of race relations in the U.S.

A. Reading Rena in *The House Behind the Cedars*

At first, *The House Behind the Cedars* (2000 [1900]) seems to be a conventional racial passing tale of the period.⁵ Two siblings—John and Rena Walden—have Black ancestry,

⁴See especially Eric Sundquist’s *To Wake the Nations* (1993), Joseph McElrath’s *Critical Essays on Charles W. Chesnutt* (1999), Dean McWilliams’s *Charles W. Chesnutt and the Fictions of Race* (2002), and Ryan Simmons’s *Chesnutt and Realism* (2006).

⁵See Werner Sollors’s influential discussion of the representation and significance of mixed-race characters like Rena in *Neither Black Nor White Yet Both* (1997).

but are light-skinned enough to move to South Carolina in search of a better life. After growing up in Patesville, North Carolina, John, the eldest, is the first to leave. His journey is inspired by a conversation with his white mentor, Judge Straight, during which he learns that his skin is fair enough to “pass” for a white man. John leaves and reinvents himself, passing as white world for ten years. After John’s wife dies and he is left to care for his child alone, he returns to Patesville for a visit. Once reunited with his sister, Rena, John invites her to come back with him to his home in South Carolina to help him care for his child. Rena agrees, easily passes for white, and shortly becomes engaged to a white aristocrat, George Tryon. In accordance with traditional passing tales, Tryon dramatically discovers Rena’s true identity and calls off the engagement. Rena returns to Patesville, but has trouble reintegrating in her old community. After a few attempts to reconcile himself to the idea of Rena’s ancestry, Tryon gives up, horrified by the sight of Rena at a party, surrounded by African Americans from her community. Rena eventually begins a new life as a schoolteacher where she is lusted after by another teacher, Jeff Wain. Wain’s advances escalate and Rena dies tragically in the woods trying to evade him.

Like conventional passing novels, *House* critiques late nineteenth-century society’s insistence on essentialist racial categories by dramatizing the tragic plight of a light-skinned character with African American ancestry who tries, but fails, to keep that ancestry secret. These narratives indict the color line as arbitrary, artificial and unjust. As Cathy Boeckmann explains, “people on the color line were in a position to threaten the science that justified the existence of the line in the first place” (14). What makes *House* different is its contradictory message about race and science. As Boeckmann has noted, nineteenth-century racist pseudo-science was grounded in quantitative data and visual measures but, over time, adjusted to accommodate the challenge of observing race (14). Discourse around race then moved to discussions of character (15), a “quantifiable set of inherited behaviors and tendencies” (3). My analysis of Rena and John’s linguistic characterization reveals that the siblings represent opposing nineteenth-century theories of race. If, as Boeckmann ar-

gues, “conventions of literature, not just its themes, help to create race and make it visible” (9), then it is important to study the way race is made not only visible, but audible, through the conventions of speech representation. John represents a view that race is environmental; racial identity is socially constructed. By code shifting and moving to a new country, he can actually become white. By contrast, Rena embodies the view that race is inherent and consists of essential properties one is born with and cannot change; it is as if she were already white, but unfairly categorized as Black in world of racial binaries.

While the characters in *House* read race in each other’s skin color, Chesnutt’s readers rely on linguistic rather than visual cues, including narrative description as well as quoted character speech. Most characters in *House* fall predictably along a linguistic/racial continuum, with dark-skinned characters speaking a language that requires special phonetic spellings on one end of the continuum, for example, “I jes’ wonder who dat man is” (8). White characters whose language requires no such special markers, and who exhibit mainstream syntax, are on the other end of the continuum, for example, “The people of a small town are inquisitive about strangers, and some of them have long memories” (23). This traditional linguistic binary along racial lines sets in relief a few pointed exceptions in which Chesnutt’s critiques can be located. The first hint of Chesnutt’s linguistic innovation is through the character of Molly, and her ability to code switch. Molly negotiates her language when she sees her son, John, for the first time in a decade. When John knocks on the door, Molly replies, “Who’s there?” (11). Molly uses the “th” sound that many of the Black characters in the novel replace with a “d” sound, a characteristic of African American English. John answers that he is a gentleman, but does not reveal his name. This prompts Molly to say, “I’m Mis’ Walden. What’s yo’r business?” (11); the orthography suggests she pronounces the “ts” combination and word-final “r” sounds that are missing in traditional AAE, and had become iconic for African American language in literature, thereby signal-

ing an alignment with a person (John) she seems to think is a white stranger.⁶ John replies, “I have a message to you from your son John” (11). Molly’s speech exhibits more specific pronunciation markers as the scene goes on, after she learns who the man is, as if she is re-aligning linguistically, this time with an African American linguistic identity. For example, she says things like, *last* and *lost* early in the conversation, but the sound combination becomes reduced later, and she says *jus’* instead of *just* (12). Molly uses more nonstandard features as the conversation progresses. As she discusses her daughter’s hair with her son, she says: “I’ve never be’n able to git that wave out. But her hair’s be’n took good care of, an’ there ain’t nary a gal in town that’s got any finer” (14). Molly’s English changes based on how she perceives her interlocutor—her fellow speaker—showing her control over her language and identity. Through Molly, Chesnutt levels a challenge to racial and linguistic dichotomies.

The reason Molly confuses John with a white stranger to begin with is because his speech has changed since childhood. This code shift was necessary in order for John to successfully pass for white, and is integral to Chesnutt’s subversion of the color line. John can easily perform whiteness, and his transition is successful enough to fool even his own mother. John’s speech before and after passing is an important illustration of his progression. There are only two instances of John’s language before he leaves for his new life. During a flashback, a very young John asks Judge Straight about how to become a lawyer. His speech is aligned almost exactly with the judge’s, except for one moment when John says, “it don’t apply to me” (113), which is traditionally viewed in standard English ideology as a verbal agreement failure; we can imagine a white, educated man like Judge Straight saying: “it doesn’t apply to me.” Other than this one moment, there is little to no distinction to be made between the speech of the judge and that of his young visitor, who says things like, “I had thought that I might pass for white” (114) and “Then I need not be

⁶There is an apostrophe in “yo’r,” but it is not clear what it indicates.

black?” (115). The result is that John is characterized as special from the outset, conversing with the judge as a social equal.

In another flashback, John’s language sounds more like his mother’s. In this scene, John leaves his family to pursue a new life and says his goodbyes to his sister: “Nev’ min’, sis,” he says, “ ... Be a good little gal, an’ some o’ these days I’ll come back to see you and bring you somethin’ fine” (116). The apostrophes at the ends of some words like *Nev’* signify the omission of a syllable, sound, or sound combination. John, for example, does not say “Never mind”, but rather “Nev’ min’”. Like his mother, John has a fluid linguistic repertoire, speaking one way with an educated white judge and another with his own sister. However, this is the final instance of code switching in John’s speech. John does not vary his language with his mother or sister as an adult—his transformation to whiteness as a young man, once complete, seems permanent.

John is the only character whose language undergoes this type of transformation. To explain how John is able to alter his speech, the novel describes his hours spent reading and studying written texts left in his home by his absent, white father (12). The text suggests that the language of literary texts, like the narrative text of *House* itself, is the standard of correct English. That these texts were left by his white father suggests the connection between Standard English and whiteness. The difference between John’s speech before and after passing is subtle, but significant, and that very subtlety reflects Chesnut’s insistence on the fragile nature of the color line. John represents a view of race that was gaining steam in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, that race was environmental, not biological, as John’s linguistic evolution maps onto his racial transition. The case for Rena, though, is different.

In Rena’s first appearance in the novel, she is “read” as white by both her estranged brother, John, as well as the reader. As John walks to his childhood home behind the cedars, he watches Rena walking home along the same route. John does not know whom he is watching, and Rena does not know that she is being watched. John sees Rena help a

woman raise a basket over her head, and the woman replies, in “dulcet negro intonation,”: “T’ank y’, honey; de Lawd gwine bless you sho’. You wuz alluz a good gal, and de Lawd love eve’ybody w’at he’p de po’ ole nigger. You gwine ter hab good luck all yo’ bawn days” (6). Rena responds, “I hope you’re a true prophet, Aunt Zilphy” (6). Rena’s speech is importantly different from Aunt Zilphy’s. Presumably, there are no special spellings or punctuation needed to capture Rena’s speech. John hears Rena’s “soft and sweet and clear” voice, which gives him a “thrill” (6). Rena’s clear voice is part of what makes John think he is following a white woman, until he sees her enter his own childhood home.

Once inside, Rena’s language is contrasted with that of her mother. When Molly instructs Rena to “Tell ‘im howdy,” referring to John, Rena replies, not with “Howdy,” but with, “It seems but yesterday” (13). Rena’s speech is indistinguishable from her brother’s, but very different from her mother’s. The difference between Rena’s speech and that of the other African American and mixed-race characters cannot, like John’s, be attributed to a difference in environment. At this point in the novel, Rena has been living with her mother in the Black community all the time her brother has been gone. Rena’s standard English cannot be attributed to reading or education, either. Rena has received no special education and is not especially interested in books. In her mother’s words, “she don’t take to books quite like [John] did” (12).

To add to the mystery of Rena’s standard language, the passage that shows young John’s farewell to Rena, above, in which he promises to bring her back “somethin’ fine,” his younger sister’s reply is completely omitted from the dialogue. There is no response from Rena, leaving what she said and how she said it completely to the readers’ imagination. The only speech we “hear” from Rena is from her adult character, which sounds the same throughout the novel, no matter with whom she is speaking or with what community she aligns herself.

Although Chesnutt represents Rena’s speech the same way throughout the novel—before, during, and after her passing—the narrative itself suggests she actually does adjust

her language, at least slightly, when she enters the white community: “It had not been difficult for Rena to conform her speech, her manners, and in a measure her modes of thought, to those of the people around her” (50). There is a disconnect between Rena’s quoted dialogue—what she says and how she says it—and the actual narrated information about her language. It seems that Chesnutt would have it both ways—Rena both does and does not change her language as part of her racial passing.

That Rena’s speech is fixed, while the language of her brother and mother is dynamic, is a function of convention. Rena’s speech conforms to the literary conventions for representing young, marriageable white women. As I mention above, there are relatively few examples of code switching and mixing between varieties of English in nineteenth-century American literature. However, there are many examples from the same era of young, beautiful unmarried female characters who speak the English of the narrator in the midst of characters whose speech is continuously marked as nonstandard; the linguistically pure young white woman is a trope. One example is Hannah in *The Hoosier School-master*, discussed in the previous chapter. Although her parents are British, and despite being raised in a rural Indiana village, Hannah speaks the same English as the hero of the novel, a worldly outsider, and is quickly singled out as his love interest. Chesnutt situates Rena within these same conventions of young white womanhood, which requires linguistic purity as an inherent characteristic, like physical beauty.

Rena’s linguistic characterization may have made her a more comfortable love interest for white male readers. A white man’s patrilineal heritage, as in the case of George Tryon, Rena’s white fiance, would be considered, in the eyes of a turn-of-the-century readership, endangered by a mixed race woman’s racial background. The text of the novel suggests as much when Tryon discovers Rena’s ancestry, and he thinks “no Southerner who loved his poor, downtrodden country, or his race, the proud Anglo-Saxon race which traced the clear stream of its blood to the cavaliers of England, could tolerate the idea that even in distant generations that unsullied current could be polluted by the blood of slaves” (96). Tryon’s

inner ravings about blood and heritage show why Rena cannot be marked with nonstandard English, specifically the characteristics used by many African American characters, even temporarily in a childhood scene, like her brother can—it would indicate her unsuitability as his match. Matthew Wilson shows that, as Chesnutt re-worked earlier versions of Rena's story, he eventually introduced Tryon as a character with which white readers could identify: “by having readers experience what Tryon experiences, the author was attempting to mine and infiltrate readers' feelings” (67). If white readers found a “surrogate” in Tryon, the argument goes, their racial prejudice would soften (67). This softening would require readers to imagine the unfairness that a characteristically white woman should be stuck on the wrong side of the color line simply because of her family. For the identification with Tryon to work, Rena can be ancestrally, but not characteristically, “Black.” The possibilities for representing Rena may have been limited by anti-black beliefs and fears surrounding miscegenation that Chesnutt critiques in his representation of George.

Chesnutt hints at the gendered fear of racial and linguistic corruption in the scene in which John sees Rena after years away, and reads her as a white woman:

The sound of [Rena's] voice gave Warwick a thrill. It was soft and sweet and clear—quite in harmony with her appearance. That it had a faint suggestiveness of the old woman's accent he hardly noticed, for the current Southern speech, including his own, was rarely without a touch of it. The corruption of the white people's speech was one element—only one—of the negro's unconscious revenge for his own debasement. (6)

Chesnutt points to the negative attitudes his white readers may have about speech characteristics associated with African Americans. Not only is it crude and base, it seems, but it has the power to corrupt the speech of others, spreading like a contagious disease. The correlative power of African American English is linked to the beautiful speech of Rena; Chesnutt suggests that Rena is akin to a white Southerner who has managed to escape this corruption. The narrative states that Rena has some accent, but that it is happily “faint,” however, there is no indication of this in her speech representation. Rena's speech is “quite in harmony with her appearance” (6), and her speech representation's lack of accent is also

“quite in harmony” with how John hears her. Rena’s language is biological, like a part of her beautiful body, and signifies graceful young womanhood.

Rena’s traditionally feminine embodiment has also been discussed by SallyAnn Ferguson, who argues that Rena’s stereotypically Black qualities—she is superstitious and emotional—doom her to be a failed “Future American” (78), as outlined in Chesnutt’s series of race theory essays. Chesnutt’s hypothetical future American was a member of a new amalgamated American race, made up of white, black and Native blood, and would herald the end of racial distinctions and the hierarchies that come with them. Rena represents Blacks who cannot eschew their Blackness and, according to Ferguson, fail to commit to assimilation. But if Rena fails to assimilate to whiteness, her speech should be one of the foremost aspects that reveal that failure, since character language, as I have attempted to show, is a preeminent feature of racial categorization in Chesnutt’s work. He underscores the role of language by employing a metaphor of language acquisition at the height of Rena’s struggles with her racial identity. Rena has difficulty fitting in with her home community after passing for white:

The guests as well were dimly conscious of a slight barrier between Mis’ Molly’s daughter and themselves. The time she had spent apart from these friends of her youth had rendered it impossible for her ever to meet them again upon the plane of common interests and common thoughts. It was much as though one, having acquired the vernacular of his native country, had lived in a foreign land long enough to lose the language of his childhood without acquiring fully that of his adopted country . . . (143)

During the dance, Rena stands physically apart, refuses to dance, and is characterized as not speaking the same language as the other guests. Rena’s time in her “adopted country” in the white community in South Carolina, which puts her on another “plane.” People of different countries, the metaphor suggests, do not have “common interests” or “common thoughts.” The language barrier implies not just communication problems, but a disparity between class, ethnicity, and intellect. In contrast, during his passing journey, John is figured as “a naturalized foreigner in the world of wide opportunity” (45). Boeckmann points to both

John and Rena's ability to change their speech as evidence that their "blackness appears to exist on the external and symbolic level" (160). This seems true only on the level of narrative descriptions of their language, though, and not on the level of representation. Chesnutt's critique of racial essentialism is limited by his essentialism of gender.

B. The Dialect of Racism in *The Marrow of Tradition*

Eric Sundquist has noted that the "fundamental trope" of Chesnutt's "color line stories," is irony (397). One of those ironies is that the race of John and Rena is not visible to other characters, but by making race audible through character speech, their racial identity is returned (in part) to the realm of the visible. Apostrophes indicating missing sounds and nonstandard spelling can mark them as "other" or deficient, while lack of those markers signals normative speech. But these audible/visual markers of race are not always reliable either, and I have tried to show how the intersection of race and gender complicates easy linguistic-racial categories of Chesnutt's characters. In the following discussion of *The Marrow of Tradition*, I turn to the intersection of race and class and focus on Captain McBane, who tries to gain social standing by sharing his white supremacist plans with the aristocrats of Wellington. McBane's speech reveals his true characterization as a poor white and the violent racism associated with that group. Chesnutt uses McBane's speech to characterize—and compromise—the "po' white." His moral corruption and low-class roots become increasingly more audible/visible through his speech as his actions become more dangerous.

The Marrow of Tradition is a fictional retelling of the race "riots" of Wilmington, North Carolina in 1898. The town becomes tense when a Black servant, Sandy, is accused of murdering a wealthy white woman. Sandy is almost lynched after erroneous reports that he was seen near the scene of the crime. The murderer turns out to be a young, white aristocrat desperate to pay off gambling debts, but the damage is already done. The whites in the town are whipped up into a frenzy, just as the story's villains—The Big Three—planned. "The

Big Three” refers to three white supremacist political conspirators who seek to take control of the local government. Captain McBane, one of the conspirators, is a low-class upstart who has money, but not the aristocratic birth of his co-conspirators. McBane, seemingly in character with his low birth, embraces the violence and his bloodthirsty racism leads to his demise as he confronts a crowd of angry African Americans brave enough to defend themselves.

McBane is an upstart opportunist who tries to squeeze his way into the upper classes to gain position, but not honorably so. Like a noxious weed, McBane “had sprung from the poor-white class;” “No longer overshadowed by a slave-holding caste, some of his class had rapidly pushed themselves forward . . . Others . . . had done the dirty work of politics, as their fathers had done that of slavery” (22). McBane, whose father had been an overseer, gained wealth by taking advantage of post-Civil War opportunities like convict labor. Now that convict labor is illegal, McBane seeks other platforms from which to suppress the local African American population, making rich white friends who share his white supremacist notions. McBane’s villainous character is evident from his initial description:

His broad shoulders, burly form, square jaw, and heavy chin betokened strength, energy, and unscrupulousness. With the exception of a small, bristling mustache, his face was clean shaven, with here and there a speck of dried blood due to a carelessly or unskillfully handled razor. A single deep-set gray eye was shadowed by a beetling brow, over which a crop of coarse black hair, slightly streaked with gray, fell almost low enough to mingle with his black, bushy eyebrows. (20)

Each time Chesnutt introduces a character, he includes information about the eyes, jaw shape, and other facial features, along with clues about how to read their inner character from these outer characteristics. Ellis, a sympathetic character in the story, has “honest gray eyes” (9), and his love interest, Clara, has “tenderness . . . in the curl of her lip” (11). Clara and Ellis are would-be lovers, and the honesty and gentleness in their characterization encourages readers to hope their love prevails. Conversely, McBane’s description is big, strong, dark, and dangerous. From first “sight,” readers understand his outward appearance

as “coarse,” “bristling,” and “unscrupulous,” which foreshadows his unscrupulous personality. His single eye alludes to a host of mythological one-eyed monsters, suggests a history of violent encounters, and indicates the man is less than whole.

The characteristics above are physical and unchanging, but McBane’s dress, while changeable, is also significant: “His coat had not been brushed for several days, if one might judge from the accumulation of dandruff upon the collar, and his shirtfront, in the middle of which blazed a showy diamond, was plentifully stained with tobacco juice” (20). McBane wears the stain of his humble background on his person alongside his new wealth, which can be pinned on like a tacky jewel. Tobacco “juice” on one’s shirt results from sloppy use of chewing or dipping tobacco. Reminiscent of blood, the stain marks McBane’s sin of using convict labor. The “showy” diamond cannot hide the abject stain, however, no matter how much money McBane makes.

Captain McBane’s speech, like his outer appearance, sets him apart from his fellow white supremacist companions, General Belmont and Major Carteret, and emphasizes class divisions. Belmont is a middle-upper class white, while Carteret is from an old family of Southern aristocrats. The trio discuss their plans to suppress African Americans’ political activity while Carteret’s Black servant, Jerry, listens: “[Jerry] could hear the major, now and then, use the word ‘negro,’ and McBane’s deep voice was quite audible when he referred, it seemed to Jerry with alarming frequency, to ‘the damned niggers,’⁷ while the general’s suave tones now and then pronounced the word ‘niggro,’—a sort of compromise between ethnology and the vernacular” (23). The “major” is Major Carteret, who uses the common contemporary word “negro” to refer to African Americans. McBane, whose voice carries powerfully through the wall, uses the extremely derogatory “nigger.” Furthermore, McBane adds “damned,” repeating himself a number of times, indicating a lack of gentlemanly temperance. The “general” is General Belmont, who “compromises” with “niggro.” The

⁷In this section, it is regrettably necessary to discuss the this word in non-euphemistic terms in order to capture the variant pronunciations and the way those pronunciations map onto characterization.

compromise is that the vowel is consistent with the harsh “nigger” while the “r” ending is consistent with the more gentlemanly “negro,” reflecting Belmont’s middle-class white status. Belmont’s pronunciation situates him apart from aristocratic Carteret’s “negro” as an “ethnological” term, which indicates education, rational thought, and science. But Belmont is also importantly set apart from McBane’s “vernacular” pronunciation which yields the violent racial slur. “Vernacular” calls to mind uneducated, slang, low-class, nonstandard identity—the kind of person who would use this word—and situates the term as a dialectal feature. McBane’s use of the strong “-er” ending contrasts with Belmont’s “niggro,” and Carteret’s “Negro,” positioning him a symbol of obscene racism. That the reader experiences this scene through Jerry’s ears is significant because it emphasizes how African Americans might read danger in the language of whites, and suggests that readers might, as well. Jerry reflects on the trio’s plans: “ef dat one-eyed Cap’n McBane got anything to do with it, w’atever it is, it don’ mean no good” (24).

Importantly, although Belmont used “niggro,” as if he were slightly less racist than McBane, later in the novel, as tensions rise, his language changes as well, and he replaces the “-ro” ending with the unmistakably violent “-er.” Jacquelyn Rahman, who studies the history of “the N word,” explains that while it “historically wreaked symbolic violence,” it is “often accompanied by physical violence” (142). This is precisely what we find during the riots at the end of the novel—the symbolic violence of McBane’s use of the word is magnified by Belmont’s, and terrorism in the streets of Wellington follows.

McBane’s language sets him apart from his white supremacist co-conspirators, in other instances, as well. For example, while Belmont, McBane, and Carteret discuss the possibility of the African American vote turning the state Republican, McBane says, “Too many white people are saying that it will be better to wait until the amendment goes into effect. That would mean to leave the niggers in charge of this town for two years after the state has declared for white supremacy! I’m opposed to leaving it in their hands one hour,—them’s my sentiments” (157–158). Later in the conversation he says, “In a month we can have the

niggers so scared that they won't dare stick their heads out of doors on 'lection day" (158). McBane also uses 'em (*them*) several times and uses "double negatives": "That nigger don't belong here nohow" (163). McBane's language tends to mark him as more extreme than his colleagues. After a particularly outrageous proclamation from McBane—"They're all alike;—they're a scrub race, an affliction to the country, and the quicker we're rid of 'em all the better"—Carteret "had nothing to say by way of dissent. McBane's sentiments, in their last analysis, were much the same as his, though he would have expressed them less brutally" (56). This foreshadows the upcoming violence in the sense that Carteret is only willing to act so openly on his racist views, while McBane shamelessly declares his brutal plans and attempts to carry them out.

As a white character displaying nonstandard features, McBane's speech is an anomaly in the text. In *The Marrow of Tradition*, speech representation at times seems to roughly correlate with race; Black characters speak a dialect much like that of Uncle Julius in Chesnut's satirical Conjure stories, saying things like "Now look a-hyuh, Doctuh Price . . . you don' wanter come talkin' none er yo' foolishness 'bout my not takin' keer er Miz' 'Livy" (2). The speech of the white characters is typified by Dr. Price's greeting to Dr. Miller: "I'm delighted to meet you, and to see you looking so well" (31). The mixed race characters who speak in *Marrow* are educated (and like Rena in *House*, are largely characterized as "white") and speak in a way which is indistinguishable dialectally from white characters. See the response from Dr. Miller, a man with mixed racial heritage, to Dr. Price's greeting above: "I deserve no credit for either . . . for I inherited both health and prosperity" (31). The two doctors sound and look the same; as the novel contends, they were both "tall and sturdy, both well dressed, the white man with perhaps a little more distinction . . . the elder representing a fine type of Anglo-Saxon . . . while the mulatto's erect form . . . showed nowhere the signs of that degeneration which the pessimist so sadly maintains is the inevitable heritage of mixed races" (32). Respellings and other indicators

of dialect in the doctors' speech could have been read as "degeneration," which Chesnutt cautiously avoids.

McBane's language sets him apart as poor white, and signals his immorality. The only white character besides Captain McBane with nonstandard English markers is also a poor white, who stops Dr. Miller at the height of the riots. He says, "Sorry to have to trouble you, doctuh, but them's the o'ders. It ain't men like you that we're after but the vicious and criminal class of niggers" (187). The thoughts of Dr. Miller, who was stopped and then released, are as follows: "He was quite well aware that the virtuous citizen who had stopped him had only a few weeks before finished a term in the penitentiary, to which he had been sentenced for stealing. Miller knew that he could have bought all the man owned for fifty dollars, and his soul for as much more" (187). Again, nonstandard speech markers in the mouth of a white character are part of the characterization of a low, immoral, poor, racist type whose claim to racial supremacy is made ridiculous.

The emphasis on economic disparity alongside characterization is telling and appropriate. As Boeckmann points out, one of the ways in which pseudo-scientific ideas about race and evolutionary thought was made legible to the general public was through the economic discourse Joseph Le Conte employs in *The Race Problem in the South*: "[T]he inherited bank account is continually growing from generation to generation by small additions from individual acquisition. The growing inheritance constitutes the evolution of the race" (qtd. in Boeckmann 21). Inheritance of capital figures largely in *The Marrow of Tradition*; for example, Dr. Miller's position in the town as a successful and ambitious doctor seems predicated on his father's and his grandfather's financial sense:

Miller's father, Adam Miller, had been a thrifty colored man, the son of a slave who, in the olden time, had bought himself with money which he had earned and saved, over and above what he had paid his master for his time. Adam Miller had inherited his father's thrift, as well as his trade, which was that of stevedore . . . His savings, shrewdly invested, had by constant accessions become a competence. (32)

Along with legal inheritance of money, Millers pass down the thrift that can sustain it. Another example is Olivia Carteret, (Major Carteret's white, aristocratic wife) who reluctantly admits to herself that her long unacknowledged mixed-race half-sister "was her father's child ... it was written in her features no less than in her father's will" (175). Physical features are inherited traits much like inherited money and property.

Chesnutt criticizes racism and the violent acts it precipitates through a discourse of degeneration and savagery. When McBane attempts to manipulate Tom Delamere into helping him become a member of the local gentleman's club, the Clarendon Club, his tone of voice is described as having a "sneering savagery about it" (103). It is important that the term "savage" is applied to his speech sounds at the very moment in which he tries to gain entry into the institution that represents and referees genteel, civilized manhood in the community. As Ellis explains at one point, "As long as a man retains his club membership, he's presumed to be a gentleman" (63). The notion of the savage unsurprisingly reappears when the tensions in the town finally result in outright racial violence. Dr. Miller's summation of the riots is that "the white people of Wellington" suffered a "temporary reversion to savagery" (190). This "temporary reversion" parallels McBane's seemingly temporary lapses into the dialect of poor white Southerners, above.

McBane's linguistic idiosyncrasies slowly and subtly increase in frequency as the novel progresses, just as the threats of white on Black violence heighten. At the climax of the racial tension in the novel, Captain McBane is finally pitted against Josh Green, one of the African American characters who dares to defend himself. McBane warns, "you niggers are courtin' death, an' you won't have to court her but a minute er two mo' befo' she'll have you" (195). McBane's language here is dense with innovative spelling and punctuation to reflect his pronunciation, precisely at the moment in which his bloodthirsty racism manifests itself most brutally. Like the dandruff on his collar when he is first introduced into the narrative, the markers of nonstandard speech accumulate and invite the reader to judge accordingly. The symbolic violence of "nigger" becomes realized, but rather than

succeeding in making good on his threat, McBane is stabbed to death. McBane's linguistic characterization makes clear to readers that, although he has money to spend, he will never shake his poor-white roots, his true character being always audible if one listens long enough. Detecting members of the poor-white class is important because, like McBane and the characters in the upcoming section on *The Colonel's Dream*, they are dangerous.

C. An Uncertain Future in *The Colonel's Dream*

The image of stained and otherwise unkempt clothing is one of Chesnut's favorite metaphors for dubious respectability. McBane's shirt is stained, although he wears a diamond, which indicates that money cannot buy class. Chesnut also uses clothing as what Gates calls an "extended metaphor of the presentable," e.g. in Chesnut's criticism of William Wells Brown's *The Negro in the American Rebellion, His Heroism and His Fidelity* (1867) (117). For Chesnut, Brown's book is like "a gentleman in a dirty shirt. You are rather apt to doubt his gentility under such circumstances. I am sometimes doubtful of the facts for the same reason—they make but a shabby appearance" (Helen Chesnut 28). Gentility and morality (or lack thereof) is also worn by characters in his last published novel, *The Colonel's Dream*. For instance, take the character McLean, whose "shabby" and "natty" appearance is born out in his speech and behavior in the novel, which are equally distasteful to Colonel French (72). Chesnut's final novel takes up the themes of dangerous poor whites like McBane in *Marrow*, but goes further to suggest the doubtful future of the South, which can be traced in the corrupted speech of its inhabitants, as clearly visible as their clothing.

The Colonel's Dream laments that money and good intentions cannot save the South, because its own people will resist change, white and Black, though the blame is mostly laid on the violent "po' white" class, and their now-wealthy (through ill-gotten gains) "upstarts." Colonel French's dream is that of a redeemed South which is "truly free" and where "the strong will cheerfully help to bear the burdens of the weak, and Justice, the seed, and

Peace, the flower, of liberty, will prevail throughout all our borders” (294). The Colonel eschews his Confederate heritage and title after the War, making a name for himself as “Mr. French” in the manufacturing business of the North. He marries, begins a family, and enriches himself when he sells his business after his wife dies. French and his son need a change in air for their health. Father and son visit in Clarendon, the birthplace of French and, importantly, the resting place of his Southern aristocratic ancestors. Seeing the corruption, dilapidation—but also opportunity—around him, French once again dons the name of “Colonel” and sets out to save the town using his good sense, good name, and seemingly endless store of money. He saves a former family slave by buying his debt and rescues the French ancestral home from disrepair by purchasing it on a whim. One gets the sense that Colonel French could save the whole South if he had enough money to simply buy it. Add to these benevolent purchases Colonel French’s economic rebuilding. He employs many men in his new cotton mill, pays fair wages to workers with no regard to race, and pledges to support a new “coloured school” and a hospital (161). He also bails men out of jail and fights debt peonage.

French soon finds that his money will only go so far when Mr. Fetters, Colonel French’s suggestively-named nemesis, refuses to accept the payments for one Bud Johnson’s debts in exchange for his release. Colonel French looks the other way while one of his men secures the poor Black’s release by un-lawful methods. Johnson uses his freedom ill, endeavoring to kill the men who worked him so hard at Fetters’s plantation under his debt peonage. Johnson succeeds in maiming Fetters’s son and overseer. The shootings set in motion a series of events that eventually contribute to the driving of Colonel French out of town. His young son dies, and so does his servant, Pete, while trying to save him. Both are buried in the family plot, but the heightened white supremacist anger of the whites (especially poor-whites) drives them to dig up the casket of poor old Pete and leave it ominously at Colonel French’s doorstep. French decides to take himself, his money, and his dead, back North to leave the South to its own devices. French attempts to bring along (and thereby, save)

his Southern fianc, Miss Laura Treadwell. However, like the bittersweet past she seems to represent, Laura belongs in the South.

The town is entrenched in racism, and African Americans in the town “will never get very far along in the world without the good will of the white people” (293), but most of the whites in Clarendon seem to be the dangerous “po’ whites” who suffer from economic poverty as well as moral poverty. Poor-whites are a specific category in the novel; even the name of this class of people is marked with the apostrophe in place of an “r” in *po’*. Like McBane in *The Marrow of Tradition*, the nonstandard speech of the poor-whites is indicative of their moral corruption, which includes their increasingly hateful attitude towards the African Americans in the community. A typical example of “po’ white” speech is the following from in which a poor white arrests Peter, French’s former family slave: “No, that’s the trouble; you ain’t done nuthin’ fer a month, but loaf aroun. You ain’t got no visible means of suppo’t, so you’re took up for vagrancy” (57).

While McBane and poor whites like him were the only white characters who used the word “nigger” to refer to African Americans in *Marrow*, the word is ubiquitous in *Colonel’s Dream*. Not only do poor white men use it, but so does a young lady from a Southern aristocratic family, Graciella. Graciella is young and beautiful, like Rena: “In addition to a pronounced attractiveness of form and feature, Miss Graciella Treadwell possessed a fine complexion, a clear eye, and an elastic spirit” (91). Incongruously, Graciella indulges in the same racist language as McLean above, when she says “trifling niggers” a handful of times in the novel (41). She also uses other constructions like “right good” (56) and occasionally there is a hint of Graciella’s pronunciation: “I love the South, Ben, as I loved Aunt Lou, my old black mammy. I’ve laid in her arms many a day, and I ‘**most** cried my eyes out when she died” (123–124).

Graciella’s sometimes vulgar, sometimes subtly nonstandard language seems to foreshadow her flawed character and unsuitability as French’s love interest. The young woman and French become fast friends as soon as he arrives, bonding over her interest in life in

the North and especially New York City. Graciella has a beau—Ben Dudley—but is ready to throw him over as soon as she overhears women in the community speculate about a romance between her and Colonel French. The idea is shocking at first, but she soon decides that it makes sense, after all, because French is rich, while Ben is penniless. Graciella rather presumptuously perceives French’s attention to her as courtship. She is mistaken, and French proposes to Lauren Treadwell, Graciella’s aunt. Although she eventually reconciles with Ben, the text suggests Graciella’s generation lacks the refined sensibilities of the previous. Her beau, Ben’s, language is also marked, despite his noble birth; he says things like “tol’able,”⁸ which seems to foreshadow some flawed character (129). Indeed, after Graciella throws Ben over, he drinks too much at a party and gets in a brawl, ostensibly protecting Graciella’s honor: “I want you to un’erstan’ . . . that no gentleman would mensh’n a lady’s name in a place like this, or shpeak dissuspeckerly ‘bout a lady ‘n any place; an’ I want you to unerstan’ fu’thermo’ that you’re no gen’l’m an, an’ that I’m goin’ t’ lick you, by G-d!” (206). While Ben is well-meaning here, he is also clearly “no gentleman,” because a gentleman does not over-indulge in drink to the point of slurred speech, the outward sign of inner flaws. Overall, this generation represents a step down—morally and financially—from their elders, and this is evident in their behavior and their language.

Chesnutt’s consolidation of standard English among his educated, genteel, and moral white characters in *Dream* allows him to make a statement through the character of Taylor, the African American teacher. The exception that proves the rule, Taylor is the only African American character in *The Colonel’s Dream* that speaks in a way that approximates the Colonel’s English, who sets the standard for speech, behavior, and morality in the story. Unlike the other African Americans in the novel, Taylor’s language is not marked for special pronunciation throughout most of the novel. Presumably, Taylor has been educated in order to prepare him for his career as a teacher, and this has influenced his language,

⁸“tolerable”

and he conforms to the “proper” English spoken by other educated characters in the text. Taylor’s plight at the end of the novel, and the language in which he expresses that plight, represents the deterioration of the plight of Southern Blacks. The following excerpt is the final dialogue of the novel, between Taylor and French—both of whom have fled the South in fear and disgust. Taylor was driven out of Clarendon once it was made known that he revealed where Johnson was hiding and nursing his murderous plans. Taylor has become a porter—a position that represents a step down from his professional teaching career—and in that capacity sees French on the train to Chicago a few years after moving North. Taylor approaches French and begins a conversation:

“Excuse me, suh,” he said, “I’ve been wondering ever since we left New York, if you wa’n’t Colonel French?”

“Yes, I’m Mr. French - Colonel French, if you want it so.” “I ‘lowed it must be you, suh, though you’ve changed the cut of your beard, and are looking a little older, suh. - I don’t suppose you remember me?” (291–292)

Taylor’s professional demotion resulted in a linguistic one as well. The novel positions his new situation as a degradation, a “menial position” which French feels urged to remedy through his business connections. In the course of their conversation, Taylor relates how he came to be in his present predicament, and as he speaks with French his speech includes fewer nonstandard markers. When Taylor is in French’s presence, his language begins, although falteringly, to take on its former integrity, which points to French’s refining influence. After this conversation, French finds Taylor a new job more worthy of him which, presumably, will once more bring out his more refined qualities, like speech. Like Taylor’s English, the future that lies in store for Southerners seems wavering and it is not clear when and how it will progress.

Overall, code switching and code shifting take on a different, less hopeful significance as Chesnut’s career moves forward, and Chesnut’s “cherished dream” to become an author and make real change over time becomes more like the Colonel’s dream—impossible. In *House*, the linguistic fluidity represented the mutability of racial categories, albeit at the

expense of naturalizing gender categories. However, the linguistically fluid characters in *Marrow* and *The Colonel's Dream* represents the deterioration of Southern life resulting from the rise of Jim Crow. At least in *Marrow*, the degrading speech signals seemed to mean that one particular form of violent white supremacy was detectable and would eventually mean its own destruction, and the opportunity for the Dr. Millers of the world to bring in a new generation. *Dream* has a grim view of the role of whiteness in the South; the Colonel is a member of a rare and disappearing type of man. While Chesnutt's characters move between varieties of English, the next chapter will focus on characters that move between varieties of English as well as between English and other languages.

CHAPTER 4

(NON) NATIVE SPEAKERS: ABRAHAM CAHAN'S *YEKL: A TALE OF THE NEW YORK GHETTO* AND ORA V. EDDLEMAN REED'S "INDIAN TALES BETWEEN PIPES"

Americans are often surprised to learn that the U.S. does not have an official language. English is the major institutional language in the U.S., of course, but English is not the official language of the country. In the U.S., two hundred and twenty-seven languages are currently spoken, and almost all of them are classified as either “immigrant” or “indigenous” (Lewis, Simons, and Fennig). This heritage of linguistic diversity is reflected not only in American literature published in those various languages, but also in the diverse Englishes the presence of these languages helped create. Abraham Cahan, a nineteenth-century immigrant to America from Russia, made a name for himself publishing fiction and nonfiction in both Yiddish and English, and his English works also depict Yiddish English. Ora V. Eddleman Reed, a Choctaw from Indian Territory (which later became Oklahoma) wrote in English, but also created characters who speak an English called “American Indian English.”¹ I bring Cahan and Reed together in this final chapter to expand the conversation of literary Englishes to include so-called “non-native” English as well as the multiple Englishes spoken by Native Americans. Both writers enriched the literary-linguistic landscape through their defiance of easy categorization and of “nativeness” or “non-nativeness,” respectively. Both resist the tired dichotomy of English/American on one hand and Foreign

¹“American Indian English” is used by William Leap and others to denote what is really a category of Englishes spoken in many Native American communities, especially in the West and Southwest. More on this below.

Language/Un-American on the other, instead emphasizing the multiplicity of identity and language within their communities.²

It is important to discuss works like Cahan's *Yekl* and Reed's "Indian Tales Between Pipes" together because the politics of language in American literature complicates discussions of "native"³ American English dialects. Furthermore, American anxiety about incoming immigrant languages and the creation of creoles have crucially motivated the way regional American dialects are depicted. I have already noted in earlier chapters that, according to scholars like Amy Kaplan and Stephanie Foote, ethnic identity gets displaced onto "regional" white characters in much local color and regionalist fiction as part of a management of racial differences in urban, northeast areas. For this reason, all literary varieties of English—native, non-native, and Native American—are best understood in relation to each other. I begin with the multiple languages of *Yekl*.

A. Abraham Cahan's *Yekl: A Tale of the New York Ghetto*

Most of the dialogue of Jewish immigrants in *Yekl* is meant to be understood as being "in" Yiddish, but is actually rendered in English. Within that, the dialogue that is meant to be understood as English is marked with italics. For example, when the main character Jake says, "*Alla right*, hurry up now!" we are to understand that "*Alla right*," because it is in italics, is English, while "hurry up now" is Yiddish. Furthermore, the nonstandard spelling of "alla" for "all" further marks Jake's English as a particular kind of English. Like other works in this dissertation, it is the orthography in *Yekl* that chiefly signals linguistic difference. The orthographic distinctions embed English within the Yiddish of the text

²See also Werner Sollors's *Multilingual America* (1998) for a discussion of the linguistic diversity that has always existed in American literature.

³The term "native speaker" in common usage points to English acquired as a first language. I put "native" in quotation marks to call attention to the constructed notion of "nativeness," a concept which I hope to show these texts complicate. Thomas Bonfiglio's *Mother Tongues and Nations: The Invention of the Native Speaker* (2010) explains the ethnolinguistic prejudice behind the notion of "native" speakers.

rather than being separate from it. While Bakhtin holds that languages “are specific points of view on the world, forms for conceptualizing the world in words, specific world views, each characterized by its own objects, meanings, and values” (291–292), English and Yiddish in *Yekl* are perhaps best described as alternately emerging and submerging within one another.

The leading view of *Yekl* is that it is a story of the problem of immigrant “Americanization;” Jake (formerly “Yekl”) wants to assimilate to American life but cannot shake his former religious and ethnic identity. As Louis Harap puts it, Cahan “projected the frustrations and unhappiness that issue from Americanization” (497). Americanization is conceptualized as a personal journey from the behaviors, language, and identification of the old country (everything that represents Russian Jewish life, like speaking Yiddish) towards an “American” language, behavior and identity (like speaking English, working on the Sabbath). The aim of this section of the chapter is to deconstruct the Jewish (Yiddish) versus American (English) dichotomy and to instead show how *Yekl* emphasizes the various ways of being Jewish-American, and the complicated role of English in Jewish-American communities. *Yekl* is less about the struggle to become Americanized and more about struggling with what kind of *Jewish-American* to be. *Yekl* asks, what does Jewish life look like in the U.S.? What is the complicated role of English as a second lingua franca among people who already share Yiddish? The dialogue in *Yekl* is a palimpsest of language that reveals not a linear journey towards Americanization/speaking English but layers of identity and the complications that come with it. Furthermore, the leading view of a linear journey towards Americanization has tended to simplify the role of women in the novella as obstacles in the main character’s path towards an appropriate level of Americanization. In fact, the Jewish immigrant women in the story face similar problems as Jake, with some added gendered linguistic expectations.

B. The Languages of *Yekl*

Cahan was born in Lithuania in 1860. His family moved to Vilnius, a part of Lithuania under control of the Russian Empire, in 1866. Cahan studied to be a teacher and eventually moved to another town some distance away from his family to teach at a Jewish school. As a young man in the 1870s, Cahan became associated with radical, socialist politics. His interest was evident enough that in the early 1880s, Russian police searched his rooms more than once under suspicion that he had radical reading material. Fearing his life, Cahan left for the U.S. in the summer of 1882. In 1885, he met and married Anna Bronstein, a fellow immigrant, from Kiev. After immigrating to the U.S., Cahan found he was able to explore socialist thought freely, and joined the Socialist Labor Party in December. Cahan began publishing essays in 1889, and became a U.S. citizen in 1891. He published his first story in English in 1895, called “A Providential Match,” followed by *Yekl* the next year. During Cahan’s life he was most well-known for a long career editing *Forward*⁴, a Yiddish daily newspaper. Today, most recognize Cahan as the author of *The Rise of David Levinsky* (1993 [1917]), a rags-to-riches immigrant story with a dark side; while Levinsky gains material wealth, he fails to succeed in personal relationships. Cahan died in 1951 just a few years after his wife, Anna.

Sanford Marovitz’s 1996 biography of Abraham Cahan opens with this sentence: “Not yet through his twenty-first year when he arrived in the United States on 6 June 1882, Abraham Cahan was already a man of two worlds” (1). In fact, Cahan was always a man of multiple linguistic worlds. He grew up speaking the Yiddish of his Lithuanian community, and learning Hebrew as a religious and legal language. Cahan also studied Russian. While Yiddish was the spoken language of his community, it was discouraged as a religious language. Marovitz relates the common saying: “A prayer in Yiddish was a mock prayer,” (3). Yiddish has a history of being disparaged, and there were official movements

⁴“*Forverts*” in Yiddish

against it in Europe at the precise era in which Cahan was immigrating to the U.S. Yiddish was considered a corruption of German and Hebrew and its use was cautioned against by a school of thinkers called “Wissenschaft des Judentums” (WdJ) in the early nineteenth century (Jacobs 10). Members of the WdJ were German Jews that discredited Yiddish, and encouraged Jewish people to change their speech to lessen their marked status as Jews. The era’s devaluing of Yiddish, according to linguist Neil Jacobs, was the direct result of the growing marginalization of minority speech and more general German efforts towards a “unified standard language to serve the nation, within the framework of the nation-state” (10).

The story of Yiddish is a story of language contact and fusion. Jacobs traces its trajectory as a language born out of contact between Jews exiled from Babylon and the other language traditions those communities became influenced by over the centuries. Linguist Sol Steinmetz situates Yiddish within a tradition of Jewish languages that came and went as the people of the Jewish diaspora encountered and modified the various languages they came in contact with by infusing them with elements of Hebrew and Aramaic. It seems to have begun in the ninth century as Jews of northern France and Italy moved into the Rhine Valley among German speakers (12). It was the language of the Ashkenazic Jews and, unlike most other Jewish vernaculars that came and went over the centuries, Yiddish remained, largely “by virtue of its Hebrew component and its long association with Jews and Judaism” (11). Over two million Jews came to the U.S. between 1877 and 1917, bringing Yiddish with them from many different regions (16). Yiddish became a lingua franca in the Jewish communities of the U.S. not only because the other languages they brought with them, like Russian or Polish, were not mutually intelligible, but also because Yiddish was an integral part of their identity (16).

Yiddish was important to Cahan, who was raised to have a more nuanced view than the WdJ members. Yiddish and English existed side-by-side for Cahan from the beginning of his time in the U.S. Cahan presented the first socialist speech in Yiddish, for example, in

August of 1882 (Marovitz 20). That Cahan valued Yiddish did not preclude his firm belief that Jews coming to the U.S. should learn English as soon as possible. He began teaching English to immigrants just over a year after arriving in the U.S., undoubtedly drawing on his experience as a teacher in Velizh. Cahan's own English was largely self-taught, including a stint as a make-shift translator on the voyage to America. On the ship, Cahan helped translate between Russian, Yiddish, and English speakers by way of a Russian to English/English to Russian dictionary he brought on board. This struggle may have inspired the opening of *Yekl*, an image of Mr. Bernstein who literally makes himself sick at the stomach while reading an English newspaper with the dictionary heavy on his lap.

Yekl is a novella that focuses on the life of one Russian Jewish immigrant, known as "Jake"; Jake is the American name Yekl gives himself. Jake leaves his wife, Gitl, and baby boy, Yossele, for America in the midst of heightening oppression of Jews in Povodye, Russia—a story not unlike Cahan's own life. Jake plans to get settled and then send for his wife and child later. After settling in Boston with fellow Jewish immigrants from Povodye, Jake eventually moves north to New York City to make more money in the sweatshops. In New York City, none of Jake's fellow immigrants know him from his former life. Jake becomes quite comfortable with this anonymity and declines to tell his friends and coworkers that he is married and a father. He also never mentions his marital status to the ladies he goes dancing with who, he rationalizes, never actually asked him if he were single. Jake spends his money on these social amusements like Joe's "dancing school" rather than saving money for passage for his family. When his family finally arrives after a few years' separation, Jake feels embarrassed by his new wife's old-world look, limited English, and "greenhorn" ways. After Gitl disappoints Jake by failing to assimilate to American-Jewish culture and language, he eventually asks for a divorce and plans to start a new life with Mamie, a young woman from the dancing school. The ending is not necessarily happy for Jake; the text suggests he is reluctant to part with his single status so soon. While Gitl acts appropriately upset at the divorce hearing, she plans to start a new life with one of

Jake's co-workers—the quiet and studious Mr. Bernstein—and open a grocery store with the divorce settlement money. The text seems to reward Gitl for her cultural and linguistic fidelity; she is marrying “up” to someone who would have been out of her league in Russia.

C. English in the Jewish Ghetto

Learning English is a major marker of assimilating to life in America in *Yekl*, but it signifies more than American identity. As part of its encoding as whiteness, English is positioned by the male characters throughout the novel as the language of self-control and civility, consistently paired with images of activities that rely on careful rule-following, like boxing and dancing. The first scene in the novel finds Jake standing tall, explaining American boxing. During Jake's demonstration, his male-coworkers are reading—one an English newspaper, one the Talmud, and one a socialist magazine in Yiddish. Jake is speaking Yiddish to the women who work at the sweatshop. As he shows off to his rapt female audience, Jake argues with Mr. Bernstein. Jake praises the precision of James Corbett, a famous late-nineteenth century boxer, who was later called the “father of modern boxing” for treating boxing like a science that could be perfected, rather than a brawl. Jake contrasts Corbett's fighting with the burly Russian peasants—moujiks—from his former life in Povodye. The moujik “only knows how to strike like a bear [Jake adapted his voice and gesticulation to the idea of clumsiness], *an' dot'shull!* What does he *care* where his paw will land, so he strikes. *But* here one must observe *rulesh* [rules]” (3–4).

Jake's view is derided by Mr. Bernstein, who seems skeptical that something like boxing can be a science with a methodology. He says wryly in Yiddish, “Can't you see? . . . America is an educated country, so they won't even break bones without grammar. They tear each other's sides according to 'right and left,' you know . . . I do think that a burly Russian peasant would, without a bit of grammar, crunch the bones of Corbett himself; and he would not *charge* him a cent for it either” (4). With enough strength, according to Bernstein, precision and correctness does not matter. The remark about “right and left” refers

to the Hebrew equivalent of the written letter “s,” the pronunciation of which differs based on whether the mark over it is on the right or left, as a footnote in the novella explains. For Jake, English represents American values of reason, civility, and self-control, which is why he so fiercely contrasts it with what looms in his past as the very opposite of those things: Russian peasants. Jake’s admiration of Corbett—the son of an Irish immigrant—foreshadows Jake’s own son’s impending immigration to the U.S. Jake’s English does not come from careful study or attention to rules; rather, he learns by doing. Jake relies on what natural ability he has. In fact, he belittles the studies of Bernstein, who at the outset of the novel we find struggling to read an English newspaper with an enormous dictionary in his lap. Jake berates his co-worker: “Learning, learning, and learning, and still he can not speak English. I don’t learn and yet I speak quicker than you!” (7). Although Jake values English as a sign of an intelligent self-restraint, he does not have those qualities himself. In fact, Jake is a quick-tempered, muscular man, much more like the burly Russian peasants with no skill that he criticizes. Jake’s muscles are like his English, growing with exercise rather than with study. Sometimes he speaks with his muscles when his words fail him. Jake’s response to a quick-witted innuendo from a co-worker is to attack him, “catching him by the front of his waistcoat” and “aiming one of those bearlike blows which but a short while ago he had decried in the moujik” (7). Although Jake learned Russian by watching orderly military drills of the soldiers, he often skipped school to do so: “He would often play truant to attend a military parade; no lad in town knew so many Russian words or was as well versed in army terminology” (10). However much he learned, his Russian is still described by the narrator as “broken,” like his American English (11).

How Jake sees his language skills and how the narrator sees them are often at odds with one another. Although Jake says that “every Jew speaks English like a stream” in Boston (2), his own Boston Yiddish is described this way: “He spoke in Boston Yiddish, that is to say, Yiddish more copiously spiced with the mutilated English than is the language of the metropolitan Ghetto in which our story lies. He had a deep and rather harsh voice, and his

r's could do credit to the thickest Irish brogue" (1–2). Jake's characterization here is multi-ethnic and multi-regional; his voice is Jewish, Bostonian, and Irish all at once. "Jewish" and "Irish" were not just ethnic (and/or religious) categories, but racial categories as well. The description of Jake's "Irish" "r"s emphasizes his racial/linguistic identity.

It is also important that Cahan specifies regional variations of Yiddish. Jake's blended characterization is echoed in Cahan's description of the Jewish New York ghetto as a mixed space, including many ways of pronouncing English, and many Yiddishes. The "ghetto" was centralized around Hester Street, and refers to the part of the city in which Jewish immigrants lived together in close quarters, many starting their own businesses to cater to Jewish customers. The ghetto is described like a microcosm of the entire U.S.'s linguistic and social diversity. In the ghetto, there are

... rills of immigration flowing from all the Yiddish-speaking centers of Europe
... speaking all sorts of subdialects of the same jargon, thrown pell-mell into
one social cauldron—a human hodgepodge with its component parts changed
but not yet fused into one homogenous whole. (13–14)

Cahan emphasizes the varieties of Yiddishes coexisting in the classic American melting pot image—or in this case, "social cauldron"—in which immigrants have changed by virtue of being thrown together, but have not become homogenous. There is not only one "Yiddish," just as there is not just one way of being Jewish in America. The image of the Jewish-American community as a linguistic melting pot is also called up in the dancing scenes at "Joe's." Joe's is a dancing "school," where Jewish Americans came to learn how to waltz and practice their English. Joe's is largely a singles' scene, with young men and women spending what little spare money and time they have after work in the sweatshops. Jake frequents Joe's regularly, consorting with young, unmarried women. Jake is shown to be a great dancer—something that requires specific steps and moves—and criticizes his inferiors in Yiddish:

“You do hop like a Cossack, as true as I am a Jew,” he added, indulging in a momentary lapse into Yiddish. English was the official language of the academy, where it was broken and mispronounced in as many ways as there were Yiddish dialects represented in that institution. (17)

Like the description of the ghetto as a whole, the dancing school crowd is described as a coming together of Jews from all linguistic backgrounds, with Yiddish and English as their common tongues. Their common language is more of a set of dialects under the category of “Yiddish” than a single language.

Although English is the standard language for the academy, Jake is not the only one who “indulges” in Yiddish. The alternation between Yiddish and English is an important maneuver, and represents a strategic negotiation of power. For example, in the following conversation, Jake tries to persuade Mamie to dance with him, but she resists. Both pretend to be indifferent about dancing with each other, although each desires it. Mamie creates a challenging distance by switching into (and out of) English. Her remarks begin in English, with nonstandard spelling to indicate her pronunciation:

“Vill you treat?”

“Treat? Ger-rr oyt!” he replied with a sweeping kick at space.

“Den I von’t dance.”

“Alla right. I’ll treat you mit a coupel a waltch.”

“Is dot so? You must really tink I am swooning to dance vit you,” she said, dividing the remark between both jargons. (20)

At this point, Jake responds to Mamie in Yiddish, with English borrowings included in italics:

“Look at her, look! she is a *regely* getzke: one must take off one’s cap to speak to her. Don’t you always say you like to *dansh* with me *becush* I am a good *dansher*?” (20)

Mamie responds to Jake’s Yiddish in English, seemingly forcing the conversation to take a permanent turn to English—a language she commands better than he:

“You must tink you are a peach of a dancer, ain’t it? Bennie can dance a ---- sight better dan you,” she recurred to her English.

“Alla right!” he said tartly. “So you don’ vonted?”

“O sugar! He is gettin’ mad again. Vell, who is de getzke⁵, me or you? All right, I’ll dance vid de slob. But it’s only becuss you ask me, mind you!” she added fawningly.

“Dot’sh alla right!” he rejoined, with an affectation of gravity, concealing his triumph. “But you makin’ too much fush. I like to shpeak plain, shee? Dot’sh a kin’ a man *I* am.” (20)

Before Jake and Mamie perform their actual dance, they perform a linguistic one. Mamie compels Jake to follow her lead in English, which he marks with “Alla right!”—one of his favorite phrases that seems to mean everything from “OK” to “I submit.” It is difficult to know when Jake is speaking mostly English with Yiddish-influenced pronunciation (like “Alla right!”) and when he’s speaking Yiddish with English borrowings included (like “she is a *regely* getzke”) when the languages switch back and forth so quickly. Readers heavily depend on the orthography to know what language is being used, which is why a Yiddish borrowing into the English orthography (like “getzke”) can be confusing. The readers’ struggle to make sense of the dialogue is ironic, since Jake purports to “shpeak plain.” A second linguistic power struggle takes place when Fannie, one of Jake’s co-workers who is clearly attracted to him, pretends to not to want to dance, and delivers what Jake calls a “sermon” in her “mother tongue” of Yiddish (22). He cuts her off with his catch-all English catchphrase: “*Dot’sh alla right!*” and sweeps her up into the dance (22).

English is used frequently in the novel to inspire awe, for example, when Jake’s use of English impresses Gitl, his wife, on the day she arrives in the U.S. (38). In another excruciating scene, Jake begs Mamie to stop speaking in English because of the intimacy it seems to suggest between them at the exclusion of Gitl, who understands little English (50). Jake’s neighbor, Mrs. Kavarsky, knows that the use of English can be an assertion of power, which she uses to her advantage during a rather public argument between Gitl

⁵According to Cahan’s footnote, “getzke” means “crucifix.”

and Jake. Jake derides Mrs. Kavarsky loudly in English, and she rises to the challenge, “drawing herself up and putting her arms akimbo” she retorts in Yiddish: “He must think I, too, can be scared by his English. I declare my shirt has turned linen for fright! I was in America while you were hauling away at the bellows in Povodye; do you know it?” (72).

The power that English seems to represent explains Jake’s pride that, unlike Gitl, his son, “little Joey,” is learning it so effortlessly (45). Because Joey is a child, he can easily pick up English without a teacher:

“Look at the soldier’s appetite he has, *de feller!* Joey, hoy you like de borshtch! Alla right?” Jake asked in English.

“Awrr-ra rr-right!” Joey pealed out his sturdy rustic r’s , . . . (47)

Joey’s “rustic r” sounds allude to Jake’s own “Irish brogue” pronunciation of “r.” Jake delights in Joey’s effortless acquisition of English, something Jake wants for himself. The “sturdy, rustic” strength of the “r” sounds and the “soldier’s appetite” may allude to English as a cultural and imperial force at the turn of the century (47). Overall, the way English is used in *Yekl* suggests that its primary significance is as an image of civility and power among Jewish immigrants within the Jewish-American community itself, as they negotiate their relationships and standing with one another.

While Jake applauds Joey’s strong “r” sounds, he deplores Gitl’s lisp. At work at the sweatshop, his mind frequently wanders to his feelings towards his wife:

. . . he would see, reddening before him, Gitl’s bandana kerchief and her prominent gums, or hear an un-American piece of Yiddish pronounced with Gitl’s peculiar lisp—that very lisp, which three years ago he used to mimic fondly but which now grated on his nerves and was apt to make his face twitch with sheer disgust, insomuch that he often found a vicious relief in mocking that lisp of hers audibly over his work. (44)

Gitl has a “lisp,” a speech pattern usually understood in terms of a defect in which “s” sounds are rendered more like “th” sounds. Gitl’s lisp seems to have become representative of all of her defects as a wife in America. Yet Gitl’s lisp is cross-linguistic; it is only

tied to her American Yiddish and English, but was also part of her Lithuanian Yiddish pronunciation back in Russia, in which context he used to think of “fondly.” That Jake now views it with such revulsion indicates that it is her presence in America, not her, that displeases him.

However, Jake has a linguistic idiosyncrasy of his own that is almost identical to Gitl’s. While a lisp renders “th” sounds in place of “s,” sounds, Jake’s English is characterized as using “sh” in place of English “s” and “z” sounds. For example, when Jake says *weeks*, he pronounces it *veeksh*; when he says *rules*, it is rendered *rulesh*. Both Gitl and Jake’s transformation of “s” sounds are example of lenition—a categorical process of sound weakening. “S” is considered a stronger sound, with respect to the articulation, than “sh” and “th” because the tension held by the tongue is more relaxed in “sh” and “th” sounds. Both transformations constitute one articulatory step away from “s.” That is, the most salient difference between the formation of a “th” and an “s” sound is how far forward the tongue is extended in the mouth. A “th” sound is one articulatory step forward for the tongue—from the upper ridge of the mouth up to the front teeth. However, a “sh” sound is one articulatory step backward for the tongue, from the upper ridge back to the soft palate (and also a slightly different shape of the tongue). Given the similarity of these processes, Gitl’s lisp is no more egregious a linguistic misstep than Jake’s “sh” alternation, but hers becomes iconic of her inappropriateness in America, and unsuitability as his wife. Jake’s “sh” sounds also index something to the reader—the difference between his English and the English of other Jewish immigrants in the novel. For example, Mamie says *veeks* instead of *veeksh*, like Jake; the spelling suggests that Mamie’s pronunciation is one step closer to “correct” English than Jake’s. While Gitl’s lisp is an arbitrary marker in Jake’s mind of her unsuitability as a wife in America, his “sh” sounds mark him as a non-native English speaker, despite his claims to being more American than his wife. Through phonetic spelling, Cahan exposes Jake’s hypocrisy and reveals that, like Gitl he struggles with his Jewish-American identity.

Jake's use of "sh" in the place of "s" is, according to Hana Wirth-Nesher, reminiscent of a pronunciation variation called "sabesdiker losn" in Yiddish, or "Sabbath speech" (49). This is considered a speech impediment associated with Lithuanian Yiddish (Weinreich 362). Wirth-Nesher adds that Cahan positions Jake in a literary tradition of "country bumpkin" characters with speech impediments, and points to a play, *Serkele*, from the 1830s. This alternation between "s" and "sh" sounds is precisely what Bernstein was referring to when he said that American punches are thrown according to "right and left" above. However, Bernstein was talking about Hebrew orthography, and Jake's lisp only comes out in the text when he speaks English; Jake seems to fail to follow the rules of American (English) civility. The message is clear—Jake's speech is marked at least as significantly as Gitl's. If she does not belong in the U.S. (in his view), then neither does he⁶.

D. Women's Language in *Yekl*

Jake's displacement of his own anxieties about assimilation onto Gitl is gendered. Clay Motley has a persuasive reading of Jake's struggle to perform American masculinity, but Motley relegates Gitl to the position of representing Jake's old life in Russia, rather than as a character with her own, parallel struggles. The female characters, like Gitl and Mamie, also grapple with their roles as women in the Jewish ghetto, and how the expectation to be ladylike, motherly, etc. in the U.S. intersects with their linguistic identity and repertoire. Cahan's linguistic characterization of the women in *Yekl* supports a reading of Jewish immigrant subjectivity as a palimpsest of multiple, layered identities.

First, some female characters seem to have special linguistic strength in *Yekl*, as mentioned above, but it is dubious whether that skill is empowering or whether it represents misogynistic fear. Recall that English seems to signify power, and the female characters are, as Cahan makes clear, more skilled in English. For example: "Like the majority of

⁶Wirth-Nesher does not mention Gitl's lisp, despite Jake's apparent obsession with it.

the girls of the academy, Mamie's English was a much nearer approach to a justification of its name than the gibberish spoken by the men" (19).⁷ While both the men and women here have free evenings with which to practice English and dancing, the women's English is consistently better. This suggests a special power among single, working women. In fact, the women also seem to have special skills in Yiddish. For example, Fanny, Jake's fawning co-worker, uses insults expertly when a co-worker makes an innuendo about her and Jake: "The girl's milky face became fiery red, and she retorted in vituperative Yiddish from that vocabulary which is the undivided possession of her sex" (7). It is important that Fanny's verbal skill is connected to protecting her honor as a single woman, and that it is biting insults (not apologies or excuses) that she expertly employs. In both the dancing school context and Fanny's retort at work, linguistic skill is connected to some strength (or fearsome power) associated with single women.

Cahan uses language skill to indicate a corrupting power that Mamie has over Jake. She is, after all, able to convince him to leave his wife and child. She speaks English "like one American born," and her Yiddish is distinct (52). She "spoke with an overdone American accent in the dialect of the Polish Jews, affectedly Germanized and profusely interspersed with English, so that Gitl, whose mothertongue was Lithuanian Yiddish, could scarcely catch the meaning" (49). Mamie's language might be called promiscuous, with her quick learning of English, and her generous and calculated mixing of Polish, English, and German elements in her Yiddish speech. Other descriptions of Mamie are lightly sexualized. When she visits Jake to show off in front of Gitl, her attire is ostentatious. She was "powdered and straight-laced and resplendent in a waist of blazing red, gaudily trimmed, and with puff sleeves, each wider than the vast expanse of white straw, surmounted with a whole forest of ostrich feathers" (49). Her opulence astounds Gitl, who "instinctively

⁷Importantly, this facility with English is only available to a certain class of woman. The women at Joe's dance school are single women with no children—the only women who can be respectably found at a dance academy in the evenings. These are also women with jobs and their own money and free time. (The poorest of single women would not have leisure and disposable income to spend at the academy.)

scented an enemy” (48).⁸ Mamie’s quick English and mixed Yiddish are, perhaps, a linguistic counterpart to her “blazing red” dress.

By contrast, Gitl is utterly conservative and practices a kind of cultural and linguistic fidelity that the text suggests is appropriate for a married Jewish immigrant to the U.S. Gitl struggles to acquire English, and there are extra-linguistic reasons for this. As a married woman and mother, Gitl does not go out to the workplace or the dancing school, where she might hear more English and have an opportunity to practice with others. Gitl has trouble letting go of even appropriate markers of her old-world Jewish identity, like her hair coverings and her name. Her American name, “Gertie,” given to her by Jake, is too close to the Yiddish word for “Gentile” for her comfort. She tries to update her hair to an American style, but feels vain and foolish; the text seems to praise her modesty.

On the other hand, Gitl’s cultural conservatism has been slightly over-emphasized. For example, Motley sums up Jake’s attitude towards her as “disgust” at her “greenhorn dress and attitudes” (6). Wirth-Nesher calls Gitl Jake’s “stubbornly un-Americanized wife.” Yet Gitl’s compromises are numerous. The one time she tries to Americanize her hair, Jake seems more appalled at her American hair than her old hair. To him, the sight was “something unseemly and meretricious” (68). And while learning English is a struggle for Gitl, she quickly learns American Yiddish. She even makes a clever pun when Jake tries to teach her the English word, “dinner.” She responds:

“Dinner? And what if one becomes fatter?” she confusedly ventured an irresistible pun.

This was the way in which Gitl came to receive her first lesson in the five or six score English words and phrases which the omnivorous Jewish jargon has absorbed in the Ghettos of the English-speaking countries. (38)

Importantly, this is not an example of her acquiring the word into her English lexicon as much as it is an example of Gitl making English words work into her American variety of

⁸There are hints that Jake and Mamie were intimate before his wife arrived: “comparing Gitl to the dancing-school girls . . . it now filled him with disgust to think of the morals of some of them, although it was from his own sinful experience that he knew them to be of a rather loose character” (32).

Yiddish. Jake does not appreciate her linguistic accommodation to American Yiddish over American English (41). He says, “What a peasant head! Other *greenhornsh*⁹ learn to speak American *shtyle* very fast; and she—one might tell her the same word eighty thousand times, and it is *nu used*¹⁰” (41). Of course, as Jake corrects Gitl, he only uses a few English phrases, and those he uses have (literally) marked pronunciation. Cahan makes it clear that Jake is too hard on Gitl, and quite hypocritical about his linguistic expectations.

While the text seems to value Gitl’s modesty (linguistic and otherwise), it also uses her language to racialize her during scenes that are focalized through Jake. For example, when Jake first picks Gitl up from Ellis Island, she “loomed up in all the individual sweetness of her rustic face. He beheld her kindly mouth opening wide—rather too wide, but all the lovelier for it—as she spoke; her prominent red gums, her little black eyes. He could distinctly hear her voice with her peculiar lisp” (32). Gitl’s wide mouth and prominent gums call to mind Dean McWilliams’s argument that nineteenth-century blackface minstrelsy illustrations exaggerated the organs of speech of African Americans, including large lips, big teeth, etc., in order to mark them and suggest that African Americans were somehow evolutionarily unsuited for sophisticated speech (61–62). Racially charged language is also used to describe how Jake is disgusted by Gitl’s looks: “She was naturally dark of complexion, and the nine or ten days spent at sea had covered her face with a deep bronze, which combined with her prominent cheek bones, inky little eyes, and, above all, the smooth black wig, to lend her resemblance to a squaw” (34). She also smells, according to Jake, as a result of her long journey (35). When Gitl and Jake argue over her wig, and find a compromise in her use of a kerchief, “Jake thought it made her look like an Italian woman of Mulberry Street on Sunday” (37). For Jake, Gitl is an abject caricature of ethnic, racial,

⁹Jake and his fellow immigrants use the word “greenhorn” to refer to someone obviously new to America, especially when this is evident through clothing and speech.

¹⁰“no use”

and linguistic otherness that he must remove himself from if he is to live the life he dreams of in the U.S.

The text seems to condemn Jake's view and treatment of Gitl, as evidenced by the tone of calm triumph in the final divorce scene. Gitl has agreed to give Jake a divorce, but she will keep Joey and accept a monetary settlement that is provided from Mamie. In this scene, Mrs. Kavarsky helps prompt Gitl to do and say what she must, since Gitl is appropriately emotionally distressed. The old rabbi reads the official language of the ceremony, which is presumably Hebrew, but rendered in archaic English in the novel: "Thou must accept this divorce with the same free will and readiness with which thou hast married thy husband. Should there be the slightest objection hidden in the heart, the divorce is null and void. Dost thou understand?" (85). Gitl apparently hesitates when the rabbi addresses her thus, because it is up to Mrs. Kavarsky to prompt her:

"Say that you are *saresfied*," whispered Mrs. Kavarsky.

"*Ull ride*, I am *salesfiet*" muttered Gitl, looking down on the table. (85)

That this is rendered in English for both women is important. The word *satisfied* is the key word needed from Gitl's response, as it describes her state in relation to the divorce proceedings and shows that she has no further questions; she understands. Mrs. Kavarsky elicits the word from her in English, which gives her a chance to showcase her English at this crucial juncture that represents her new life in America. Gitl's lisp is either phonetically absent or simply orthographically erased by Cahan, and indicates her quiet position of strength at the divorce proceedings. Meanwhile, Jake's "sh" sounds are evident as ever. When it is Jake's turn to confirm that the state divorce process is underway (in addition to the religious proceedings), he replies: "*Dot'sh alla right . . . I have already told you that the *dvosh* of the court is already *fkshed*, haven't I?" (85).*

Gitl is the one with the happy ending in *Yekl*. She has an offer of marriage from the ever suitable Bernstein, a studious man who readers remember from the opening scene struggling with the weight of an English dictionary. While Gitl and Bernstein plan to open

a grocery with Mamie's money, Jake's future happiness with Mamie is less certain. Jake is more than reluctant to meet Mamie at city hall to be married, now that the divorce is over. His ride in the cable car is described in ominous terms: "Each time the car came to a halt he wished the pause could be prolonged indefinitely; and when it resumed its progress, the violent lurch it gave was accompanied by a corresponding sensation in his heart" (89).

Yekl is a story of the Jewish ghetto as a microcosm of American society in which multiple languages and origins come together and reify the existing linguistic politics of American literature. Yiddish exists, like "American English," as an umbrella term for differing dialects. Rather than reading *Yekl* as a story of the problem of Americanization, I read it as a story of Americans—*Jewish-Americans*—and how they fare together. That is, these characters are struggling with an inter-ethnic assimilation process that simultaneously defies and reproduces the country's larger inter-ethnic assimilationist anxieties. Although Jake teases Bernstein for never getting out of Hester Street—the heart of the Jewish ghetto—neither does Cahan venture from the ghetto in his tale. There is no moment in which Jake or anyone else interacts meaningfully with non-Jewish characters. The pressures Jake and other characters face are within their own community. This is a story about being Jewish-American among Jewish-Americans with the spectre of the domestic and imperial politics of English looming overhead, as racially-motivated English standardization efforts are ramping up at the turn of the century.

E. Ora V. Eddleman Relocates Local Color in "Indian Tales"

When Cahan uses the image of the "squaw" to describe Gitl's dark skin when she is reunited with her husband at Ellis Island, he calls up a host of well-known stereotypes about Native Americans at the turn of the century. American literature was saturated from its very beginnings with images of savage, silent, and simplistically noble indigenous people who seemed to belong to another time, and were therefore quickly (and mercifully) vanishing. Westerns, captivity narratives, and melodramatic romances featuring "half-breed" Native

women dominated the popular American image of indigenous American identity. Ora V. Eddleman Reed, a Choctaw in Indian Territory, grew up with these stories and spent her life countering the stereotypes they endorsed. In this section, I show how Reed re-invented the local color story through her “Indian Tales Between Pipes” (1995) by humorously upsetting readers’ expectations about place, language, and culture. The scant scholarship on Reed’s work shows how she forces her (largely white) readers to question their expectations of Native Americans. Although very brief, “Indian Tales” represents at least three varieties of Native American English, insisting on the variability of native experience and native language, including a scene in which the Indian speaker articulates a much more culturally prestigious variety of English than the white, Midwestern visitor. Reed’s sharp humor masks her deeply subversive reminder that the mainstream, white, East Coast reader is the actual immigrant to what is now the U.S.

Ora V. Eddleman Reed was a woman of Cherokee descent who born near Denton, Texas in 1880. Later she moved to Indian Territory as a teenager, in what would not become the state of Oklahoma until 1907. Reed grew up helping her family edit and publish *Twin Territories: The Indian Magazine*, a publication for the two Indian territories in the area. Reed eventually took over the magazine, becoming the chief contributor and editor of the magazine, which seems to have had a substantial readership outside of Indian Territory among those who wanted to learn more about Native American life out West. In fact, Reed wrote a humorous column for *Twin Territories* called “What the Curious Want to Know,” in which she answers questions readers (largely from the Eastern U.S.) about Indian Territory. One of Reed’s responses, which appeared in 1902, was in answer to a New York woman’s inquiry about what to bring if she were to set up her millinery shop in Indian Territory. Reed published her answer as follows:

You ask what kind of a stock of millinery you should select to settle in a town in Indian Territory; also you add, if lots of beads and such things are required as trimmings, and if it is true that the Indians like only the brightest of colors of Ribbon? Really, I ought not to pay attention to your questions. What do you take us for? Where have you been the last half century? Seriously, I wouldn't advise you to come here with a stock of millinery. You're needed in that place, I am sure, where you won't be misunderstood—and unappreciated . . . It would be a pity to have you sacrifice yourself to come way out here in order to educate them in wearing up-to-date hats . . . It wouldn't pay you my dear madam—but you might learn a whole lot! qtd. in Kosmider, “What the Curious Want to Know” 52

Reed's column was only one of the ways in which she combatted stereotypes with wit; she also wrote stories like “Indian Tales” and hosted a radio talk show later in life. She died in Tulsa in the late 1960s.

The passage from Reed's column above is examined in Alexia Kosmider's “‘What the Curious Want to Know’: Cherokee Writer, Ora Eddleman Reed Writes Back to the Empire” (1995) in which Kosmider argues that Reed sought to change the popular, stereotypical image of what it meant to be “Indian” in the early twentieth century. More than that, Reed “subverts the language of post colonial domination as she declares Indian Territory as the hub, with outposts extending from its central location” (52). Indeed, in “Indian Tales,” Reed subverts the traditional and well-known local color story by making Indian Territory the default location and relating the humorous dialogue of the outsiders that come to visit—virtually the opposite of the Eggleston and Jewett's dynamic of the visitor narrating the “local” regions of backwoods Indiana, and rural Maine, respectively.

The usual local color author was a white man or woman living and writing from, or having been educated in, the American Northeast, but Native American writers also wrote local color stories from central and Western U.S. Daniel Littlefield and James Parins were the first to investigate this tradition and published their findings in 1982 to show that dozens of Indian Territory writers published local color stories. While Littlefield and Parins give a quick nod towards Reed, she is virtually unknown in the scholarship. The Muscogee Creek, Alexander Posey, however, is a much more well-known writer and has gotten more atten-

tion for local color stories featuring Indian narrators and characters speaking the English one might hear in the Territory. Posey has been compared to Charles Chesnutt, because both used dialect and humor to satirize local color fiction. Though much less well-known, Reed's fiction should also be considered as humorous literary resistance to the local color tradition that exploited simple "locals," and falls within a tradition of Native American humor in service of resistance, survival, and community. Vine Deloria, a Lakota scholar, explains: "When a people can laugh at themselves and laugh at others and hold all aspects of life together without letting anyone drive them to extremes, then it would seem to me that the people can survive" (Taylor 169).

When Reed sarcastically advises the milliner above to stay "where you won't be misunderstood," she emphasizes the damaging (and comic) possibility of miscommunication. This theme of misunderstanding also runs through "Indian Tales Between Pipes," an ultra-short story which may be considered a series of vignettes, or episodes. Each episode reads much like a joke. The "punch line" of each story is the moment in which a white political official is bested by an Indian character, usually because the white character has misunderstood or misinterpreted the Indian's English.¹¹ The entire piece is framed as stories Dawes Commissioners tell about "full-blooded" Indians in Indian Territory. The Dawes Act of 1887 was ostensibly intended to encourage Native Americans to become landowners and farmers, and thus "civilize" them. However, the results of this act were disastrous for Native Americans, and resulted in the eventual loss of millions of acres of Native land, as much of it was deemed surplus and sold to outsiders. The Dawes Commission was created in the 1890s to persuade Native Americans to agree, register for their allotments, and move to the appropriate space.

Reed treats this serious change in Native life with biting humor. In the following example, Ury is a politician from Kansas who invests in land and is traveling in the Creek

¹¹I use the word "Indian" here to align with Reed's own vocabulary in describing the identity of her characters.

nation. Presumably, Ury is a prospective buyer of “surplus” allotment land. When Ury and his friends get lost in unfamiliar territory, the Native Americans they encounter quickly avoid them before they can ask them for directions:

Along about high noon the party was overjoyed by seeing a wagon, drawn by two fine mules, approaching them. Mr. Ury hailed the driver, who stopped his mules and politely waited. Ury asked him several questions, but was answered each time with “ugh,” and the dull Indian shake of the head. Finally Ury lost all patience remained and began swearing, (and being a politician he has a fair “cussing” vocabulary, by the way). He cursed every Indian within the bounds of Indian Territory, then jumped from the Atlantic to the Pacific coast from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico and back. It is difficult to state just where he would have ended had he not exhausted his breath and stopped for a moment. During this time the Indian had been sitting in his wagon, watching Ury with all interest possible. When the swearing ceased, he asked in excellent English and with the most bland manner, “what is the name of the town you gentlemen are desirous of reaching?” (141)

Ury is associated with American politics and white occupation of land, but his status, and all the education and power that is associated with it, is undermined through his verbal behavior. When loses his temper and curses, he makes himself ridiculous. The coarse rant he indulges in signifies vulgarity, intemperance, and immorality. This nameless Indian, however, speaking “excellent English” signifies intelligence and education; his patient, tempered response contrasts with the overly emotional, unreasonable cursing of the politician. In a classic local color story, it is the backwards members of the local village that speak in a way that is positioned as unrefined or unsophisticated. Reed reverses the local color paradigm; the only backwards, uncivilized language or behavior is from the white man venturing into Indian Territory who misunderstands the local behavior as “dullness.” In fact, it is not in the best interest of those he encounters to speak to him or help him, as he is an outsider and potential threat to their resources.

The Indian man’s speech is a linguistic equivalent of Philip Deloria’s “unexpected” Indians. Deloria’s *Indians in Unexpected Places* (2004) is an analysis of twentieth-century images and narratives about Indians, including a photograph of Geronimo in a Cadillac in

1904, that reveal “expectations,” the “dense economies of meaning, representation and act that have inflected American write large and individuals, both Indian and non-Indian” (11). Deloria shows that, at the turn of the twentieth century, just as Reed is writing, “according to most American narratives, Indian people, corralled on isolated and impoverished reservations, missed out on modernity—indeed, almost dropped out of history itself” (6). In depicting an Indian man with unexpectedly “excellent English” (and all of the notions of civility and modernity his dispassionate, “excellent English” might engender) Reed subverts the reader’s stereotypes, on which the humor depends.

Reed works against the local color tradition through her calculated use of local language. A quintessential element of the local color story was plenty of dialogue showcasing the writer’s skill at depicting the regional dialect. Reed does something different in the next episode, featuring Mr. Smith, who is sent down to Mississippi to gather some of the Choctaw people who had successfully evaded previous attempts at forced removal to Indian Territory. Mr. Smith has been promising the Choctaw gifts to persuade them to agree to meet at the train station on the scheduled removal date.

Everything appeared to be moving lovely and according to schedule until the day before the trip to the Territory was to take place. On this day a hungry looking wearer of the blanket approached Smith and after inspecting him for a few minutes said: “Maybe so, Injun take him dog.” Smith was preoccupied and merely answered, “all right, take your dog if you want to.” However, the Indian was not fully satisfied, and again said, this time with more emphasis “Maybe so, Injun take him dog.” Smith replied with like emphasis that as far as he was concerned he could take all the dogs he wanted to, and then promptly dismissed the matter from his mind.

The next day Smith was detained in the town until nearly train time. When he arrived at the depot, however, he understood why his full blood friend had been so persistent on the day previous, for lo and behold—sixty-four Indians and sixty-five dogs. A dog for each Indian, and they had thoughtfully brought an extra one for Smith. (139)

Unlike a traditional “local color story” there is little dialogue, especially from the “local.” What little dialogue there is is importantly misunderstood by the commissioner; this misunderstanding is the site of critique as well as humor.

The source of confusion is the gap between the Indian man's English and Mr. Smith's English. The Indian man seems to be speaking an "American Indian English," as delineated by linguist William Leap. This variety of English is said to have arisen in some communities during the long history of language contact between Native American languages and English. This contact resulted in ancestral language-based varieties of English—a type of creole English—which can be collectively referred to as "American Indian English." Reed enregisters American Indian English through some of the linguistic features in her Indian character's limited dialogue. One is a discourse marker, *maybe so* (which also appears often in Alexander Posey's work) which roughly means *maybe* or *perhaps*. Just like *maybe*, *maybe so* can be used to lessen the illocutionary force of what follows. There is the use of *him* as the possessive marker in *him dog* rather than *his dog*, which is what other varieties of English might use. Also, the verb is not marked for tense-person agreement in *Injun take*, rather than *Injun takes*, which is not unusual in Indian English, especially for the present tense. Finally, although a feature that is not necessarily tied to Indian English, the speaker refers to himself in the third person as *Injun* rather than *I* as in *I take my dog*. Overall, the language leads to a misunderstanding, resulting in the unmanageable number of dogs that we can imagine disrupted (at least temporarily) Mr. Smith's plan to remove the Choctaw.

What, though, should Mr. Smith have understood as the Indian's request? The context suggests the Choctaw man is essentially asking permission for each member to bring their dog with them, but Mr. Smith thought he was asking permission to simply bring his own dog. In fact, if we assume that *Injun* in *Injun take him dog* only refers to the speaker and that *him* also refers to the speaker, then we sympathize with Mr. Smith's interpretation. However, it is also possible that *Injun* refers collectively to all the Choctaw members scheduled to leave, as Indian English often does not require plural markers. That is, the speaker may have been saying, "Can all of the Indians take their dogs?" Another possibility is that the speaker was using a cross-linguistic politeness strategy in which the speaker uses third person references in order to diminish imposition of requests. In this case, *Injun* might refer

to himself and *him* might not be a possessive at all but instead refer to Mr. Smith as the indirect object, meaning, something like, “What if I bring you a dog?”

The linguistic pragmatics—ideal, polite procedures—of questions in Native American languages are often quite different from English and, according to Leap, carry over into American Indian English. Sometimes direct questions are considered rude and are to be avoided if at all possible. We can see in Reed’s work that the Choctaw man’s sentence was not a question, grammatically speaking, but a statement: “Maybe so, Injun take him dog.” When the nameless speaker doubts that he has been understood clearly, he does not directly ask if Mr. Smith understands him, but restates his idea more emphatically. It is not the Choctaw man who misunderstands or makes a mistake, but Smith. Leap has also noted the American Indian English use of silence. Since a direct personal question, in many communities, is considered rude, an acceptable response to this rudeness is silence. This silent behavior may partly contribute to stereotypes that Native Americans are less knowledgeable, unwilling to cooperate, cannot speak or understand English, and so on, just as Reed illustrates in the episode with Ury. Reed uses “real” American English speech out West in a completely different way than local color writers use it. She shows how language practices can be misunderstood if outsiders assume they are hearing incorrect or simplified English. This assumption is an important mistake that Reed’s Indian characters take advantage of for their own benefit. Instead of depicting local language in order to codify it and present it for consumption (and sometimes condescension) like prominent local colorists, she uses it to dismantle stereotypes and resist control.

Finally, the framing of the “Indian Tales” is an ironic twist on the local color tradition. The beginning of the piece states that some men from the Dawes Commission are seated around a fire telling stories about their encounters with “full-blooded” Indians. At first glance it might seem to match the local color convention of the frame tale—white men telling tales of their adventures West. However, the reality is that Reed is a Cherokee woman telling these tales in an Indian Territory paper. The “local” in her “local color”

story is what is local to her—Indian Territory. The “color,” in a sense, points to the color—racial/ethnic identity—of her people, as well. In fact, the title of the piece itself is ambiguous. “Indian Tales Between Pipes” might first seem to mean “tales *about* Indians” but this title also calls up an image of Indians smoking pipes, telling *their* tales about outsiders. The title and content of the stories asks the reader to consider how these tales might have been told by these Indian characters, laughing together at their shared joke. In short, these tales are framed as if they are told by white men for white men, but more than that, they are *Indian* stories for *Indians*.

Reading Native humor chiefly as reactionary to whites is problematic, as Thomas King has pointed out, “as though the Native people spend their entire existence fighting against non-Native whatever. That just isn’t true” (Lutz 111).¹² Native humor is also used for community building and to promote harmony (Taylor 25). Ian Ferguson categorizes Native humor into three types of jokes: “not jokes,” “in jokes,” and “our jokes.” “Not jokes” are told at the expense of Indian people (124); “in jokes” are “jokes told by Indians” when “White People” are present (125), and “our jokes” are “less directed outward, towards the dominant culture” and focused, instead, toward individual Native experience (128). “The purpose of Our Jokes,” Ferguson explains, “is to tell the truth” (128). Reed’s use of framing and the title “Indian Tales Between Pipes” can be read as a strategy to tell both an “in joke” and an “our joke” simultaneously, targeting both her Native and non-Native audiences on different planes in order to “tell the truth” about the Dawes Acts. Thus, while the story reinforces community through shared experience, it is also bitterly and deeply conscious of the injustices of forced removals and dwindling land holdings and demands recognition of the humanity of these speakers. The forced relocation of Native people West, and still further West, is a grotesque parallel to the formulaic westward venturing explorer of the local color story who goes West and writes back home to civilization about what he (usually

¹²Much of my discussion here is indebted to Kristina Fagan’s essay in *Me Funny*, pages 23–46.

“he”) has found. The construction of the “West” at the turn of the century was forced and fraught, Reed reminds us, and those who were relegated there will insist on its centrality as the “local.”

“When I sit down to write,” Junot Díaz once said, “I sit down to write with all my languages present,” (qtd. in Williams 2012). This is a sentiment I can imagine Abraham Cahan sharing over 100 years before when writing *Yekl*, and an image to remember as we critique American fiction as a whole. Although Reed focuses on inter-ethnic linguistic politics and Cahan focuses on intra-ethnic dynamics, both insist upon a multiplicity of language varieties within their own communities and interrogate those languages’ relationship with ideologies of “native” English. Finally, in my conclusion, I will discuss the way these themes endured as the twentieth century advanced.

CONCLUSION

At a major literature conference during the winter of 2017, I attended a panel on Mark Twain in which one presenter discussed a portion of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. One particularly important passage was printed and distributed as a handout to the audience so that we could read along ourselves as she read the text aloud. When the woman read aloud Jim's quoted dialogue, she performed his voice with her own vocal animation, including an increase in volume, a slowing of speed, and an effort to approximate Jim's dialect. But the voice she performed did not match what I was reading in front of me. She didn't pronounce "r"s where they existed on the page; she lengthened her vowels in places where no long vowel was indicated. She spoke Huck's dialogue only briefly (Jim's input being the relevant part of her discussion), but in those few instances, she seemed to use her natural voice. My point in sharing this anecdote is that the linguistic politics of canonical nineteenth-century texts influence our understanding of these characters, largely below the level of consciousness; well into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Jim's is a voice to be *heard*.

The linguistic politics of nineteenth-century fiction also influence today's literature which, in many respects, responds to what came before. In 2015, John Keene, an African American writer from Missouri, published a short story that reclaims the character of Jim. The story is set in Jim's later years, in which he is an old man and a veteran of the Civil War. The premise of the story is that a reporter has asked to interview Jim about his experience in a famous battle, but Jim knows that the reporter, in reality, wants to hear about Jim's experiences with the boy who became famous, Huck Finn. This story, called "Rivers," is organized around what Jim *considers* saying, versus what he *actually* says. This results in only minimal quoted dialogue from Jim, but renders a rich interiority. Jim relates the words

he exchanged with Huck and Tom, but does not share it with the reporter. Jim remembers what happened when he forgot to neglected to call Tom “sir.”

“You call me Mr. Tom Sawyer, Sir, old man,” and I said,
“YesMissTomSawyerSoilMan,” so fast it wasn’t clear whether I’d left out the
“Mr.” or the “Sir” or added the ”Old Man,”

Jim manipulates his own speech sounds to confuse his white interlocutors, who still represent danger to Jim, reversing Twain’s manipulation of Jim’s speech sounds in the novel. Jim’s scant dialogue in “Rivers” includes almost no indication of nonstandard pronunciation, another reversal of his speech in *Huck Finn*. But Keene does emphasize the role of African American English in Jim’s characterization. He allows Jim speak to the role of his language in his life. In the presence of the reporter, Jim thinks about his days on the run and remembers (but decides not to say): “We spoke in what they call our gibberish but to us it was a language full of secret keys . . .” The minimal quotation, almost total absence of nonstandard pronunciation in Jim’s speech, and the emphasis on the disconnect between what white people hear and what he pronounces all point to a linguistic reclamation of Jim’s language in Twain’s *Huck Finn*.

African American language is “full of secret keys,” as, perhaps, no American writer has known as well as Zora Neale Hurston. An anthropologist and a folklorist, Hurston knew where the keys were kept and what do with them. Or, as Henry Louis Gates, Jr. has argued, Hurston invented the “speakerly text” (181). Consider the dialogue below from “Sweat” (1926):

“Looka heah, Sykes, you done gone too fur. Ah been married to you fur fifteen years, and Ah been takin’ in washin’ fur fifteen years. Sweat, sweat, sweat! Work and sweat, cry and sweat, pray and sweat!”
“What’s that got to do with me?” he asked brutally.
“What’s it got to do you with you, Sykes? Mah tub of suds is filled yo’ belly with vittles more time than yo’ hands is filled it. Mah sweat is done paid for this house and Ah reckon Ah kin keep on sweatin’ in it.” (27).

“Sweat” adopts many of the same conventions—nonstandard spelling and apostrophes for missing sounds. Hurston’s orthographic strategies to indicate pronunciation are, like Jew-

ett's, regular and predictable. There is also a balance between grammatical, phonological, and lexical indicators of African American English, as Hurston eschews the nineteenth-century practice of using the sounds of Black speech as a stand-in for the African American language as a whole. "Sweat" is different from the texts analyzed in these chapters in that all the characters are speaking the same language with seemingly the same linguistic background. There are no significant white characters in the story, which means there are no cross-racial linguistic comparisons to be made, as we find so often in nineteenth-century texts. The characters' language is not standard, but the text lessens a sense of hierarchy through complexity of these characters' experiences and an emphasis on their inner speech. Finally, the text is self-aware, as Hurston knew that she was experimenting with nonstandard orthography crafted these voices.

Hurston would refine these skills in her now famous *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, which expertly collapses dialogue and narrative language by way of free indirect discourse, and then use that discourse mode to enregister African American English. By the late nineteenth century, any attempt to render African American English in literature was deemed by many African American authors as "a literary trap" because of the racist uses to which it had been put (Gates 177). Henry Louis Gates, Jr. explains, writers were on a "quest to register a public black voice in Western letters" (170); "what was at stake . . . was nothing less than the implicit testimony to their humanity" (171).

There is still much work to be done to understand the relationship between literary dialects in American literature and the language ideologies within which these literatures are produced, and that they often help reinforce. This dissertation has charted some possible avenues for this future work. To review, Chapter 1 illustrates the importance of a holistic view of character speech representation that takes into account factors other than linguistic authenticity, instead attending to the way literary-linguistic hierarchies are created through a combination of characterization and orthographic strategies. Chapter 2 explores the significance of spelling not only as a representational strategy (and the extremes to which it

can be put), but also the symbolic role of spelling as an activity characters engage in. The aim of this chapter is to connect the way regional speech communities exist in the public imagination to the specific manifestations of their speech in fiction. Chapter 3 demonstrates the way close reading of character dialogue can reveal high levels of nuance in the intersection of race, gender, and class as negotiated in character code switching and code shifting. Finally, Chapter 4 continues this emphasis on the importance of linguistic negotiation of identity, and emphasizes the extent to which American literature is multilingual, owing much to the experiences and languages of indigenous and immigrant groups. Future work might quantitatively investigate the degree to which syntax and vocabulary supersede an emphasis on pronunciation markers in the enregisterment of American dialects between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Furthermore, certainly more research is needed on literature from regions other than the East, South, and Midwest, as I have focused on here, and on dialects not discussed in this study. Wherever the field takes us, I maintain that any future work on literary dialect will benefit from an emphasis on the surface representation of character speech, and the way that speech shifts and changes.

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