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The Ohio State University, Ph.D., 1973
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THE TIE THAT BINDS: THE FUNCTION OF FOLKLORE IN THE FICTION OF
CHARLES WADDELL CHESNUTT, JEAN TOOMER AND RALPH ELLISON

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By
Trudier Harris, A.B., M.A.

*** ***

The Ohio State University
1973

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American Literature through the 19th century. Professor Thomas Woodson.

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Introduction

The folk influence on American literary tradition has long been recognized and studies have been done illustrating this influence. In both religious and secular writings, the folk mind made its impact felt. Early histories recording the pilgrim transplant to America as well as beginnings in the new land have their share of providence tales and popular superstitions, a major part of which concerned witchcraft. Washington Irving found German folktales worthy of re-creation in "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" and "Rip Van Winkle." Continuing this tradition through the 19th century and into the present day, writers such as Hawthorne, Twain, Melville and Faulkner as well as others have become renowned for their conscious assimilation of folk materials into their literature. On a popular level, writers in the Southwestern humor tradition did essentially the same thing. In an effort to satirize Jacksonian democrats, they imitated these so-called backwoods clowns and yokels in their popular creations.

Black American literature, developing at a much slower rate than its white counterpart, was similarly influenced by its folk tradition, and perhaps more so because the black man's early expressions in America were primarily oral. However, less scholarship has been devoted to a consideration of folk influence on black writers, a situation which is also partially due to the lesser quantity of Afro-American literary creations as well as a general lack of interest among
academic circles. This study, therefore, was conceived with just such an exploration in mind. Its subject is to discuss the black folk cultural influence (as well as others) on three black American writers.

The study concentrates on the fictive writings of Charles Waddell Chesnutt, Nathan Eugene (Jean) Toomer and Ralph Ellison in an exploration of their uses of folklore and the various structural and thematic functions folk culture serves in their works. More specifically, the study concentrates on The Conjure Woman, Cane, and Invisible Man, but references are made to other works. The major contention is that Chesnutt, Toomer, and Ellison were bound to the roots of their culture and even when they achieved the highest praise for literary accomplishments (judging by the standards for achievement previously set by the dominant culture), they did not soar far from their basic black inherited traditions. The rudimentary black cultural ideas and attitudes remained an inseparable part of their art; the folk, with all of their polished and unpolished implications, coexisted with the "sophisticated." In their writings, these authors allowed the folk to appear in their true garb; the folk retained their superstitious beliefs, home remedies, mannerisms, and everything else which was a part of their lives and culture. Also, in the fiction of these three writers, characters in the folk tradition retained racial attitudes which grew out of being a minority culture shaped in part by the prejudices, stereotypes, and other repressive concepts imposed upon it by the majority culture. In other words, these authors could not stray far from the ties that bound them to their ancestors and contemporary blacks. Nor did they wish to
do so, for the patterns which shaped their race and culture provided almost unlimited subject matters for artistic endeavors.

These particular three black writers were chosen because they represent three distinct periods of development in the black American's literature and history. Chesnutt's black society was concerned with assimilation. Blacks felt whites would accept them if they worked hard enough to improve themselves and/or if they were humble enough. During Toomer's age, blacks looked inward in search for individuality and identity. The Harlem Renaissance was a period of self-discovery and there was a sharp growth of interest in things black. Unfortunately, the black man found himself called upon to uphold a new stereotype; he became a symbol of the freedom from restraint for which the white intellectual longed so ardently. For Ellison and his fellow blacks, disillusionment had set in. The cement frontier had collapsed with resounding consequences. Re-affirming the black did not erase the problems of dealing with the white. An age of turmoil and open conflict was emerging which has continued into the present day. There was no desire to return to Toomer's age of partially ignoring racial problems or to Chesnutt's age of essentially begging one's way into the dominant culture.

Born in 1858, Chesnutt was close enough to the slavery era to observe the black culture almost in its original state. Education was just being offered to blacks on a wide scale and as a teacher in North Carolina, Chesnutt was greatly involved in this transitional period. Blacks were skeptical of so many new opportunities and often pre-
ferred their superstitious old ways to new forms of enlightenment. Chesnutt's writings could only reflect the nature of his society and he, like Toomer and Ellison, consciously employed the folk mind in his artistic creations. The rural folk culture was the way of life for most blacks during Chesnutt's time.

A drastic change occurred immediately after the turn of the century. There was a black exodus from the rural South to the urban North. Between 1890 and 1920, more than two million blacks left their farms in hopes of finding jobs in the cities. Harlem became the center of this activity, and in the twenties it emerged as the black cultural mecca of the United States. With an increased interest in things black, black writers were not as confined in their subject matter as Chesnutt had been; they could find publishers without portraying popular stereotypes. Black intellectuals such as Jean Toomer wanted a cultural identification; they wanted to preserve racial identity instead of assimilating. Robert Bone makes the following comment about this preservation:

The search for a distinctive tradition led in many directions. The alienated Negro intellectual fell back predominantly on the folk culture, with its antecedents in slavery, its roots in the rural South, and its final flowering on the city pavements. Where the folk culture seemed inadequate to his needs, he turned to the cult of African origins, and to primitivism. . . . The sum and substance of these explorations was an unequivocal cultural dualism—a conscious attempt to endow Negro literature with a life of its own, apart from the dominant literary tradition. 4

Toomer thus turned from the urban North back to his roots in Georgia for an identity which he found in the black folk culture of rural Georgia. Cane is the product of this search and identification.
Growing up in the frontier boomtown of Oklahoma City in the post World War I years, Ellison too could observe the stuff of which the folk were made. He saw the folk in churches, barbershops, cotton picking camps and in a variety of other places. He could combine a specifically black folk heritage with the spirit of the frontier. By doing most of his writing in New York, Ellison was able to incorporate the folk tradition he inherited from Oklahoma as well as the urban folk tradition into his work. Unlike Chesnutt and Toomer, Ellison's use of folk materials also came by way of literary absorption as well as from his own experiences and observation.

The exploration of folklore and folk influences on these three writers follows the pattern suggested by Alan Dundes for the study of folklore in literature. Such a pattern entails an identification and an interpretation of the items of folklore. The process of identification consists of isolating an item of folklore within the literary text and examining previously reported items for similarities. With this study, collections of black folklore and folksongs, and anthologies, as well as Stith Thompson's Motif Index have been employed in an effort to identify specific items of folklore. Interpretation, according to Dundes, is concerned with how and why items of folklore in literature differ from previously reported items as well as how the items function in the particular literary work as a whole. For example, the fairy tale structure which Ellison uses differs greatly from its original sources in terms of content. Modern America has no dragons or flying horses. Thus Ellison symbolically fits the pattern to 20th century America.
His reasons for altering the folktale structure coincide with his exploration of the contemporary American social system.

The level of interpretation in the study is also governed in part by Hennig Cohen's more specific comment on the function of folklore in literature. Folklore in American literature has been put to work in a number of ways—among them, to advance the plot, to characterize, to provide structure, and to defend, explain, and raise questions about the nature of society.  

All three of the authors studied use folklore in these ways. Once items have been identified and documented as to similarity in various sources, such interpretations of the functions are examined in depth. This approach to the study reveals each author's creative genius at work on the material he has incorporated from the folk in suiting this material to his own purposes. Both Chesnutt and Toomer use primarily black folklore in their works; Ellison uses black folklore as well as white American and European traditions. However, each writer's use of folk materials reveals that he, like his white counterparts, has thoroughly absorbed the folk influence into his writings.
Introduction Notes

1 The most recent and perhaps the best study of the folk influence on American literature, with a concentration on Hawthorne, Melville and Twain, is Daniel Hoffman, Form and Fable in American Fiction (New York: Oxford, 1965).

2 An extensive study of the treatment of the clown or yokel in Southwestern humor tradition is Kenneth S. Lynn, Mark Twain and Southwestern Humor (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1959).

3 Carl Van Vechten's Nigger Heaven (New York: Knopf, 1926) is one example of this portrayal of new stereotypes of blacks with unlimited freedom.

4 Robert A. Bone, The Negro Novel In America (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1965), p. 64. I am indebted to Bone for my three chapter titles, which are taken from this quotation.


"Antecedents in Slavery"

Charles Waddell Chesnutt, a passable mulatto, was born in Cleveland, Ohio on June 20, 1858. He spent the years from 1866 to 1883 in and around Fayetteville, North Carolina. His first attempt at creative writing resulted in a story which was published as a serial in a small weekly newspaper run by a black man. Chesnutt was 14 at that time. When the growing Chesnutt family needed more money, Charles went to Charlotte to accept a job as an assistant teacher when he was 15. At the age of 23, he acquired the position of Principal of the State Normal School at Fayetteville. He later resigned this somewhat lofty position in order to return to the North and pursue a career in stenography and law. He set up an office in Cleveland and settled down to providing for his family. In 1887, he published a short story, "The Goophered Grapevine," in the Atlantic Monthly. He reached his peak in publishing between 1899 and 1905, when his two collections of short stories and his three novels appeared.

During his seventeen year stay in North Carolina, Chesnutt studied the life style of Southern blacks, which was to provide him with a virtually untapped reservoir of material for artistic development. He could observe the results of the peculiar institution of slavery on the hundreds of thousands of newly freed blacks. He became acquainted with conditions, traditions, and superstitions. As early as age 17, Ches-
nutt noted the superstitious nature of the blacks around him. He was teaching in Charlotte, North Carolina and living with one of his pupil's family when he recorded in his journal:

Well! uneducated people are the most bigoted, superstitious hardest-headed people in the world! These folks downstairs believe in ghosts, luck, horse shoes, cloud signs, witches, and all other kinds of nonsense, and all the argument in the world couldn't get it out of them.¹

The quotation reflects an attitude of condescension on Chesnutt's part. Even at 17, he had become so well acquainted with books and a rational approach to life that he was instructing others in the enlightening methods of academia. Hence the impressionable Chesnutt is already scornful of the ignorance associated with folk ways. The folk are so set in their ways that they have a mental block towards education, which Chesnutt values. They value their nonsense over his argument and Chesnutt is not the least tolerant of their position.

Nevertheless, Chesnutt's observations from this point in time enabled him to produce The Conjure Woman, the series of short stories which is considered his most polished work. The general contact with folkways also proved to be useful for inclusion of material in the novels. I am inclined to agree with Sylvia Lyons Render who maintains that Chesnutt left North Carolina in fact, but not in spirit. Geographically and historically, Chesnutt's works have their parallels in North Carolina. His settings, characters, events and portrayal of black dialect are of "unmistakable North Carolina origin."²

It was also in North Carolina that Chesnutt became aware of one of his favorite subjects, that is the condition of the mulatto in Southern society. From a personal experience he learned that even if
a mulatto had no traceable negroid features, he was still "just a nigger." In a somewhat immature response to being taken for white, Chesnutt, like many of his characters, considered the possibility of "passing." In another journal entry, he writes:

Twice today, or oftener, I have been taken for 'white.' At the pond this morning one fellow said he'd 'be damned if there was any nigger blood in me.' At Coleman's I passed. On the road an old chap, seeing the trunks, took me for a student coming from school. I believe I'll leave here and pass anyhow, for I am as white as any of them. One old fellow said today, 'Look here, Tom. Here's a black as white as you are.'

(Journal for July 31, 1875)3

But Chesnutt, unlike many of his characters, became an ardent spokes­man for the acceptance of black men as equals to whites, not as "passed" whites. He looked upon his works as a kind of crusade en­deavor. In one journal entry he wrote that the object of his writings would be not so much the elevation of black people as the elevation of the whites. He felt the "unjust spirit of caste" was "a barrier to the moral progress of the American people."4 Chesnutt's belief in and purpose for his writing is expressed in the following journal entry.

The Negro's part is to prepare himself for recognition and equality, and it is the province of literature to open the way for him to get it— to accustom the public mind to the idea, to lead people out, imperceptibly, unconsciously, step by step, to the desired state of feeling. If I can do anything to further this work, and can see any likelihood of obtaining success in it, I would gladly devote my life to it.5

This quotation serves to explain in part the condescending manner in which Chesnutt recorded his observation of folk belief in North Carolina. Part of the preparation for "recognition and equality" would entail a substitution of the nonsense of folk tradition with
the argument of a society less geared to superstition. Until such a change is made, blacks cannot show themselves as equal to whites. A negative tradition must be replaced with a positive embracing of the values of the dominant culture.

Chesnutt was writing for a cause and his works must be viewed in the light of his ultimate goal. He wanted no less than the complete assimilation of blacks into American society. At times, his purpose obscured his art and he resorted to sentiment, melodrama, and coincidence, elements which mark the second-rate fiction of his period. Chesnutt had read works by Thomas Dixon, Thomas Nelson Page, and Judge Albion Tourgée, and was familiar with their propagandistic, stereotypic portrayal of blacks. Dixon’s The Clansman depicted brutish, illiterate, degenerate blacks raping white women. Judge Tourgée’s A Fool’s Errand had also depicted Southern society and Page’s In Old Virginia portrayed loyal, happy darkies tending their white masters. Page used the frame technique that Chesnutt was to employ in The Conjure Woman. In a journalistic response to the prevailing trend in literature of Northern white interest in Southern blacks, Chesnutt wrote:

... if Judge Tourgée, with his necessarily limited intercourse with colored people, and with his limited stay in the South, can write such interesting descriptions, such vivid pictures of Southern life and character as to make himself rich and famous, why could not a colored man, who has lived among colored people all his life, who is familiar with their habits, their ruling passions, their prejudices, their whole moral and social conditions, their public and private ambitions, their religious tendencies and habits—why could not a colored man who knew all this, and who besides, had possessed such opportunities for observation and conversation with
the better class of white men in the South, as to understand their modes of thinking; who was familiar with the political history of the country, and especially with all the phases of the slavery question—why could not such a man, if he possessed the same ability, write as good a book about the South as Judge Tourgée has written?

In March of 1880, when Chesnutt recorded this entry, he said such a man had not yet made his appearance. A few years later, he was to discover that he himself was the man. He had found the call to a career as a writer too strong to resist.

Most of Chesnutt's works are set in the South and deal with a mixture of political, social, and racial themes. Within the works, folklore functions to enhance themes and structure. Folk materials are used to point out racial and social attitudes of various black and white characters toward each other, either positively or negatively. Chesnutt explored black folk culture as a medium for presentation of political ideas and panaceas for the race conflict in America. Also, folklore functions for structural development of the novels and short stories, thus indicating Chesnutt's understanding of the cultural workings of the material he chose for artistic and thematic points.

Folk elements do appear in the four other works Chesnutt produced in his short writing career, but The Conjure Woman (1899) contains most of the folklore in his works. Chesnutt spent more time putting this volume of seven stories together and trying to get it published than any of his other works. The volume acquires its name from the kind of tales that are included. Each tale deals with the mystic art of conjuration carried out by some person well versed in the art. Four conjurers
appear in the volume, two men and two women. However, of the seven stories included, Aun' Peggy, the principal conjurer, has a place in six of them. The work is considered to be truly representative of the African and Oriental folk heritage of blacks in slavery. Robert A. Smith describes it in the following way.

Interwoven in Chesnutt's stories are the humor, weal, woe, and pathos of the slave and his plantation life, colored by blind ignorance and belief in voodooism. The author tells tales of simple people who had nothing practical on which to depend. To them the slightest phenomenon was inexplicable and was deemed to be the work of the conjurer.

Superstitions associated with conjuring are essential to The Conjure Woman as well as to the novels. To the fictional slaves, as to historical blacks in slavery, the conjure woman or man was a means to obtaining a desired result. These people were feared, but they were also respected. For the slave, who did not have access to scientific rationalization for inexplicable phenomena, the strange arts of conjuration and magic struck his superstitious fancy. If he could not see, understand, or commune with the plantation owner's god, he could identify with practices resembling those with which he was familiar in his native Africa. He could see the powerful goopher worker, uncover his charms, and bear witness to his role as an important individual in the slave or newly freed community. His faith in goophers was not to be shaken. In a discussion of the power of faith in relation to conjuring, Puckett writes:

It is hard to convey to the modern materialist the intense reality of voodoo beliefs to the average illiterate Negro. The astonishing thing to those
who are not acquainted with the almost unbelievable actuality of the spirit environment to primitive people is the fact that voodoo so often works. Reputable physicians everywhere recognize the power of faith in human affairs, and it is due to this over-powering belief in conjuration that the hoodoo-doctor so often accomplishes what he sets out to do, whether it be witching things into, or witching things out of a person.10

Faith is just as necessary for curing as it is for the inception of a spell, a fact which Puckett also credits the medical profession with recognizing. Superstition becomes the only reality in such instances.

There are also superstitions concerning other aspects of the folk culture. These appear mainly in the novels and may involve dreams or signs. For the characters involved with such items, they are all to be feared, hence the superstitions are fear-oriented. Dreams to the unlettered individual represent an unfamiliar territory and cannot be explained away. They come to have divination associations. They are a way for God to reveal to the person, often in rather elaborate symbolism, some aspect of his future or of those around him. Because of the power involved in foretelling the future, dreams acquire somewhat frightening proportions. The same thing is true of signs from the respect of divination. A sign is an even more visible indicator of what the future will bring and is even more to be feared.

In order to alter to a degree the effect of signs, characters often resort to charms which act as positive controls of negative signs. An element of hope is introduced. Perhaps the charm will ward off the effect of the sign or prevent it from ever being realized.

Thus another dimension of superstition is introduced, that which main-
tains that initial negative signs can be diverted from their disastrous effects by the use of positive controls for conversion purposes.

In addition to superstitions surrounding conjuration, dreams, signs, and charms, there are also certain superstitious beliefs appearing in folktales in the novels. One such tale centers around superstitions associated with black cats. But folktales are mainly used to represent another aspect of black folk culture Chesnutt is exploring. Through them, we can see the entertainment value of such pieces within the culture. Even more so, we can analyze the numerous ways in which Chesnutt is using the material in a functional literary way.

Both superstitions and folktales have some definite purpose for inclusion in the works. The folkloric items may serve to develop plots or characterize the various personages appearing in the works. At times, they function for educational purposes from Chesnutt's as well as the character's point of view. Because his writing was cause/goal oriented, Chesnutt's use of folkloric items reflect his attitude towards these materials as dysfunctional elements in the lives of most of his black characters, but as positive features when his ultimate goals are considered. This is especially true of the novels, but Chesnutt made his own statements about the stories in The Conjure Woman. In 1931, he wrote two significant comments.

They are naive and simple stories, dealing with alleged incidents of chattel slavery, as the old man Julius had known it and as I had heard of it, and centering around the professional activities of old Aunt Peggy,
the plantation conjure woman, and others of that ilk.\textsuperscript{11}

And again:

They are sometimes referred to as folk tales, but while they employ much of the universal machinery of wonder stories, especially the metamorphosis, with one exception, that of the first story, \textit{The Goophered Grapevine}, of which the norm was a folk tale, the stories are the fruit of my own imagination, in which respect they differ from the Uncle Remus stories which are avowedly folk tales.\textsuperscript{12}

Just how naive and simple the stories really are this study will reveal. Also, Chesnutt had mentioned earlier in his career that the idea of the stories being purely the product of his imagination was a little less than true. On a return trip to North Carolina in the early twentieth century, he observes:

\ldots I discovered that the brilliant touches, due, I had thought, to my own imagination, were after all but dormant ideas, lodged in my childish mind by old Aunt This and old Uncle That, and awaiting only the spur of imagination to bring them again to the surface.\textsuperscript{13}

The works themselves disclose whether or not Chesnutt's evaluations of his creations are accurate. They also reveal how each item of folklore operates for Chesnutt and his characters in the functional roles we have defined.

Several things are vital to an analysis of folk materials in Chesnutt's works. Setting is one of these. Setting is very important to an interpretation of the function of the stories in \textit{The Conjure Woman} as well as the tales which appear in the novels. The setting determines which story will be told at any given point. A sawmill evokes a story about a sawmill and it is appropriate in that
particular context. A story about a gray wolf's haunt would not fit very well in such a context. Uncle Julius is very much aware of the story controlling context of each setting and fits stories accordingly. They grow out of each particular situation. With setting and lore so closely tied together, each functions in relation to its specific context.

Uncle Julius relates the seven stories in *The Conjure Woman* to a visiting Northern gentleman and his wife who have moved South in an attempt to improve the wife's health. All the tales Julius relates are set in slavery times in and about the McAdoo plantation the gentleman, John, has purchased. Some action in the real world triggers a responding story from Julius' unlimited storehouse. This gives an illusion of spontaneity. The stories become involved with the new plantation owners (John and his wife Annie), Julius, and other persons. Each imaginative piece has some immediate value, serves some immediate purpose to the real world events surrounding it. Some tales are reminiscent of Uncle Remus in their didacticism. Others are more unique in their message. In each case, however, the setting determines the tale Julius recounts.

For example, Julius first meets John and Annie on a sunny afternoon in the vineyard, a major industry on the old McAdoo plantation. Julius sits eating grapes when John and Annie come to examine the property before purchasing it. When their purpose is revealed, Julius explains in "The Goophered Grapevine" why the vineyard should not be purchased. The story centers around a curse that was put on the vine-
yard in question during slavery times. Julius wishes to impress upon his listeners the idea that the goopher is still strong and working; the vineyard is a dangerous thing and will do more harm than good. The present setting and the tale from days of slavery have the still existing vineyard in common and one evokes the other.

The same thing is true of the remaining six tales. Present day, real world events are essential to the evocation of the various tales. On one occasion, Julius drives his employers to a sawmill to get lumber for a new kitchen. The foreman is away and the couple must await his return sitting in their carriage at the mill. The atmosphere surrounding the carriage, that is the grinding of the sawmill, reminds Julius of "Po' Sandy" and he relates this tale of conjuration which also deals with lumber and sawmills. The wife, Annie, is extremely interested in Julius' tale and an unwanted break passes quickly during the telling. John, the husband, is more skeptical, but nevertheless, he listens attentively to what Julius has to say. This contrast in the tales' effect on husband and wife is consistent throughout the book and provides points for discussion on each occasion.

Julius is easily at home with his storytelling in outdoor settings, but lazy spring afternoons at the big house are also conducive. The setting for "The Gray Wolf's Ha'nt" is one such rainy Sunday afternoon. When Julius is told that swamp ground is going to be cleared for additional growing space, he tells the story of the gray wolf's haunt in an effort to prevent John from clearing the land, an area which is haunted by dead lovers. On another Sunday Julius visits his employers
and is told about new ground being cultivated for more grapevines and watermelons. John comments that he must get an additional creature for ploughing, namely a mule. Julius uses the occasion to show the disadvantages of buying a mule by relating the tale of "The Conjurer's Revenge" in which a man had been turned into a mule. By driving a mule, Julius argues, he might be "imposin' on some human creature," some relations or "somebody else what can't help deyse'ves" (p. 106).

Another spring afternoon evokes "Sis' Becky's Pickaninny," the theme of which is the pitfalls to which one may fall prey without the help of a trusty rabbit's foot. Annie, sitting in an armchair on the piazza in an effort to recuperate from her illness, is without a rabbit's foot as she listens to Julius' tale. A few weeks later, however, John discovers a rabbit's foot in one of her pockets. Julius has acquired a convert of sorts with his tale, but more immediately, he succeeds in lifting the lady's spirits and she takes a turn for the better. Again, setting and tale are closely related.

The seventh story, "Hot-Foot Hannibal," is related on a drive when the horse balks. John, Annie, and Annie's sister Mabel are in the carriage. While waiting for the horse to get started again, Julius relates the tale of separated lovers and a searching ghost. The horse, he says, has balked because it sees the ghost of the female in the tale, patiently waiting by the roadside for her lost lover. The tale succeeds not only as entertainment, but it inspires Mabel, who sent her lover away a few days before and promised never to see him again, to seek the young man and become reconciled. The ghost from the past connects
the present day scene with the tale.

Another drive to a local spring provides the setting for "Mars Jeems's Nightmare." Julius drives John and Annie to the spring for water and discovers that it is being cleaned. While they are waiting, a stranger passes by beating his horse with a riding whip. The incident inspires Julius to relate the tale of a cruel master in slavery who beat his chattels in the same manner that the passing man beats his horse. Another associative connection has provided a tale from the annals of a tradition in slavery. Julius has used settings and scenes to his advantage and the aura of spontaneity is maintained.

It is also significant here and should be emphasized, that Julius' tales are consistently related to the same audience—two intelligent adults. The attentive boy of the Uncle Remus tales has been replaced with thinking adults. Therefore, the fantasy aspect of the tales should be minimized and the serious purpose underlying them emphasized. Chesnutt could not expect adults to believe that men were turned to mules or white men to blacks, but he could expect his adult audience to be aware of the underlying conditions in which such things supposedly happened, that is, slavery with all its cruelties.

Setting is also important to the function of the tales occurring in the novels. In The House Behind the Cedars (1900), a version of tale type 1890, "The Lucky Shot," occurs in the conversation after an important dinner party. The appearance of the tale in this particular setting causes its value to be minimized by the hearers. A different
setting would have undoubtedly produced a different reaction to and evaluation of the tale. When it occurs, however, it is intentionally pushed into the background for more important considerations.

A tale in The Colonel's Dream (1905) receives much more attention in its particular setting. Peter French, a faithful family servant, takes his young master fishing. In such a relaxed atmosphere, he leisurely relates a version of "When Caleb Comes" (Motif J1495.2) to the inquisitive little boy. The tale covers five pages in contrast to the paragraph in which "The Lucky Shot" is treated in The House Behind the Cedars. Length implies significance. Peter's tale, leisurely related in an extremely relaxed atmosphere, will produce major consequences in the novel. Homer Pettifoot's account of "The Lucky Shot" is immediately forgotten.

In the short stories and the novels, Chesnutt's settings for the longer items of folklore serve a valuable purpose in evoking the tales, determining their treatment, or in defining their significance to plot development.

In addition to setting, the point of view from which the tales are presented is also significant to a functional interpretation of the stories in The Conjure Woman. A frame device in the tradition of Southwestern humor is employed. Such a device offers four levels of interpretation in the stories. John provides the initial commentary in traditional standard English. Then Julius takes over to relate the tales in his North Carolina dialect. John returns at the end of each story to offer an evaluation, a moral, or other insight into the tales.
The two are kept separate and each has an idea of the relevance of the tales. From their actions in the stories, there is also a level of interpretation from the characters' point of view. Most significantly, however, Chesnutt is manipulating all three of the other viewpoints and his must also be evaluated.

Style must also be considered in an overall view of the tales. Within the frame, Julius tells his stories in the dialect of the region in North Carolina surrounding the location of the stories. The Fayetteville with which Chesnutt became familiar in his youth becomes the Patesville of the stories and novels. In an unpublished doctoral dissertation treating the dialect used in The Conjure Woman, the author concludes that Chesnutt "was remarkably accurate in his representation of the dialect of the area which corresponds roughly to that delineated in Atlas Studies as the Cape Fear-Pee Dee River Corridor" (Linguistic Atlas of the South Atlantic States). This area surrounds Fayetteville, North Carolina. The author further concludes that Chesnutt "does not exploit dialect for its own sake, but depends on its accurate use for additional depth of character development in Uncle Julius." Julius is steeped in the tradition of the language as well as the lore of the area. This emphasizes a further closeness to the subject matter that John's standard English could not possibly portray. Stylistically and traditionally, Julius is a part of the community whose lore he perpetuates.

Julius' involvement with the traditional lore moves us into areas of types, stereotypes, and folklore for characterization purposes.
Julius is described as one of those relics from slavery who was either too old to move when freedom came or had no place to go. John describes Julius in this manner:

He had been accustomed, until long after middle life, to look upon himself as the property of another. When this relation was no longer possible, owing to the war, and his master's death and the dispersion of the family, he had been unable to break off entirely the mental habits of a lifetime, but had attached himself to the old plantation, of which he seemed to consider himself an appurtenance. We found him useful in many ways and entertaining in others, and my wife and I took quite a fancy to him. (p. 65)

For whatever reason, Julius has remained in his old plantation home, a home which John purchases and acquires Julius as a coachman; with Julius comes all the lore surrounding the plantation. Julius becomes a type of entertainer, relating the tales from the perspective of a free working man with all the traditions and beliefs of his former status of slavery.

Julius establishes a folk mode of storytelling by using dialect and with the minute detailing of oral transmission. This, he frequently reminds his listeners, is how a particular story was related to him. Julius is insulted in one instance when the gentleman asks him if he made a story up all by himself. In response, Julius says:

'No, suh, I heared dat tale befo' you er Mis' Annie dere wuz bawn, suh. My mammy tol' me dat tale w'en I wa'n't mo' d'n knee-high ter a hopper-grass.' (p. 101)

The footnoting defines Julius as a one hundred percent believer in what he tells, but it also absolves him of creative responsibility if his tale should prove too incredulous for his listeners. He is an active tradition bearer relating his stories to a captive audience.
Each story is "evidently embellished to suit the exigencies of the occasion."  

Like Dorson's J. D. Suggs, Julius is concerned with accurately detailing his numerous stories. The two of them also have the habit from black tradition, especially in the Baptist preacher mode, of creating polysyllabic words for sound effect (or perhaps from illiteracy).  

Julius and Suggs also feel a need to attach moral significance to their tales. They leave no room for misinterpretation on the part of the audience. As a general comment, Suggs remarks after relating a tale of a deer escaping from a fox and the fox's punishment by Brer Rabbit: "There's a lesson in all those stories." He, like Julius, understands cultural implications and can apply his tales accordingly.

In a sense, Julius becomes a man for all seasons with his ever ready tales on diverse occasions. But, unlike Uncle Remus, Uncle Julius is not the bowing, scraping sort of black person in his role as an entertainer. He controls not only the events of the tales themselves, but the circumstances surrounding them for effecting some purpose of his own. Julius can go to the big house on a rainy Sunday afternoon and entertain his mistress with the tale of "The Gray Wolf's Ha'nt" without in any sense demeaning himself as a human being. His audience is appreciative because Julius is a great storyteller, but he does not entertain for entertainment's sake alone.

In his role as a storyteller, Julius evokes contrasting responses from his audience. Annie is always sympathetic to the plight of the
characters in the tales. John, on the other hand, is always the rationalizing skeptic. However, he does not attempt to lessen the entertainment value of the tales. On the trip to the spring in the frame to "Mars Jeems's Nightmare," he makes the following comment about Julius' offer to tell a tale:

The man had not yet finished cleaning the spring, and we might as well put in time listening to Julius as in any other way. We had found some of his plantation tales quite interesting. (p. 70)

He finds the tales interesting for the superficial fantasy. The wife is more attuned to the human suffering underlying the fantasy.

Julius uses folk culture to entertain others and to achieve his own purposes, but items of folklore are also used to characterize him as a product of a folk culture. Julius' superstitious nature comes out as he is about to relate the story of "The Gray Wolf's Ha'nt."

He arrives at the big house in a pouring rain under a huge faded cotton umbrella. He closes the umbrella and gets "a good dash of rain" before stepping onto the piazza. When asked why he didn't keep it up until he got under cover, Julius responds that "it's bad luck ter raise a' umbrella in de house,20 en w'iles I dunno whuther it's bad luck ter kyar one inter de piazza er no, I 'lows it's allus bes' to be on de safe side" (p. 165). Julius is a product of a folk culture in his actions as well as his conversations.

On another occasion, Julius takes his employers on a drive and the horse balks. Julius says the mare has seen a ghost. Asked how he is blessed with such knowledge, Julius replies.

'Well, suh, dis yer is a gray hoss, en dis yer
is a Friday; en a gray hoss kin alluz see a ha'nt w'at walks on Friday.' (p. 203)\(^21\)

There is some question as to the authenticity of Julius' belief in this item of folklore because he has an ulterior motive in mind and apparently stopped the mare without his employers' knowledge. He is familiar with the tradition, however, thus illustrating his closeness to the folk culture.

There is also some discrepancy about his belief in carrying a rabbit's foot. In the "Sis' Becky's Pickaninny" frame, Julius visits his employers carrying a rabbit's foot which John makes fun of. Julius admits it is true that all rabbits' feet are not necessarily powerful; it has to be a special one.

'De fo'-'foot ain' got no power. It has ter be de hin'-foot er a grabe'ya'd rabbit, killt by a cross-eyed nigger on a da'k night in de full er de moon.' (p. 135)\(^22\)

Julius might believe in the tradition, but he also knows Annie is ill and he is looking for some way to make her feel better. If he can divert her attention away from her illness to a tale and an inanimate object, then he doesn't mind being characterized as a believer in folk tradition.

Julius as a type of character is treated much more positively than the stereotyped characters in the novels. Chesnutt was much more tolerant of Julius as a product of folk tradition than he would be of the characters in the later works. He came to see folk tradition as a definite hindrance to the black man's progress in America. Therefore, he firmly indicts characters exemplifying those traits in the novels. The change in attitude stems from the cause-oriented purpose
to which Chesnutt more openly committed himself in the novels. Bowing, scraping, self-degrading stereotypes of blacks could not be indulged if advancement was to become a realizable goal. Chesnutt was aware of these stereotypes simply from observing the world around him, and he could record the types, but he could not condone their actions.

Chesnutt wrote at a time when the black and white races were thrown together in a situation most whites found impossible to tolerate. Blacks had been slaves for too long a period to suddenly think of them as social or intellectual equals. Calculated schemes were carried out to keep the newly freed blacks "in their place" when whites felt threatened by aspiring blacks. These schemes often came about as a result of real life incidents, such as a dominant black population in Wilmington, North Carolina, or they were fabricated out of stereotypes whites had of blacks in an effort to control and suppress an entire race. No self-respecting white person would dare question the "facts" that all blacks steal, and all black men lust after white women. By showing blacks as illiterate, animalistic, and criminal, whites could prove their own racial superiority and continue to uphold their cherished traditions. When they actually found blacks who were the epitome of their stereotyped attitudes, this made their feeling of superiority even stronger.

Chesnutt was well aware of stereotyped white attitudes towards blacks and he recorded them with accuracy in his works. He was also aware of the corresponding stereotyped attitudes blacks had of whites, and of themselves, but he clearly emphasized that white attitudes were
more widespread and whites had more means with which to perpetuate their stereotypes. The system of justice was also white-dominated and laws could easily be used to prosecute blacks simply on the basis of stereotypes.

Along with stereotyped attitudes, Chesnutt was also aware of certain types of individuals in this conflicting society. During the period following slavery, he saw the displaced "Mammy Janes," the "Dilseys" of the white masters' households, who, even when freedom was extended to them, could only remain in the kitchens which provided an instinctive security for them. He saw the "Peter Frenches," who were also lost without some association with whites. He saw the "Josh Greens" who embraced freedom so willingly that it proved destructive; one act of a president could not and did not erase over 200 years of status quo. Chesnutt also saw the "Rowena Waldens," and the "Janet Millers," the near white blacks who worshipped whiteness as the only means of survival in their changing world, and the "Frank Fowlers" and "Jerry Letlows," who in turn worshipped near whiteness and whiteness as representative of the pure white goals they were too black ever to achieve. Then, too, Chesnutt saw those somewhat obscure blacks who went slowly on their way from freedom to education to a quietly obtained, but relatively stable place in the society in which they lived. They were scorned for their blackness by mulattoes and for their lack of "humbleness" by plantation-minded blacks. Yet they continued on their way, often with the help of white philanthropists, the "Colonel Frenches," who proved to be misunderstood, somewhat
anachronistic in their own times.

Chesnutt uses folklore to characterize several of these types. In characterizing various types of blacks in the novels, he uses a dream, two folktales and a charm. The dream is used to convey the idea that Rowena (Rena) Walden, the major character in The House Behind the Cedars, is prey to a superstitious black environment and has inherited the attitudes and practices of that environment. Rena, while away on a trip, dreams that her mother is ill. Her brother tells her that dreams usually go by contraries and that their mother is probably in good health. Rena concedes that dreams do go by contraries in the case of one or two, but "a dream three times repeated was a certain portent of the thing defined" (p. 91). When Rena dreams her mother is ill a third time, she goes home, for her years of schooling "had scarcely disturbed these hoary superstitions which lurk in the dim corners of the brain" (pp. 91-92).

The black environment from which Rena has acquired her superstitious nature was dominated by Mis' Molly, Rena's mother. To acquaint the reader with how this environment has influenced Rena, Chesnutt discusses Mis' Molly's attitude toward dreams.

Mis' Molly had a profound faith in them dreams. . . . For Mis' Molly, to whom science would have meant nothing and psychology would have been a meaningless term, the land of dreams was carefully mapped and bounded. Each dream had some special significance, or was at least susceptible of classification under some significant head. (p. 91)

At a time when Rena has been away from home trying to pass for white, the dream has called her back to her basic black environment. The
dream, and her response to it, illustrate the fact that Rena is instinctively black, the product of an atmosphere of upbringing from which she cannot escape. The dream and the mother serve as cultural reminders of blackness.

On a psychological level, the dream characterizes Rena as a sensitive girl who has developed feelings of guilt about leaving her mother alone in the isolated house behind the cedars. She returns home to discover that her mother has been ill for a few days and has required the attention of a physician. The matter is not one of near death, however. Nevertheless, Rena's belief in a response to her superstitious nature is reinforced by a degree of basis in fact.

Just as the dream serves to characterize Rena as a product of a folk culture, the two folktales serve to characterize other figures in the novels in a somewhat similar way. In *The House Behind the Cedars*, Mis' Molly gives a party at which she hopes to make great strides in getting a husband for Rena in the person of a Mr. Wain. "The Lucky Shot" (Type 1890) receives very cursory treatment in the after dinner conversation.

Homer Pettifoot related, with minute detail, an old, threadbare hunting lie, dating, in slightly differing forms, from the age of Nimrod, about finding twenty-five partridges sitting in a row on a rail, and killing them all with a single buckshot, which passed through twenty-four and lodged in the body of the twenty-fifth, from which it was extracted and returned to the shotpouch for future service. (pp. 213-214)²⁵

The tale serves to characterize Homer as exemplifying the behavior of a simple folk type. He is not the least significant to Mis' Molly's
plans; his primary function as a minor character is to announce Rena's death. Hence Homer's tale of a wonderful hunt, which makes him an object of derision for the guests, immediately paves the way for the wealthy, glamorous Mr. Wain to capture the audience's attention with a lively account of one of his afternoons as a member of "de fus' legislatur after de wah" when he passed for white. Chesnutt does not even give Homer an opportunity to express his story in his own words; he simply edits the summary as "an old, threadbare hunting lie" that "was viewed with suspicion." Wain's story is told with much detail. Just as Homer has started to defend his story, Mr. Wain "cut short his protestations, in much the same way that the rising sun extinguishes the light of lesser luminaries" (p. 214). As Homer becomes relegated to a lowly position because of his subject matter, Wain becomes esteemed in the eyes of the ladies for the same reason. The reactions suggest that some value judgment is being made. A typically folk subject is set against a "cultured" concern, and the former loses out. The folk have no place in this "better society" of blacks. The persons attending the party, who pride themselves on being "blue veins," are more interested in the real world of black and white relationships than in the imaginative world of a storyteller.

The second folktale, a version of "When Caleb Comes" (Motif J1495.2), occurs in The Colonel's Dream. Peter French, a faithful old servant to the wealthy French family, tells the story of the haunted house and the appearance of a talking black cat to his seven-year-old master (pp. 146-150). The tale itself is entertaining, but it also defines Peter
in his role as an entertainer, that is, in his position of servitude. The folklore becomes dysfunctional because it serves to perpetuate a stereotype which originated in slavery. Peter becomes an example of the black person whose sole function in life is to please his white master and relating folktales becomes an example of that pleasuring function. Unlike Julius, he entertains only for the sake of entertainment.

In the same vein with Peter is the voluntary servant, Mammy Jane, in The Marrow of Tradition (1901), and, as her name suggests, she is an accommodating black "mammy," sacrificing everything for the well-being of her young white charge. She is characterized by her superstitious belief in charms. When the Carteret baby is born with a mole behind its left ear, Mammy Jane thinks it is born for bad luck, specifically hanging. Even if it seemed "manifestly impossible that a child of such high quality as the grandson of her old mistress should die by judicial strangulation," Mammy Jane nevertheless considers the "warning" a serious thing, and "not to be lightly disregarded" (p. 10). She therefore has a charm concocted which will act as a permanent conversion. She filled a small vial with water in which the infant had been washed and took it to "a certain wise old black woman" who was well known to be versed in "witchcraft and conjuration." The conjure woman added a bit of calamus root to the vial, along with one of the cervical vertebrae from the skeleton of a black cat and "several other mysterious ingredients." In the traditional manner, Mammy Jane buries the charm in the Carterets' back yard "one night during the full moon."
These characters, especially the servants, are variously involved in perpetuating stereotyped attitudes of blacks from the white point of view. Mammy Jane and Peter help to solidify their stereotyped roles by being "good niggers." Rebellion is an unknown word in their limited realm of existence. Mammy Jane's young charge must be assured of a bright future at all costs. Everything surrounding the little white heir must be as perfect as possible. For Mammy Jane, who has nothing of material value to offer, her superstitious nature surfaces in a protective gesture. The baby is too precious to leave its future to chance; the power of the charm will supposedly make the baby's future secure. Mammy Jane does her best for preserving whiteness and the master/slave relationship. Thus, from Chesnutt's point of view, the lore is again dysfunctional because it perpetuates inequality, not assimilation.

In addition to using folklore to characterize stereotypes, Chesnutt also treats other types of folk characters in his works. Julius fits into this category by exemplifying traits of a trickster figure. The trickster in Afro-American tradition can take the form of the rabbit in the Brer Rabbit cycle of tales or John in the Marster and John tales. Generally, the trickster's actions are audacious, rebellious, egotistical, and always performed with the idea of giving freedom to personal action in the face of group restrictions. He is creator and destroyer, giver and negator, he who dupes and who is always duped himself. The trickster usually lacks morals; he is at the mercy of his own passions and appetites. He functions in the culture as a
release valve for all of the anti-social desires repressed by people who tell and listen to his stories. Often, stereotyped traits of blacks are transformed into characteristics which are to be admired, a stance that Julius masterfully employs. The rabbit's triumphs over his larger adversaries provide a source of identification and admiration for the black person who dares not strike out against white society. Rabbit's cleverness is appreciated even though the black person realizes that it is a short-lived triumph to be laughed at but not imitated. With animal and human tricksters in black tradition, the sequence of events in which they function to trick others is usually the only mask they wear.

Julius fits into this category very well. Obviously he is superstitious, as we have seen on a couple of occasions, but Julius has ulterior motives for each of the seven stories involving conjuration that he relates. We have mentioned that for him the tales are not simply entertaining, though he apparently enjoys telling them. For Julius, the tales serve a higher purpose; they have a function that only becomes apparent when his ulterior motives are uncovered. He has been shaped by tradition, but he uses tradition to his own personal advantage. This also makes us question further his protests of telling the tales as they were told to him. Chesnutt himself wrote the following of Julius' motives.

In every instance Julius had an axe to grind, for himself or his church, or some member of his family, or a white friend. The introductions to the stories, which were written in the best English I could command, developed the characters of Julius's employers and his own, and the wind-up of each story reveals the old
man's ulterior purpose, which, as a general thing is accomplished.\(^{30}\)

When Julius protests so convincingly that John should not purchase the vineyard in "The Goophered Grapevine," we later learn that Julius "had occupied a cabin on the place for many years, and derived a respectable revenue from the product of the neglected grapevines" (pp. 34-35). Julius maintains that once the lime planting Yankee Mars Dugal employed had destroyed the original vines, new ones were planted, but some of the old ones grew back. He can eat the grapes because he knows which ones are which. Thus he has no reason to be afraid of the continuing goopher. John buys the vineyard anyway, but Julius gets something more than neglected grapes. As Richard Baldwin puts it:

Julius emerges from this dramatic conflict with a qualified success, for while he loses the vineyard he gains a more stable livelihood in the white man's employment.\(^{31}\)

In the "Po' Sandy" frame, Julius convinces Annie to get new lumber to build her kitchen and leave the haunted schoolhouse standing. She does so and we later discover that there was a split in Julius' church and the seceding party, of which Julius is a member, needs the schoolhouse to hold their meetings. Annie gives her consent while John is away. When he returns, he asks what the seceders plan to do about Sandy's ghost.

'Oh,' replied Annie, 'Uncle Julius says that ghosts never disturb religious worship, but that if Sandy's spirit should happen to stray into meeting by mistake, no doubt the preaching would do it good.' (p. 63)

The lore functions for Julius to get something he wants. He has literally conjured his opponents with words in the tradition of the
man of words. Annie has no defense against Julius' well put case. Julius is never reprimanded for his cunning; we can safely assume that the skeptical, rationalizing John admires the somewhat undermining Julius. Or at least Julius reinforces his own stereotypic ideas of cunning, conniving blacks and he feels more secure in his own racial superiority.

With "Mars Jeems's Nightmare," Julius also has an ulterior purpose in mind. A few days before the story is related, John has hired Julius' nephew Tom to do odd jobs around the house. Tom proves to be trifling, lazy, careless and lacking in any sense of responsibility. John discharges him because he is so "absolutely untrustworthy." The tale on the cruelty of masters has a moral aimed at John, a moral which Julius refuses to let go unnoticed. When he concludes the tale of the white master being turned into a slave and suffering the agonies of that condition, he adds:

'Dis yer tale goes ter show'. . . 'dat w'ite folks w'at is so ha'd en stric', en doan make no 'lowance fer po' ign'ant niggers w'at ain' had no chanst ter l'am, is li'ble ter hab bad dreams, ter say de leas', en dat dem w'at is kin' en good ter po' people is sho' ter prosper en git 'long in de worl'.' (p. 100)

When John returns from town the next day, he discovers that Annie has rehired Tom. She says she has done so because he "was hanging round the place all morning, and looking so down in the mouth" (p. 102). Here, Julius tells the tale to subtly emphasize the point that his poor, ignorant nephew should be given another chance. Perhaps Julius even informed him on which day he should go to the big house and "look down in the mouth" to achieve the desired result. John does not fire Tom
again because he "did not wish the servants to think there was any conflict of authority in the household" (p. 102). Perhaps Julius had already analyzed that aspect of the situation also.

With the moral, Julius is almost taunting John to accept his responsibility in the superiority/inferiority setup that the white world has established. If they can never look upon each other as equals, then John should accept the responsibility of a willful position of superiority, a position that Julius uses to his own familial advantage.

Julius' motive in preferring horses to mules in "The Conjurer's Revenge" comes but when he offers to put John in touch with a man who has a horse for sale. The man brings the horse to the vineyard and John unwittingly purchases what appears to be a sound and gentle horse with no bad habits, a fine-looking animal. "But alas for the deceitfulness of appearances" (p. 130).

I ascertained that the horse was blind in one eye, and that the sight of the other was very defective; and not a month elapsed before my purchase developed most of the diseases that horse-flesh is heir to, and a more worthless, broken-winded, spavined quadruped never disgraced the noble name of horse. After worrying through two or three months of life, he expired one night in a fit of the colic. I replaced him with a mule, and Julius henceforth had to take his chances of driving some metamorphosed unfortunate. (p. 130)

John suspects Julius of having had a hand in the transaction. He sees Julius with a new suit of clothing when he hasn't been paid recently, but he cannot confront him with a charge of duplicity without proof. He considers it beneath him to approach Julius on circumstantial evidence. Julius, whom Chesnutt shows as much more perceptive
and analytical of human behavior than John, is perfectly aware of John’s position, and uses it to his advantage. He openly sports his new suit of clothing, allowing his employer to draw his conclusion and suffer in silence. His trickery is open defiance.

Brer Rabbit exhibits some of the same qualities in his trickster roles. He steals the butter owned jointly by several animals in one tale and makes no attempt to run away. He even aids in uncovering the "real" culprit and complacently stands by and watches the poor fellow being punished (Dorson, Nos. 1, 2). In this and other instances of Brer Rabbit's trickery, some of the animals might suspect his guilt, but they cannot prove it and Brer Rabbit is always ready to make a fast getaway. Even when suspicion actually results in Brer Rabbit's capture, as in the famous Tar Baby story, Brer Rabbit is still able to use more trickery to escape (Dorson, No. 3). The other animals know Brer Rabbit does not play fair with them, just as John suspects Julius, but their cases against him are short-lived.

The same thing is true when John gets the better of Old Marster. Marster believes that John will cheat him, not work, and steal if he gets the chance, but John always manages to stay one step ahead of Old Marster in not allowing him to get actual proof of cheating and stealing. One such instance occurs in "Old Boss and John at the Praying Tree" (Dorson, No. 54). During a year when crops are bad, John lives in luxury by stealing hams, flour, sugar and other items from Old Marster. Marster suspects John and finds his food at John's house. But Marster is no match for the wily John. He says God has given him
the food because he prayed for it and he takes Marster to the praying tree to prove his point. As John prays for food with Marster's brand name on it, he has a friend drop items from the tree. John keeps praying until "God" comes down from the tree and beats Old Marster, who instantly gives John his freedom. In this case, Old Marster is not allowed to believe his own eyes in recognizing his food and John succeeds, as does Julius, in maintaining his ill gained profit.

We must not think, however, that Julius' motives are all so profit-oriented. When he learns that his mistress is not recovering as rapidly as expected, he goes to her and relates the delightful tale of "Sis' Becky's Pickaninny." He makes Annie feel better and convinces her of the value of carrying a rabbit's foot. He carefully caresses her into feeling better with the power of words. It is a delicate trickery, but trickery nonetheless.

In "The Gray Wolf's Ha'nt," Julius returns to his profit-oriented stance. He doesn't want the swamp land cleared because he has a very profitable honey tree in the area. John suspects that the gray wolf's haunt had proved useful in keeping off too inquisitive people, who might have interfered with Julius' monopoly. When the ground is cleared, no wolf bones or grave are discovered. The fact that John actually looked for them again defines him as the skeptical rationalist, only superficially examining the stories.

We can infer that Julius has interfered in "Hot-Foot Hannibal" in an effort to get Mabel and her betrothed, Malcolm Murchison, back together again. The verisimilitude presented by the balki...
the account of Chloe's ghost force Mabel to realize that human existence is a transitory thing and she should make up as soon as possible. It just so happens that the longer route Julius prefers for the drive is the one frequently used by Malcolm. Once the horse starts again and they reach the longer route, they meet a servant who informs them that Malcolm is going away to New York indefinitely. He is coming along behind the servant and Mabel goes to meet him.

John cannot be sure that Julius and Malcolm had a previous arrangement, but he notes that "a most excellent understanding" existed between the two after the incident. In fact, the Murchisons even offered Julius an opportunity to enter their service once they were married; he preferred to remain with John and Annie. Asidely, however, the gray mare never balked again.

Julius has clearly embellished each of the stories for his own purposes, but even the embellishment is a part of tradition. The tales are related with power and humor and capture the spirit of plantation life and conjuring. However, it is in the embellishment that Julius' trickster characteristics come out. He is obviously an active agent. None of the things he wishes to achieve happen by chance. And while he does exhibit some characteristics of the trickster figure, he is not completely the amoral, unethical character as defined by Abrahams. He is never duped; he always comes out on top by using established attitudes to his advantage. Nor is he a conning Simon Suggs, always working for his own good. Perhaps he can best be described as a person who is uncannily aware of the world view around him, of black
and white attitudes and positions, and uses these thoroughly to his advantage with a subtlety that completely bypasses John as narrator.

Mars Dugal McAdoo, who owns most of the slaves appearing in The Conjure Woman, is also somewhat of a trickster figure. In "The Goophered Grapevine," Henry, the new slave who accidentally gets the goopher put on him, becomes a valuable commodity to Mars Dugal. After Henry is goophered by eating the conjured grapes, his life can only be saved by linking his destiny to the grapevines. He must anoint his head with sap from one of the vines each year in order to keep from dying. Thus when the vines are green and supple, so is Henry. When they droop at the end of the harvesting season, Henry reverts to his old, bald, weak, rheumatic self.

After observing this waxing and waning process for a couple of years, Mars Dugal decides to capitalize on this strange phenomenon. He sells the powerful, hardworking Henry in the spring for $1500 and buys the weak, rheumatic Henry back for $500 in the fall. He keeps this up for five years at a $1000 profit each season. When Henry's hair would begin to fall out and his joints would stiffen, the new masters would bring in doctors to try to find out what was wrong with him, but "de med'cine didn't 'pear to do no good; de goopher had a good holt" (p. 25). Mars Dugal would then appear on the scene as the picture of innocence, pretend to regret the bad sale, and repurchase Henry. Henry would then live off the fat of the land until the next spring.

This profit on Mars Dugal's part can be compared to Old Marster
making a profit on John in several of that cycle of tales. John is often presented as having fortunetelling abilities and Marster wins plantations and huge tracts of land or sums of money because John accidentally but correctly states that there is a coon or some other animal in a box. The Marster might acquire the same profits by pitting his bad John against some other bully in the community. By some method of trickery—slapping the master’s wife or pulling up an already unearthed tree—John forces his adversary to run away and Marster makes a huge profit. He continually increases his bets with the hope of increasing his profits. Like the marsters from oral tradition, Henry’s owner thinks his good thing can be made better and that his profits can be increased.

Mars Dugal gets greedy and wishes to improve the product from his vineyard by allowing a Yankee to treat the roots of the grapevines with lime, ashes, and manure. The vines dwindled, drooped and died, and so did Henry. This is a perfect example of Chesnutt’s serious purpose in bringing out “the horrors of slavery and the injustice of treating Negroes as if they have no feelings.” Henry is no more than a chattel, a piece of property to Mars Dugal. He pays with his life for his master’s folly in adhering to foolish advice. Thus here, the trickery has much more serious consequences than anything Julius devised. It destroys a human being and is all the more tragic because Mars Dugal is totally unaware of Henry’s humanity. Julius, speaking for Chesnutt, is aware of this in the tale, but it bypasses John.

A blacksmith assistant in “The Web of Circumstance” also plays a
trick which has tragic consequences. He steals a riding whip and points the finger at innocent Ben Davis, who spends five years in the penitentiary at hard labor. He also has an ulterior motive—he wants Ben's wife. Chesnutt uses the incident, as he does "Hot-Foot Hannibal," to illustrate how blacks have become so enmeshed in the white value system that they use it against one another. Tom, the assistant, hides the whip in Ben's blacksmith shop. He knows that the word of a black person will never stand up in a white court and that Ben will be sent to prison, thus out of Tom's way in his amorous pursuits. As Ben's sentence is pronounced, Tom smiles to himself and walks out of the courtroom.

Hannibal, in "Hot-Foot Hannibal," is also satisfied with his trick. He smilingly relates to Chloe how he has tricked her into believing Jeff, her lover, has been unfaithful to her. The revelation comes only after Jeff has been sold down the river for using a conjure doll against Hannibal. Hannibal had disguised himself as a woman and thrown himself into Jeff's arms in full view of the indignant Chloe. She then went to Mars Dugal and revealed how she and Jeff had used the doll to get Hannibal out of the big house as a servant and Jeff in. Mars Dugal had warned his slaves about using conjuration and immediately sells Jeff away. When he learns of Hannibal's trick, he attempts to buy Jeff back for Chloe's sake, but Jeff has been drowned in a fall from a steamboat.

Hannibal has been fully aware of how the system will operate to punish Jeff once he makes Chloe angry enough to reveal their scheme.
to Mars Dugal. The revenge motif is successfully accomplished and Hannibal is guilty of the same fault as whites, that is, treating blacks with no regard for personal feeling or motivation. Even though he was wronged first, he still is not justified in blind revenge. His trickster role is a destructive one and Chesnutt makes a judgment which is usually not made with such characters— he holds him responsible for his actions in the same way that he holds Tom accountable for his in "The Web of Circumstance."

A trickster figure exemplifying slightly different characteristics appears in "The Passing of Grandison." Grandison, a middle aged slave of unquestionable loyalty, is offered as a traveling companion for his master's son on a trip to the North. Grandison is the only slave allowed to go because his master trusts him explicitly. Dick, the son, has convinced his girlfriend that he can run one of his father's slaves off to Canada. All of his attempts to do so with Grandison fail. Dick sends Grandison on errands but he faithfully returns, admonishing his young master to keep the abolitionists away from him. Dick writes notes to abolitionists in Boston telling them that a cruel slave owner has dared enter their midsts with the hope that Grandison will be approached, but Grandison slinks from all encounters with abolitionists. Finally, Dick takes Grandison into Canada and literally runs away from him. Back in Kentucky, he tells his father that Grandison has run away. The heartbroken master's faith in slavery is restored when three weeks later Grandison appears on the plantation. He is ragged and tells his story; he had been kidnapped and taken into a forest in
Canada, but managed to escape and walk home.

In a re-enactment of the prodigal son's return, the master prepares a feast for Grandison. His faith is thoroughly shattered when three weeks later not only Grandison, "but his wife, Betty the maid; his mother, aunt Eunice; his father, uncle Ike; his brothers, Tom and John, and his little sister Elsie, were likewise absent from the plantation." The master reaches Lake Erie in time to see the smiling Grandison waving farewell.

Grandison has been thoroughly able to dupe his master in the tradition of "The Arkansas Traveler." By completely assuming the role his master thinks he fits, Grandison is able to use such a role to his advantage. His dramatic return to the plantation puts the master off guard. He now believes Grandison is the epitome of the happy, contented, loyal darky in slavery and he feels no need to watch him as constantly as he might watch other slaves. In a masterful stroke of trickery, Grandison provides escape for himself and his family. We can appreciate the trick even more because Chesnutt gives no hint as to Grandison's inner feelings or his plans until they are finally executed. The reader and the white master discover Grandison's intentions at the same time, but obviously their reactions to such a discovery are different. These reactions undoubtedly offer a key to how black and white audiences perceived the trickery--appreciation on one hand and outrage on the other.

Along with stereotypes and specific types of folk characters in the works, Chesnutt also treats very stereotypic attitudes expressed
in a folk way. We should understand that Chesnutt's recognition and portrayal of stereotyped attitudes and characters does not imply that such characters or concepts originated with the folk culture he writes about. Stereotyping is a much broader concept encompassing all aspects of black and white culture in America. The appearance of such concepts in the folk culture is just one way of expressing them, or one level of expression. Stereotypes along the lines Chesnutt recorded also appear in other works of art and popular culture. Contemporary with Chesnutt, Thomas Dixon treated stereotyped attitudes of sexual prowess in blacks and their lust for white women. He also treated the brutish, animalistic stereotypes whites have of blacks. Thomas Nelson Page depicted the bowing, scraping servant stereotype of happy darkies in slavery.

Stereotypes also appear in various forms of oral tradition, especially in folktales and jokes. They may be either positive or negative, reflecting the intent of the person relating the material. Blacks often make stereotypes a positive feature and laugh at themselves. Sexual stereotypes are made a source of cultural triumph when blacks are pitted against other races. Stealing traits are looked upon as assets in black folktales when John succeeds in getting a pig from Old Marster and concealing it. In a situation where only so much food was available, John is able to get even more for his family and the black storyteller admires him for it.

Whites, on the other hand, use stereotypes as a means of social control. This is especially true of Chesnutt's depictions. In the
1870's, the time in which most of Chesnutt's works are set, most whites viewed blacks in a slightly different light from slavery in some aspects. As one good doctor put it:

"The Negroes are hopelessly degraded. They have degenerated rapidly since the war."

Whites must rationalize the fact to themselves that blacks are no longer their property. If the master/slave relationship is no longer possible, then blacks must be in a worse condition. To admit that they are in any way in a better condition would be a move toward equality which the white mind must reject. The whites are consistently being satirized for refusing to perceive the truth and growing in a bond of humanity and equality. Within the context of the work, the comment was made in an effort to keep the philanthropic Colonel French from spending money on a black academy and library.

Another good doctor makes a similar comment:

"The niggers ... are getting mighty trifling since they've been freed. Before the war, that boy [a black who had been sent on an errand] would have been around there and back before you could say Jack Robinson; now, the lazy rascal takes his time just like a white man."

Blacks are still looked upon as servants. Whites still refuse to replace the master/slave relationship with an employer/employee relationship and complaints about performance abound. The doctor doesn't fire his employee because, in his own words, "What would be the use? ... All negroes are alike." The implication is he would simply get another lazy, trifling black worker. He doesn't even consider the possibility of getting a white person to run errands for him. Workers
in a servile position can only be of one color. In other than positions of servitude, one white makes the following comment in reference to Colonel French hiring blacks to work construction.

'You'll have trouble if you hire niggers,' said the major. 'You'll find that they won't work when you want 'em to. They're not reliable, they have no sense of responsibility. As soon as they get a dollar they'll lay off to spend it, and leave yo' work at the mos' critical point.'

Again the purpose is to undermine Colonel French's philanthropic ideas. The irony of the situation comes out when we discover that the white construction workers are just as unstable on their jobs as blacks are made out to be.

Even with slight changes in the black attitude since the war, most things remain basically unchanged from the white point of view.

... white people had not changed their opinion of the negroes [sic], except for the worse. The general belief was that they were just as inferior as before, and had, moreover, been spoiled by a disgusting assumption of equality, driven into their thick skulls by Yankee malignity bent upon humiliating a proud though vanquished foe.41

One thing that remained unchanged is the idea of the docile nature of blacks. Loyalty and fidelity are actions of which they are instinctively capable. Chesnutt, in describing Frank Fowler's loyalty to Rena Walden, editorializes thusly:

There are depths of fidelity and devotion in the negro [sic] heart that have never been fathomed or fully appreciated. Now and then in the kindlier phases of slavery these qualities were brightly conspicuous, and in them, if wisely appealed to, lies the strongest hope of amity between the races whose destiny seems bound up together in the western world. Even a dumb brute can be won by kindness.42
This is one of the few times that Chesnutt pleads directly to his white audience for some kind of solution to the race problem. If blacks are appealed to as human beings, as a part "of our common race, the human race," then there might be hope for the races considering each other equal. As long as whites are scornful, use hard words, and treat blacks as inferiors, then the problem of equality cannot be solved.

However, the docility and fidelity that Chesnutt seemingly presented as a positive trait worthy of development, the white supremacist Major Carteret presents as an accepted pattern of behavior for a servant.

"No doubt," mused the major, "the negro is capable of a certain doglike fidelity,—I make the comparison in a kindly sense,—a certain personal devotion which is admirable in itself, and fits him eminently for a servile career."43

Jerry Letlow, Mammy Jane's son, who is accommodating to the point that he actively wishes he was white,44 provides the major and his friends a measure by which to categorize blacks in their "no nigger domination" campaign.

"Jerry, now, is a very good negro. He's not one of your new negroes, who think themselves as good as white men, and want to run the government. Jerry knows his place,—he is respectful, humble, obedient, and content with the face and place assigned to him by nature."45

There are also tales from oral tradition which espouse this sense of place. In a tale where a black man is taken into court for killing a white mule, he knows that he is to refer to the mule as Mr. Mule. Tales of white men appearing in sheets at the black man’s door emphasize white control and warning to the black person to be a "good nigger." A sense of place is also emphasized in such tales as those
about God giving out hair, where blacks are the last called and receive least. A specific example of place and obedience is "Making the Negro Jump" (Dorson, No. 170). A black person is caught in an all white town and made to jump across a fence. He knows he must obey the orders of "Over," "Back Again," and "Halt." The elements of obedience and subservience are brought out when he is told to "Halt" in mid air. The informant concludes: "The poor Negro just had to hang up there in the air over the fence." Although physically impossible, the ingrained concept of obedience that has been observed in Jerry is nevertheless emphasized.

In the town in which the characters in Chesnutt's story live, blacks outnumber whites two to one. Jerry, however, makes sure he remains in the good graces of the "Angry-Saxon" race. There are whites who take exception to the opinion of Jerry quoted above. He might be humble and obedient, but as far as the entire black race is concerned, Captain McBane maintains--

'... he's one of the best of 'em.' ... He'll call any man "master" for a quarter, or "God" for half a dollar; for a dollar he'll grovel at your feet, and for a cast-off coat you can buy an option on his immortal soul,—if he has one! I've handled niggers for ten years, and I know 'em from the ground up. 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.'

Jerry is only one black person, but the whites consider him typical of all blacks. Jerry essentially sells his soul for the twenty cents change he receives for buying drinks for Major Carteret and his political associates. As the captain has pointed out, Jerry, in spite of his skin bleaching and other white aspirations, is "one of them." He is
shot down with other resisting blacks as he races from a burning hospital calling on his white "friends" for protection. Jerry had been pushed into the hospital in the crowd, but his cries that he "wouldn' do nothin' 'g'inst de w'ite folks" only result in his death.

Again, whites are being satirized for their unwarranted view of blacks. Captain McBane, the descendant of poor whites and a former convict labor contractor, is himself looked down upon by the aristocratic Major Carteret and General Belmont. He doesn't realize that he is as representative of a type to the major and the general as Jerry is to him. Just as Jerry is considered docile and obedient, McBane is considered brutish, uncultured, uncouth, and unmannerly.

Even Jerry looks down upon him in comparison with the other two gentlemen "of quality" and strong family tradition.

By presenting blacks as obedient, humble, loyal and possessing similar qualities, and finding examples of blacks to prove their point, whites are able to justify treating them as servants. It is their basic, God-given place in the world to be subservient.

"The negro is an inferior creature; God has marked him with the badge of servitude, and has adjusted his intellect to a servile condition."47

Any other treatment would be out of keeping with that nature. If blacks are kept down, then whites can perpetuate their own image of racial superiority, i.e. white supremacy. As the mayor of Clarendon so succinctly puts it:

"We must preserve the purity and prestige of our race, and we can only do it by keeping the Negroes down."48
In his attempt to elevate the white race, Chesnutt realized that he could only get them to change their attitudes towards blacks by getting them to see blacks in a different light. He presented positive black characters alongside negative ones and tried to illustrate the discrepancies in a system grouping them all together in such stereotyped attitudes. Nevertheless, most white readers missed Chesnutt’s point and considered him to be very bitter in his portrayal of white attitudes.

Along with these basic, instinctive, God-given traits of stereotyping, the whites also held various ideas of animalism in blacks, in both manners and more aggressive actions. In manners, blacks are accused of “aping” those of whites. When Tryon discovers Rena is black, he rejects her to the very depths of her blackness. When she goes back to her own people, he still finds fault.

With the monkey-like imitativeness of the negro she had copied the manners of white people while she lived among them, and had dropped them with equal facility when they ceased to serve a purpose. Tryon is disgusted that Rena has the audacity to attend a ball six weeks after he breaks their engagement. She had plunged “headlong into the childish amusements of her own ignorant and degraded people.”

Before the engagement is broken, Tryon had looked upon Rena as the best his race could offer.

She represented in her adorable person and her pure heart the finest flower of the finest race that God had ever made— the supreme effort of creative power, than which there could be no finer.

Looking back on the deception, however, he surmises that she had
'deliberately, with a negro's low cunning, deceived him into believing she was a white girl."'52 He thinks the man who brought the first black into the British colonies had committed a crime against humanity and an even worse crime against his own race. Tryon, like other prominent white characters, continues to look outward to find fault for his situation. He doesn't realize that his white society, perpetuating a certain system of values, has taught Rena to aspire to be white, has told her for hundreds of years that whiteness is the best possible condition of existence. Until whites can recognize and accurately evaluate discrepancies in their own system of values, blacks will continue to suffer.

We notice with Tryon, as will be true of most of the other stereotypic attitudes, an indictment of a black individual constitutes an indictment of the entire race. The case becomes the monkey-like imitativeness, not of Rena Walden, but "of the negro"; not Rena Walden's cunning, but "a negro's low cunning."

Sandy Campbell is also accused of "aping" white manners in The Marrow of Tradition. His best suit of clothing is that in which his master was married forty years before. He not only wears the outfit, but has taken on the mannerisms of his master, a fashionable Southern gentleman of the old school. Sandy also becomes an example of animalism in blacks as exemplified through aggressive actions, as we shall soon see.

Again, the folk stereotype that Chesnutt has picked up has its parallels in oral tradition. From hundreds of years of being taught
that whiteness was best, blacks are often recorded as imitating things white. The imitation may be humorously presented, but it exists none-the-less. For example, there are several tales illustrating how trusted slaves act when their masters leave them in charge of the plantation. They usually throw huge parties in the likeness of their masters and invite slaves from miles around to attend. They bask in the role of host and the pride of ownership. They serve the best food and drink the best liquor. At the height of the slave's feigned possession, the master generally appears and reduces him to his lowly status again. Nevertheless, he has had a few moments of the good life of whites (See Dorson, Nos. 40 and 53).

Stealing as a racial trait in blacks is also brought out in Chesnutt's works. As pointed out earlier, the Brer Rabbit cycle of tales and the Master and John cycle explore this concept in depth. In oral tradition, this trait usually receives positive treatment and it is usually in a humorous manner. The pig in the crib and the praying tree have already been mentioned. Underlying the tales are the ideas that John and blacks in general are expected to steal and that masters are generally lenient in their punishment of such acts, even when they have conclusive proof that the black person is guilty. Their concept of a moral laxness in blacks is reinforced along with their own concept of a personal racial superiority.

In Chesnutt's works, the stealing trait is not only perpetuated by whites, but blacks as well. Two such instances occur with Uncle Julius. When he relates "The Goophered Grapevine," he recalls how
Henry took a present to Aun' Peggy in an attempt to get the goopher off him.

"Nex' spring, w'en de sap commence' ter rise in de scuppermon' vime, Henry tuk a ham one night. Whar'd he git de ham? I doan know; dey wa'n't no hams on de plantation 'cep'n' what 'uz in de smoke-house, but I never see Henry 'bout de smoke-house." (p. 21)

The persistent stereotype of ham-stealing slaves is brought out in Henry's payment. But the stealing is not limited to hams. When Solomon employs Aun' Peggy's services in "Mars Jeems's Nightmare," Julius says he "tuk a peck of co'n out 'n de ba'n one night, en went ober ter see ole Aun' Peggy" (p. 76). The implication is, as with Henry, that Solomon steals his payment to Aun' Peggy. There may be some question as to whether or not Julius accepts these stereotypes or simply inserts them as touches he knows John will expect to appear in the tales. After all, he does underscore his lack of personal witness to the ham-stealing. And he doesn't explicitly say that Solomon stole his peck of corn. But then, what slave ever owned a barn full of corn?

As a general thing, the stealing stereotype is used to partially justify the convict labor system in The Colonel's Dream. A prominent editor comments:

'We have so many idle, ignorant Negroes that something must be done to make them work, or else they'll steal, and to keep them in their place, or they would run over us.'53

Consequently, any idle black could be picked up and contracted to do labor in lieu of a prison confinement, for as long as a judge determined. Any act or word of defiance could lengthen the term of confinement.
Ironically, however, Colonel French initiates his program of reform in the town because almost every man is idle, white and black.

On the stealing trait in blacks, Captain McBane believes thusly:

''All niggers are alike.' . . . 'The only way to keep them from stealing is not to give them the chance.
A nigger will steal a cent off a dead man's eye.'' 54

Again, the entire race is indicted on general principles. Major Carteret, the leader of the white supremacy movement in Wellington (Wilmington, North Carolina), states that he should imagine ''that one could more safely trust his life with a negro than his portable property.'' 55

In ''The Web of Circumstance,'' a black man, Ben Davis, is arrested and tried for stealing a riding whip. A young man working in Ben's blacksmith shop committed the crime and framed Ben, but that bit of information never comes to light. Ben is tried as a member of the black race, not as an individual. When the lawyer asks one witness how he gets around the fact that Ben denies the theft, he responds: ''I've tuck up more'n a hundred niggers fer stealin', an' I never seed one yit that did n' 'ny it ter the las.''' 56 Blackness is a precondition for guilt; no other evidence is necessary because whites are only too eager to think the worst of blacks.

On the day that Ben is sentenced, two white men are also sentenced. The equality of justice is easily discerned. The first white man, who had been convicted of manslaughter several days before, receives an admonition on ''the sanctity of human life'' and is sentenced to one year in the penitentiary. The second white man, who committed forgery in
order to buy lottery tickets, is sentenced to six months in prison and is charged a hundred dollar fine. Ben, erroneously accused of stealing the fifteen dollar riding whip, receives the "light sentence" of five years in the penitentiary at hard labor. He receives such a light sentence because one of the prominent white citizens informs the judge that Ben is the best blacksmith in the county and should be let off easy. The judge justifies his sentencing to Ben in the following manner:

'You are not an ignorant, shiftless fellow, but a man of more than ordinary intelligence among your people, and one who ought to know better. You have not even the poor excuse of having stolen to satisfy hunger or a physical appetite. Your conduct is wholly without excuse, and I can only regard your crime as the result of a tendency to offenses of this nature, a tendency which is only too common among your people; a tendency which is a menace to society itself, for society rests upon the sacred right of property.'

The lack of justice is intensified by the mere fact that the judge feels a need to justify his sentence. Ben and his race spend their five years in prison. He loses his wife and business, his daughter drowns in a drunken stupor, and his son is lynched for shooting a white man. Finally, Ben is shot upon release from prison by the good citizen who pleaded for leniency in his behalf.

Sandy Campbell escapes lynching, but he is confined to jail on an accusation of theft and murder. An old white lady in the town of Wellington is brutally decapitated and robbed of her life's savings. Editorialy, Chesnutt inserts that "Suspicion was at once directed toward the negroes, as it always is when an unexplained crime is committed in a Southern community." Sandy is arrested on circum-
substantial evidence. He was seen coming home late and is found in possession of a silk purse which was known to be in the dead woman's chest. Sandy is arrested while his master, Mr. Delamere, is out of town. Major Carteret muses on the crime.

The whole race, in the major's opinion, was morally undeveloped, and only held within bounds by the restraining influence of white people. Under Mr. Delamere's thumb, this Sandy had been a model servant,—faithful, docile, respectful, and self-respecting; but Mr. Delamere had grown old, and had probably lost in a measure his moral influence over his servant. Left to his own degraded ancestral instincts, Sandy had begun to deteriorate, and a rapid decline had culminated in this robbery and murder,—and who knew what other horror? The criminal was a negro, the victim a white woman;—it was only reasonable to expect the worst.

The other horror is immediately concocted in the assumption of sexual assault added to robbery and murder. The woman was nearly seventy, but the stereotypic assumption of black men, passionately and animistically lusting after white women, comes through nevertheless. A forty-five year old black servant rape a seventy-year-old white lady "of quality," then rob and kill her—absurd, to say the least. But Chesnutt's absurdity escapes his readers and the proponents of white supremacy; it is perfectly reasonable and they believe some action should be taken.

'It is a murderous and fatal assault upon a woman of our race,—upon our race in the person of its womanhood, its crown and flower. If such crimes are not punished with swift and terrible directness, the whole white womanhood of the South is in danger.'

The myth of Southern womanhood is enough to bring about "swift and terrible directness." But again, the racial tones overshadow individuality.
'Burn the nigger,' reiterated McBane. 'We seem to have the right nigger, but whether we have or not, burn a nigger . . . It would justify the white people in burning any nigger. The example would be all the more powerful if we got the wrong one. It would serve notice on the niggers that we shall hold the whole race responsible for the misdeeds of each individual.61

Ironically, however, old Mr. Delamere returns to town and works to uncover the real culprit in the person of his own grandson, Tom. In an attempt to pay off gambling debts, Tom borrowed money from Sandy and tried to double it at cards. He was caught cheating and thrown out of the fashionable gentlemen's club in town. All of his debts became payable in three days. Out of desperation, he "borrowed" Sandy's best suit of clothing and robbed his aunt, killing her when she discovered him. He repaid Sandy with money and in the purse he had taken from his aunt. At Sandy's release hearing, people are shocked to learn, as a result of a medical examination, that the victim had not been raped.

The image of blacks is one thing, but the image of the white race is another. If blacks are to be kept down, whites must be up. Therefore, Major Carteret cannot allow the heir of one of the prominent families to be sent to prison for murder while the white supremacy campaign is on. A black man can be condemned by circumstance, "but a white man must not be condemned without proof positive."62 After positive proof is uncovered, Major Carteret is still troubled.

Carteret's thoughts were chasing one another tumultuously. There could be no doubt that the negro was innocent, from the present aspect of affairs, and he must not be lynched; but in what sort of position would the white
people be placed, if Mr. Delamere carried out his Spartan purpose of making the facts known? The white people of the city had raised the issue of their own superior morality, and had themselves made this crime a race question... Even the negroes would have the laugh on them,—the people whom they hoped to make approve and justify their own despoilment. To be laughed at by the negroes was a calamity only less terrible than failure or death... The reputation of the race was threatened. They must notlynch the negro, and yet, for the credit of the town, its aristocracy, and the race, the truth of this ghastly story must not see the light,—at least not yet.

The truth never comes to light. Mr. Delamere, hating the scheme but willing to save Sandy, swears that he was with him on the night the crime was committed. Sandy is allowed to go free, but Tom Delamere is simply ostracized within the white community. His villainy exceeds anything Sandy could have dreamed of, but a different set of rules are used for judging his offense. Chesnutt's comparative analysis continues in an effort to bring to light the fallacies of the superiority/inferiority way of looking at things.

For the sake of an image which is not worth preserving, one group must suffer and go down as another rises. Stereotyped attitudes are a means of ensuring the rise and the fall. If the truth were revealed, it would shatter hundreds of years of cultural lies, lies which must be preserved at all costs, but especially at a time when cultural superiority was being threatened on a widespread basis. Whites failed to realize, Chesnutt seems to say finally, that the threat was all of their own creation.

Moving away from characterization, types and stereotypes, we turn to look at the organizational use of folklore in Chesnutt's works. In
The Conjure Woman, the folklore in each tale makes the tale. Without the folklore, there would be no stories. In other words, folklore is essential to plot development in each of the tales. It is also essential to plot development in the novels. Often, the folkloric items anticipate characters' future actions in a proverbial way. Thus they also serve as unifying devices. A dream in one section of a novel may come to life in a later section. Superstitious attitudes towards signs or dreams or charms may recur at different intervals throughout a work, and we are able to recognize and follow subplots in relation to these attitudes. However, in the tales, the items serve as the core of the plots as well as any subplots that might be introduced.

Plot development in each tale centers around a specific item of folklore, specifically a spell, which is vital to the existence of the literature. Once a spell is set in motion, all other actions are organized around it and the story enacts its effects upon the people whose lives it was designed to touch. If they prosper, their destinies originated with the casting of the spell. Most of the spells, as mentioned earlier, are Aun' Peggy's handiwork. We should therefore take a look at her and her role in the community.

Chesnutt's conjure woman is much more than just a character in the stories. She is closer to the core of the action. Her very active part in casting spells puts her in the league with Chesnutt as an initiator of plots and subplots. Without her, there would be no spells in six of the seven stories, and without the spells, there would be no stories.

Aun' Peggy's power is respected far and wide. Uncle Julius, the
indefatigable raconteur in The Conjure Woman, maintains that "all de
darkies fum Rockfish ter Beaver Crick (towns in North Carolina) wuz
feared" of Aun' Peggy. His evaluation of Aun' Peggy stems from a
profound respect for her abilities.

'She could wuk de mos' powerfuls' kin' er goopher,—
could make people hab fits, er rheumatiz, er make 'em
des dwinel away en die; en dey say she went out ridin'
de niggers at night, fer she wuz a witch 'sides bein'
a cunjuh 'oman.' (p. 15)

Uncle Julius is not alone in his respect for Aun' Peggy's powers.
All of Mars Dugal's slaves exhibit the same awesome respect. Aun'
Peggy's various conjurations act as stimuli inducing certain responses
from the slaves. The conjurer and the conjured are mutually conducive
to each others' status. Aun' Peggy's strength feeds on the supersti-
tious atmosphere around her and the ignorant slaves easily believe as
gospel any tale of supernatural interference they might have an occasion
to hear. Perhaps in a more enlightened community Aun' Peggy would be
looked upon as a con artist. This could not apply here. Except for
her free status, Aun' Peggy is one of the community. She is obviously
a believer in her works. More significantly, however, she sympathizes,
in an authoritarian manner, with her fellow blacks in slavery and uses
her powers in some instances to alleviate their conditions.

Aun' Peggy holds somewhat of an exalted position in her role as
conjurer. She is revered for her conjurations, but she is also
respected on a strictly business level. One thing which is consistent
with Aun' Peggy's clients is payment, in advance, for services to be
performed. No troubled slave would dream of going to Aun' Peggy for
help unless he had sufficient payment for services to be rendered. If
he had misjudged the price, Aun' Peggy would send him back for additional payment. A bushel of corn, a scarf, a ham—either would serve as payment. The exchange is almost always a barter because slaves had very little money. Only the plantation owner paid cash ($10.00) to have his vineyard goophered, and even he also took along some bartering items. To Aun' Peggy, conjuration is a profession. To other conjurers in the work, it is a sideline engagement with various motivations and none other than Aun' Peggy receives payment for work performed.

Oral accounts of conjuring and conjured victims reinforce the slaves' belief in Aun' Peggy's power. Even Julius' accounts are in the form of memorates. Julius is nevertheless somewhat removed from what he relates. For Mars Dugal's slaves, the immediacy of a conjured vineyard and deaths resulting after contact with the vineyard, was enough to send a distinct fear and respect to the very depths of their hearts. As a Nation reviewer points out, it was perhaps more often the goopher "mixtry" than the overseer's lash which struck terror to the superstitious slaves.64

Aun' Peggy casts spells for various reasons in the stories. She devises spells to bring people together, to tear people away from each other through revenge, or to prevent something. Some kind of charm is almost always required to achieve the desired purpose. Most ingredients are listed, but on occasions the items or herbs included get rather vague. There are, however, general procedures, ones with which Chesnutt was familiar, for concocting charms and effecting the conjured
result. In an article entitled "Superstitions and Folk-Ilore of the South," published in 1901, he made the following comment:

The means of conjuration are as simple as the indications. It is a condition of all witch stories that there must in some way be contact, either with the person, or with some object or image intended to represent the person to be affected; or, if not actual contact, at least close proximity. The charm is placed under the door-sill, or buried under the hearth, or hidden in the mattress of the person to be conjured. It may be a crude attempt to imitate the body of the victim, or it may consist merely of a bottle, or a gourd, or a little bag, containing a few rusty nails, crooked pins, or horsehairs. It may be a mysterious mixture thrown surreptitiously upon the person to be injured, or merely a line drawn across a road or path, which line it is fatal for a certain man or woman to cross. I heard of a case of a laboring man who went two miles out of his way, every morning and evening, while going to and from work, to avoid such a line drawn for him by a certain powerful enemy.65

The man who avoids the conjured line is only so typical of characters in the stories avoiding the possibility of goophers being put on them.

In "The Goophered Grapevine," Aun' Peggy casts a spell on the vineyard to prevent Mars Dugal's slaves from stealing grapes and lessening his annual profit in wine. Mars Dugal pays Aun' Peggy for her services,

'One day in de spring er de year, ole miss pack' up a basket er chick'n en pour'-cake, en a bottle er scuppermon' wine, en Mars Dugal' tuk it in his buggy en driv ober ter Aun' Peggy's cabin." (p. 15)

and she casts the following spell:

'She sa'ntered 'roun' ' mongs' de vines, en tuk a leaf fum dis one, en a grape-hull fum dat one, en a grape-seed fum anudder one; en den a little twig fum here, en a little pinch er dirt fum dere,—en put it all in a big black bottle, wid a snake's toof en a speckle' hen's gall en some ha'rs fum a black cat's tail, en den fill' de bottle wid scuppermon' wine. W'en she got de goopher all ready en fix, she tuk 'n went out in de woods en
buried it under de root uv a red oak tree, en den come back en tole one er de niggers she done goopher de grapevimes, en a'er a nigger w'at eat dem grapes 'ud be sho ter die inside'n twel' mont's.' (p. 16)

The spell produced on the sample ingredients will bring about the same effect on the entire vineyard. The oak tree, a symbol of strength, will perhaps add to the potency of the charm. Aun' Peggy leaves no room for speculation among the slaves; she tells one person what she has done because she knows the others will find out immediately. A great part of the psychology of conjuring rests on effective oral transmission. Consequently, the slaves "let de scuppernon's 'lone, en Mars Dugal 'dind' hab no 'casion ter fine no mo' fault" (p. 17).

Near the end of the grape harvesting season, however, the slaves' belief in the goopher gets reinforcement in these incidents:

'. . . a strange germman stop at de plantation one night ter see Mars Dugal' on some business; en his coachman, seein' de scuppernon's growin' so nice en sweet, slip 'roun' behine de smoke-house, en et all de scuppernon's he could hole. Nobody didn' notice it at de time, but dat night, on de way home, de gemman's hoss runned away en kill' de coachman. W'en we hearn de noos, Aun' Lucy, de cook, she up'n say she seed de strange nigger eat'n er de scuppernon's behine de smoke-house; en den we knowed de goopher had b'en er wukkin'. Den one er de nigger chilluns runned away fum de quarters one day, en got in de scuppernon's, en died de nex' week. W'ite folks say he die' er de fevuh, but de niggers knowed it wuz de goopher.' (p. 17)

Here, the superstitious nature of the slaves finds reinforcement for the goopher in what Chesnutt creates as an ambiguous situation. It reflects his unwillingness to commit himself to a belief in the power of the goopher. The deaths may or may not be accidental, but the blacks know the two dead persons have come into contact with the vine-
yard, hence, unlike Chesnutt, "de niggers knewed it wuz de goopher." An alternative explanation is offered and ruled out. The atmosphere in which the slaves live leans towards the more occult explanation.

For the remainder of the story, the entire plot development revolves around the initial spell. Subplots following the inception of the spell are all woven from it, or are consequences of it. The spell proceeds indefinitely or to its logical or illogical conclusion in the incident with Henry. Chesnutt subtly makes his point through Julius about an impersonal system of slavery and true to the perceptive discrepancy in his audience, John fails to understand while Annie seriously asks if the story is true. John, like so many whites, is so accustomed to the happy-go-lucky darky in slavery that he can laugh at Henry instead of perceiving his tragic situation underlying the comedy. Annie, on the other hand, strikes the chord that Carol Gartner says Chesnutt wanted to evoke in his audience.

The reactions of Miss Annie, the Northern gentleman's wife, would seem to be what Chesnutt wanted to produce in his audience. She is sympathetic, not harshly incredulous as her husband is. Sympathy for a fanciful situation could easily lead into a more open-minded evaluation of blacks in relation to white society. It could also expose to those who were willing to see it the depth of the illusions they might have had about slavery.

The spell in "Po' Sandy" is cast not by Aun' Peggy, but by Tenie, Sandy's wife. When Sandy is constantly shuffled around from plantation to plantation in serving his master's married children, Tenie executes a spell that will keep Sandy by her side. Tenie's power lies in her
ability to transform human beings into animals or objects (Motifs D100 and D200). Similar motifs occur in Dorson's American Negro Folktales. In the Old Marster and John cycle, John decides on one occasion that he will get a mojo to prevent marster from whipping him. John gets a "pretty good" mojo that can turn him into a rabbit, a quail, and a snake. When marster threatens to put John to work or whip him if he refuses, John uses his mojo. He turns into a rabbit and marster runs him down as a greyhound. He turns into a quail and marster becomes a chicken hawk. Finally, he turns into a snake only to discover that marster has become a stick intent upon beating him. In each case, John's transformation has backfired; it has not been good enough to escape the all powerful white influence. This is also a case where trickster roles are reversed and marster gets the better of John. Marster's mojo is stronger. The same proves true for Tenie and Sandy. They debate the form Sandy should take. He rules out being a rabbit because dogs might catch him. He decides against being a wolf because people are generally frightened of wolves and he doesn't wish to be feared. He doesn't want to be a mockingbird because hawks might catch him. They therefore decide that Sandy should be a pine tree. Tenie takes him to the edge of the slave quarters and performs the transformation. She promises to turn Sandy back on occasions so they can be together; as a tree, he could neither hear nor talk.

Sandy's absence is discovered and dogs are sent after him. It baffles the trackers when the dogs constantly return to the pine tree, baying and barking. The animals are aware of some unnatural presence
in the tree that humans cannot detect.69

Sandy's life as a tree is not without its troubles. A woodpecker decides to peck away at the tree on what happens to be Sandy's arm. Tenie sends a sparrowhawk to kill the woodpecker. A turpentine gatherer tries to chop a box in Sandy's leg, leaving a huge scar. Tenie sends a hornet to sting the gatherer away.70 In a sense, these are instances of the transformation backfiring, but they are not circumstances directly controlled by the white world. Tenie also turns Sandy back to a human being in the evenings in order to tend his wounds.

These humorous aspects of the tale overshadow the fact that Sandy has been forced to resort to such a measure to keep from being treated as a non-feeling commodity. It is humorous in the same way that Henry's amorous pursuits are humorous during his waxing and waning process. With Sandy, the humor simply covers the fact that his rights as a human being have been violated. The sanctity of his marriage is of no consequence to his master. The marriage union for blacks is completely ignored by whites. The master's major concern is with keeping his selfish sons and daughters happy.

Tenie leaves the plantation in an emergency situation and returns in time to see Sandy cut "inter bo'ds en scantlin's right befo' her eyes" (p. 55). The mistress had wanted a new kitchen and Sandy the tree was chosen and taken to the sawmill. Here, whites unknowingly heap destruction upon blacks. The white mistress has a whim and her whim must be satisfied. The kitchen is built, but no one will enter it once the story becomes known. The slaves "all knewed de kitchen
wuz ha'nted by Sandy's sperrit" (p. 58). The kitchen is torn down
and rebuilt into the schoolhouse Julius acquires for his faction of
the church membership.

Tenie's efforts to save Sandy have backfired in a mere whim from
the white world. Even supernaturalism on the part of blacks does not
ensure them from destruction by whites. The white man's mojo is the
"damn good one" that John bypassed for the "pretty good one" (the tale
does not offer an explanation for the less powerful choice). Whites
are assured of success with no regard to amount of effort involved
in an attempt, but things beyond nature do not aid or protect the
black man forever. The tales reflect Dorson's informant's and Julius'
awareness of their black situations in relation to the powerful white
worlds around them. They know that they cannot combat the engulfing
white world simply by using human characteristics, but even with this
knowledge, they are still doomed to failure.

The helpful Tenie, haunted by Sandy's ghost and her failure, dies
one cold winter night in the schoolhouse. Both she and Sandy have
been victims of an intolerant system of chattel ownership. Annie
perceives part of Chesnutt's purpose when she says, "What a system
it was, under which such things were possible!" (p. 60). John only
sees the superficial again: "What things? Are you seriously consi-
dering the possibility of a man's being turned into a tree?" (p. 60).
Annie only retorts, "Poor Tenie!" She maintains a depth of sensitivity
that John will never attain. She also refuses to use the schoolhouse
lumber for her new Southern style kitchen.
In "Mars Jeems's Nightmare," a spell is cast by Aun' Peggy on the white master in an effort to temper his cruelty to his slaves. A man by the name of Solomon seeks the spell because he has received forty lashes for courting and his girl has been sold away to another plantation. Aun' Peggy gives him "some stuff w'at look 'lack it be'n made by poundin' up some roots en yarbs wid a pestle in a mo'tar."

She directs Solomon in the use of the goopher.

"Dis yer stuff," sez she, "is monst'us pow'ful kin' er goopher. You take dis home, en gin it ter de cook, ef you kin trus' her, en tell her ter put it in yo' marster's soup de fus' cloudy day he hab okra soup fer dinnah. Min' you fol'lers de d'rections."

The spell transforms the white master into a black person (Motifs D30 and D31) who arrives on Mars Jeems's plantation as a slave. The plot revolves around the "noo nigger" and his escapades on the plantation. He alternates between days locked in the barn with nothing to eat, hard tasks, and lashes from the overseer, who often "gun 'im fo' ty, wid a dozen er so th'owed in fer good measure" (p. 83). Finally, the overseer sells the "noo nigger."

Aun' Peggy gives Solomon a yam to take to the "noo nigger" where he is chained up. By eating the yam, Mars Jeems reverts to his old self, shows up at the plantation, and fires the overseer. Things are forever changed around the plantation. Courting and marriage are permitted, dances are given on Saturday nights, and Solomon's girl is returned. Even Mars Jeems brings home a new bride. Through reincarnation into a slave, Mars Jeems has been able to suffer the plight of a black person in slavery, even to the yam eating episode. With an
Ingenious idea metamorphosed into reality, Aun' Peggy has been able to intervene and better the condition of slavery by making the enslaver become the enslaved. The transformation, or at least Aun' Peggy's part in it, can only be implied because "ole Aun' Peggy would 'a 'n ied it ef she had be'n ax, fer she'd 'a' got in trouble sho', ef it 'uz knowed she'd be'n cunj'in de w'ite folks" (p. 100).

It is only through an ironic transformation and reversal of roles that Mars Jeems can adequately evaluate his treatment of the slaves on his plantation and work to effect some much needed changes. Only by carefully exploring the black point of view can whites really appreciate it. But whites are not willing to voluntarily examine black existence in America. Hence Chesnutt uses literature as a way of compelling his white audience to take a longer look.

A conjure man in "The Conjuror's Revenge" puts a spell on Primus and turns him into a mule (Motif D132.2) because Primus steals a "fine, fat shote" from him. After the excitement of Primus' disappearance has died down, the conjure man and a poor white man sell Primus to his master for fifty dollars.

The humor of the tale comes in with Primus the mule's various activities. The outer change is complete, but Primus still has human qualities underneath his mule skin. He gets into the tobacco patch and chews up two rows of tobacco leaves. On a visit to the vineyard and wine-press, he drinks himself into a stupor. When he discovers that Sally, his wife, has taken up with the man who plows him, Primus makes life miserable for Dan. He kicks him out of the field into a
briar patch, and when the injured Dan is left alone in his cabin, Primus comes kicking and gnawing at the window enough to scare the poor man out of his wits. Evidence of Primus' humanity has not been suppressed even when he actually assumes one of the brutish forms that whites figuratively espouse as a part of black nature.

It takes a spiritual awakening for the conjure man to have a change of heart and turn Primus back into a man. He dies before the process is complete, leaving Primus with a clubbed foot. Julius' motive overshadows any serious point Chesnutt may have had in the story. Immediately following the tale, Julius makes a pitch for his friend with the horse. The tale is an example of conflict among blacks instead of blacks against a system of slavery.

The same thing is true of "The Gray Wolf's Ha'nt." The plot centers around a vicious conflict among blacks in which conjuring is used mainly for destructive purposes. Dan and Mahaly, a couple on Mars Dugal's plantation, are very happy until a conjure man's son starts pursuing Mahaly. When Dan accidentally kills the conjure man's son, he knows the conjurer will "wuk his roots en prob'ly fin' out who had killt' 'is son, en make all de trouble fer 'im he could" (pp. 172-173). Dan takes a "peck er 'taters" and a pig to enlist Aun' Peggy's aid. She gives him a life charm consisting of hairs from Dan's head, a piece of red flannel, some unidentified roots and herbs, and a little bag made of coonskin. Aun' Peggy gives Dan directions for safely preserving the life charm.

"You take dis cha'm," sez she, "en put it in a bottle er a tin box, en bury it deep unner de root er a live-
Dan buries the charm by a river and carefully replaces the earth.

Having discovered who killed his son, the conjure man sets about carrying out his revenge on Dan.

... he sent a rattlesnake fer ter sting 'im, but de rattlesnake say de nigger's heel wuz so ha'd he could n' git his sting in. Den he sent his jay-bird fer ter put p'isen in Dan's vittles, but de p'isen did n' wuk. Den de cunjuh man 'low' he'd double Dan all up wid de rheumatiz, so he could n' git 'is han' ter his mouf ter eat, en would hafter sta've ter def; but Dan went ter Aun' Peggy, en she gun 'im a' 'intment ter kyo de rheumatiz. Den de cunjuh man 'lowed he'd bu'n Dan up wid a fever, but Aun' Peggy tol' 'im how ter make some yarb tea fer dat. Nuffin dis man tried would kill Dan, so fin'lly de cunjuh man 'lowed Dan mus' hab a life-cha'm.' (p. 175)

The animal agents define the conjure man as a warlock as well as a conjurer. The same thing is true of Tenie and Aun' Peggy when their witch qualities are brought out through the insects and birds they employ to do their bidding. Once the conjure man knows he is fighting a life charm, he sends the jay-bird to follow Dan around until he discovers it. The charm is discovered and the conjurer brews a storm--wind and rain--to blow the oak tree down and wash the charm down the river.

Witches then start riding Dan and he stupidly trusts Uncle Jube, the conjurer, to help him find the culprit. Believing that the witch always comes in the form of a black cat, Dan consents to being turned
into a wolf (Motif D113.1) in order to kill it. The conjure man then turns Mahaly into a black cat (Motif D142.0.1) and Dan unknowingly kills her. The plot becomes even more complicated when Dan discovers the trick, strikes Uncle Jube, who consents to turn him back, and discovers that the dying Jube has made the spell permanent. The mixture caused the goopher to set for good "en all de cunj'in' in de worl' won't nebber take it off.

'Wolf you is en wolf you stays
All de rest er yo' bawn days.'" (p. 189)

In the midst of plantation existence, blacks are literally wasting time destroying each other.

The plot in "Hot-Foot Hannibal" centers around a conjure doll, but this is also the story of blacks hurting each other within the slavery system. Chloe's ghost waits for her lost Jeff on the road that Julius and his companions take when the horse balks. She is remorseful about what she did to Jeff, but the damage is permanent. The doll is used to get Hannibal out of the big house and Jeff in and has been fashioned by Aun' Peggy. It has "a body made out'n a piece er co'n-stalk, en wid splinters fer a'ms en laigs, en a head made out'n elderberry peth, en two little red peppers fer feet" (pp. 207-208). Commenting on this and other concoctions in later years, Chesnutt noted on a return visit to North Carolina:

... in the story 'Hot-Foot Hannibal,' there figures a conjure doll with pepper feet. Those pepper feet I regarded as peculiarly my own, a purely original creation. I heard, only the other day, in North Carolina, of the consternation struck to the heart of a certain dark individual, upon finding upon his doorstep a rabbit's foot—a good omen in itself
perhaps—to which a malign influence had been imparted by tying to one end of it, in the form of a cross, two small pods of red pepper.

When Hannibal is out of the house and Jeff is sold away and drowned, Chloe pines away until she dies on the spot in the road where the gray mare balks. The tearful love story from plantation days serves the immediate purpose of inspiring Mabel to become reconciled with her estranged lover. Julius the manipulator is still at work.

A complicated plot in "Sis' Becky's Pickaninny" elaborates on the troubles to which one may fall prey without a trusty rabbit's foot. Sis' Becky is sold away from her son Mose in a violation of the familial relationship; her master wanted a race horse in exchange. Little Mose's nurse, Aun' Nancy, takes him to Aun' Peggy with "a mess er green peas" to enlist her aid. Mose is turned into a humming bird (Motif D150) and sent to see his mother. When he becomes unhappy again, he is turned into a mockingbird and the trip is repeated.

Aunt Nancy is fast running out of payments; she therefore uses her best silk head handkerchief to pay Aun' Peggy to bring Becky home. The process is a lengthy one and Aun' Peggy employs her witch agents to help her. She sends a hornet to sting the race horse and make his knees swell so the old master will think he has made a bad deal. When a sparrow reports that linament has been used to reduce the swelling, Aun' Peggy sends the hornet again. This time, the swelling achieves the desired effect and the master writes a letter threatening to sue the horsetrader if Becky is not returned. The horsetrader refuses and Aun' Peggy starts to work on the other end.
The sparrow is sent to drop a bag of roots in front of Becky's cabin door.

"One night Sis' Becky dremp' her pickaninny wuz dead, en de nex' day she wuz mo' nin' en groanin' all day. She dremp' de same dream th'ee nights runnin', en den, de nex' mawnin' atter de las' night, she foun' dis yer little bag de sparrer had drap' in front her do'; en she 'lowed she'd be'n cunju'd, en wuz gwine ter die, en ez long ez her pickaninny wuz dead dey wa'n't no use tryin' ter do nuffin nohow. En so she tuk 'n wen ter bed, en tol' her master she'd be'n cunju'd en wuz gwine ter die." (p. 155)

This method of three dreams as an indication of truth is also the means by which the wife in "The Wife of His Youth" knows her missing husband is alive.

"Oh no, he ain' dead. De signs an' de tokens tells me. I dremp three nights runnin' on'y dis las' week dat I foun' him."75

The wife is taken seriously, but the horsetrader laughs at Becky. However, when her determination to die is revealed, the master writes a letter and offers to return her because "a lame hoss wuz better'n a dead nigger." The exchange is made and Becky returns home. Aun' Peggy takes the goopher off her and she lives to raise her pickaninny. Again an elaborate plan of conjuration has achieved its purpose and Julius has made his point. If Sis' Becky had owned a rabbit's foot, none of her troubles would have happened.

John is incredulous as usual. He can only see the "humming-bird episode, and the mocking-bird digression, to say nothing of the doings of the hornet and the sparrow" (p. 159). Annie responds: "The story is true to nature, and might have happened half a hundred times, and no doubt did happen, in those horrid days before the war." She can see
the cruelty of the trade, a separation motif that once again, John is too superficial to perceive.

The items of folklore are the essence of the plots in each of the stories in *The Conjure Woman*. Folkloric items are also essential to the development of the plots of the novels. The development of *The House Behind the Cedars* depends on Rena's response to her third dream. By returning to see her mother, she puts herself in a position where her white lover discovers she is black and rejects her. The chain of events following this rejection and leading to Rena's death have all been set in motion by her initial superstitious response to a dream. If she had not been superstitious, perhaps she might have lived a much happier life. But here, as always, Chesnutt is in control. Judging from Rena's point of view, the superstition might be dysfunctional because it prevents her from marrying a white man "of quality" and being accepted into white society. For Chesnutt, the dysfunction serves a positive purpose because Rena is willing to become a "passed" white instead of accentuating her blackness and striving for acceptance as an equal. She must be stopped from such a self-degrading aspiration.

Chesnutt uses a dream and Mammy Jane's superstitious nature to advance his plot in *The Marrow of Tradition*. Mrs. Carteret dreams that her mulatto half-sister, Janet Miller, refuses to save her baby from drowning in a turbulent sea. Mrs. Carteret sees Janet gliding by in a small boat, rowing away from the drowning mother and babe. Olivia Carteret, who has a mind "as logical as any woman's," indicating that she is not usually subject to superstitious behavior, recalls the
dream "like a dim foreboding of misfortune." Her feeling is more one of faint intuition than pronounced superstition. Implicit in the dream, however, is the half-sister's ability to save Olivia's child if she desires to do so. The dream is realized to the contrary when Janet, standing over her dead son (who has been killed in a "political demonstration" instigated by Major Carteret), permits her physician husband to attend the suffocating Carteret baby.

The dream is not only important to the development of the plot, but its realization serves an educational function for the mulatto half-sister. Prior to her son's death, Janet had wished for some recognition from her white sister. Olivia, who had always shunned her "baseborn" sister, must beg to have her baby attended by the only available doctor. Janet finally realizes that her sister is not to be "worshipped." White is not better than black; they are simply flesh and blood and equal in tragedy. The lesson has been learned at a very high personal loss to Janet, but it is one that Chesnutt feels must be learned at all costs.

Mammy Jane's charm and her superstitious nature act as unifying devices for other incidents surrounding the baby. On one occasion the baby swallowed a piece of ivory from a rattle. The object lodged in the mouth of the right bronchus and a specialist had to be called in to remove it. Mammy Jane was too busy to visit the conjure woman again. She did dig up the charm, shake it vigorously and bury it with the other side up. She made a cross over the top with the thumb of her left hand, and walked three times around it. Just as the operation
is about to be performed, the object shifts its position and a slap dislodges it. The charm may or may not have been the cause of the child’s reversed luck in escaping a dangerous operation and Chesnutt does not commit himself, but Mammy Jane “was able to sleep better” once she had shifted its position. Also, her belief is reinforced. But here again, she works to preserve the master/slave relationship.

On another occasion, the baby almost had a fatal fall from a window. Janet Miller was passing by and happened to look up. Mammy Jane wonders—“Might she not have cast the evil eye upon the baby, and sought thereby to draw him out of the window?” (p. 108). Of course this is not true, but Mrs. Carteret blames Janet for her baby’s misfortune and Mammy Jane uses folklore to extend the white point of view. The sign of the mole is too strong for Mammy Jane to take any chances. She attaches a more immediate charm to the baby’s crib. Mrs. Carteret discovers the charm and leaves it there, but not for the same reason as Jane. “To remove it would give unnecessary pain to the old nurse. Of course these old negro superstitions were absurd,—but if the charm did no good, it at least would do no harm” (p. 108).

One other item of folklore is used for plot development in the novels. Peter’s tale of the haunted house and the talking black cat in The Colonel’s Dream serves to arouse his young master’s curiosity about this speaking ability in cats. The child pursues a black cat into the path of a train and he and Peter are killed. Colonel French, the boy’s father, buries the two in the same cemetery and incurs the
wrath of the people residing in the small, conservative Southern town. When Peter's casket is dug up and deposited on the Colonel's porch, he finally realizes that his philanthropic ideas for improving Southern society are out of place. He takes his dead and returns to the North. The events resulting from Peter's item of folklore produce a major turning point in the novel. The lore also causes Peter's death as well as his protector's. In his attempt to preserve his young master's life, Peter and his master become equal in death in the way that Olivia Carteret and Janet Miller become equal in experiencing the pangs of tragedy growing out of a position of motherhood, which is colorless.

In a way, Chesnutt rejects each one of the characters who is actively involved in using and responding to elements of the folk culture. Rena dies as a result of wandering in a swamp during a rainstorm. Mammy Jane is shot down in Major Carteret's "political demonstration" (She was on her way to the Carteret house for protection). Peter is killed by a train. Neither has become aware of his or her worth as an individual. Rena has to live the life of a black person once her white lover rejects her, but she never fully accepts her blackness. Mammy Jane and Peter are forever subservient to their white masters. Thus Chesnutt becomes the great leveler as far as these characters are concerned. The dysfunctional use of folklore in their lives serves a positive purpose to his ultimate goal. As mentioned earlier, he believed that it was the black man's part to prepare himself for recognition and equality, and it was the
province of literature to open the way for him to get it, that is, to accustom the public mind to the idea. He therefore uses folk culture in the novels to illustrate to his public two kinds of blacks who have no place in the new concept of blackness and equality: those blacks who would be satisfied to act as substitute whites, and servants. He has characterized his figures by making the blackness of slavery a negative thing either when it instills in a mulatto the desire to be white or in "people of color" the tendency to continue to grovel in positions of servitude.

For the black who is to become equal to whites, he must develop a new attitude. He cannot, like Mammy Jane, scorn the "uppity niggers" of enlightenment and education. If this seems obviously didactic, I think Chesnutt intended it so. On one occasion he wrote that most of the "delusions" connected with a belief in conjuration grew out of "mere lack of enlightenment." Folk culture was one good way of bringing out the didacticism because Chesnutt associated it with the ignorant blacks of slavery, blacks who relied on magic, charms, and superstitions because they were offered no alternatives. In the 1870's the alternatives were offered in the form of educational opportunities and the slave mentality should have been cast aside in favor of self-improvement.

Therefore, Chesnutt's attitude towards superstitions and charms is often rationalistic. He wonders if Rena's third dream is produced by her anxious state or if Mammy Jane's charms are really the cause of the baby's reversed luck. However, characters and author must contin-
ually be separated. Chesnutt can follow his characters through their
superstitious acts and maintain his disbelief. There is only one
case of an obvious superstition that Chesnutt did not attempt to
rationalize. It occurs at Rena’s death-bed.

Mary B. threw open a window to make way for the passing
spirit, and the red and golden glory of the setting sun,
triumphantly ending his daily course, flooded the narrow
room with light. (p. 294)??

This item is rather sympathetically presented. Once the spirit passes,
the sun almost gives a sigh of relief as Rena Walden’s troubles are
finally ended and death softens her pain. Perhaps Chesnutt simply
didn’t wish to drag out the story any further because an explanation
at this point would have interfered with the rather melodramatic
ending of the novel. In all other instances, however, the rationali-
zation or underlying purpose does surface and must be viewed in the
light of the role Chesnutt adopted for himself as an artist.

As to the rationalistic explanations at the end of the stories
in The Conjure Woman, other comments can be made. The gentleman, who
is seemingly very indulgent of Julius’ schemes, has been equated with
Chesnutt, and the gentleman’s ideas are considered indicative of
Chesnutt’s own ideas. On the distancing device between the gentleman-
ly narrator and Julius, Donald Winkelman writes:

Even his fondest admirers could not claim any real
identification of Charles Waddell Chestnutt /sic/
and the folk beliefs and dialect he uses in his
tales. Like Southwestern humor, Chestnutt’s con-
jure stories contain a sophisticated, well spoken,
well read, stuffy gentleman who serves as a frame-
work for a lowerclass Negro raconteur. This device
permits the reader to identify with the gentleman
who for all practical purposes is white, and to
chuckle at the naivete of an Uncle Julius, Negro, ex-slave.  

It is true that Chesnutt in real life was rather far removed from an active folk culture. His very middle class family was involved with college educations and trips across country and to Europe, which is a long way from the illiterate blacks on which the stories are patterned and the majority of blacks at the turn of the century. This is the only identification Chesnutt could possibly have with the gentleman for, as we have seen, John is pathetically limited in his perceptive abilities. Chesnutt wanted his audience to be aware of the underlying horrors he was projecting and, as Carol Gartner suggests, he desired his audience to identify with the more understanding and sympathetic Annie. If the audience laughed at Julius, it is sad but understandable; they were as limited as John. We cannot expect such an audience to appreciate the cultural triumphs of Julius' tricks because it is mainly a white audience to which Chesnutt was writing. He realized that most blacks, even if literate enough to read, probably could not afford to purchase many books. Whites bought the books, but didn't understand what they were reading and apparently Winkelman too has fallen into the "John" position.

On the inclusion of Julius' ulterior motives, or Chesnutt's rationalizations, Gartner makes the following comment.

These endings reflect Chesnutt's own need to offer a rationalistic explanation, no matter how unconvincing, for the supernatural tales. He is unwilling to let them stand on their own, and perhaps is himself distrustful of their narrator, a polite old family-retainer type, left over from the days of slavery.
The stories reveal their serious purpose as they gently bring out the horrors of slavery and the injustice of treating Negroes as if they have no feelings. 80

Chesnutt obviously trusts Julius enough to allow him to present the serious purpose of the stories. Julius is aware of what he is presenting even when the point is subtly made. Chesnutt's distance from the culture would not let him accept the fantasy, but he found it an adequate means by which to convey broader themes.

We have already mentioned that the gentleman, too, is rationalistic throughout the work. He asks Julius if he has made up some of the stories and insults him by referring to "Sis' Becky's Pickaninny" as "a very ingenious fairy tale." Winkelman points out that:

For Chestnutt, the stories of Uncle Julius--interesting, colorful, filled with the beliefs of an unsophisticated group--are proved to be completely ridiculous when held up to the light of intellectual reason and skepticism. . . . The Negro folklore of Charles Waddell Chestnutt's books is interesting, but Chestnutt is the bemused gentleman who, after the tale, says, 'That is a very ingenious fairy tale . . . and we are much obliged to you.' 81

But again, for Chesnutt, only the fantasy is rationalized. When Julius comes to relate the tale of little Mose the pickaninny and the value of a rabbit's foot, John admonishes him in the following way.

'Julius'. . . 'your people will never rise in the world until they throw off these childish superstitions and learn to live by the light of reason and common sense. How absurd to imagine that the forefoot of a poor dead rabbit, with which he timorously felt his way along through a life surrounded by snares and pitfalls, beset by enemies on every hand, can promote happiness or success, or ward off failure or misfortune!' (p. 135)
The first sentence expresses the attitude that Chesnutt was to adopt more openly in the works after The Conjure Woman. He is always rationalistic and unbelieving where folk elements appear in the later works. He began to look upon folk elements, not with an indulgent smile, but as a definite hindrance to the advancement and assimilation of blacks into the dominant culture. We must nevertheless understand that Chesnutt objected to folk culture as an end in itself. Entertaining for entertainment's sake produced idleness, not progress. Total belief in superstitions blocks educational advancement.

However, Chesnutt knew that the picture of happy, idle blacks was the one with which most whites were familiar. If he could use this same picture and make serious racial points by doing so, then he would embrace the folk culture. Richard Baldwin very aptly sums the situation up.

... Chesnutt has been the ultimate conjure man, hoping that by 'wukking de roots' of black culture he might be able to work a powerful goopher on white America and lead it to accept the equality of the black.

When Chesnutt realized in 1905 that his conjuring had failed to produce the desired results, that most of his audience considered him racist in reverse, he gave up his rather high ideals for literature. He did continue giving speeches in behalf of his fellow blacks, but his publishing days were over.
Notes—Chapter 1


3 H. M. Chesnutt, p. 13.

4 Ibid., p. 21.

5 Ibid.


8 H. M. Chesnutt, p. 20.


12 Ibid.


As mentioned earlier, Chesnutt denied that the stories were taken directly from oral tradition. In a letter to Walter Hines Page, then editor of the Atlantic Monthly, he wrote: "I hope you will find time to read my 'conjah' stories, and that you may like them. They are made out of whole cloth, but are true, I think, to the general 'doctrine' of conjuration, and do not stray very far beyond the borders of what an old Southern Negro might talk about." (From H. N. Chesnutt, p. 93)


James Weldon Johnson suggests that in addition to the sound effect such words gratified a sense of rhythm in the preacher and in his hearers. See God's Trombones (New York: The Viking Press, 1966), p. 9.


Hand, No. 3130, 3131.


Hand, No. 3705.

I have not been able to locate verification for this procedure as an established tradition, but I have seen it included in numerous folk materials. In reference to the full moon, beliefs in the Brown Collection and other sources refer to planting. For the best crops, a gardener should plant certain seeds at the full of the moon. This belief in a greater growing potential at full moon has apparently been carried into folk culture and the assumption of greater potency for the charm by burying it at the same time.

29 Ibid.

30 "Post-Bellum Pre-Harlem," 193.


32 It is a widespread belief among voodoo cults that medical doctors have no power to relieve or cure the effects of a spell. See Puckett, pp. 308-309.

33 Dorson, No. 38 (a), (b), (c).

34 Gartner, 8.

35 Baldwin, 387.

36 The Wife of His Youth, p. 200.


39 Ibid., pp. 111-112.


41 The House Behind the Cedars, p. 120.

42 Ibid., pp. 176-177.


44 Ibid., p. 36.


46 Ibid.

47 The House Behind the Cedars, p. 136.

48 The Colonel's Dream, p. 265.
The House Behind the Cedars, p. 223.

Ibid.

Ibid., p. 98.

Ibid., p. 252.

The Colonel's Dream, p. 75.

The Marrow of Tradition, p. 181.

Ibid., p. 24.

The Wife of His Youth, p. 302.

Ibid., p. 311.

The Marrow of Tradition, p. 178.

Ibid., pp. 181-182.

Ibid., p. 182.

Ibid.

Ibid., p. 226.

Ibid., pp. 227-228.

"The Conjure Woman," Nation, 68 (June 1, 1899), 421.


Gartner, 8.

Dorson, No. 45.

White, Nos. 5722 and 5738.

Conversing with the sparrowhawk and the hornet defines Tenie as being a witch as well as a conjurer.

The need for a cloudy or rainy day in conjuration occurs more than once in Chesnutt. It would appear that this association with cloudiness, or lack of sunshine, defines conjuring as a black art, the
practitioners of which are in league with the devil. Perhaps Godly sunshine is not often conducive to the inception of a spell.

72 White, No. 5592; also Motifs G211.1.7 and G241.2.

73 "Superstitions and Folk-Lore of the South," 232.

74 Hand, Nos. 3130, 3131.

75 The Wife of His Youth, p. 14.

76 "Superstitions and Folk-Lore of the South," 232.

77 White, No. 5433.


79 H. M. Chesnutt, pp. 120 and 127.

80 Gartner, 8.

81 Winkelman, 132-133.

82 Gartner, 9.

83 Baldwin, 397.
"Roots in the Rural South"

In 1923, when Nathan Eugene (Jean) Toomer published Cane, he was 28 years old. All of Chesnutt's works were out of print and Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man was thirty years in the future. During the eighteen year period between The Colonel's Dream and Cane, the only significant black work of fiction published in the United States was Johnson's Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man (1912). With the appearance of Cane, the Harlem Renaissance received an official beginning date and from that point, numerous black writers of great accomplishment were to appear. Toomer had played a part in successfully initiating a movement from which he was to withdraw almost immediately.

Born in Washington, D.C. in December of 1894, Toomer was the grandson of a once acting governor of Louisiana, Pinckney Benton Stewart Pinchback. Pinchback, a mulatto who was born in Georgia, later became a carpet-bagger in Louisiana. He successfully manipulated the black vote to become Lieutenant Governor of Louisiana. After a brief interlude as acting governor, he took his family to Washington, D.C. where Jean was born. Unlike Chesnutt's mulatto beginnings, Toomer was from the beginning exposed to the very best the white world had to offer. His grandfather bought an imposing house on Washington's Bacon Street, an all white neighborhood.
Pinchback lived a high life while his prestige lasted. As his financial situation lessened, he moved his family to "the heart of the Negro upper-class world." Toomer was now exposed to the black world for the first time. In later years he wrote that there was "more emotion, more rhythm, more color, more gaiety" among the blacks.

Toomer's early school years did not inspire him to study; instead, he became a nuisance in the classroom, a troublemaker. Toomer's family relations began to deteriorate at this point and he became a wanderer. The family situation was also declining economically and fast verging on poverty. In search of better things, Toomer traveled to Wisconsin and studied agriculture for a semester. He then returned to Washington and a difficult relationship with his grandfather. Trying to overcome self-doubt, he attended the Massachusetts College of Agriculture for almost a week. Later, he entered a physical training college in Chicago. This pattern of wandering came to an end after several personal defeats and fits of boredom and Toomer returned to Washington in 1920. He read and wrote incessantly in an attempt to clarify his bid to become an artist.

For Toomer, Cane, a work which deals primarily with the black folk culture in rural Georgia, was the culmination of a major step in his search for identity. He had been constantly exposed to the black and white worlds of America and was equally at home in either. In either position, he had a vantage point because he always brought to one group the knowledge of the other. On his racial makeup, Toomer wrote:

... One half of my family is definitely white, the other, definitely colored. For my own part, I have lived equally
amid the two groups. And, I alone, as far as I know, have striven for a spiritual fusion analogous to the fact of racial intermingling. ... Viewed from the world of race distinctions, I take the color of whatever group I at the time am sojourning in. As I become known, I shall doubtless be classed as a Negro. I shall neither fight nor resent it. There will be more truth than they know in what they say, for my writing takes much of its worth from that source.5

Toomer tried to transcend race in later years by declaring himself an "American," but he was not allowed to forget. In 1921, he made a trip to Georgia, his ancestral home. In 1922, he accompanied Waldo Frank on another trip to the South. The 1921 trip, during which Toomer taught in a remote area in Georgia, enabled him to come very close to a racial identification because he willingly embraced black folk life and folklore and felt a kinship to it. While in Georgia, he wrote many of the sketches which appear in Cane. Others were written after but still with the inspiration of the trip. Toomer felt that he had finally found a source of identification for artistic creation. In summarizing the results of the trip, Toomer wrote:

There, for the first time, I really saw the Negro, not as a pseudo-urbanized and vulgarized, a semi-Americanized product, but the Negro peasant, strong with the tang of fields and the soil. It was there that I first heard folk-songs rolling up the valley at twilight, heard them as spontaneous with gold, and tints of an eternal purple. Love? They gave birth to a whole new life.6

Toomer recognized in these peasants his own folk heritage. The reaction to his Southern experience was an active thing with Toomer and he immediately incorporated it into his literary intentions. In a March 24, 1922 letter to Waldo Frank, he wrote:

Within the last two or three years, however, my growing need for artistic expression has pulled me deeper and
deeper into the Negro group. And as my powers of receptivity increased, I found myself loving in a way I could never love the other. It has stimulated and fertilized whatever creative talent I may contain within me. The visit to Georgia last fall was the starting point of almost everything of worth that I have done. I heard folk-songs come from the lips of Negro peasants. I saw the rich dusk beauty that I heard many false accounts about, and of which, till then, I was somewhat skeptical. And a deep part of my nature, a part that I had repressed, sprang suddenly into life and responded to them.7

Toomer's inspiration is a look within, a look at the part of him that ties him to the folksongs and what they represent to a people to whom he is bound. It is a desire to release the part of him that has its roots in Africa and the slave South.

_Cane_ is Toomer's only work which deals with "the Negro group" and it is the one work upon which his reputation rests. His ability to write about black folk life, to capture the spirit of blackness in its folkways, enabled Toomer to reach heights of artistic creation that he was never again to achieve. _Cane_ has been described as a frappé of poetry and prose. Toomer is attributed with having a subtle command of word-music and is considered to be a skillful literary craftsman, one who was free to experiment and invent. Bone maintains that Toomer was far beyond his Harlem Renaissance contemporaries. While they were still experimenting with a crude literary realism, "Toomer had progressed beyond the naturalistic novel to 'the higher realism of the emotions,' to symbol, and to myth."8 His subject matter of blacks and their life style in the basic folk culture enabled Toomer to progress to these new levels.

Another critic makes the following comment about Toomer's revo-
tionary work.

... Cane is noteworthy because of its departure from argumentation and apologetics in the treatment of interracial subject matter as well as because of its prefiguration of Southern realism and Negro self-revelation.9

This statement is significant because it offers a direct contrast to Chesnutt's literary purposes. Chesnutt had a very straight and narrow path to follow in his portrayal of black life and interracial relationships. He could not be as bold as Toomer; he felt he must argue for the acceptance of his point of view and consequently, blacks themselves. He tried to prove black humanity to his white audience; black humanity was something Toomer took for granted. With this basic assumption, Toomer could then proceed "to create something that ordinary Black people can either recognize, understand, or are interested in . . . ."10

Toomer found black humanity most vibrant in the rural Georgia area he visited; it was a subject in which he could rejoice and which he could embrace with all of its positive and negative aspects. He had joined the search for roots in defining identity and had found a heretofore unrecognized kinship in and love for the folk heritage represented by the darker side of his mulatto make-up. He could now write about his heritage and sing the song of the son.

The work itself is divided into three parts. Part I consists of six sketches and sets forth the tragic lives of women of rural Georgia. Part II moves the scene to Washington, D. C. and Chicago and consists of seven sketches of bourgeois black society. The third and final part, "Kabnis," is an eighty-three page story-drama which returns to
the rural Georgia setting and is a character study of a learned but excessively emotional Northern black teaching in a small southern town. Fifteen poems are interspersed between and within the prose sketches. The poems are thematically integrated into the work; they "are all functional, serving to elucidate or to set the stage or to provide a transition between the sketches."11

Toomer's work is an attempt to preserve the basic black existence in the South that he felt was dying or being destroyed by modern technological advances. He therefore worked to make the description of the folk culture as close to reality as possible. He wanted to capture the spirit of what he felt when he heard folksongs for the first time, the beauty and creativity of a people who had managed to survive slavery, but who still maintained all the habits and traditions of slavery. Blacks were now free, but they still had their spirituals and folksongs from the age of slavery. They now worked for themselves, but they still stood in awe of the white man and an unwritten code of master/slave relationships still existed to an extent. Nevertheless, Toomer saw a heritage and felt a kinship so strong that he wanted all aspects of the culture captured in literature for posterity.

In Cane, Toomer creates a folk culture by drawing upon black history as well as by drawing specific items of folklore from the already existing culture. The culture is defined in its entirety in order that we may see it functioning from various aspects. Toomer was very concerned that basic black culture was dying in the South and he wanted to preserve an authentic replica of this culture before it
became completely extinct. He returned to the South as the wayward son come to embrace the roots of his beginnings. A poem from the work, "Song of the Son," expresses this feeling.

O land and soil, red soil and sweet-gum tree,  
So scant of grass, so profligate of pines,  
Now just before an epoch's sun declines  
Thy son, in time, I have returned to thee,  
Thy son, I have in time returned to thee.12

Toomer wanted to get a glimpse of the land, the soil and the people before "ugly sophistication" destroyed the basic culture. He "turns back to the ancestral soil, opens himself to its folk art and its folk-ways" and "tries to find his roots, his origins."13

In his attempt to capture what he felt was dying, Toomer embraced all parts of the folk culture and re-created it in Cane. He attempted to deal with all forces affecting the lives of Southern blacks. Consequently, his symbol of sugar cane is appropriate. The cane is both literally and figuratively an expression of the life style of the people. In defining this symbol, James Kraft writes:

Cane is the black people, the black life, the black oppression, the black condition that becomes cosmic in its attempt to reach out of the earth to the sun, to something more than itself. The symbol 'cane' is a symbol of man's life movements.14

Kraft further writes of sugar cane that it is rich, lingering, sweet, sticky, heavy, oppressive, deep-rooted, oracular, and all-pervasive.15 Its varied qualities in turn reflect the variety within the black life which surrounds it. The cane is everywhere; it is a constant reminder of work, love, violence and other activities in the black community.

The symbolism of the cane also illustrates one of Toomer's in-
direct uses of folk-connected material. He uses occupations associated with the soil to suggest the character of the culture he writes about. The soil was the basis of early black existence in America. Living and dying depended upon it; if crops did well, slaves were generally given some small reward or might not be whipped as often. If crops were poor or a slave's performance not up to par, bad times resulted in fewer clothes and rations, or beatings that often resulted in crippling or death. Toomer wants to establish a setting which indicates that his blacks are just as closely connected with the soil; they are also isolated from more industrialized societies in their small, rural community. The land is their livelihood. From the soil grows the cotton and cane from which they derive their living. Toomer uses the elements connected with soil and basic living as the setting for the folk culture. He also uses images derived from soil-connected occupations as the poetic expression of these people.

Toomer further uses other elements connected to historical blacks in slavery to suggest a folk culture. Along with specific images of slavery, Toomer uses song tradition to define his folk culture. The reader is made aware of the oral nature of the culture in the spontaneous, pervasive singing which permeates the book. The heritage from spiritual and worksong tradition is immediately apparent from the voices of the folk as well as Toomer's lyrical manner of writing. It might be well to point out that Toomer considered becoming a composer before he turned to fulltime writing. Thus he is even more attuned to this singing quality of the folk that he
portrays and to giving a musical unity to several pieces within the work.

The cane crop is a major part of the setting Toomer has generated for sowing his folk culture; its association with the soul-resurrecting soil enmeshes it with the basic folk culture. It is this setting which acts as the womb from which black life on the Dixie Pike grows. The setting houses Toomer's folk culture and it is made up of many things, most of which are designed to appeal to us in a sensual way. The people, their work and social activities, their religion, singing, and slave backgrounds all work to produce a pervasive backdrop against which specific actions are carried out in the various stories. For example, in Part I, the type of work the blacks do is never an issue in either of the stories, but we are made to feel its presence. Singing is often not essential to a sketch in terms of movement or plot development, but we hear a pervasive singing nonetheless. These are everpresent examples of the vibrancy of the folk as they go about their daily lives and of Toomer's bid to paint the culture in total perspective.

Most of the folk in Part I derive their livelihood from the cane which provides the prevailing symbolism. They plant it, plow and cultivate it, cut it, and boil it into syrup. Intermittently, we see the cane, or work associated with it, providing the backdrop for action in the sketches. Old David Georgia, who grinds cane and boils syrup, never goes to visit Becky without some sugar sap. The descriptive element of the cane provides David with his only identity and
connects him with the soil. Nothing else is said about him. In
"Blood-Burning Moon," the scene of boiling cane provides the setting
for Tom Burwell to discover Louisa's unfaithfulness with Bob Stone.
The passage is significant for its description of the pervasiveness
of the cane as well as producing a story-telling atmosphere.

... the air was heavy with the scent of boiling cane. A large pile of cane-stalks lay like ribboned
shadows upon the ground. A mule, harnessed to a pole,
trudged lazily round and round the pivot of the
grinder. ...

Old David Georgia stirred the thickening syrup with
a long ladle, and ever so often drew it off. Old
David Georgia tended his stove and told tales about
the white folks, about moonshining and cotton picking,
and about sweet nigger gals, to the men who sat there
about his stove to listen to him. (pp. 53-55)

Work and recreation representative of a certain life style are brought
out. The cane grinding process reveals a lack of modern technology,
again indicating how basic the culture is. Hand-feeding the stalks
to the grinder is a slow process, thus the men are able to combine
work with leisure. Storytelling ensues; it, too, is representative
of a way of life not overcrowded with unnecessary concerns. Here,
the cane has a two-fold purpose in the lives of the folk—work and
recreation. It is in the storytelling process that someone casually
mentions Louisa and Tom makes his fatal discovery of her infidelity.
The land or soil, and the lives of the people, are inextricably
enmeshed.

The cane not only provides work and recreation, but its presence
is an eternal force connected to other activities. The canebrake is
the scene for love between Bob Stone and Louisa. It provides the
background for Carma's illusion of an attempt at suicide. It is in
the canefield also that Fern faints in the presence of the narrator.
The canefield not only provides the setting, but the image with which
the narrator describes Fern's emotional outburst.

... Her body was tortured with something it could
not let out. Like boiling sap it flooded arms and
fingers till she shook them as if they burned her... (p. 32)

Again, the cane provides a setting and a means of interpretation for
the characters. Recalling their historical field tradition, blacks
also use images of the cane in figurative expressions in oral tradi-
tion. A caricature of "Uncle Ned," a character in black song tradi-
tion, paints his "digits [fingers] as long as de cane in de brake."^{17}

The cotton industry is also a part of the work setting and
connects the folk to the soil. It too provides images and tales for
the folk. Karintha is described as a "November cotton flower," a rare
flower indeed. King Barlo and Tom Burwell engage in a cotton picking
contest.^{18} It is the cotton ginning factory that gives Louisa's sec-
tion of town the name of factory town in "Blood-Burning Moon." Cotton
is the subject of praise in "Cotton Song." Even more than cane, it
is the product with which blacks in slavery found their source of
identity.

Further emphasizing the context of a folk culture, the people, in
going about their work and social activities, are described with an
ease that paints their lives as a slow motion counterpart to the
hustle and bustle of cities and more "progressive" and industrialized
cultures. They go about life with a leisurely appreciation of all its
aspects. They are relaxed in a lazy, slow moving environment. There is no need for hurry about anything. Work and relaxation are performed with an equal amount of attention to detail. This combination of work and relaxation in an unhurried manner can be seen in the activities at David Georgia's sap-boiling camp, a scene which is described in the quotation on page 100. The rolling, musical manner in which Toomer writes helps to perpetuate this concept of ease. Words and action flow along together as in the case of Carma driving her wagon home. We are told that "It bumps, and groans, and shakes as it crosses the railroad track" (p. 16). The verbs of sound and action, set apart by the commas, paint the picture of the wagon's state as it is intermittently interrupted by the railroad tracks.

Life style coincides with the description of work and the people themselves in establishing a setting for the folk culture. We see Carma driving her mule and wagon down the Dixie Pike. We join the narrator on the store front gathering place and watch her pass. In Part III, the meeting place turns to Halsey's wagon and blacksmith shop and it is there that the men congregate to eat their home-packed lunches every day.

We can see the simple life style which puts Kabnis into a portable bath tub that has been pulled "from beneath the bed." A kettle is used to boil the water, again emphasizing the lack of technological advances within the homes in this part of Georgia. The houses themselves are also reminiscent of a now passing era of black history. The homes are built "on the two-room plan. In one, you cook and eat,
In the other you sleep, and there love goes on" (p. 2). Often, these two rooms were separate from each other. The regularity of architecture emphasizes the material part of the folk culture which goes along with the oral part. This is a traditional, stylized way of building, passed from generation to generation in the same way that stories are passed on. It represents another expression of the way the folk live in this part of Georgia.

In addition to where they live, the way in which the people talk further defines the basic isolationist quality of the culture. The natives speak in dialect, often using regional expressions, e.g. "branch" for stream or creek. We observe in Part III that as Kabnis tries to return to his roots, to embrace the folk culture, he too becomes more and more an active user of dialect. It is done almost unconsciously. When he runs from Halsey's house thinking whites are pursuing him, he employs dialect in his next conversation and throughout the rest of the story-drama. The word "you" is shortened to "y" and "for" to "f"; "here" becomes "ere" (pp. 184, 212, 214). He consistently drops his "ing" endings: "nosin" and "kiddin" (p. 217). Once Kabnis has come face to face with a vital element of black life, that is, the potential destruction by whites, he identifies more with the rudimentary black element and his use of dialect is an expression of that identification. But Kabnis remains "suspended a few feet above the soil whose touch would resurrect him" (p. 191).

The poet-observer, and by implication Toomer, joins spiritually with the natives by using earthy folk images, although he does not
resort to dialect. For the folk, the images serve the immediate purpose of conveying an idea; they are a mode of expression. For Toomer, the immediate purpose is combined with literary purposes. The images serve to unify the work and to connect the folk with a common origin in a folk culture. The images, especially in Part I, are drawn from the world with which Toomer's characters are most familiar. They center around trees, plants, work and recreational activities. Most of the images are connected with the soil, thus again emphasizing Toomer's unifying and mythic purposes. Cain, about whom the underlying myth is developed in the work, was the first "tiller of the soil" (Genesis 4:2). Therefore, images connected with the soil not only root Toomer's folk in their historical background, but in the mythic connotation associated with them. The soil as a source of energy, of origin and of mythic proportions, is primary in Jean Toomer. Donald Ackley makes the following comment about it.

Soil in Cane is first and foremost the stuff into which the Negro's roots are thrust—it is saturated with the blood and sweat of the Negro's history, and nurtures [sic] the soul of a race of slaves. It is to this soil that Toomer has returned to anchor himself, for 'when one is on the soil of one's ancestors, most anything can come to one... ' (p. 31). Herein lies the significance of all the plant and growth imagery of the book, and of the title, for the roots of pines, sweet-gum, and sugar cane grow down and mingle with the Negro's in the land of Toomer's ancestors.19

The images are always made explicitly concrete in keeping with the level of awareness of the characters. Abstractions, the few times that they are used, are followed by concrete images. The images also capture the life style of Toomer's folk.
We can take a look at a few of these images to further understand the significance of their source. Karintha is described in terms of the soil: "Karintha’s running was a whir. It had the sound of the red dust that sometimes makes a spiral in the road" (p. 2). The abstraction, "whir," is concretized in the familiar sound of a whirlwind raising the red Georgia dust. Karintha is also described as a "November cotton flower" (connecting her with an occupation of the soil) and the poem of the same title following this sketch espouses the same theme. Usually, cotton picking is over by November and to see a cotton flower so late in the fall is a rare thing indeed. Toomer uses this knowledge and the image to express Karintha’s extraordinary quality. She is a rarity among women.

Toomer’s images not only illustrate the folk quality of his natives, but they also reflect historical black oral tradition. This stresses even further Toomer’s ability to authentically re-create black folk culture. Cotton as an occupation is referred to in many work songs and folksongs, but it also provides images in proverbs and superstitions. White records this proverb: "Heaps of cotton stalks get chopped up from association with the weeds." He specifically indicates this as an American Negro proverb. Brewer records an image from popular belief in the form of a simile of a hungry person’s saliva looking like cotton. These examples from oral tradition demonstrate the tendency of the folk to derive images from their soil-connected occupations and the folk who describe Karintha are simply following this tradition.
The men cherish Karintha without knowing that "the soul of her was a growing thing ripened too soon" (p. 4). Again the abstraction, "soul," is made concrete in the metaphor of that which comes from the soil, the life blood of this folk culture. The people can identify with something beautiful, which grows and ripens out of season and consequently must die out of its seasonal time. It spoils when it should be green or just ripening. Karintha lives her life too soon and is spoiled before she has had time to really appreciate life.

In "Becky," we are given the pathetic fallacy of the pine trees whispering to Jesus (pp. 8, 9, 10, 12, 13). Pine trees and their scent pervade the Dixie Pike and are vegetation with which all the folk are familiar. In this image, the pine trees must whisper to Jesus because Becky and her sons are outcasts and no human being will intervene for her. She is isolated from people; perhaps only the trees can see into the true condition of her existence. Once again, the image has its counterpart in black song tradition. In religious songs, the pathetic fallacy of trees bowing occurs. More specifically relating to pines, they are pictured as sympathetic comforters for the dead. A departed soul sleeps in rest, away from the troubles of the world, "Wey de tall pines grow, On the banks of a river," in a chanted sermon recorded by White. It is appropriate that they should be "sorrowful" at Becky's plight.

Carma's mule and wagon are described as a "Georgia chariot." The word "chariot" is given meaning with the native descriptive adjective. The word would also be suggestive of the oral culture of blacks from
the tradition of the spirituals. Perhaps the most famous example is "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot." The chariot was a symbol of escape from slavery and was also the means by which the better life in heaven was to be reached. The idea of a mode of transportation has been transformed to Toomer's image.

In describing Esther's aging process, Toomer writes:

> Her hair thins. It looks like the dull silk on puny corn ears. Her face pales until it is the color of the gray dust that dances with dead cotton leaves. (p. 43)

Toomer returns to the soil and the occupations of the folk for his images. Corn and cotton are as familiar to his natives as breathing. It is a part of their lives which they cannot help but recognize, and in turn formulate pictures to coincide with the expression.

Louisa, upon leaving the white people's kitchen and walking towards factory town, is described thusly:

> Her skin was the color of oak leaves on young trees in fall. Her breasts, firm and up-pointed like ripe acorns. And her singing had the low murmur of winds in fig trees. (p. 51)

All of these images are ones that can readily be seen or heard; they are ones that even the most unlettered person in this section of Georgia can visualize.

The images are also drawn from recreational activities. The outstanding example is Tom Burwell's desire to ask Louisa about her relationship to Bob Stone,

> ... But words is like th spots on dice; no matter how y fumbles em, there's times when they jes wont come. (p. 56)

It is hard for Tom to express himself just as most of the natives are
aware of how hard it is to get the right combination of spots in a
crap game. The vague, elusive world of words is made concrete in
comparison to an activity in which they often indulge.

In all of the above expressions or images, Toomer has tried to feel what it would be if a black person in Georgia expressed what he had to say and in the last instance, he allows the expression to come from the mind of a native. In his attempt to preserve what he considered to be a dying culture, Toomer found it necessary not only to write about the natives, but to try to think as they would in the expression of the writing itself and thereby reflect the authentic oral culture. We can see to what an extent he was able to succeed.

Along with folk images, the setting for Toomer's folk culture also includes the folk-connected elements of religion, singing (religious and folksongs), and slave and African backgrounds. Religion is just as much an everpresent force as the cane and the cotton. In "Cotton Song" (p. 15), religion and work are combined. The song serves the utilitarian purpose of making work easier. It is in the tradition of the "call and response," especially in work songs, that black Americans inherited from Africa. In the call and response, a leader gives out a line of song and workers repeat it or add another line to the rhythmic pull of unloading bales of cotton from steamboats, laying railway tires, etc. This tradition was also carried into religion with persons "giving out" a line of hymn and the congregation repeating it or responding to it. More generally, the phrase is applied to any vocal interaction of a performer with his audience,
a minister and his congregation, a leader with his work gang, etc.

"Cotton Song" espouses religious themes which occur throughout Cane as well as in black history. A line such as "Shackles fall upon the Judgment Day" reflects the recurring idea of death and the final judgment erasing the pains and wrongs of the world. Things will be better after one has crossed Jordan river. But the work cannot wait until Judgment Day; it must be done now in order to ensure getting to heaven—"Cotton bales are the... way... to the throne of God. Cant blame God if we dont roll." Each individual is responsible for his own salvation and salvation comes as a result of working faithfully in God's vineyard.

Oh! watch the sun, see how it run,
Never let it catch you with your work undone. 27

This passage from a religious song in oral tradition also combines the imagery of spiritual work in God's vineyard with physical toil on earth. The setting sun is the twilight stage in man's life as well as the end of a workday. At the end of a day, if a slave had been assigned to pick two hundred pounds of cotton, he was expected to weigh in that amount. So too when one comes to die he should make sure that his scales on God's record assure a pleasant afterlife.

Religion in "Becky" reveals a less positive approach. Blacks and whites perform Christian acts for Becky, but not with any Christian intention. They pray for Becky, but they say that God has put His cross upon her and cast her out for having two black sons. They build a cabin for her, but only to physically isolate her from the townspeople. They bring her food not because they feel it their
Christian duty, but out of a sense of shame and guilt for how they have treated her. Thus, only the pine trees can whisper to Jesus in earnest. Fern is also isolated in her religious experience. In the manner of a Jewish cantor singing, she offers her incoherent cries to Jesus for, by implication, He will understand what men have failed to understand.

King Barlo's vision of Africa is the one instance in which a religious trance occurs in the book. He is looked upon as a prophet and the blacks anxiously await his message from beyond the realm of the layman's knowledge. Barlo's vision of the middle passage, of African royalty chained by white enslavers, again elicits the familiar call and response of black church gatherings and other activities, and grounds the incident in oral tradition. The scene becomes an open air preaching. Audience responses of "Ah, Lord," "Amen. Amen," and "Preach it, preacher, preach it!" establish a bond of sympathy among the blacks that excludes white observers. There is a tremendous emotional impact: "Old gray mothers are in tears. Fragments of melodies are being hummed" (p. 39). Toomer succeeds in capturing what might occur in a church, at a camp-meeting or revival, or at a baptism.

Even the blacks in Part II cannot escape the religious influence of their origins. In "Calling Jesus," the soul is described as "a little thrust-tail dog" that follows the lady in question. Perhaps she would like to be completely free of her religious origins, but she cannot escape. She must learn to accept the little dog and warm
Dan Moore compares himself to Christ in "Box Seat." He comes as a "new-world Christ" in an attempt to free Muriel from the sterile societal influence around her. When she withdraws from the dwarf's offer of a blood-stained rose, Dan realizes she will never be free. He yells out, "JESUS WAS ONCE A LEPER!" But it is the audience's stare, a societal influence, which forces Muriel to accept the rose, and not Dan's Christian-oriented shout.

The sketches of city blacks show most of them attempting to push religion, which would tie them to black oral tradition, out of their lives. The same is true of Kabnis, a Northern black returned to the South. Religion in the little Georgia community in which Kabnis lives is a pervasive thing. Layman, one of Kabnis' acquaintances, is a preacher. Religious worship is a backdrop to the first major conversation in the story-drama. Kabnis, Layman, and Halsey are discussing white influence on blacks, lynching, the position of blacks in Southern society, etc., when a church bell tolls. At intervals, the meeting interrupts the conversation. Following a tale of whites killing a black man, they hear singing from the church. A woman shouts and Kabnis is repulsed. Preceding a tale of lynching, the church service is heard again.

The preacher's voice rolls from the church in an insistent chanting monotone. At regular intervals it rises to a crescendo note. The sister begins to shout. Her voice, high-pitched and hysterical, is almost perfectly attuned to the nervous key of Kabnis. (pp. 177-178)

The essence of the black culture which Kabnis rejects is used to
describe him. He will reach even greater emotional heights in the near future when he thinks he is being pursued by a lynch mob.

The choir sings "an old spiritual" as Layman continues to relate the tale of the lynching. It quiets the shouter and seems to be background for Layman's voice, which is "uniformly low and soothing."

The tale ends and the rock carrying the threatening note that Kabnis thinks is meant for him comes crashing through the window, right at the point the shouter "gets religion." She cries out: "Jesus, Jesus, I've found Jesus. O Lord, glory t God, one mo sinner is acomin home" (p. 179). Kabnis in turn has an emotional fit; he "springs to his feet, terror-stricken." The religion, like the cane, the something which is always there, has provided the scenery, or setting, against which Kabnis' emotional crisis is acted out. He is offered an opportunity to embrace the soil, the basic oral tradition represented by the shouter, but he refuses.

As Kabnis dashes out into the night, the choir, after a long silence, sings an appropriate song.

My Lord, what a mourning,
My Lord, what a mourning,
My Lord, what a mourning,
When the stars begin to fall. (p. 180)

The actual substitution of "mourning" for "morning" (both were probably pronounced alike) accentuates Kabnis' situation at this point. That which Kabnis would like to reject surrounds and engulfs him nonetheless. Its expression is his expression. He is a part of black cultural origination and it reaches out to tell his tale of woe.

The instances of singing that have been mentioned in relation to
religion are but a few of numerous occasions on which the folk lift their voices in song and in which Toomer indirectly uses folk-connected materials to enhance the atmosphere of a folk culture. Singing is always in the background of the sketches in Part I and to a lesser extent in Parts II and III. The work is given a prevailing musical quality, as Rosenfeld observes.

The musical state of soul seems primary in Jean Toomer. The pattern generates the tale. He tunes his fiddle like a tavern minstrel, and out of the little rocking or running design there rises the protagonist, solidifying from rhythm as heroes once solidified from mist ...28

The lyrics as well as the actual singing enhance the musical quality of the work. Like the people who sang during work, play, religious experience and during sorrowful times, so too must Toomer's book reflect this everpresent quality in re-creating the culture. Fragments of songs serve to unite the early sketches by their repetition at strategic points, as in "Karintha." Poems often reveal the structure of black songs, as has been illustrated in "Cotton Song." Songs are often used as accompaniments to work; for example, the "supper-getting-ready songs" in "Karintha." Going a step further, Toomer uses songs in "Blood-Burning Moon" to unite the action and reflect the moods of the characters; a similar usage was illustrated in the choir reflecting Kabnis' mournful state. For Toomer, singing is pervasive and continues to give evidence of the oral culture he wishes to depict.

"Karintha" begins with a song before we actually see the title character.

Her skin is like dusk on the eastern horizon,
0 cant you see it, 0 cant you see it,
Her skin is like dusk on the eastern horizon
. . . When the sun goes down. (p. 1)

As Puckett writes, "The Negro is peculiar in that he habitually begins his song with the chorus instead of the verse."29 This is illustrated here as well as in several other places in Cane. For example, in "Carna," the following appears.

Wind is in the cane. Come along.
Cane leaves swaying, rusty with talk,
Scratching choruses above the guinea's squawk,
Wind is in the cane. Come along. (pp. 16 and 20)

Frequent repetition is also a feature of black folk songs.30 So too is the rhyme; it reflects the black man's tendency to put seemingly alien words in terms of sight rhyme in conjunction with each other. This in turn reflects the spontaneity of his creation; it also emphasizes the oral aspect of the culture—hearing or sound was important, not how the words looked. The song about Karintha reveals that there is a rhythmic motion about her. Her body is always "singing" or "dancing": "her sudden darting past you was a bit of vivid color, like a black bird that flashes in light" (p. 2). There is something gracefully elusive about her that keeps men attentive.

Not only are the songs in this section specifically about Karintha, but she exists in the midst of a singing environment. The hush after the close of the sawmill is a prelude to the "supper-getting-ready songs" that the women sing. It is also at this time that Karintha is most mischievous. She stones cows, beats her dog, and fights the other children. The women create their songs and Karintha creates mischief. The backdrop action coexists with the more specific
action. The same thing is true of the whispering pine trees in "Becky." They are simply there, quietly projecting Becky's plight heavenward. They are a nonparticipant force reflecting specific instances of Becky's condition.

Toomer joins the singing in "Song of the Son." It is his song about the South, his slave heritage, and his intentions towards this heritage, but it also includes a portrait of a singing people. The remaining soil and land and the people they represent are enough to give an indication of the strong song tradition which once existed in the South. Singing for the slaves was one means of survival just as Toomer's song (Cane) is one means of preserving the slave heritage. Singing represented a freedom of spirit that physical bonds could not harness. Slaves could not walk away from their chains, but they could break their links with singing. The spirituals are representative of a creativity that pervades the singing in Cane. The caroling souls of slavery are reborn in the distant, "sad strong song" that Carma hears on the way to enacting her crude melodrama as well as in numerous other instances in the book.

The pervasive singing accompaniment continues on the Dixie Pike in "Fern." From her perch below the nail on her porch, the narrator speculates that Fern turns her mysterious eyes "at the gray cabin on the knoll from which an evening folk-song was coming" (p. 27). When the narrator first sees Fern, she reminds him of singing.

But at first sight of her I felt as if I heard a Jewish cantor sing. As if his singing rose above the unheard chorus of a folk-song. (p. 28)
In his dreams of Fern the narrator imagines her in Harlem looking down on "indifferent throngs," then concludes: "Better that she listen to folk-songs at dusk in Georgia" (p. 28). The songs become representative of a way of life, a predominantly oral culture and a style of existence into which Fern very comfortably fits and to which she belongs. The songs are as much a part of this life setting as Fern is. And Fern adds her song to the singing around her when she joins the narrator in a walk to the canebrake.

In "Blood-Burning Moon," singing is more closely related to moods of the characters and to actions within the story. The full moon suggests something evil; it is an omen and we are told that "Negro women improvised songs against its spell" (p. 51). The instance is similar to those in which an individual might be alone in a dark and frightening place, perhaps walking through or past a cemetery at midnight. That person may whistle or sing in an effort to calm his rapidly beating heart and unsettled nerves and try to convince whatever spirits may be that he is not afraid of them. There is a gap between what reason knows or could know and what the body responds to. The women feel something evil in the moon and respond to that evil potential; whether or not it becomes reality is insignificant.

Louisa leaves the white kitchen where she works singing. "And her singing had the low murmur of winds in fig trees" (p. 51). She comes from the white community to the black factory town singing "softly at the evil face of the full moon" (p. 52). While thinking about her two lovers, Louisa looks up at the moon. It has a strange effect
upon her, of something foreboding, and "the low rhythm of her song grew agitant and restless" (p. 53). Louisa's song no longer provides any comfort for her, but the other women keep singing. "The women sang lustily. Their songs were cotton-wads to stop their ears" (p. 53). For the women, singing continues to be a form of insulation against possible tragedy. It soothes them and creates an aura of immunity comparable to the supposed immunity the spirituals provided for the slaves in their toil and strife. There is only one instance in which the women are silenced. It occurs when Bob Stone blindly falls to the ground with a thud that dazes him. The singing reflects the action; for a moment things stand still. The impending doom is delayed. The break in singing reflects a break in Bob's pursuit of Tom.

When Tom Burwell arrives at Louisa's house, an old woman comes to the community well and sings.

An old woman brought a lighted lamp and hung it on the common well whose bulky shadow squatted in the middle of the road, opposite Tom and Louisa. The old woman lifted the well-lid, took hold the chain, and began drawing up the heavy bucket. As she did so, she sang. Figures shifted, restless-like, between lamp and window in the front rooms of the shanties. Shadows of the figures fought each other on the gray dust of the road. Figures raised the windows and joined the old woman in song. Louisa and Tom, the whole street, singing:

Red nigger moon. Sinner!
Blood-burning moon. Sinner!
Come out that fact'ry door. (p. 58)

The atmosphere itself is one of waiting and this waiting is figuratively expressed in a song. As bodies join in dances so too can bodies join in the execution of evil expressed in a song.

Finally, there is the aftermath of the expectation of evil. This,
too, is conveyed in terms of singing. Tom Burwell and Bob Stone are both dead and Louisa has withdrawn into her world of illusion. In the presence of a full moon and empty streets, Louisa wonders at her isolation.

Where were they, these people? She'd sing, and perhaps they'd come out and join her. Perhaps Tom Burwell would come. At any rate, the full moon in the great door was an omen which she must sing to:
Red nigger moon. Sinner!
Blood-burning moon. Sinner!
Come out that fact'ry door. (p. 67)

The refrains seem to be an invocation to the moon to stay its evil power, an invocation which must go unheeded because it is the people, not the moon, who have caused the tragedy. Or perhaps the refrains are a judgment on Louisa for her infidelity in love. Nevertheless, the singing again pervades the atmosphere, quietly accompanying the action of the story. It is spontaneous, but deep. It constantly reminds the reader of the culture in which the story is set.

Like the cane, the work, and the religion, singing is auxiliary to the action in the stories. It might reflect moods, attitudes and action, but it is never the most crucial element to the point Toomer wishes to make in any given sketch. Toomer uses song as a further expression of the culture in the setting he creates. It is a part of the life style of the people which returns to their oral slave heritage.

Referring more specifically to slave and African backgrounds, there are several instances in which these are retained almost without alteration in Cane. They, too, become a part of the overall
cultural re-creation. Barlo's vision, (pp. 38-39), is a personal version of the historical condition of blacks as they were captured in Africa and sold as slaves. Chained, sold, and sailed across the ocean, the blacks were victims of whites and their "old-coast brothers." Barlo's vision is so moving that "To the people he assumes the outlines of his visioned African" (p. 39). Barlo is big, black and kingly as reflected in his name, "King" Barlo, and in the tales about him. He is a living reminder of an African heritage as well as the embodiment of an Afro-American folk hero. He serves as a source of racial identification and pride for the near-white, isolated Esther as well as for other blacks.

Slave backgrounds, either comparatively or historically, are also used in the work. Dan Moore in "Box Seat" thinks of the blacks around him in terms of their slave roles in relation to the white society that engulfs them. He views Muriel as the epitome of a slave, doing what society tells her to do. In this instance, society has bid her to attend the theater. Dan comments:

Old stuff. Muriel—bored. Must be. But she'll smile and she'll clap. Do what you're bid, you she-slave. Look at her. Sweet, tame woman in a brass box seat. Clap, smile, fawn, clap. Do what you're bid. Drag me in with you. Dirty me. Prop me in your brass box seat. I'm there, am I not? because of you. He-slave. Slave of a woman who is a slave. I'm a damned sight worse than you are. (pp. 120-121)

Muriel's slavery has in turn forced Dan to become a slave, to adhere to the conventions of society, in his attempt to win her love.

Kabnis also thinks of his surroundings in terms of slavery. He kills the chicken which has been disturbing his attempt to rest by
wringing its neck. He responds to this action as a defiant slave
going revenge on a cruel master.

That's done. Old Chromo in the big house there will
wonder what's become of her pet hen. Well, it'll
teach her a lesson; not to make a hen-coop of my
quarters. Quarters. Hell of a fine quarters, I've
got. (p. 161)

The phrase "big house" and the word "Quarters" add a historical di-
mension to Kabnis' perspective. He views himself as a slave because
of his physical surroundings and in relation to the faulty school
system in which he serves.

Echoes of slavery also enter the work in descriptive comments
from Toomer, and again emphasize the authenticity of the folk culture
Toomer writes about. The following passage on darkness uses the image
of a black expectant mother in slavery.

Night, soft belly of a pregnant Negress, throbs evenly
against the torso of the South. Night throbs a womb-
song to the South. Cane- and cotton-fields, pine
forests, cypress swamps, sawmills, and factories are
fecund to her touch. Night's womb-song sets them
singing. Night winds are the breathing of the unborn
child whose calm throbbing in the belly of a Negress
sets them somnolently singing. (pp. 208-209)

Images of darkness, slavery and its soil-connected occupations, and
pregnancy are all woven together in a unique expression of the full-
ness of the South and the heritage of blacks.

From characters' comments and evaluation of their conditions to
Toomer's editorial comments, images of slavery appear. Going one step
further, Toomer creates an actual personification of the slave heritage
in Father John; this physical presence is added to the setting in
"Kabnis." Father John is the past that Kabnis can never accept, the
present that Lewis understands, and the future that Carrie K. embraces. The slave heritage cannot be denied and Lewis realizes this when he looks upon Father John. He sees in him the history of a people. The tale he visualizes as Father John's is only one of many similar circumstances originating in slavery.

Slave boy whom some Christian mistress taught to read the Bible. Black man who saw Jesus in the ricefields, and began preaching to his people. Moses- and Christ-words used for songs. Dead blind father of a muted folk who feel their way upward to a life that crushes or absorbs them. (Speak, Father!) Suppose your eyes could see, old man. (The years hold hands. 0 sing!) Suppose your lips... (p. 212)

The song that Father John might sing would be the story of blacks in slavery. The man is a storehouse of told and untold tales of a world of darkness, a world which was as real as his present state of darkness.

Toomer achieves the purpose of enhancing the folk culture with references to slavery with Father John's physical presence. Father John's one pronouncement is folklore, oral heritage in the form of a myth, thus again emphasizing the present black connection to an oral tradition originating in slavery. When Toomer moves his characters into Northern environments, he offers indications of origination in a folk culture by other means. Either with conscience problems or inability to fit into sterile Northern society, we are made to understand where the black characters have their roots. An example is "Theater." Reserved, sophisticated John feels a kinship with black roots as the chorus girls enter to begin their performance.

And as if his own body were the mass-heart of a black audience listening to them singing, he wants to stamp his feet and shout. (p. 92)
But cool, educated, brother of the manager, John cannot allow himself
to outwardly join in what he inwardly feels. The North has taught him
that there is an unbridgeable gulf between black intellectuals and
black chorus girls and he must maintain this hierarchy. He cannot
stoop to feel what Dorris inspires in him because it is against the
rules set up by a domineering society.

As the girls dance, John experiences a kind of "physical ecstasy."
But John fights against his natural desires and "He wills thought to
rid his mind of passion." His bid to deny feeling that should be
natural to him has to take the form of a society-oriented conscious
effort, thus suppressing the freedom of a nature not accustomed to
being bound by society. His restricted state is in direct contrast
to the naturalness of emotional expression in Part I.

Dorris' response to John is the negation of a recurring blues
theme. "Blues are plaintive sorrow songs lamenting the inability of
the wooer to capture the love of the one he loves, or to keep this
love once it has been secured,"31 Numerous are the blues lyrics
which express how a loved one leaves on a train or at the break of
day. An example:

   My baby left me this morning, and she caught that
   Southern train (Repeat)
   When she got on board, that almost addled my brain.32

Thus, silently in her heart, Dorris tells John she would defy this
tradition; she would be faithful and not give him the blues. "I'd
like to make your nest, and honest, hon, I wouldn't run out on you" (p. 98). But Dorris' appeal is to no avail.
Further grounding her in black tradition, Dorris is described in terms of the black folk culture that dominates Part I of the work.

Glorious songs are the muscles of her limbs. And her singing is of canebrake loves and mangrove feastings. (p. 98)

John, too, as he dreams of possessing Dorris but refuses to follow through actively, sends her back to the canefields and images of Part I in his imaginative concoction of their union. He imagines Dorris waiting for his approach.

The air is sweet with roasting chestnuts, sweet with bonfires of old leaves . . . Of old flowers, or of a Southern canefield, her perfume. (pp. 98-99)

John can only possess Dorris in a dream. When her dance is completed, he has faded into the shadow of the theater away from her penetrating eyes. Nevertheless, in spite of his Northern manners and his concern with a sterile morality, the reader gets an opportunity to see through his superficiality into his origins; he has no reason to put on a facade in his dream.

Neither can the unnamed lady in "Calling Jesus" escape her folk beginnings. Her inability to completely separate herself from her religious origins has already been mentioned. In more specifically pointing to her origins, her situation is described and discussed with images from a Southern field tradition. In speculating on who will embrace and warm the little dog described as her soul, Toomer writes:

Some one ... soft as a cotton boll brushed against the milk-pod cheek of Christ, will steal in and cover it that it need not shiver, and carry it to her where she sleeps upon clean hay cut in her dream. (p. 102)
And a comment on the lady herself:

Her breath comes sweet as honeysuckle whose pistils bear the life of coming song. (p. 102)

Finally, a last statement on the little dog soul being saved:

Some one ... soft as the bare feet of Christ moving across bales of Southern cotton, will steal in and cover it that it need not shiver, and carry it to her where she sleeps: cradled in dream-fluted cane. (p. 103)

Ultimately, perhaps the lady will be able to bring her beginnings into harmony with city life. They must be harmonized because she can never escape her cultural origins.

Dan Moore, in "Box Seat," is indeed aware of his heritage. He knows also from whence his fellow theater goers came. When he follows Muriel to the play and is being ushered to his seat, he recognizes kindred black spirits from the rolls of Southern blacks.

... He shrivels close beside a portly Negress whose huge rolls of flesh meet about the bones of seat-arms. A soil-soaked fragrance comes from her. Through the cement floor her strong roots sink down. They spread under the asphalt streets. Dreaming, the streets roll over on their bellies, and suck their glossy health from them. Her strong roots sink down and spread under the river and disappear in blood-lines that waver south. Her roots shoot down. (pp. 118-119)

The strength of the soil makes its products easily discernible even when they are physically removed from it. In the midst of Northern pretentiousness, a slave descendent of cotton fields and toil exposes her roots in black tradition.

The same thing is true of Paul in "Bona and Paul." Gazing at the sunset early one evening, Paul's mind wanders Southward.

... Paul follows the sun to a pine-matted hillock in Georgia. He sees the slanting roofs of gray un-
painted cabins tinted lavender. A Negress chants a lullaby beneath the mate-eyes of a southern planter. Her breasts are ample for the suckling of a song. She weans it, and sends it, curiously weaving, among lush melodies of cane and corn. Paul follows the sun into himself in Chicago. (pp. 137-138)

The soil-connected occupations and the song tradition pervade Paul's vision. There is a peace in his vision that temporarily removes him from the reality of his confrontation with Bona. His vision of the South is crystal clear. Trying to see into Bona's "window," into the white mind, he discovers only that "he looks through a dark pane."

The implication is, as with Corinthians 11:13, that the black man's relationship to the white world is much as far from a clear conception as man's is of his present, earthly relationship to God.

Even in the Crimson Gardens, Paul can momentarily escape the repressive atmosphere when someone sings "Li'l Liza Jane."

But I feel good! The color and the music and the song ... A Negress chants a lullaby beneath the mate-eyes of a southern planter. O song! (p. 148)

The song, originally of Southern descent and composed in Negro dialect, is sung by both blacks and whites. Both it and Paul's vision of the Negress are indicative of his cultural origins. He is able to identify with the song and in turn to conjure up pictures representative of feeling expressed in the song, but he and Bona are not able to mingle their blackness and whiteness as such features have been mingled in the song.

For Northern blacks, various elements of the Southern black folk culture emerge to remind them of their beginnings, but they are still in the foreign setting of concrete and inhibiting buildings. In con-
trast, elements comprising the folk culture provide the setting or backdrop for actions being carried out in Southern black society. The setting simply exists and is the state of things. With the establishment of the backdrop elements of the folk culture with the use of folk-connected material, Toomer can then move to explore other aspects of folk life, whether they are beliefs, customs, tales, heroes, or broader concepts of folk tradition such as myths and stereotypes.

With specific items and direct uses of folklore, Toomer characterizes folk heroes in several instances. Legends and memorates, which are prelegend narratives by persons who actually witness a potential legend-making situation, are the primary sources of such characterization. Toomer also uses specific items of folklore to define various stereotyped personages appearing in Cane. Dealing with more abstract concepts of folklore, Toomer paints a myth in the making within the work and deals with the Biblical myth of Cain (Cane). Structurally, folk beliefs are used for purposes of divining human affairs within several of the pieces. Underlying these specific uses or functions of folkloric elements in Cane are Toomer's very pointed social comments, either in relation to black and white society or to certain blacks' attempt to escape from black society into the city or more directly into the white world.

Folk heroes are traditionally pictured as masculine figures embodying the actions which reflect a view of life based on contest values and a social hierarchy built on the model of a male-centered
family.35 Stories about such heroes therefore project the values of any given culture. According to Abrahams, these projections of cultural values are either viewed as a guide for future action in real life or as an expression of dream life, of wish fulfillment.36 The values that are reflected can center around strength, marksmanship, a virtuous act, an outstanding feat, sexual appeal, etc.37 The American attraction for marksmanship is exhibited in the case of several heroes of the Southwestern humor tradition. Strength is cherished in heroes such as Mike Pink or John Henry. An overwhelming ability to attract the female sex can also be seen in John Henry, or Stackalee. The hero’s reputation might also rest upon the performance of some legendary feat, such as Shine outswimming the whale and the shark in the toast of the “Titanic.”

In Afro-American tradition, heroes are usually characterized in variations of tricksters, bad men, strong men, or great lovers.38 The source of such characterization rests in the songs or tales heard about such men. In the various ballads and other songs about John Henry, his ability to attract the female sex is portrayed just as often as his legendary defeat of the steam drill.39 All the women come from miles around when they hear of his death.

All the women in the West  
That heard of John Henry’s death,  
Stood in the rain, flagged the east bound train,  
Goin’ where John Henry dropped dead,  
Goin’ where John Henry dropped dead.40

Within Toomer’s work, King Barlo takes on the hero’s characteristics of strength and sexual attractiveness. Esther, in the title
story of the same name, looks upon King Barlo as a savior; she con-
siders him the only escape from her tragic mulatto world. King
Barlo is pure in the blackness with which Esther has only been
tinted and Esther is sexually and racially attracted to him.

Barlo first captures his audience's attention because he is
considered a prophet, thus he is set apart from the common man. He
controls his audience emotionally as a Baptist preacher would. He
is also somewhat of a folk poet. His revelation of African captivity
comes out in a spontaneous rhyme.

They led him to the coast, they led him to the sea,
they led him across the ocean an they didn't set him free.
The old coast didn't miss him, an th new coast wasnt free,
he left the old-coast brothers, t give birth t you an me.
0 Lord, great God Almighty, t give birth t you an me.

The rhyme is simple, but the subject is extensive. Centuries of
history have been captured in a few lines. Barlo, a man originally
of the masses, a cotton picker, is also a conscious creative folk
poet.

From this trancelike performance, the masses send Barlo into
his hero status. Tales begin to develop about him and what happened
on the day of his speech. One such tale is the following.

Years afterwards Esther was told that at that very
moment a great, heavy, rumbling voice actually was
heard. That hosts of angels and of demons paraded
up and down the streets all night. That King Barlo
rode out of town astride a pitch-black bull that had
a glowing gold ring in its nose. And that old Limp
Underwood, who hated niggers, woke up next morning
to find that he held a black man in his arms. This
much is certain: an inspired Negress, of wide repu-
tation for being sanctified, drew a portrait of a
black madonna on the court-house wall. (pp. 39-40)
Here, Toomer reveals an awareness of the legend-making process in oral tradition in painting the culture in its entirety. He follows the tale by word of mouth until it comes down to Esther. Esther was told what happened when Barlo spoke; she was nine years old at the time of the historic occasion. The first four sentences of things Esther was told might still be in the process of becoming truths. The fifth sentence is already an established truth on the Dixie Pike. The people are certain that it happened. Not only does the drawing of the black madonna appear in connection with the situation in "Esther," but in "Fern" as well (p. 31). This further demonstrates the oral processing of legends. A given story might be claimed as happening at different times, under different circumstances, and in different localities. For example, John Henry's contest with the steam drill is said to have occurred historically in Alabama as well as in West Virginia.

Toomer uses his knowledge of the oral processing of folkloric materials to indicate how stories of Barlo have come down to Esther and to emphasize her willingness to accept them as true. Esther believes all; the tales elevate Barlo even further in her eyesight. He assumes even more heroic proportions. It is as if the "rumbling voice" was God and Barlo has been ordained as a chosen one. Esther sees his chosen purpose as being that of releasing her from her limited position in life. Barlo's exalted status becomes Esther's only reality. Her mind creates more tales about him.

... She thinks of Barlo. Barlo's image gives her a slightly stale thrill. She spices it by telling herself
his glories. Black. Magnetically so. Best cotton picker in the county, in the state, in the whole world for that matter. Best man with his fists, best man with dice, with a razor. Promoter of church benefits. Of colored fairs. Vagrant preacher. Lover of all the women for miles and miles around. Esther decides that she loves him. (pp. 42-43)

Here, Esther emphasizes the contest values that her society cherishes. Barlo is able to hold his own in all contest situations having to do with strength and agility with weapons, as well as in recreational activities. Also, he is a great lover. He now becomes a John Henry and Stackalee all wrapped up into one. But he is also a man of changing roles, one who anticipates Ellison's Rinehart. He is good at everything from work to dangerous activities to religion and race consciousness to love. He brings to mind (in the latter three roles) Rinehart the lover, the pimp, the preacher and the pusher and verges on the "cat" figure as defined by Abrahams, a smooth operator who works in terms of verbal persuasion. He exercises wit and indirection rather than direct attack. Valuing his heroic characteristics, Esther eagerly awaits Barlo's return to the Dixie Pike only to see the legend she has inflated collapse in a lustful heap. Esther's hero cannot save her after all and she withdraws further into her unreal world. She has looked for a source of identity which denies reality; it is wish fulfillment and consequently, it achieves nothing.

For Esther, Barlo is simply human in the end. For others, part of the legend lives on. Tom Burwell evaluates his manly ability for Louisa by comparing himself to Barlo in "Blood-Burning Moon."

Ise carried y with me into th fields, day after day, an after that, an I sho can plow when yo is there, an I
The memorates continue in spite of Esther's personal disappointment. She tried to give an intimate connotation to a more universal concept and ultimately she fails. Barlo belongs to a larger racial constituency than Esther's mulatto frustrations. The masses consider her too privileged in her near-white status to even consider needing someone like Barlo, hence they misconstrue her intentions, laugh at her, and harshly destroy a genuine need on her part.

As a potential hero, Dan Moore fails in just the opposite way--the masses refuse to endorse the status that would set him apart from them. Reminiscent of the legend of Sampson and endowed with a Christ-like purpose, Dan is castrated before he has a chance to realize his potential. He would like to free blacks in Washington from the white influence under which they live. Most of them, like Muriel, go to the theater because white society dictates that it is the thing to do in order to be culturally refined. They adhere to a morality which denies natural instincts also because white society so dictates.

Dan contemplates on what he can do to "Stir the root-life of a withered people" and thereby "Call them from their houses, and teach them to dream" (p. 104). Dan's purpose is a high one; he is a potential hero with an inner strength, not the flare of a Stackalee or a Shine. And Perhaps therein is his reason for failure. He declares: "I was born in a canefield. The hands of Jesus touched me. I am come to a sick world to heal it" (pp. 105-106). Similar words of a lowly origin are uttered by Stackalee: "I was raised in the backwoods, where
my pa raised a bear. It is Dan's intention to emphasize his soil-connected origins; Stackalee emphasizes his self-sufficiency, his undeniable audacity and tendency to meanness. And Stack gets a more receptive audience than Dan. No one will listen to Dan. Muriel cannot break away from Mrs. Pribby, the white influence, and she has very little desire to do so.

Dan's self-imposed purpose is expressed even more symbolically in the theater.

... I am going to reach up and grab the girders of this building and pull them down. The crash will be a signal. Hid by the smoke and dust Dan Moore will arise. In his right hand will be a dynamo. In his left, a god's face that will flash white light from ebony. I'll grab a girder and swing it like a walking-stick. Lightning will flash. I'll grab its black knob and swing it like a crippled cane. (pp. 126-127)

Through his Sampson-like destruction, Dan hopes to save his people from the industrialization they are embracing and denying the humanity that extends to roots in the South. But the lightning flash merely recedes into the dwarf's mirror and the audience's laugh at his embarrassment. He and the dwarf become one; they are both alien to the present society in which they find themselves. The other theatergoers form a clique and force Muriel to accept the blood-stained rose because it is the proper thing to do. Only Dan and the dwarf realize that it is the human thing to do. To accept the rose is to accept the dwarf's humanity, no matter how deformed he may be. Dan expressed this in his shout that Jesus was once a leper, but he realizes that the others will never understand this. As far as they are concerned, he is only a boisterous troublemaker who has shouted out when it was
improper to do so; what he said is of little concern. Dan leaves the theater realizing his utter impotence as a potential savior: "He is as cool as a green stem that has just shed its flower" (p. 129). With the recognition of impotence, the hero potential is shattered. The concrete is not the soil. Dan has no receptive constituency like Barlo, no fertile soil to grow in, and he withers.

Memorates, or personal narratives, are also used to characterize personages in the work who are not in any way folk heroes. The townspeople create tales about Becky to characterize her as a wayward human being who has an unfavorable mark of God upon her. Simultaneously, they use such tales as social justification for treating her as an outcast. Becky's sons grow up in full view of the town, but no one ever sees her.

The part that prayed wondered if perhaps she'd really died, and they had buried her. No one dared ask. They'd beat and cut a man who meant nothing at all in mentioning that they lived along the road. (p. 10)

The town would prefer to believe that Becky actually is dead instead of venturing into the cabin, which would be the human thing to do. The situation becomes even more ridiculous when Becky's sons shoot up two men and leave town.

Folks began to take her food again. They quit it soon because they had a fear. Becky if dead might be a hant, and if alive—it took some nerve even to mention it... (p. 11)

We can imagine the speculation that might have ensued. But none of the speculation is positively acted upon. We can not even be sure that Becky is in the cabin when it actually caves in. Perhaps the assumption of her presence is just another folktale. After all, no
one really unearths the body. The narrator only thinks he hears a
groan, yet he and Barlo rush into town to start another tale, that
is, to give the townspeople "the true word" of what has happened.
They are in a position to provide only superficial analysis, but
they will create another tale to maintain an air of mystery about
Becky. Again, Toomer reveals an awareness of the process by which
items of folklore make their way into oral tradition as finished
products. In an effort to supply answers to the questions surrounding
Becky's existence, more legends about her are born. As these tales
continue to be repeated, they will be fixed as truth.

Other tales serve to characterize the atmosphere of Southern
society. In the conversation with Layman and Halsey, they both
give Kabnis an indication of what Georgia whites are like by relating
tales of lynching and murder. They compare Southern white society to
a hornets' nest. Layman says he comes from where they are always
swarming and relates a tale of some of this swarming activity.

\[\ldots\] I've seed th time when there weren't no use t
even stretch out flat upon th ground. Seen um shoot
an cut a man t pieces who had died th night befo.
Yassur, An they didnt stop when they found out he
was dead--jes went on ahackin at him anyway. (p. 173)

Such tales of the horrors whites inflicted upon blacks, especially
during slavery times, occur in black oral tradition.\(^46\) This treatment
often continued in post-slavery times. A similar beating of a dead
black man is recorded in Dorson, "The Prison Farm."\(^47\)

When Kabnis asks what he did about the atrocity, Layman responds:
"Thems th things you neither does a thing or talks about if y want t
stay around this away, Professor" (p. 173). Perhaps there is an element
of tall tale in Layman's account, but Kabnis does get an idea of what
the white South is like. Kabnis asks again if something can't be
done about the situation.

... Layman: Sho. Yassur. An done first rate an
well. Jes like Sam Raymon done it. ... Th white
folk (reckon I oughtnt tell it) had jes knocked two
others like you kill a cow--brained um with an ax,
when they caught San Raymon by a stream. They was
about t do fer him when he up an says, 'White folks,
I gotter die, I knows that. But wont y let me die
in my own way?' Some was fer gettin after him, but
th boss held um back an says, 'Jes so longs th
nigger dies--' An Sam fell down ont his knees an
prayed, '0 Lord, Ise comin to y,' an he up an jumps
int th stream. (pp. 174-175)

When a lynch mob comes for you in Georgia, the only thing you can do
is kill yourself for them. Sam enacts a real live version of crossing
Jordan river.

It is the story of Mame Lamkins, a pregnant black woman, which
provides the foreground for the shouting which bothers Kabnis. Mame's
lynching took place a year before Kabnis came to the Dixie Pike.

Layman: White folks know that niggers talk, an they
dont mind jes so long as nothing comes of it, so here
goes. She was in th family-way, Mame Lamkins was.
They killed her in th street, an some white man seein
th risin in her stomach as she lay there soppy in her
blood like any cow, took an ripped her belly open, an
th kid fell out. It was living; but a nigger baby
aint supposed t live. So he jabbed his knife in it
an stuck it t a tree. An then they all went away. (pp. 178-179)

Similar tales of the atrocious treatment of pregnant women during
slavery times also occur in black oral tradition. Dorson records
a tale of an expectant mother being beaten with a cat-o'-nine tails;
she was laid face down on the ground with a hole dug under her
stomach in order not to hurt the "property" she was carrying.48 A
tale of a black female hanging in oral tradition appears in Brewer; a child was also involved in this tale. 49

Mame had tried to hide her husband when whites came after him. Consequently, they were both killed. It is at this tragic ending to the tale that the climactic shout occurs. Before Kabnis has a chance to respond to one emotional upset with the tale (horrors of slavery), he gets a second in the shout (religious tradition) and a third in the rock crashing through the window (white threat to blacks). All of these are elements of black culture, the soil above which he is suspended a few feet.

In addition to using items of folklore to characterize the atmosphere of Southern society and to define various characters and in turn developing items of folklore about them, Toomer also uses types of characters that have their counterparts in oral tradition. The most memorable stereotyped characters appear in "Kabnis." They range from the working man to the black aristocracy. They are vividly presented in their stereotyped roles and reflect Toomer's deep understanding of blacks in relation to their fellow blacks and in relation to white society. Hanby, the black principal of Kabnis' school, anticipates Ellison's Bledsoe by thirty years. 50 Hanby is the black man of power who has acquired his position through very careful struggle. He maintains this position by suppressing the blacks who work for him and giving whites what they want. In breaking one of the school regulations by drinking in his cabin, Kabnis, like the invisible man, represents a source of threat to the black man of
power. Hanby must crush this strange nigger from the North before he has a chance to effect in any crucial way his little stronghold.

Kabnis describes Hanby as a "cockroach" and groups him with "lynchers and business men." He also groups God and Hanby together in one of his outbursts. "God and Hanby, they belong together. Two godam moral-spouters" (p. 162). In the tradition of the stereotype, however, Toomer defines Hanby as a man for all seasons. He adopts the mask of the hour.

He is a well-dressed, smooth, rich, black-skinned Negro who thinks there is no one quite so suave and polished as himself. To members of his own race, he affects the manners of a wealthy white planter. Or, when he is up North, he lets it be known that his ideas are those of the best New England tradition. To white men he bows, without ever completely humbling himself. Tradesmen in the town tolerate him because he spends his money with them. He delivers his words with a full consciousness of his moral superiority. (p. 185)

Hanby's tone and manner in evicting Kabnis is that of condescension. He is skilled in the use of language and showy to the point of verbosity. We note that underneath the facade, Hanby is basically a coward. He retreats when Halsey reproaches him for not paying a bill in the same tone and manner he has affected with Kabnis. He visibly stiffens when Lewis enters the room. There is some indication that perhaps Hanby is responsible for the note ordering Lewis out of town, the note that mistakenly came crashing through Halsey's window when Kabnis was present. By firing one of the intruders and threats to his power and attempting to frighten the other out of town, Hanby can be free of both potential threats at the same time. When Lewis asks to see him outside of Kabnis' cabin, Hanby falters; only his "tight collar and
vest effectively preserve him" (p. 192). He stammers and addresses Lewis as "Mr." Lewis and though we can only speculate on the nature of their conversation, obviously there is something going on. Hanby has become unnerved, his dignified manner is barely held in tact. He, like Bledsoe, would prefer to do his dirty work in an underhand manner; the direct confrontation with a strong personality like Lewis upsets him whereas he can be thoroughly superior with the weak Kabnis. He adopts whatever manner he needs in order to survive.

Layman, on the other hand, is thoroughly knowledgeable about the state of Georgia, whites, and blacks. He knows enough to be silent in order to stay alive; he could justifiably be called an accommodationist. He is also a preacher and is aware of certain attitudes circulating about preachers. When Kabnis comments on "this preacher-ridden race" and wishes to except the present company, Layman responds: "Preacher's a preacher anywheres you turn. No use exceptin" (p. 174). Layman is willing to take responsibility for what he is although he doesn't admit any specific faults. He takes it all in stride and is cautious to the point of complete inactivity, which might be considered a fault for a man of his knowledge, but it keeps him alive. His silence is emphasized in the description of him.

... Professor Layman, tall, heavy, loose-jointed Georgia Negro, by turns teacher and preacher, who has traveled in almost every nook and corner of the state and hence knows more than would be good for anyone other than a silent man. (p. 169)

We see examples of this silent non-committal in Layman's conversation with Halsey and Kabnis. When the woman shouts, Kabnis hears
it and "His face gives way to an expression of mingled fear, contempt, and pity" (p. 175). Although Halsey grins and makes fun of Kabnis, we are told that "Layman takes no notice of it." After the shouter "gets religion" and Kabnis becomes unnerved again, "Layman's face is expressionless" although Halsey is greatly amused. The significance of this practiced composure is illustrated when the rock comes crashing through the window. Kabnis is terror-stricken, Halsey picks up the stone, and "Layman is worried." A potential white influence has entered the serenity of Layman's mind. He is immediately concerned about the consequences of such an action. When the threat passes, Layman's passivity returns. Hanby enters and reprimands Kabnis. Halsey joins in the fight but "Layman's eyes are innocently immobile." He remains unbelievably neutral in the conflict. The one time he finally takes an opportunity to comment on Kabnis' situation "his voice is like a deep hollow echo," and he can only voice the opinion that Halsey has already forced Kabnis to submit to. If Layman cannot feel genuinely safe and unchallenged in what he ventures to say, then he remains silent.

Halsey is a stereotype of yet another kind. He is an ironic conception of the American dream, the myth of the self-made man, the man who pulls himself up by his bootstraps or at least uses family money to stay on top. The ironic thing is that even in his wagon and blacksmith shop, Halsey is still a nigger. He bows and scraps to the poorest of whites. But he tells himself that he understands the workings of the system and he is simply being accommodating to increase his business. After fixing an axe handle for the poor white
Mr. Ramsey, Halsey refuses to charge him. He merely concludes, "They like y if y work fer them" (p. 202) and the echoing Layman agrees, "Thats right, Mr. Halsey. Thats right sho." By remaining on good terms with whites, Halsey is able to keep his business in operation, but he doesn't really make any money.

The description of Fred Halsey as a continuation of several generations of shop owners continues the irony of his conception. The description parodies aristocratic tradition.

The parlor of Fred Halsey's home. There is a seediness about it. It seems as though the fittings have given a frugal service to at least seven generations of middle-class shop-owners... the portrait of a bearded man... The eyes are daring. The nose, sharp and regular.... His nature and features, modified by marriage and circumstances, have been transmitted to his great grandson, Fred. To the left of this picture, spaced on the wall, is a smaller portrait of the great-grandmother.... A tin woodbox rests on the floor below. To the right of the great-grandfather's portrait hangs a family group: the father, mother, two brothers, and one sister of Fred.... The walls of the room are plastered and painted green. An old upright piano is tucked into the corner near the window. (pp. 167-168)

The uncultured Fred Halsey has been given all the semblance of aristocratic tradition. The portrait fails to stress that the tradition is one of service not only in the shop but of servitude in relation to his fellow human beings. The nose as an indication of aristocratic origins, the family portraits, the piano, are all pathetically misplaced, a superimposed concern on menial existence.

Halsey, Layman and Hanby must all define themselves in relation to the larger white culture. How this culture sees them and how they view it form a chain of attitudes and conceptions often in the form
of stereotypes. These stereotyped attitudes extend back to the history of blacks in slavery and often reflect how slavery continues into the twentieth century. The major attitude from which others grow is that the Dixie Pike is white man's land and he is the superior creature.

White-man's land,
Niggers, sing,
Burn, bear black children
Till poor rivers bring
Rest, and sweet glory
In Camp Ground. (pp. 157, 167, 209)

The poem embodies the recurring ideas from the history of a people and shows a religious influence, especially from the spiritual tradition. In the foreign land, the white man's land, blacks are taught to accept their place, to be happy in their singing and look forward to crossing the river Jordan. The old idea of the pie in the sky comes through. Blacks are to bear their sufferings on earth, whether they are literally burned, as Tom Burwell is, or if their children are sold into slavery. Whatever happens, the "sweet glory in Camp Ground" will make it all worthwhile. Not only the same theme, but the same phrase is used in spirituals. An example from The Book of Negro Folklore is as follows:

Deep river, my home is over Jordan,
Deep river, Lord; I want to cross over into camp ground.51

Also:

I'm gonna walk on de streets of glory,
Some o' dese days.52

The idea of a reward in the afterlife for hardships suffered on earth justifies the concept of place.
In applying the concept even more specifically to Georgia, Halsey informs Kabnis:

... An Mr. Kabnis, kindly remember you're in the land of cotton—hell of a land. Th white folks get th boll; th niggers get th stalk. An don't you dare touch th boll, or even look at it. They'll swing y sho. (p. 171)

The same idea is expressed in black song tradition. An example is found in *American Negro Folklore*. "I went to Atlanta, Never been dere afo'. White folks eat de apple, Nigger wait fo' co'."53 The gap between black and white is described to Kabnis in traditional terms of fruit for whites and chaff for blacks. When Kabnis responds that whites wouldn't touch gentlemen, like the three gathered for the conversation, Layman rides him of his illusions.

Nigger's a nigger down this away, Professor. An only two dividings: good an bad. An even they aint permanent categories. They sometimes mixes um up when it comes t lynchin. I've seen um do it. (pp. 171-172)

There are no variations to the concept as far as the white world is concerned.

Once the concept is established, individual expressions of that concept are readily seen. Bob Stone recognizes a difference in place and social status as well as color when he meditates on his affair with Louisa.

Bob Stone sauntered from his veranda out into the gloom of fir trees and magnolias. . . his mind became consciously a white man's. He passed the house with its huge open hearth which, in the days of slavery, was the plantation cookery. He saw Louisa bent over that hearth. He went in as a master should and took her. Direct, honest, bold. She was lovely--in her way. Nigger way. . . She was worth it. Beautiful nigger gal. Why nigger? Why not, just gal? No, it was because she was nigger that he went to her. (pp. 58-59, 60-61)
The positions of the two are made clear. Bob is conqueror and Louisa is to be conquered. It is tradition; it is what his father and forefathers have done. He cannot escape the stereotyped role he must play or the attitude he has towards his black lover as an inferior being.

The sense of place in terms of the white world is also made clear to Halsey when he repairs Mr. Ramsay's axe handle. Ramsay patiently observes Kabnis botching the job, then remarks that Halsey is still breaking in the new hand who seems "like a likely enough feller once he gets th hang of it" (p. 201). Ramsay smiles with the sense of knowing the right profession for blacks. Halsey comes to the rescue with his own acknowledgement of a place in life.

Halsey: He'll make a good un some of these days,
Mr. Ramsay.
Mr. Ramsay: Y ought t know. Yer daddy was a good un before y. Runs in th family, seems like t me.
Halsey: Thats right, Mr. Ramsay. (p. 202)

Not only does it run in Halsey's family, but in the "family" of blacks. Mr. Ramsay takes his axe handle and invites Halsey to come and take it out in trade: "Shoestrings or something." The level of inequality persists even when Halsey is the skilled craftsman and Ramsay procures his services.

Bona and Paul can never meet on equal terms because of stereotyped ideas they have of each other. Bona associates Paul's color with something strange and different, hence necessarily negative. She meditates on Paul: "Colored; cold. Wrong somewhere" (p. 144). Paul in turn thinks she will be excessively pale, thus typically white, when he picks her up for the blind date.
Paul’s white friend Art also looks upon him in terms of difference with a negative connotation.

Art: ... Christ, but he’s getting moony. It’s his blood. Dark blood; moony. Doesn’t get anywhere unless you boost it. (pp. 138-139)

The old idea of black blood not being able to survive by itself comes out. Pure black and it is evil, like the influence of the moon. Presumably the booster would be white blood or association with white society. As a roommate Paul can be tolerated, but Art regrets his blackness because he always has to answer questions about it.

When Paul enters the Crimson Gardens with the party of University of Chicago students, the people want to make him anything but black. Their supposed racial superiority will allow them to tolerate almost any nationality in their midsts except blacks; such an act would be too much of a degradation. The people present speculate on Paul’s racial identity.

What is he, a Spaniard, an Indian, an Italian, a Mexican, a Hindu, or a Japanese? (p. 145)

They can accept Paul for anything except what he is. Paul is made to realize that people see “not attractiveness in his dark skin, but difference.”

Within the work, blacks perpetuate stereotypes they have of themselves or those that they have picked up from whites about blacks. Layman defines the various categories of blacks who attend church and shout most vigorously on Sunday mornings.

... An its th worst ones in th community that comes int
th church t shout. I've sort a made a study of it. You take a man what drinks, th biggest lickerhead around will come int th church an yell th loudest. An th sister whats done wrong, an is always doin wrong, will sit down in th Amen corner an swing her arms an shout her head off. Seems as if they cant control themselves out in th world; they cant con­ trol themselves in church. (p. 176)

These same ideas are expressed in almost every black church where shouting occurs. It seems as if the good Christians are all doing a study of it; they can always point to the sister or brother guilty of such actions.

Kabnis, in a non-native state of confusion, asks God to take away the beauty of the night that he encounters at the beginning of the story-drama. "Give me an ugly world: Ha, ugly. Stinking like unwashed niggers" (p. 161). He gives vent to the commonly held view among whites that blacks smell and perhaps unwashed blacks do smell, as any unwashed personages would. It is interesting to note that Kabnis wants a world steeped in the blackness he negates. He wants a world smelling of unwashed blacks, but his most vehement dislike for the basic culture is directed at a shouting black woman, whose physical condition probably verges on a realization of his request.

Black women in "Kabnis" are given a sense of place as are women in general in other parts of the work. In "Kabnis," the role of the black woman is expressed in a poem.

rock a-by baby ..
Black mother sways, holding a white child on her bosom.
when the bough bends ..
Her breath hums through pine-cones.
cradle will fall ..
Teat moon-children at your breasts,
down will come baby . . .
Black mother. (p. 160)

The black woman becomes the traditional black mammy, taking care of white babies ("moon-children"). This role seems to hang in the atmosphere into which Kabnis steps. It is an everpresent idea in the same sense that his cabin is reminiscent of the quarters from the days of slavery.

A role in reverse of the black/white concept is imposed upon Becky. Both blacks and whites think she has gone beyond her God-given place in the world by crossing the color line and getting sons by a black man. They show their judgment of this act by ostracizing her. Miscegenation cannot be tolerated. Even the expression of Becky's action from both sides is the traditional one. The white tone is one of intolerance and condemnation for the lover and Becky. The black tone is one of condemnation for the lover and near understanding for Becky. She is simply a poor, misguided, "poor-white crazy woman."

In "Box Seat," Dan Moore also speculates on the role of women in general. He concludes that it is a clearly defined set-up with male as the superior creature.

. . . Those silly women arguing feminism. Here's what I should have said to them. 'It should be clear to you women, that the proposition must be stated thus:
Me, horizontally above her.
Action: perfect strokes downward oblique.
Hence, man dominates because of limitation.
Or, so it shall be until women learn their stuff. . . .'
(pp. 123-124)

Blacks and women are put in stereotypic, limiting roles as defined
by whites and males in general. The attitudes reflect ideas circulating in the oral culture and are connected to the tradition of oral transmission. They enter the folklore to characterize and define types of people in the same way that legends define heroes.

There are structural uses of folk beliefs and structural and thematic uses of the myth of Cain. Folk beliefs are used structurally in the work as leitmotifs for unifying actions. One of the dominant motifs is that of the moon. Traditionally, the moon, especially at its fullest, is associated with evil doings. The full moon is an omen in itself, a bringer of evil. Perhaps the most widespread belief about the full moon is that it is the time for the appearance of werewolves. If a person has these tendencies, then surely they will be unleashed at full moon. Even when there is no belief in an actual physical change in man or animal at full moon, there is a more general belief that the full moon does effect human behavior and studies have been done in support of this theory. Linking human behavior with the phases of the moon, Bernard Bell writes:

In its waxing and waning the moon is the traditional symbol of the cyclical pattern of life, its changing phases influencing the cycle of fertility in humans and Nature alike.

References to the moon and its evil influence occur most obviously in "Blood-Burning Moon." Louisa starts her journey to factory town singing in the full moon. Old women create songs to ward off the effect of the moon.

Up from the dusk the full moon came, Glowing like a fired pine-knot, it illumined the great door and soft showered the Negro shanties aligned along the single street of factory town. The full moon in the great
door was an omen. Negro women improvised songs against its spell. (p. 51)

It is when Louisa looks directly at the moon that she jumbles visions of Tom and Bob and stops singing.

The scene shifts and Tom Burwell discovers Louisa has been seeing Bob Stone. He starts away from David Georgia's camp in anger and immediately becomes chilled.

He shivered. He shuddered when he saw the full moon rising towards the cloud-bank. He who didn't give a godam for the fears of old women. (p. 55)

Tom only briefly feels uneasy when he looks at the full moon, but he is aware of how the old women feel about it. It appears as a silent warning almost, a sign of fate which could be avoided if he would only consider it in relation to himself. But his mind returns to Louisa and Bob and he continues on his way.

As Tom sits on the step beside Louisa, another reference is made to the moon: "The full moon sank upward into the deep purple of the cloud-bank" (p. 58). A negative passion for Bob Stone is combined with the positive passion Tom feels for Louisa. The moon is almost writing its own kind of play and patiently waiting for the characters to follow through with their predestined actions.

Bob Stone enters the canefield with his cheeks glistening purple on the way to see Louisa. He arrives and the evil omen is realized. Bob is killed and Tom is taken to the factory and burned at the stake. The dazed Louisa sits before her door.

... her eyes opened slowly. They saw the full moon glowing in the great door. The full moon, an evil thing, an omen, soft showering the homes of folks she knew. (p. 67)
The full moon shines in the factory door where Tom has been burned. It is as if it had stayed behind the cloud bank until the dirty work was done, through the climactic scene, then reappeared to point it out by "glowing in the great door."

A moon is also present when other destructive acts occur in the work, but these actions are not always significant to unifying the plots. A crescent moon is shining when Carma goes into the canefield, but it is on the rise to a full moon. It shines as Carma tricks her husband and diverts his mind from her infidelity. Carma's action in the canefield leads to her husband killing one of the men who has helped with her when he learns that he has been "twice deceived."

Kabnis, angry because he has not been able to sleep, catches the chicken in his hand and steps out into the night.

With his fingers about her neck, he thrusts open the outside door and steps out into the serene loveliness of Georgian autumn moonlight. (p. 160)

The serenity of the moon is contrasted with Kabnis' evil intention and he wastes no time in wringing the chicken's neck.

The moon and its suggestion of something sinister, mysterious, etc., is consistently used to describe Paul in "Bona and Paul." Bona observes Paul in gym class: "He is a harvest moon. He is an autumn leaf. He is a nigger" (p. 134). Art continually uses the word "moony" when speaking of Paul. The implication is that he is describing Paul's moods, his inclination to meditation, to isolation, to difference.

Traditionally, also, the full moon is not only an evil omen, but a time for romance. This also comes out in the work. One of the major
romantic pursuits occurs in the light of the moon. This is the narrator's pursuit of Avey. Although she resists and treats him like a child when she finally embraces him, he comments on the brilliance of the moon as they go cruising on the Potomac on the Jane Hosely.

The moon was brilliant. The air was sweet like clover. And every now and then, a salt tang, a stale drift of sea-weed. It was not my mind's fault if it went romancing. (p. 80)

The romantic atmosphere is there with the help of the moon, but the narrator never really succeeds in being a great lover.

Just as the moon serves to divine human behavior in "Blood-Burning Moon," so too do happenings in the animal world reflect human behavior. Or at least animals have an awareness of potential disaster. Out of loneliness, dogs are traditionally pictured as baying at the moon. When a death is to occur in a house, the family dog can be seen crawling on all fours, supposedly measuring the grave. In addition to dogs, cows, roosters and chickens seem to be aware of the goings on in the world of humans in Cane.

Before Carma goes into the canefield we are told that "Foxie, the bitch, slicks back her ears and barks at the rising moon" (p. 18). The action is a sign of restlessness, perhaps of something impending. Immediately afterwards, Carma goes into the canefield and the crudest melodrama reaches its climax.

In "Esther," as Barlo comes out of his trance to deliver a message, there is a tension in the air. The sheriff swears in a couple of extra deputies because "y cant never tell what a nigger like King Barlo might be up t" (p. 37). The crowd is "hushed and expectant,"
waiting for Barlo's prophesy. Then:

A couple of stray dogs start a fight. Old Goodlow's cow comes flopping up the street. (p. 37)

These are diversions, tension relievers. For a moment, the sheriff and his deputies can forget Barlo's potential destructive power if he should choose to express his message physically. The animal world does what Barlo himself cannot do in ensuring a peaceful, receptive air for his message once the trance has ended.

Animals echo feelings of each one of the characters in "Blood-Burning Moon." When Louisa looks at the moon and stops her song, immediately there is a reason for alarm in the animal world.

... Rusty black and tan spotted hounds, lying in the dark corners of porches or prowling around back yards, put their noses in the air and caught its tremor. They began plaintively to yelp and howl. Chickens woke up and cackled. Intermittently, all over the countryside dogs barked and roosters crowed as if heralding a weird dawn or some ungodly awakening. (p. 53)

According to Puckett, the crowing of a cock before midnight indicates a "hasty death." The animals add their noise to the women's songs in an acknowledgement of impending disaster. Instead of just expressing a belief from folk tradition, Toomer allows it to be acted out.

Tom leaves David Georgia's camp and heads for factory town. "Just then, the dogs started barking and the roosters began to crow. Tom felt funny" (p. 55). The uproar is heard again in Bob's path.

... A hound swung down the path before him towards factory town. Bob couldn't see it. The dog loped aside to let him pass. Bob's blind rushing made him stumble over it. He fell with a thud that dazed him. The hound yelped. Answering yelps came from all over the countryside. Chickens cackled. Roosters crowed, heralding the
In the same way that roosters seem to be aware of the dawn before it comes, so too do they and other animals show an awareness of what will happen in the world of human affairs, although they can in no way directly influence such events. Nevertheless, Toomer effectively uses beliefs associated with animals to give the reader a further indication of the complete functioning of the folk culture.

Moon and animal beliefs structurally unite the pieces in which they prominently appear. Toomer uses myth for structural purposes of unification also. In addition, he shows myth in creation in Cane. This is evident in his female characters. It is to this creation of myth that we now turn. Myth as it is used here refers to the conscious elevation of feminine figures to the level of goddesses by those people around them, especially the males. Toomer presents women that are to be exalted, as in the case of Karintha, Fern and Avey. These women are held in awe by the men around them because they do not understand them. They do not act as society would expect them to; this is especially true of Avey. Because men cannot relate to these women on human terms, they subjugate their humanity to myth. Karintha is a regular little hellion at times, but everyone excuses her actions, even the preacher. She is something special, the November cotton flower which has bestowed its loveliness in a hostile environment. Men are physically attracted to her and possess her, then they realize they have to do more. They think money is the answer.

Karintha is a woman. Young men run stills to make her money. Young men go to the big cities and run on the road. Young men go away to college. They all want to
bring her money. These are the young men who thought that all they had to do was count time. (pp. 3-4)

They never realize that there is still something elusive about Karinthia. "Men do not know that the soul of her was a growing thing ripened too soon. They will bring their money; they will die not having found it out..." (p. 4) As with the November cotton flower, "Superstition saw/Something it had never seen before" and wrote its own tale about it. Instead of providing Karinthia with the extra-special nourishment she needed for such a delicate rarity, she is exploited in the most destructive of ways.

Fern and Avey are both better able to take care of themselves.

"In Fern," writes Patricia Chase, "Toomer is building a myth of woman, endowing her with mysticism and an eluctability that make men want to do some 'fine, unnamed thing' for her." Fern simply becomes her beauty; she has no other external identity. Her eyes are the center of this beauty.

They were strange eyes. In this, that they sought nothing—that is, nothing that was obvious and tangible and that one could see, and they gave the impression that nothing was to be denied. When a woman seeks, you will have observed, her eyes deny. Fern's eyes desired nothing that you could give her; there was no reason why they should withhold. Men saw her eyes and fooled themselves. Fern's eyes said to them that she was easy. When she was young, a few men took her, but got no joy from it. And then, once done, they felt bound to her (quite unlike their hit and run with other girls), felt as though it would take them a lifetime to fulfill an obligation which they could find no name for. (pp. 24-25)

Men continue to bring their bodies to Fern until something turns them off.

They began to leave her, baffled and ashamed, yet vowing to themselves that some day they would do some fine thing for
her; send her candy every week and not let her know whom it came from, watch out for her wedding-day and give her a magnificent something with no name on it, buy a house and deed it to her, rescue her from some unworthy fellow who had tricked her into marrying him. As you know, men are apt to idolize or fear that which they cannot understand, especially if it be a woman. (pp. 25-26)

The men begin to weave myths and dreams protectively about Fern in payment for their use of her; they attempt to assuage guilty consciences. They tell themselves that she is above them.

A sort of superstition crept into their consciousness of her being somehow above them. Being above them meant that she was not to be approached by anyone. She became a virgin. (p. 26)

Making Fern into a virgin is indeed an act of exaltation. The narrator points out that virgins in a small Southern town are "by no means the usual thing." Hargis Westerfield goes a step further to suggest that, in her virginity, that is, rejection of men, Toomer has exalted the charming Fern "with the mythos of the Jewish Mother of God." Westerfield points to the significance of the name "Rosen" as Fern's surname. He also maintains that Toomer associates Fern's rejection of the narrator with the experience of the Incarnation. Perhaps, too, the nail has symbolic associations: "Fern sits as if to commemorate the sufferings of Christ when he incurred the nails of Calvary." Or perhaps the symbolism points to the fact that Fern's suffering is comparable to that of Christ on the cross or to the Virgin Mary seeing her son killed. The ultimate suggestion is simply that Fern is more than human; her humanity has been suppressed for the sake of the guilt-ridden society surrounding her.

People on the Dixie Pike expect everyone to know Fern. When the
narrator asks who she is, he is simply told, "That's Fern," as if his strangeness to the place should have no effect upon his knowledge of Fern. Quietly sitting on her porch, head tilted forward slightly, Fern has become the subject of tales on the Dixie Pike as a tribute to her renown. One such tale has a touch of drama.

A young Negro, once, was looking at her, spellbound, from the road. A white man passing in a buggy had to flick him with his whip if he was to get by without running him over. (p. 27)

The hypnotic quality of Fern's nature is made clear. She is a wonder to behold, so much so that one risks life and limb in order to do so.

In commenting on these troubled women, Toomer remarked in a letter to Waldo Frank: "In Karintha and Fern the dominant emotion is a sadness derived from a sense of fading, of a knowledge of one's futility to check solution." In the same letter, he added: "The supreme fact of mechanical civilization is that you become part of it or get sloughed off or under." Karintha and Fern play the roles the world wants them to because it has no other place for them. People cannot accept what they are, hence they destroy them with fantasies. They are both caught in a world that has no slot for their kind of individuality and it forces them into other slots, ones that separate them from the rest of humanity.

Avey presents an enigma of a slightly different kind. The narrator cannot grasp the concept of Avey's seeming laziness, her lack of desire to get ahead in the world.

... The more I thought of it, the more I resented, yes, hell, that's what it was, her downright laziness. Sloppy indolence. There was no excuse for a healthy girl taking
life so easy. Hell! she was no better than a cow. I was certain that she was a cow when I felt an udder in a Wisconsin stock-judging class. (pp. 82-83)

Avey anticipates Faulkner's Lena in her utter ability to take life slow and easy; also, the image of the cow is used to describe both of them. Avey is determined to lead a different life from that which the narrator believes to be right for her. She refuses to care about jobs and school. She writes to him on torn paper and falls asleep when his passion is at a height. It is her indifference that he uses to set her apart from the rest of progressive humanity. It represents an insoluble problem to him and he is attracted to her because of it; he becomes a Winterbourne watching a Daisy Miller as the years pass. Chase notes this indifference in Avey in a slightly different light from the narrator.

If Avey is unconcerned and indifferent it is because she must be in order to survive. It is this quality, this refusal to compete in a competitive world that men misunderstand and resent in Avey.65

If one simply exists, perhaps he or she is somehow insulated against hurt, harm and danger. This seems to be the kind of philosophy Avey has developed. The narrator considers her an "orphan-woman" because he cannot conceive of the simple existence she prefers to the progressive world in which he is involved. She is closer to the folk culture in Georgia with her concept of living and has kindred spirits in Karintha and Fern.

Carrie K., Toomer's last look at woman, borders on a mythic conception of possibility. Supposedly, with her goodness, her compassion, she will be able to reach full potential as the picture of
woman. Turner describes her as "a youthful, pure, mother-image." There is hope for the conception. Carrie K. embraces all. She has been able to accept herself and her total cultural experience. She accepts the validity of all human experience without judgment or contempt. She loves "brother" Ralph with all his weaknesses. She feeds Father John and talks with him. Finally, she embraces the dying old man and prays for an easy death. The rising sun, streaking light on the figures of Carrie K. and Father John, suggests new hope. Carrie K. will not wither and die in the little southern town as Lewis had earlier thought she would.

The myth of woman is in creation in Cane. An established myth, the myth of the Biblical Cain, provides the dominant recurring theme and moves us into a structural consideration of the work in terms of folkloric concepts. Cain, who defies God and kills his brother Abel, is marked with the cross of a murderer and sent to wander in the world. The passage appears in Genesis.

... And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength; you shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth. ... And the Lord put a mark on Cain, lest any who came upon him should kill him.

(Genesis 4: 11, 12, 15)

No hand of man will kill Cain, but he will never find comfort, peace, or a sense of belonging. The mark on his forehead will set him apart from the rest of mankind. So too does Toomer apply the myth to the black man. The mark of Cain is upon him in the color of his skin and immediately sets him apart from the rest of mankind. Charles Scruggs
points out, however, that the myth was taken from the folklore of the
dominant culture and Toomer is using it only for aesthetic purposes.

Toomer . . . uses the myth for aesthetic purposes while he
ultimately rejects its negative implications as the lie
of the white man. Like Baldwin, he suggests that the real
mark may be white.68

This rejection of the myth is the one audible, coherent statement from
the lips of Father John. Once the old man has performed his final
mission, he can die in peace.

The myth of Cain for the black man extends to his uprootedness in
Africa. Within Cane, Toomer picks this up and follows it through the
black experience in America. Scruggs makes another comment about
Toomer's specific application of the myth.

Toomer uses Cain as a symbol of the African in a hostile
land, tilling the soil of the earth, a slave, without
enjoying her fruits. Yet strangely enough, this Cain
receives another kind of nourishment from the soil,
spiritual nourishment, which the owners of it are
denied.69

People on the Dixie Pike, which "has grown from a goat path in
Africa" (p. 18), are continually described in relation to the soil,
as we have seen in an earlier section. The soil extends its strength
to uprooted Northern blacks and offers them an identity with the basic
cultural experience. Blacks, no matter where they may be, are tied
to each other by their color and by their cultural heritage. They
cannot escape into the white world, the city, the intellect, or
themselves. The mark is there, if not physically visible, as with
Esther, then in terms of isolation.

The theme of isolation, which is only one of many in the work,
is presented in more general terms by Toomer. Men, according to
Toomer, are alone and lonely, and their souls whimper in low, sacred voices, lonely and calling out for someone to let them in, to cover them so that they will not shiver (pp. 102-103). If such a state of loneliness is the condition of man, then even more is the black man isolated and alone with his mark of Cain. The mark becomes overly oppressive only if the black man, like Kabnis, accepts the "Bible lie" in its entirety. Kabnis is marked to the point that he is completely uprooted from the traditions of the past and is unable to find a place in which to grow naturally. In contrast to Kabnis, the black man can, like Lewis and Carrie K., get a "spiritual nourishment" which inspires him to survive, not merely exist.

The soil, the color, and the experience combine in a positive expression of a curse and ultimate denial that blackness is a negative thing. The work itself is designed to sing a favorable song, to appreciate a disappearing culture and attempt to preserve a small section of it in its original form. Blacks can avoid a negative expression of the curse by embracing their blackness and their cultural origins with all of its blood, sweat, toil, and death, in all of its ugliness. But there is a beauty in the ugliness, a fact which Kabnis fails to realize when a woman shouts in tune with a tale of lynching. Negatively, he is repulsed. He doesn't realize that this is an example of release and solace, a creative, positive expression in the midst of violence and death. The black man's creative spirit and his life style are living tributes to his beauty and they, too, are themes which unite the work.

Toomer has succeeded in artistically weaving elements of the folk
culture and traditional folk beliefs into the work. Unlike Chesnutt, he makes no apology for his exploration of the culture. He sings of its beauty and in no way censors his characters for being basically black. Toomer's acceptance of his folk heritage can be seen in "Song of the Son." He is the son come to the South to embrace the last plum, the remaining elements of the original oral folk tradition.

O Negro slaves, dark purple ripened plums,
Squeezed, and bursting in the pine wood air,
Passing, before they stripped the old tree bare
One plum was saved for me, one seed becomes

An everlasting song, a singing tree,
Caroling softly souls of slavery,
What they were, and what they are to me,
Caroling softly souls of slavery. (p. 21)

The last bit of the authentic slave tradition is to be savored. The blackness of the folk, in all of its implications, is not to be denied. In fact, in their blackness lies their salvation, their means to continue existing in a hostile world. Toomer does not, like Chesnutt, superimpose the folk culture upon his black characters. The characters are their culture, roots are inseparable from products, thus there is a smoothness about Toomer that Chesnutt was never able to achieve.

But even Toomer could not long live with what he had found. He left his roots to explore Russian philosophy and the inner self and his downfall began. Although he wrote incessantly, never again was he able to get a publisher to accept plays, philosophical tracts, or poor attempts at novels. He denied his blackness and the pattern he set forth in *Cane* caught up with him. By choice uprooted from the soil, he faded into obscurity and died in a nursing home.
Notes—Chapter 2


2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.


6 Durham, p. 5.

7 Ibid., p. 6.


12 Jean Toomer, *Cane* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), p. 21. All other references are taken from this edition; page numbers are given in parenthesis following each reference.


14 James Kraft, "Jean Toomer's *Cane*," *The Markham Review*, 2 (October, 1970), 62.
15 Ibid.
16 Munson, p. 179.
19 Donald G. Ackley, "Theme and Vision in Jean Toomer's Cane," Studies In Black Literature, 1 (Spring, 1970), 49-50.
23 American Negro Folk-Songs, p. 112.
24 Ibid., pp. 126-128.
25 The Book of Negro Folklore, pp. 295-296, 301. Also American Negro Folklore, p. 147.
27 American Negro Folk-Songs, p. 119.
28 Rosenfeld, p. 227.
29 Puckett, p. 66.
30 Ibid., p. 67.
31 American Negro Folklore, p. 171.


36 Ibid.


39 Abrahams, 346.

40 This representative version appears in The Book of Negro Folklore, pp. 345-347.


43 Positively Black, p. 87.


45 Deep Down in the Jungle, p. 77.

46 The Book of Negro Folklore, pp. 89-91.


Beliefs about the moon as a source of divination in human affairs can be found in Puckett, pp. 327-328. Puckett also notes (p. 463) that bad luck can occur if one observes the full moon over the left shoulder or through tree branches.

Although not specifically related to werewolves, Puckett does record beliefs of the moon affecting physical features, as in the healing of wounds--p. 377.

If a dog howls at night, it is also considered to be a sign of death. Puckett, pp. 478-479; Brown Collection, 7, No. 5212.

Puckett, p. 486; Brown Collection, 7, Nos. 5260, 7189, 7191.

Chase, 261.


Ibid., 275.

Ibid., 276.

Quoted in Chase, 261.

Chase, 263.


Chase, 272.

69 Ibid.

70 Patricia Watkins, "Is There A Unifying Theme in Cane?" College Language Association Journal, 15 (March, 1972), 305.

71 Innes, 316.
"Flowering on the City Pavements"

_Invisible Man_ is for Ralph Ellison as _Cane_ was for Jean Toomer: the one work for which he is most well known. The book was seven years in the making and reveals the artistic talent which labored so diligently to produce it. Published in 1952, _Invisible Man_ won the National Book Award as the best American novel of that year. In 1965, a Book Week poll of two hundred authors, critics, and editors deemed it "the most distinguished single work published in the last twenty years." Earlier, in a 1955 interview, Ellison doubted that the book would be around for twenty years. "It's not an important novel," he said. "I failed of eloquence, and many of the immediate issues are rapidly fading away." But the work is still popular; apparently the "things going on in its depths" did prove of "more permanent interest" than surface ideas. Also, the rich tradition which Ellison brought to the work was instrumental in ensuring its permanence. He claimed classical 19th century American literature combined with Dostoevsky, Balzac, Hemingway, and Eliot as his literary "ancestors"; there are also echoes of Faulkner in his style. Ellison also claims to have discovered the use of folklore and folk materials from his literary "ancestors" and "relatives."

I use folklore in my work not because I am Negro, but because writers like Eliot and Joyce made me conscious
of the literary value of my folk inheritance. My cultural background, like that of most Americans, is dual (my middle name, sadly enough, is Waldo).²

And therein exists the stance from which Ellison wishes to be evaluated—as an American whose experience is a combination of "blackness" and "whiteness." How Ellison discovered his folk heritage is less important than the fact that he uses it to great advantage in the work—both his black folk heritage and a more broadly American folk heritage of which blackness is a part.

Ellison was born in 1914 in Oklahoma City and grew up in the frontier atmosphere of the 46th state to be admitted to the Union. He inherited the spirit of freedom and the belief in shaping one's destiny that is traditionally associated with the frontier. He and his young acquaintances dubbed themselves "Renaissance Men" in recognition of their almost limitless possibilities. For the sensitive, creative spirit, there was much in Oklahoma from which one's concept of Renaissance could be shaped. As Ellison himself tells us:

Thus we fabricated our own heroes and ideals catch-as-catch can, and with an outrageous and irreverent sense of freedom. Yes, and in complete disregard for the ideas of respectability or the surreal incongruity of some of our projections. Gamblers and scholars, jazz musicians and scientists, Negro cowboys and soldiers from the Spanish-American and First World Wars, movie stars and stunt men, figures from the Italian Renaissance and literature, both classical and popular, were combined with the special virtues of some local bootlegger, the eloquence of some Negro preacher, the strength and grace of some local athlete, the ruthlessness of some businessman-physician, the elegance in dress and manners of some headwaiter or hotel doorman.³

Vicarious identification with fictional characters and the sense of
chaotic adventure present in Oklahoma City had a positive effect upon Ellison, for, as he notes, "culturally play is a preparation." What he did in his early childhood was to be of value later to artistic if not real life endeavors. Ellison writes in 1964:

Looking back through the shadows upon this absurd activity I realize now that we were projecting archetypes, recreating folk figures, legendary heroes, monsters even, most of which violated all ideas of social hierarchy and order and all accepted conceptions of the hero handed down by cultural, religious and racist tradition.

In Invisible Man, Ellison explores all of these "monsters" and puts them in their cultural and social perspective.

Between 1933 and 1936, Ellison attended Tuskegee Institute in Alabama on a scholarship. He was trained as a musician and had hopes of becoming a symphony composer in an effort to master the classical tradition along with the rich jazz and blues tradition he had inherited in Oklahoma. Leaving Tuskegee in his junior year (he maintains that Invisible Man is not autobiographical), Ellison went to New York where he met Richard Wright. Wright was then editing a magazine and he convinced Ellison to submit a review. The magazine folded shortly thereafter. Ellison remained in New York, making frequent trips to Dayton, Ohio, where his mother and younger brother had re-located. He has been publishing widely in national magazines and anthologies since 1939.

In his shorter fiction (most of which appeared earlier than 1952) as well as in Invisible Man, Ellison maintains an awareness of and makes thematic uses of his folk heritage. His short stories abound with folk sermon techniques and the development of themes with the
use of folk sayings. Rhymes and folktale appear as well. For example, in "Flying Home," which appeared in 1944, a folktale emphasizing the motif of the newly arrived black man doing fancy tricks with his angel wings throughout the heavenly realm is the subject. These shorter uses of folklore helped Ellison formulate the theory he has expressed on the overall value of folklore. In a 1955 interview, Ellison elaborated upon the significance of folklore. Folklore, he says:

... offers the first drawings of any group's character. It preserves mainly those situations which have repeated themselves again and again in the history of any given group. It describes those rites, manners, customs, and so forth, which insure the good life, or destroy it; and it describes those boundaries of feeling, thought and action which that particular group has found to be the limitation of the human condition. It projects this wisdom in symbols which express the group's will to survive; it embodies those values by which the group lives and dies.

More specifically about black folklore, he comments:

Negro folklore, evolving within a larger culture which regarded it as inferior, was an especially courageous expression. It announced the Negro's willingness to trust his own experience, his own sensibilities as to the definition of reality, rather than allow his masters to define these crucial matters for him.

In a similar way, folklore is presented to the narrator in *Invisible Man*. Only when he can learn to evaluate encounters with folk-connected materials in their true perspective will he be able to "trust his own experience" and thereby know himself.

*Invisible Man*, the story of a young man seeking to define himself and assert his humanity, involves the archetypal pattern of migration for blacks, that is, from the rural South to the urban North.
movement implies more freedom to assert self and find one’s place in the world. For the narrator, Ellison treats his search as a series of gigantic reversals, debunking numerous myths associated with freedom for blacks in America simply by moving to the North. In the South, too, he uses the work to explore and negate stereotypic attitudes and myths associated with black/white relationships. The narrator is too naive to perceive the numerous lessons presented for his enlightenment in southern territory. As one critic points out, everything he will later learn has been presented to him in the South, but he must go north before the lessons can seep in. Folk materials are a major part of this teaching experience. They are crucial to the narrator’s definition of self as well as to his evaluation of his place in relationship to society. Specifically about the kinds of folklore used in the novel, Ellison comments:

Well, there are certain themes, symbols and images which are based on folk materials. For example, there is the old saying amongst Negroes: if you’re black, stay back; if you’re brown, stick around; if you’re white, you’re right. And there is the joke Negroes tell on themselves about their being so black they can’t be seen in the dark. . . . It took me a long time to learn how to adapt . . . examples of myth into my work—also ritual. . . . I know that in both The Waste Land and Ulysses ancient myth and ritual were used to give form and significance to the material; but it took me a few years to realize that the myths and rites which we find functioning in our everyday lives could be used in the same way.

These are not the only uses Ellison makes of folk materials in the novel.

In addition to folk sayings, jokes, myths and rituals, Ellison also explores legends and local character anecdotes; folktales and
folk sermons; heroes, tricksters and stereotyped folk characters and attitudes; blues and spirituals; the dozens; dreams; and superstitions. With tales and legends, Ellison, like Toomer, reveals an awareness of the oral process by which these items enter the culture as finished products. Like Chesnutt, he explores dreams and their realization, as well as their implications for the narrator in his search for identity. Characters in the folk tradition of rabbit as trickster are shown manipulating the narrator throughout the novel in adherence to the dream order to "Keep This Nigger-Boy Running." Still other characters in the folk tradition, such as Mary, aid the narrator. The narrator constantly encounters stereotyped characters and attitudes which could teach him valuable lessons if he were a little more able to see. Folk materials of this nature are not isolated; they are interwoven with important functional value for the narrator. They operate from a real life culture with real lessons for the narrator in his role as Jack-the-Bear.

On less specific levels, Ellison uses broader concepts of folk tradition to effect structural and thematic unity throughout the work. Structurally, the novel follows Vladimir Propp's universal folktale pattern as well as the Odyssean journey. Thematically, blues and spirituals reveal the underlying human condition existing in the novel. From the Prologue to the Epilogue, the blues is a way of life for the narrator. The novel is also unified thematically by parallel scapegoat rituals, such as the Battle Royal and the Harlem riot. Further, the grandfather's resounding advice of the stereotyped
accommodating black man or the masterful trickster haunts the narrator at intervals. So too do the folk-connected elements of the narrator's identity, e.g. Tarp's leg chain, Mary's bank, Clifton's Sambo doll. The narrator must deal with all of these before he can find self. Like Toomer's northern blacks, he must absorb his heritage because it cannot and will not be negated.

Ellison's exploration of folktales, local character anecdotes, dreams and folk sermons also extends from the Prologue to the Epilogue. Often the categories overlap; for example, Trueblood's tale is a dream. Also, Barbee's folk sermon tells the story of the heroic Founder. In each case, they harbor some significance that the narrator very naively passes over. The literary function is entwined with the narrator's growing up. Perhaps this is why he overlooks so much; very often he is too close to the cultural experience without really appreciating its specific values. He can't see the trees for the forest. The folktales, local character anecdotes, dreams and folk sermons all serve to define some aspect of society for the narrator, some human condition, or, they foreshadow some revelation that will occur later in the novel, and which the narrator will only be able to see in retrospect.

The first tale and the first dream occur in the Prologue. The tale, a modern version of what Twain lifted from oral tradition and recounted as "The Dandy Frightening the Squatter," is seemingly abrupt in its appearance. While listening to music in his hole, the narrator remembers:
Once I saw a prizefighter boxing a yokel. The fighter was swift and amazingly scientific. His body was one violent flow of rapid rhythmic action. He hit the yokel a hundred times while the yokel held up his arms in stunned surprise. But suddenly the yokel, rolling about in the gale of boxing gloves, struck one blow and knocked science, speed and footwork as cold as a well-digger's posterior. The smart money hit the canvas. The long shot got the nod.11

"The yokel," says the narrator, "had simply stepped inside of his opponent's sense of time." The tale serves the immediate purpose for the narrator to explain how, under the spell of a reefer, he is able to discover "a new analytical way of listening to music," which is a modern folk belief in itself. In the drug culture, there is a recurring belief that the mind is much more susceptible to the subtle nuances of a piece of music when an individual is "high." The senses become acutely attuned to the performance of each instrument in addition to the vocalists (if there are any). The individual can hear and thus feel the vibrations of creativity that somehow escape the listener who is not under the influence of drugs.12 The narrator also emphasizes an acquaintance with oral tradition in the use of a version of the folk simile, "as cold as a well-digger's ass." His substitution of "posterior" is in keeping with his character. Although he frequently encounters profanity, he very seldom uses it. Also, the word "posterior" is suggestive of the middle class college experience he undergoes, in which it might justifiably be said, a polishing-up process is a part of the progression into polite society. Even when he rejects college, words still define and reflect his experiences.
The tale is also a foreshadowing event and has its parallel scene over two hundred pages later in the El Toro bar confrontation between the narrator and Jack. On the wall are two bullfight posters. One shows a huge black bull being controlled by the matador. The other shows just the opposite, "the matador was being swept skyward on the black bull's horns" (p. 271). The conversation is centered around discipline and the narrator's lessons with Brother Hambro. "The bullfight posters," writes Thomas Vogler, "and their echo of the prizefight, are a silent comment on the discussion going on in the bar between Brother Jack—who is trying to discipline him—and the invisible man. They are also a prediction of the outcome of the contest which will be fulfilled later in the novel." Even when the end of the contest occurs, however, the narrator is forced to realize that he is neither the black bull nor the yokel. He has never been able to step inside of his opponent's sense of time. The Brotherhood remains the skillful fighter and the controlling matador. The lesson escapes the narrator until the ultimate bitter realization during the final scenes of the riot and during his hibernation.

The Prologue dream also gives the narrator a valuable clue to finding himself. The dream, set in the social conditions of slavery, contains several folk-connected elements. Under the influence of the reefer, in a trip-like dream, the narrator descends past an old woman singing a spiritual and a beautiful girl being auctioned off into slavery and into a church meeting. The sermon is on the "Blackness of Blackness," one of the themes recurring in the novel. The sermon
is a constant exchange between preacher and congregation in the call and response tradition that Barlo's vision evokes in Cane.

Retracing his steps, the narrator encounters the old black singer of spirituals. She is mourning the death of the white father of her three sons, but the sons are upstairs laughing. In a conversational exchange with her, the narrator inquires into the nature of freedom and the woman asks to be left alone. One of the sons beats the narrator for making his mother cry. "But how?" the narrator asks. "Askin' her them questions, that's how. Git outa here and stay, and next time you got questions like that, ask yourself!" (p. 10--my emphasis). It will be a long time before the narrator asks himself the right questions, but even here, he is offered a means to defining himself. As long as he accepts other people's definitions of his humanity, and waits for other people to tell him what he wants out of life, he will always be a stringless puppet, a Sambo doll ready for any manipulation.

This dream/trip and its significance can be tied to the Trueblood dream/tale. Trueblood, who is described as a singer of those "primitive spirituals," a peasant, is one of the blacks so close to the slave past that the "progressive" blacks at the college look down upon them. Trueblood is also recognized as a good storyteller, one who tells "the old stories with a sense of humor and a magic that made them come alive" (p. 36). Although Trueblood does not tell one of "the old stories," his tale of incest is a masterful tribute to his artistry as a storyteller. It is dramatic, in dialect,
imitative of the conversation involved, embellished in terms of de-
tail and imagery, allegorical and at the same time almost too real.
The narrator recounts listening somewhere between "humiliation and
fascination" to the tale of Trueblood impregnating his own daughter.

The tale of incest also puts Trueblood in the broader-than-black
tradition of folk culture that Ellison is exploring in the novel.
According to Clyde Kluckhohn, incest is one of the recurrent themes
found in the myths of the world; it occurs in tales that have been
collected from various parts of the world and is a theme in myths
of creation as well as hero tales. By allowing Trueblood, a black
raconteur, to relate a tale involving a universal theme, Ellison
effectively combines the dual traditions he claims as his heritage.

The tale's significance comes after the horror of incest. True-
blood wanders around until one night he sings himself into a recogni-
tion of his manhood in spite of the horror, and into accepting what
he has done. \textquotedblleft... I makes up my mind," says Trueblood, \textquotedblleft that I
ain't nobody but myself and ain't nothin' I can do but let whatever
is gonna happen, happen\textquotedblright{} (p. 51—my emphasis). The emphasized state-
ment is what the narrator misses. He can only see a degrading old
black peasant with a running sore on his cheek exposing his shame
before the white folks. The narrator will have to get to Harlem
before he is cognizant of the denial of self that is involved in
dying for somebody else's absurdity and before he begins to discover
\textquotedblleft I yam what I am\textquotedblright{} (p. 201). It is only after he is in the coal
cellar that he fully comes to grips with what it means to be one's
self, and if a value judgment can be placed upon it, the process by
which he finally comes to realize this is far more destructive than Trueblood getting a child by his daughter. But the wisdom of the folk has only become such through suffering and the narrator cannot be told about suffering; he must experience it.

The folk sermon relating the story of the Founder is another occasion upon which a bit of insight should come before the narrator, but he is not yet ready to grasp it. Homer A. Barbee rivals Trueblood in his ability to effect his audience with a story. In Barbee's story, the sermon technique in the tradition of the folk, such as James Weldon Johnson recorded in *God's Trombones*, comes through. Barbee is a master technician in terms of drawing upon a story, part legend, part truth, and delivering it to his audience. To a lesser degree than the minister in the Prologue, he evokes verbal exchange in the call and response tradition. On an emotional level, however, he is completely one with his audience; he makes them feel the Founder's wound as he relates the attempted assassination. He makes them relive the grief and sorrow called forth by the Founder's death. He also makes them see the great vision the Founder had of "inspiring a humble but fast-rising people" (p. 93). He presents the goodness of the South and association with benevolent whites only to fall blindly as he returns to his seat. The narrator notes in a simple sentence suggestive of impact that "Homer A. Barbee was blind" (p. 103). Minus the impact, however, it simply becomes a literal observation for the narrator. He refuses to look for any underlying meaning, namely that Barbee cannot see the goodness he espouses. Nor has the
narrator seen any justification for the same humble position expressed in his speech at the smoker. He remains unbelievably innocent and unanalytical in any positive sense.

The last series of stories coming from the folk in the novel force the narrator to face the fact that his creative political energy has gone awry as far as the riot is concerned. The riot is in full swing and nobody really knows how it started, but several persons offer an explanation. The occasion fits what Tamotsu Shibutani describes as an "ambiguous situation," one ripe for the development of rumors. There is an "unsatisfied need" for information and there is a collective attempt to solve the problem. Two other elements that Shibutani considers conducive to the development of rumors—tension and social unrest—are also present.

This is the primary instance in which Ellison reveals an awareness of the process by which items of folklore enter the culture as finished products. The rumors are orally transmitted by various persons. Some reveal themselves as active tradition bearers by altering the items as they are on their way to stabilization in some form. The intermediate stages of transmission illustrate the changes and embellishments in the story explaining how the riot started and Ellison allows the reader to see the folk mind in the process of creation.

In answer to how the riot started, Scofield, the rioter who befriends the narrator, responds: "Damn if I know, man. A cop shot a woman or something" (p. 408). Another man joins in: "Hell, that wasn't what started it," he said. "It was that fellow, what's his
The narrator immediately assumes that he is talking about Tod Clifton, even though the informant can't remember the name (the informant might even be referring to the narrator himself and his speech at Tod's funeral). The narrator is quietly elated and perhaps for this particular rioter, Clifton is the cause. Not so for Scofield and others, and the rumors continue.

"Aw man, don't tell me," Scofield said. "Didn't I see it with my own eyes? About eight o'clock down on Lenox and 123rd this paddy slapped a kid for grabbing a Baby Ruth and the kid's mama took it up and then the paddy slapped her and that's when hell broke loose."

"You were there?" I said.

"Same's I'm here. Some fellow said the kid made the paddy mad by grabbing a candy named after a white woman." (p. 408)

The "or something" of the first statement has become an eye witness account, a memorate, once Scofield has been challenged. He has particularized the incident as to street name and number as well as brand name of the candy. The story has already, in a matter of seconds, changed from shooting to slapping and a child has been added. It is interesting to note that one of Shibutani's case studies of situations where rumors develop also pertains to a race riot in Harlem, one that occurred in 1935. In it also, a child, a woman and the police were involved in an alleged beating and death which led to the riot. As more "truthful" accounts are added to the present riot, the narrator will have to do more soul searching as to his role in the riot and the irrelevance of what he thought was organized rebellion from the tension created by Clifton's death.

A local legend appears to be in the making. The rumors are not
verifiable, but they have the makings of an eventual "truth." Some standard explanation will arise as to the initiation of the riot and will be accepted as true by the inhabitants of Harlem. Shibutani points out that rumors do not always develop into legends but when they do, the situation has remained ambiguous and an explanation has been offered that tends to support the interests of the persons involved. Treatment of blacks by the police and general black/white relationships would surely support the interest of Harlemites.

After Scofield's account, another emerges. Oral tradition is at work as the informant relates what he heard.

'Damn if that's the way I heard it,' another man said.
'When I come up they said a white woman set it off by trying to take a black gal's man.' . . .
'It was a white gal, all right, but that wasn't the way it was. She was drunk'em another voice said. (p. 408)

The narrator immediately thinks of Sybil and rules her out as initiator because the riot was already in process when he left her in the care of the cab driver (also, he doesn't have a girl). Still the speculation continues:

'You wahn know who started it?' a man holding a pair of binoculars called from the window of a pawnshop.
'You wahn really to know?'
'Sure,' I said.
'Well, you don't need to go no further. It was started by that great leader, Ras the Destroyer!' (pp. 408-409)

The West Indian dialect reveals that this particular informant is looking for a hero, hence Ras gets the credit and the informant expresses the wish fulfillment aspect of rumor that Shibutani discusses. But finally, the initiation of the riot is grounded in black superstition.
'Hell, man, it just exploded. These is dog days,' he said. 'Dog days?' 'Sho, this hot weather.' (p. 409)

Dog days, from July third to August eleventh, are considered the most unlucky days of the year (Brown Collection, VII, 6009). The weather is oppressively hot and has a negative effect on plant and animal life. This heat is attributed with causing the riot. It is an intangible thing, linked to tension and restlessness, when things just explode. Tod Clifton's death and the narrator are pushed into the background from the people's point of view. What they judge as a good thing finally happens and they want it "to last a while."

The final stories about Ras appear in the form of local-character anecdotes. Such stories emphasize character and personality traits and are considered to be true by the local populace. Like rumors, they may or may not grow into full fledged legends. An anecdote of Ras turned Destroyer supplies another bit of insight before the narrator falls through the manhole into the cellar. With Ras's men pursuing him after the jaw-locking spear incident, the narrator seeks refuge behind a row of iron fences backed by low hedges. Two rioters pass and stop near the hedge to exchange observations of the riot. Their conversation centers on Ras the Destroyer. In the first anecdote the seriousness of Ras's purpose is undercut by his activities as well as by the description of his Abyssinian garb.

'Hell, yes, man, he had him a big black hoss and a fur cap and some kind of old lion skin or something over his shoulders and he was raising hell. Goddam if he wasn't a sight, riding up and down on this ole hoss, you know, one of the kind that pulls vegetable wagons, and he got
him a cowboy saddle and some big spurs. 'Hell, yes! Riding up and down the block yelling, "Destroy 'em! Drive 'em out! I, Ras, commands you." You get that, man,' he said, "I, Ras, commands you—to destroy them to the last piece of rotten fish!" And 'bout that time some joker with a big ole Georgia voice sticks his head out the window and yells, "Ride 'em, cowboy. Give 'em hell and bananas." And man, that crazy sonofabitch up there on that hoss looking like death eating a sandwich, he reaches down and comes up with a forty-five and starts blazing up at that window—and man, talk about cutting out! In a second wasn't nobody left but ole Ras up there on that hoss with that lion skin stretched straight out behind him. Crazy, man. Everybody else trying to git some loot and him and his boys out for blood." (pp. 424-425)

The costume is very incongruous to the Harlem of this period and the accounts of it as well as Ras's actions are outrageously funny. A fur cap, a lion skin, a cowboy saddle and spurs, and a horse that pulls a vegetable wagon do not make a hero or a very striking leader. The image of Ras as "death eating a sandwich" is also less than admirable, but it has the ring of the folk. A similar folk simile of derision appears in Positively Black (p. 40): "You look like death standing on a street corner eating lifesavers." The descriptions and Ras's actions are the subject of humor because they verge on the actions of a transplanted madman. There is an element of unreality in the humorous depiction.

Humor is also the major element of the second anecdote one of the rioters relates of Ras's encounter with the mounted police (pp. 425-426). The image is the absurd one of Ras charging with his spear into the midst of several mounted policemen. The anecdote is greatly exaggerated and even the other rioter is reluctant to believe his friend's imaginative account, but it is nonetheless funny. The
narrator wants to laugh, but he realizes Ras is not only funny, but
dangerous as well. He becomes aware of just how fatal the situation
is.

Why did they make it seem funny, only funny? I thought
And yet knowing that it was. It was funny and dangerous
and sad. Jack had seen it, or had stumbled upon it and
used it to prepare a sacrifice. And I had been used as
a tool. (p. 426)

The anecdote serves the purpose of getting the narrator's head a little
more in the right place. It is a further step in seeing rioters, Ras,
and himself as toys of the Brotherhood because he trusted someone else's
sense of history. With recognition comes responsibility for violence,
death, looting, and even Ras. The narrator must analyze the functional
value of the anecdote as it relates to him. Then, he can proceed more
correctly towards a definition of self and the role one must define
for one's self.

The tales, anecdotes, the dreams and the legend all have functional
value for appearing in the novel. Each one offers a definite bit of
information that the narrator must absorb before he can become visible.
Ellison uses folk materials for entertainment, but they are also used
as teaching devices within the context of the novel's movement and the
narrator's progression from ignorance to enlightenment, from symbolic
darkness to symbolic light, from invisibility to visibility.

There are also several characters in the folk tradition who appear
in the novel. They range from the accommodating black grandfather to
two types of trickster figures represented by Rinehart, Brockway and
others to the folk hero personified in the Founder. They either haunt
the narrator, help him, or join in the collective effort to "Keep This
Nigger-Boy Running." They are another set of forces he must analyze, come to grips with, and put in their proper perspective. It is when the narrator comes into contact with trickster figures that his role as Jack-the-Bear becomes dominant. Not only is he Jack-the-Bear because he is in a state of hibernation, but because tricksters in the guise of the rabbit keep overpowering him.

The grandfather gives the narrator his first glimpse into the thin line drawn between appearance and reality. He has worn a mask of accommodation for years, what Stanley Edgar Hyman calls the "darky" or "coon" mask of stupidity worn by an intelligent black person—the "smart-man-playing-dumb routine." Because the mask is a conscious guise, the wearer assumes the proportions of a folk character, the trickster. "... he is an authentic figure of folk tale, in fact the major figure of Negro folktale." In such black folktales, this figure is personified as Brer Rabbit or John in the Marster/John cycle of tales. Of Brer Rabbit and John, Hyman writes:

Behind both figures in American Negro tales there is the prototype of the West African trickster hero of so many cycles: Spider on the Gold Coast, Legba the creator god's son in Dahomey, Rabbit or Tortoise elsewhere. Like other trickster heroes in other folklores, he is not quite animal, man, or god, but partakes of all three natures.

The narrator must deal with the enigmatic advice given by his dying grandfather for dealing with whites: "I want you to overcome 'em with yeses, undermine 'em with grins, agree 'em to death and destruction, let 'em swoller you till they vomit or bust wide open" (pp. 13-14). The grandfather offers what he considers to be the only means of survival in a predominantly white and hostile world, that is,
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donning a conscious mask in which one controls his own destiny by playing the game to suit one’s self. If this means being a rabbit, then the narrator will have to adopt the mask. "The Rabbit," writes Eleanor Wilner, "is the hidden radical, the subversive figure, in his past, a figure of whom his grandfather is the first personification." If one must be a hidden radical in order to assert one’s humanity, then such should be the case. Elaborating on the grandfather’s advice, Wilner adds:

Here is the first statement of the theme which runs through the book, “the invisible black thread” of dignity and identity which runs unseen out of a past where death was the price of black defiance, and where intelligent pride wore the disguise of compliance that secretly scorned and thereby often tricked, the power that oppressed it. If one must be a hidden radical in order to assert one’s humanity, then such should be the case. Elaborating on the grandfather’s advice, Wilner adds:

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The problem with the narrator is that he plays the role without the mask, hence there is no dignity in it and instead of having the power to trick, he himself is tricked. When he does don the mask (after Clifton’s death) it is too late and his mask becomes the "straight" role the Brotherhood wants him to play in leading black Harlemites into a bloody riot.

More covert tricksters in the guise of the rabbit appear in the characters of Trueblood, Bledsoe, Brockway, Peter Wheatstraw and Brother Jack. Floyd Horowitz includes Trueblood and Wheatstraw in this category because of images used to describe them and because of references to "The Tar Baby" story in connection with them. He is also conscious of Peter (Peter Rabbit) as Wheatstraw’s first name. Horowitz does not classify Bledsoe as a rabbit trickster when obviously he is one of the most powerful.
Trueblood's role as a trickster can be understood by interpreting his ability to capitalize on his experience by telling his story and being rewarded for it. He also plays the role of the yokel in "The Arkansas Traveler," a near trickster role, when Norton asks him about having committed incest.26

'You have looked upon chaos and are not destroyed!'
'No suh! I feels all right.'
'You do? You feel no inner turmoil, no need to cast out the offending eye?'
'Suh?'
'Answer me!' 'I'm all right, suh,' Trueblood said uneasily. 'My eyes is all right too. And when I feels po'ly in my gut I takes a little soda and it goes away.' (p. 40)

Norton's stilted diction contrasted with Trueblood's folk speech represent one of the technical achievements of "The Arkansas Traveler" motif. Trueblood pretends not to understand Norton when he has been too bombarded with whites lately not to understand what Norton is referring to.

Still, Horowitz maintains that Trueblood is a rabbit trickster in addition to playing the part of backwoods yokel. He points to Trueblood making "high, plaintively animal sounds" (p. 37) when singing his spirituals. Also, during the dream, Trueblood describes the darkness as "Black as the middle of a bucket of tar" (p. 42), thereby evoking the tar baby story. If Trueblood is a rabbit trickster, the trickery has to do with morals. Trueblood then fools the narrator as bear by tricking him into listening to the tale along with Norton and getting $100 for faulty morals when the morally upright narrator simply gets humiliated, angry, and kicked out of school.
This view, however, is rather simplistic because it absolves both Norton and Bledsoe of any responsibility in the matter as well as the narrator in terms of his naiveté. Also, it introduces the element of morality, which never appears in true trickster tales. Further, there is an element of ambiguity about Trueblood that doesn't really exist with true tricksters. The reader is at times unable to determine if Trueblood is always aware of what actually happens to him. This brings in an element of chance or fate which is absent with most trickster tales. The trickster is generally thoroughly in control of the situations in which he is involved, which is the case with Bledsoe, Wheatstraw, Brockway, and Brother Jack.

A more striking trickster than Trueblood in the guise of rabbit fooling bear is A. Hebert Bledsoe. Bledsoe consents to give the narrator a chance to redeem himself in New York and gives him the seven letters continuing the "Keep This Nigger-Boy Running" theme. The motif of the rabbit sending the bear out of his presence to effect the trick occurs here. But not only does Bledsoe trick the narrator; he also uses trickery with the white power structure in which he operates. He dons the mask that Hyman has described. "I'm big and black and I say 'Yes, suh' as loudly as any burrhead when it's convenient, but I'm still the king here down here. I don't care how much it appears otherwise" (p. 109). In order to remain king, Bledsoe sends the narrator on a hopeless running mission that leads nowhere. Nor is Bledsoe completely to blame; the narrator consents to
go (so too is the element of consent important in oral tradition; the rabbit never forces any of his adversaries to their downfalls. The contests are a match of brain power, not brawn.). In fact, he concludes that Dr. Bledsoe is right and he should be punished for his action with Norton. The trickery must still be another learning experience for him.

Arriving in New York, the narrator meets a friendly rabbit trickster in the guise of Peter Wheatstraw. He knows how to escape the McGregors, the bears of the world. He tells the narrator, "Man, this Harlem ain't nothing but a bear's den" (p. 133), thereby warning him of what to expect from the city, the North, and the white world. Wheatstraw advocates the trickster role by informing the narrator that "all it takes to get along in this here man's town is a little shit, grit, and mother wit" (p. 134). As a rabbit, he can survive in the bear's den by manipulating it to suit his purposes. "Damn," he says, "if I'm-a let 'em run me into my grave" (p. 133). His warning to the narrator is of no use, however, because the bear must always be tricked.28 When Peter mentions the bear den, the narrator tries to think of some reply, but only remembers "Jack the rabbit, Jack the bear," a prefiguration of his hospital condition as well as his ultimate confrontation with Brother Jack.

The lively little man of the blueprints is also a folk character in the tradition of the man of words. The primary attributes of the man of words are the constant use of the first person pronouns, the strong interaction between performer and audience, the identification of the performer with the item being performed, and the development
of performance technique in a contest situation. The importance of such verbal contests in the black folk culture has long been recognized. The black child, especially the male, learns at a very early age that there is a power in the mastery of words. By learning the rules of the games in which such mastery can be channeled, he finds an acceptable outlet for what might otherwise become aggressive tendencies. In a restrictive society, he learns of the ways in which he can be aggressive without repercussions. Thus the significance of playing the dozens is emphasized. The child can control his opponent by out-fencing him with words, by thinking of greater insults to the opponent's mother than can be turned back on his own mother. Growing older, he learns of the persuasive power of words in developing a "line" and attracting the opposite sex. For the adult black male, who exhibits less tendency to "playing the dozens," the power of words in the sexual battle is of major importance. Still, he continues verbal contests of a non-sexual nature. Insult sessions, lie swapping or tale telling sessions—all can be forms of verbal dexterity in which one person tries to best his opponent by "putting him down" in a friendly exchange ("playing the dozens" is less friendly). Rhyme is a major part of this verbal dexterity.

Peter tries to provoke the narrator into a contest situation by asking him if he's got the dog. The narrator plays the "Arkansas Traveler" yokel by pretending he doesn't understand the reference. He feels uncomfortable in the face of this attempt to make him acknowledge his country background. When this attempt at contest is aborted by the narrator's reluctance to respond, Peter tries again near the end
of their conversation. As to "shit, grit and mother-wit," Peter maintains that he "was bawn with all three."

"In fact, I'm seventh son of a seventh son bawn with a caul over both eyes and raised on black cat bones, high John the Conqueror and greasy greens," he spieled with twinkling eyes, his lips working rapidly. "You dig me, daddy?"

"You're going too fast," I said, beginning to laugh.

"Okay, I'm slowing down. I'll verse you but I won't curse you--My name is Peter Wheatstraw, I'm the Devil's only son-in-law, so roll 'em! You a southern boy, ain't you?" he said, his head to one side like a bear's.

"Yes," I said.

"Well, git with it! My name's Blue and I'm coming at you with a pitchfork, Fe Fi Fo Fum. Who wants to shoot the Devil once, Lord God Stingeroy!"

He had me grinning despite myself. I liked his words though I didn't know the answer. I'd known the stuff from childhood, but had forgotten it; had learned it back of school...

"You diggin' me, daddy?" he laughed. "Haw, but look me up sometimes, I'm a piano player and a rounder, a whiskey drinker and a pavement pounder. I'll teach you some good bad habits. You'll need 'em. Good luck," he said. (p. 134)

The preceding not only establishes Peter as a man of words, but also as a true representative of black oral tradition. The seventh son of any family is reputed to be able to see ghosts or to make good doctors (Puckett, p. 138). Being born with a caul over the eyes ensures this ghost seeing ability (Puckett, p. 137). Black cat bones are often used in black conjurations and one such bone has the power to make the owner invisible. High John the Conqueror is a legendary figure of slavery, a black hero (see The Book of Negro Folklore, pp. 93-105) as well as the name for the most powerful conjuring herb, the "king root of the forest" (Puckett, p. 299). Association with the devil is also the source of some special power. Blues lyrics emphasizing this are the following.
Want to set this world on fire, that is my mad desire,
I'm the devil in disguise, got murder in my eyes.32

Also:

Me and the devil was walkin' side by side, (twice)
An' I'm goin' to beat my woman until I get satisfied.33

Thus Peter Wheatstraw is entrenched in the tradition which the narrator only vaguely recalls.

It is also this association with the devil which links Peter's identity to the oral tradition which produced the following song.

I am Peetie Wheet Straw, the high sheriff of hell,
I am Peetie Wheet Straw, the high sheriff of hell,
And when I lock you up, baby, you're locked in a dungeon cell.

I am Peetie Wheet Straw, the devil's son-in-law,
I am Peetie Wheet Straw, the devil's son-in-law,
The woman I married, old Satan was her paw . . .34

This song was probably recorded earlier than the time of collection because the informant forgets the third verse. Longini points out that the name is a pseudonym for a blues singer, which indicates masking or performing, both of which define Ellison's Wheatstraw. Ellison frequently discusses his closeness to jazz and blues traditions from the days of Oklahoma in Shadow and Act. Perhaps he even heard this particular song performed. By allowing the blueprint man to identify himself in such a way, Ellison further intensifies his association with the oral culture and performing. In fact, the blueprint man is such a performer that he has fooled critics about his name for years.

The narrator can't respond, but he can appreciate the man's talent. Still, he doesn't know if it is "pride or disgust" that suddenly flashes over him. Wheatstraw offers the narrator a composite
encounter with some of the major aspects of black folk culture. He is a singer of the blues, a man of words who exhibits a great propensity to rhyme and a tradition bearer of black superstitions, especially those concerning conjuration. Symbolically too, he brings in the black folktale tradition. Meeting Wheatstraw at the onset of his Harlem adventures, the narrator gets one last look at his beginnings. Symbolically, his feelings are mixed towards Wheatstraw as they are about his beginnings in general. Again, as with the vet’s advice, he is given something outright that he refuses to accept until several months later. It is his fate to continually meet the conclusions of his adventures before he begins them, but again, personal experience for the narrator is the only justifiable truth. At this point, he is simply not yet ready to fully accept his folk heritage or any bits of wisdom that go along with it.

The fourth rabbit trickster the narrator encounters is Lucius Brockway. Brockway is described in terms of "pine" and a "high-pitched" Negro voice, both reminiscent of the Tar Baby. Evoking more images of Brer Rabbit, he is considered "small" and "wiry" with "cottony white hair" (p. 157). "He was barely five feet tall, his overalls looking now as though he had been dipped in pitch" (p. 157), a description which brings an image of Tar Baby to the narrator’s mind (p. 173).

Brockway uses his mother-wit to maximum advantage in expelling the bear from his den. He literally blows the narrator out of the basement with one of the tricky steam machines. In contrast to Wheatstraw and Bledsoe, Brockway is shown in his laughing guise after he plays the
trick. "I tole 'em these here young Nineteen-Hundred boys ain't no good for the job. They ain't got the nerves" (p. 175). The rabbit protects what is his and like Brer Rabbit, who gets innocent parties punished for some imaginary crime, he feels no remorse for his action. Also like Brer Rabbit in such a story as "Who Ate Up The Butter," Brockway is on the scene to comment on the efficiency with which the punishment has been carried out. This incident gives the narrator a first instructive example of what the bear den of Harlem can do. It owes him nothing. In this instance, it is even more overtly hostile than the environment he left in the South. Combined with the Emerson letter discovery incident, the trickery is designed to destroy his illusions of northern freedom for blacks.

Jack the rabbit is the biggest, most persistent rabbit of all. He is "Brer Jack the Communist, alias Buckeye the one-eyed international hopper." He pursues the bear until he consents to play his game. Once the narrator joins the Brotherhood, he is tricked from beginning to end. Ellison is not anti-trickster because the narrator refuses to question, analyze or try to see things as they are. Hence he must learn his most valuable lesson through this tricking experience.

The narrator is always able to see some aspect of what is going on around him, but he never carries these analogies far enough. For example, he notes that Brother Jack's movements are "those of a lively small animal" (p. 219), but because he has not accepted his folk heritage, he cannot unearth any implications directly related to himself. He therefore equates the small, lively animal with a dog, a fyce. He also notices that as Brother Jack is returning with the cheesecake
and coffee he walks with a "rapid, rolling, bouncy, heel-and-toey step" (p. 219), again evoking images of the movement of Brer Rabbit. He thinks there is something unreal about Jack, but passes it off—"an idea which I dismissed immediately, since there was a quality of unreality over the whole afternoon"—and thereby sets himself up to be tricked. He doesn't trust his own judgment and appearance becomes reality, the mask becomes the wearer.

Jack gets his claws into the bear and, as Peter Wheatstraw said he would do one day, turns him "every way but loose." The rabbit programs the bear to direct his political energies to the goals of international propaganda. If in the process Harlemites are destroyed, well too bad, because Brer Rabbit has no conscience; achieving his goals is his only concern, the ends more than justify the means. If an unsuspecting bear helps things along, it simply makes the rabbit's task easier. The one time the bear tries to think for himself, by organizing Tod Clifton's funeral, he simply intensifies the tension that the Brotherhood refuses to channel into constructive patterns and which leads indirectly to the riot. Even when the narrator tries to follow his grandfather's advice and "undermine 'em with yeses," again he only succeeds in following the pattern that the rabbit has outlined for him in achieving his own purposes.

Retiring to his hole in a state of hibernation, Jack-the-Bear further tries to sort out the bits of knowledge that started seeping into his consciousness during the riot. But he gets the ultimate shock. The rabbit who has been leading him on affirms his ability
to control, to manipulate, to "Keep This Nigger-Boy Running" in the poison pen letter which he finally recognizes as Jack's handwriting. By advising caution to the ambitious young Brother, Jack has succeeded in inspiring him to be the best of the best, to prove his worth to the Brotherhood by denying his individuality. Thinking the note was sent by someone jealous of his work, the narrator has worked all the more to do the right things in the eyes of the Brotherhood. By doing so, he accomplishes Jack's goals all along the way. The knowledge of what has happened is overwhelming: "That he or anyone at that late date, could have named me and set me running with one and the same stroke of the pen was too much" (p. 429). The narrator beats himself unconscious against the walls of the cellar. He wakes up, however, to discover that the bear is finally in his natural habitat. He has moved from a rural copse to a cosmopolitan forest. If he feels no fantastic sense of dominion in his den, at least he is temporarily safe from the wily tricks of Brer Rabbit and his numerous relatives.

The appropriation of black trickster traits to a white character again reflects Ellison's use of the dual traditions he has inherited. Such a mingling of folk cultures has been seen earlier in Trueblood's tale of incest. Kluckhohn reports that in his examination of mythic themes, none of the incest tales came from "Negro Africa." Although there are tricksters in non-black cultures, the rabbit/bear analogy is specifically black and Ellison gives these traits to Brother Jack. Just as Trueblood's tale makes him more universal, the trickster traits tend to make Brother Jack more black. Not in color, of course.
but in terms of thematic concerns of the Brotherhood in relation to blacks or the common man approach. It is thus appropriate that he wear a mask commonly associated with blacks in fooling his prize orator, who happens to be the narrator. He uses a black disguise to trick blacks and ironically, it appears authentic to the narrator, which again reflects his looking through instead of at the black folk culture.

The cagy rabbits are not alone in their appearance from folk tradition. Con men and hero figures join them. B. F. (Proteus Bliss according to Ellison) Rinehart is a combination of trickster, con man, and hero. In an essay in which he responded to Hyman's earlier discussion, Ellison describes Rinehart in the tradition of Hyman's comment on the trickster. 38

He is a cunning man who wins the admiration of those who admire skulduggery and knowhow; an American virtuoso of identity who thrives on chaos and swift change; he is greedy, in that his masquerade is motivated by money as well as by the sheer bliss of impersonation; he is godlike, in that he brings new techniques—electric guitars, etc.—to the service of God, and in that there are many men in his image while he is himself unseen; he is phallic in his role of 'lover'; as a numbers runner he is a bringer of manna and a worker of miracles, in that he transforms (for winners, of course) pennies into dollars, and thus he feeds (and feeds on) the poor. 39

Although Ellison points these things out, he is cautious about such "myth-mongering criticism" lest it dissolve fiction into anthropology. Ellison uses Rinehart as a personification of chaos. Though he later learned that "Rinehart" was the Harvard call to riot, he denies using this as a source of the name. 40 It is significant, however, that the Harlem riot, a state of chaos, occurs not too long after Rinehart enters
Rinehart as a confidence man is in the tradition of Melville’s Confidence Man and Twain’s Duke and Dauphin. Daniel Hoffman points out that the confidence man is “an amalgam of America’s popular comic figures: the sly, the dupe-bilking Yankee and the frontier sharper.” The characters from oral tradition reach a point of sophistication in Melville’s Confidence Man, Twain’s Duke and Dauphin as well as in Ellison’s Rinehart. They are all masters of disguise. Nothing is sacred to them—pain, religion, pleasure—all are equally exploited. The Confidence Man swindles a consumptive miser of more than a hundred dollars; the Duke and Dauphin make off with the collection from a church; and Rinehart’s female acquaintances pay for his affection. Rinehart, like his predecessors, can alter reality at will. He shows the narrator the almost limitless possibilities for such a role. The narrator must reject Rinehart, however, because as a runner, gambler, briber, lover, and preacher (a role which both Melville and Twain characters capitalize on), the real Rinehart is lost. Appearance and reality, truth and illusions are all merged. One cannot find one’s self under such circumstances.

Nonetheless, in Afro-American folk tradition, it is just this mastery of chaos that would make Rinehart a hero in the guise of the cat. This figure in black folk culture is the male who has thoroughly mastered the man of words tradition in terms of the power of persuasion. He achieves his goals not with physical strength but with wit and indirection. The cat on the urban scene usually possesses a striking
wardrobe and a fabulous car, both of which Rinehart is noted for. He is usually the epitome of "coolness." Possessing these characteristics, Rinehart has learned to manipulate the hostile city environment to his own advantage. The narrator, a college bred character, must reject Rinehart in his search for self, but for most of the people who know him, Rinehart is an "all right dude." He's got a Cadillac, money, clothes, women and influence with the police, all of which are valued by urban blacks. The cat figure implies achieving one's purposes through indirection, persuasion, and Rinehart has these attributes. But he can become the badman, the man of force, at any moment. When friends of Rinehart come out with guns to rescue the narrator from the police, they realize he is not Rinehart. One comments:

'. . . don't let nobody make you act like Rinehart. You got to have a smooth tongue, a heartless heart and be ready to do anything.' (p. 372)

The "smooth tongue" characterizes the cat and the "heartless heart" emphasizes how easily Rinehart can assume the guise of the badman. Yet these men admire Rinehart. In his own way, he has "made it" in the white man's world and ability to survive is a major consideration for hero status to blacks, especially to those in an urban environment.

This same type of admiration exists for the badmen of black oral tradition. Stackalee is considered a great guy because he masters chaos so effectively. The extent to which blacks identify with such characters can be seen in what Roger Abrahams refers to as the "Intrusive I." Often in relating narratives of a folk hero of an aggressive, antisocial, destructive nature, the narrator will occasionally become one with the hero--Stackalee's or the Great MacDaddy's actions become those of the
narrator. An example of the badman's action combined with the narrator's personal identification occurs in the following version of Stackolee. He is speaking to the bartender.

I said, 'Raise, motherfucker, do you know who I am?'
He said, 'Frankly, motherfucker, I just don't give a damn.'
I knewed right then that chickenshit was dead,
I threwed a thirty-eight shell through his motherfucking head.

When Benny Long enters and asks who had the nerve to shoot his brother, the Stackolee/narrator answers:

I jumped up and screamed, 'Me, motherfucker, put your mind at ease.
I'm known as a bad motherfucker called Stackolee.'

(Deep Down in the Jungle, pp. 136-137)

Surely the "heartless heart" aspect comes out in these quoted sections. Also, the admiration/identification aspect is inherent in the "Intrusive I." Hence what is suggested of Rinehart as an admirable badman hero has its parallels in the black folk tradition.

The Founder is a hero in the tradition of Arsitotle, Moses, and Christ. The tale of the Founder, which is part truth, is also part myth, part legend, wishful thinking, fantasy, etc. The Founder's vision, his role in relation to blacks, is given cosmic significance. The very constellations are in tune to the sufferings and death of the Founder.

Initially, the Founder is "a humble prophet, lowly like the humble carpenter of Nazareth" (p. 92), a "princely personality" who has been chosen, like Moses, to lead his people out of the Egypt of oppression and ignorance, into the Canaan of enlightenment and education. But there is a threat to the chosen one in his infancy. Just
as Pharaoh tried to kill all Jewish babies at Moses' birth for fear that one would destroy him, the Founder's Pharaoh emerges in the person of an "insane cousin" who splashed the babe with lye. Nine days he lay in a deathlike coma, then suddenly "miraculously recovered" as Moses was miraculously saved by the Pharaoh's own sister. "You might say," recounts Barbee, "that it was as though he had risen from the dead or been reborn" (p. 92), a god-like act indeed.

The Founder is called "godly," a "black Aristotle," "the great spirit," "the great sun," "the leader," as well as the more common "the Founder," all of which set him apart as some special anointed creature. The refusal to name the Founder enhances the esteem of this mysterious, god-like helper who came with his Mosean mission.

"You have heard his name from your parents, for it was he who led them to the path, guiding them like a great captain; like that great pilot of ancient times who led his people safe and unharmed across the bottom of the blood-red sea. And your parents followed this remarkable man across the black sea of prejudice, safely out of the land of ignorance, through the storms of fear and anger, shouting, LET MY PEOPLE GO! when it was necessary, whispering it during those times when whispering was wisest. And he was heard." (p. 93)

This Moses was not without his enemies or his divine friends. Preceding an assassination attempt, one such friend offered assistance to the Founder.

"Some say he was a Greek. Some a Mongolian. Others a mulatto—and others still, a simple white man of God. . . and we must not rule out the possibility of an emissary direct from above—" (p. 94)

It is of interest to point out the domain of legend over this part of the story. Recognizing the influence of oral tradition, Barbee recounts
the possibilities of what some people have said. The speculation goes from the very earthy Greek to a possibility of divine intervention.

The Founder continued on his way in spite of the emissary's warning and was shot under cover of darkness. Another emissary aids in the guise of a demented black man well versed in the matters of "germology and scabology." At this point in the narrative Barbee intensifies the identification between audience and Founder. "For he [the demented black man] shaved our skull, and cleaned our wound and bound it neat with bandages stolen from the home of an unsuspecting leader of the mob..." (p. 9—my emphasis). Barbee's role as a ritual priest is to keep before the students the painful details of the Founder's life. By so doing, the students are inspired to greater heights of appreciation and imitation, and the effect is not lost upon the narrator. He has hopes of continuing in the tradition of the Founder and Bledsoe.

As Barbee recalls the Founder's death, the cosmic significance of the man is brought out. The Founder lay near death as Barbee and Bledsoe waited in another section of the train. "I remember," says Barbee, "how I looked out of the frosted pane and saw the looming great North Star and lost it, as though the sky had shut its eye" (p. 99). The heavens do not want to witness the Founder's death. Even the moon hides behind a cloud.

'It was as though the very constellations knew our impending sorrow... 'For against that great—wide—sweep of sable there came the burst of a single jewel-like star, and I saw it shimmer, and break, and streak
down the cheek of that coal-black sky like a reluctant and solitary tear. . . ' (p. 99) Barbee and Bledsoe both witness the "dying star," a cosmic counterpart to the falling star on the train.

Having listened to the tale of the hero, the narrator's guilt intensifies for having possibly endangered the dream of the humble, but fast-rising people. The tale also makes him realize the value of what he will be losing if he is expelled. He accepts myth, legend and all else about the Founder as truth. He feels unworthy of the honor he has been given with the scholarship. Then comes the confrontation with Dr. Bledsoe, who has been the Founder's right arm. In fact, the Founder blesses him and bids him to carry on the good fight in the tradition of Isaac and Jacob (p. 100). The narrator sees Bledsoe in all of his lust for power, but he never stops to think that perhaps part of the dream is faulty, that the Founder's way may not be the only way, that perhaps the dream has been corrupted. Instead, he goes his naive way to New York in the hope of one day becoming Bledsoe's assistant. The image of what this represents is painted very vividly in his mind.

. . . he was the example of everything I hoped to be: Influential with wealthy men all over the country; consulted in matters concerning the race; a leader of his people; the possessor of not one, but two Cadillacs, a good salary and a soft, good-looking and creamy-complexioned wife. What was more, while black and bald and everything white folks poked fun at, he had achieved power and authority; had, while black and wrinkle-headed, made himself of more importance in the world than most Southern white men. They could laugh at him but they couldn't ignore him. . . (p. 78)

Thus the hero and his dream are still untainted in the narrator's
eyesight.

Of less heroic but just as courageous status are two other characters representative of the black folk tradition. They are Mary and Brother Tarp, both of whom have their beginnings in the rural South. Mary, representing a familial warmth heretofore lost to the narrator, has managed to retain her folk heritage in the midst of the negating Harlem atmosphere. "I'm in New York," she says, "but New York ain't in me" (p. 194). In the hustle and bustle of the city, she still has time to extend a true Southern hospitality. She has not adopted the purely monetary motives of her Harlem environment; she can give without expecting pay in return. Mary, singer of the blues, knows and accepts her folk heritage. She in no way considers the bank the narrator discovers a degrading thing. Mary awakes vague feelings of kinship to folk heritage in the narrator, but he pushes them into the background.

Other than Mary I had no friends and desired none. Nor did I think of Mary as a 'friend'; she was something more—a force, a stable, familiar force like something out of my past which kept me from whirling off into some unknown which I dared not face. (p. 196)

In her strength, warmth, and acceptance of heritage, Mary stands in relation to the narrator as Carrie K. does to Kabnis. In both cases, there is an approach/avoidance conflict on the part of the males. The narrator likes Mary's company, but he is often made to feel ill at ease with her numerous questions about his role as a member of the black race. Kabnis, too, could find in Carrie K. the soil from which he has been uprooted, but he refuses to take advantage of the opportunity.
As a folk character, Mary Rambo receives greater treatment in two of Ellison's short stories: "Out of the Hospital and Under the Bar" and "Did You Ever Dream Lucky?" In the former, a deleted section from *Invisible Man*, Mary is portrayed as a menial hospital worker who unbolts the machine and feeds the narrator by hand. Later, she opens it again and gives him some herbs for strength enough to get himself completely out of the machine. Mary says that the herbs are a traditional family recipe, but she refuses to divulge the contents of this recipe to the narrator. In "Did You Ever Dream Lucky?," Mary relates a family legend to guests in her rooming house.

Brother Tarp (as well as the old couple at the eviction) arouses similar feelings of kinship in heritage in the narrator when he gives him the greasy link of chain from the leg iron he wore nineteen years before. He accepts the link because he feels Tarp offers it out of some "deeply felt significance" and the narrator is compelled to respect the gesture. He compares it to the traditional passing on of some cherished momento from father to son and immediately feels homesick. Tarp can operate in Harlem because, like Mary, he does not forget the South, the time he spent in jail there, and what it means to his identity. He recognizes his beginnings and his Southern farm existence as the makings of Tarp the man. He said no and thereby defined himself. The narrator is simply quietly repulsed by the leg chain; he expects no lesson of life from this ignorant, limping old black man.

Stereotyped characters and ideas appear in the novel along with
tricksters, heroes and other folk characters. Usually the characters and the ideas are negated as stereotypes. Ellison is constantly debunking stereotypic myths associated not only with blacks, but with American society in general; at other times, however, he lets the stereotypes stand. Writing about stereotypes in connection with blacks, Ellison comments:

The prejudiced individual creates his own stereotypes, very often unconsciously, by reading into situations involving Negroes those stock meanings which justify his emotional and economic needs. Hence whatever else the Negro stereotype might be as a social instrumentality, it is also a key figure in a magic rite by which the white American seeks to resolve the dilemma arising between his democratic beliefs and certain antidemocratic practices, between his acceptance of the sacred democratic belief that all men are created equal and his treatment of every tenth man as though he were not.49

The validity of such a comment can be seen in Norton’s assumption that illegitimacy is an accepted way of life among blacks (p. 38), hence he cannot understand why the narrator should mention that Trueblood’s daughter has no father for her child.

Not only are stereotypes projected through white eyes, but through black ones as well. The narrator casts himself as a stock character, Jack-the-Bear, who is always subject to defeat by the rabbits of the world. He plays the stereotyped role into which he has cast himself. The graduation speech perpetuates a stereotyped image of the Negro and comes from the lips of a representative of that stereotype—know one’s place, live humbly with the white man, work hard, be a chef or a farmer, lead other blacks in the "right" paths, etc.

Ellison uses the occasion of the speech to negate all that it praises. The scene is one gigantic ritual in which the white men,
representing society, act out their rationalization for its arrangements. There is nothing there that blacks should want to operate within or work with. It is an initiation into denial of anything positive in a social role. Eleanor Wilner summarizes the scene:

In a grotesque perversion of the rites of initiation with which young men are ushered into their adult social roles, a group of black teen-agers, including the novel's narrator, are herded before an audience of jeering white men, blindfolded, put in a ring, made to fight each other, and then, to the echoes of 'Sambo,' are thrown coins and counterfeit tokens for which they must scramble on an electrified carpet.

There is no indication of the social responsibility that the narrator espouses in his speech. The complete role blacks should play in society is negated by the actions of their white counterparts. But at the same time, the black man is told where he stands; he is introduced to caste in Southern society. He should know his place by realizing that white women and money, the power of the white world, are taboo as far as he is concerned. The young black boys have stamped upon them the symbolic castration they are supposed to experience in the presence of a white woman. Also, they are made to realize the control the white man has over money, and that they can only get what he will let them have. The lesson about white women is very thoroughly impressed upon the narrator as evidenced by his reaction to being pressed against a huge white woman on his first subway ride (p. 121) and by the way he feels when he dances with Emma at the first Brotherhood party (p. 239).

With Trueblood's tale of incest, Ellison undercuts or punctures the stereotype of the kindly folk character, the sweet little teller
of tales. As mentioned earlier, Trueblood is described as "one who told the old stories with a sense of humor and a magic that made them come alive" (p. 36). Bluestein comments on the punctured image:

Ellison undercuts the conventional image of the Negro folk character whose major reference for most readers is the kindly Uncle Remus. Norton is ready to receive the impression of a fascinating spinner of tales in the quaint and curious diction of the country folk. What he gets is Trueblood's devastatingly effective recital of incest.55

It is necessary to point out that Bluestein refers to a character (Uncle Remus) who comes from a literary instead of a folk source. This emphasizes Joel Chandler Harris' tremendous influence on the popular mind in relation to black folklore. That there are black raconteurs of this type cannot be denied, but what Ellison turns out to negate, from Bluestein's point of view, is the literary stereotype of what Harris maintains is a popular stereotype. Also, Bluestein ignores the obvious fact that Norton is attracted to Trueblood not because of his abilities as a folk storyteller, but because the narrator has already informed him of Trueblood's crime. Nevertheless, the tale and Norton's psychological identification with Trueblood are emotionally devastating for the philanthropic Northerner. Trueblood is able to rise above his act by accepting his guilt in desiring his daughter.56 Norton, on the other hand, still pretends to be morally superior and continues to suffer for his vicarious identification with Trueblood and his lust for his daughter.

Other stereotypes survive with this tale. Ellison commented at one point that perhaps the object of the stereotype is not so much to
crush the Negro as to console the white man.\textsuperscript{57} Trueblood's act provides neighboring whites with a very definite consolation in terms of their supposed superiority.

\ldots the neighboring whites had seeming justification for their prejudiced notions of blacks as barbaric, crude, and no better than animals. The whites can use Trueblood's act to justify their own sense of moral superiority, and as a weapon against Dr. Bledsoe and his Tuskegee-like college, which is educating Negroes for economic equality; that is why they give Trueblood aid and why the college wants Trueblood 'run off'.\textsuperscript{58}

As long as the whites have Trueblood to relate his story, they feel secure in thinking blacks are beneath them. By the same token, the educated blacks think the same thing. Trueblood, as an ignorant "peasant," connects them too closely with their recent slave past. He is too representative of the negative image whites have of blacks and which the blacks at the college are trying to destroy.

Bledsoe, who is overly concerned about keeping the progressive image intact, becomes another Hanby as an unscrupulous wielder of power. He hastens to dispel the threat the narrator poses to his power (also Trueblood) as rapidly as Hanby tries to get rid of Kabnis and Lewis. Bledsoe, also like Hanby, wears a mask for whites; he can become the true stereotype of the "burrhead nigger" at any minute, but he knows the extent of his power. He tells the narrator: "Your arms are too short to box with me, son" (p. 111). Bledsoe has twisted the folk saying (the correct one is "Young man, young man, your arms are too short to box with God")\textsuperscript{59} to equate himself with the omnipotence of God.\textsuperscript{60} And in this case, he is the highest authority to whom the narrator may appeal.
In connection with myths commonly associated with American society in general, Ellison reverses the stereotyped idea of the jealous husband when the hero goes to bed with a white woman from his Woman Question lecture. The husband comes home in the wee hours of the morning and assumes that it's the most natural thing in the world for his wife to be in bed with another man. The myth takes on even less credence because the violator is not just any man, but a black man. The husband and wife simply exchange pleasantries and bid each other good night (p. 315). But the hero is suddenly struck with the forbidden proportions of his act and hastily departs.

The other major reversal of a commonly held myth also has to do with a white woman and sex. In the figure of Sybil, the white woman is shown with all of her stereotyped conceptions of black men as to their extreme sexuality and rape tendencies. When the narrator thinks he can undermine the whites by getting information from one of their women, Sybil is his prize. His political questions are blocked on every hand by her stereotyped attitude toward him. He becomes an image, a natural resource, instead of an individual. She asks him to rape her as a friend of hers has been "raped" by a black man who is described as "a brute, huge, with white teeth, what they call a 'buck'--" (p. 392). Sybil christens the narrator "black bruiser" and anxiously waits for him to slap her a few times and rape her. Instead of giving the narrator information, Sybil

... merely gives him another lesson in his invisibility. She looks through him and sees nothing but
her own fantasy of the Black phallus, the Negro rapist. And since he is now 'doing a Rinehart' as he puts it, operating in the world of possibility, he can convince her—or let her convince herself—that she was raped without actually doing it. 'SYBIL, YOU WERE RAPED BY SANTA CLAUS SURPRISE' he writes on her bare belly. And the image is a perfect one, for her fantasy of him is no more real than the child's fantasy. She has been taught to believe in the Black sex fantasy as the child is taught to believe in the great magic gift-giver.  

By pretending to be raped, Sybil, like her friend, can maintain her position as a morally upright woman while enjoying the pleasures received through a supposedly degrading act. She continues the fantasy by pretending not to know her assailant. The narrator becomes "Anonymous brute 'n boo'ful buck" (p. 399), unnamed but still the epitome of the stereotype. Thus the stereotype functions to keep her position in the dominant culture intact. Sybil, like Norton and the other whites with whom Trueblood comes into contact, must console themselves and maintain their images of superiority.

Structurally, the novel is similar to that of the universal folktale pattern as established by Vladimir Propp. According to such an arrangement, certain non-varying functions or motifs as stable, recurring elements are recognized as existing independent of any specific tale. They remain the same but can occur in different situations with different characters. The number of functions is fairly limited, but the sequence is always identical when they appear in different tales. Of the thirty-one functions Propp defines, they often occur in pairs. For example, an Interdiction, that is, some kind of order or command (the 2nd function), must be given before it can be violated (the 3rd function). Propp points out that one or
another function is absent in all folktales. However, this does not interfere with the established sequence of the remaining functions. Functions begin after some "initial situation" has been defined. This initial situation can be an introduction of the hero, a family genealogy, etc.

The various functions as defined by Propp are readily applicable to *Invisible Man*. The "initial situation" can be considered the Prologue to the novel. In it, a relatively peaceful situation is presented which will contrast directly with the violent, active state of the narrative. Also, the future victim-hero is introduced. The narrator is considered a victim-hero because he goes on a journey to help himself; the story is about him, not about someone who pursues (the seeker-hero) in an effort to assist or rescue him. In a tale which follows a victim-hero, all functions which would pertain only to a seeker-hero are automatically deleted; there is "absolutely" no instance in which a narrative follows both in the same tale. As an initial situation, the Prologue sets the stage for the tale proper to get under way.

In chapter one, the functions or universal motifs begin. An Interdiction is addressed to the hero (II). He is given advice by his grandfather, but there is an immediate second Interdiction from other relatives telling him to forget his grandfather's advice. The Interdiction is violated (III) when the narrator slips and inserts "equality" for "responsibility" in his speech at the smoker. The violation immediately puts the narrator in a hostile environment. He gets a glimpse into the consequences of slipping out of the role
white society expects him to play. Also, the violation of the Interdiction brings the narrator into a conflict with the social system which will show itself as villain in various personages.

A specific villain is introduced in the figure of Bledsoe who represents the society which has awarded the narrator his scholarship. The villain makes an attempt at reconnaissance (IV), that is, he tries to obtain information from the hero. Such is the case with Bledsoe and the hero after the Trueblood/Norton incident. Bledsoe wants to know exactly how the narrator has brought Norton to the Golden Day. He seeks specific information about the hero's part in the episode and about his attitude towards whites. Bledsoe as villain receives information about his victim (V). This scene is significant because in it Bledsoe destroys the narrator's one bit of fighting spirit as far as the Southern social system is concerned. Bledsoe thus learns that he will have very little resistance in effecting his plan to "Keep This Nigger-Boy Running."

Deception or fraud (VI) is a major part of the uncovery of the information as well as the ensuing events. Bledsoe uncovers the mask he has worn for whites in humility and as a consoling device and decides to discipline the narrator in spite of his promise to Norton. Thus, lying becomes a part of the deceptive situation involving the narrator. Nevertheless, the victim-hero/narrator submits to deception (VII) and thereby helps his enemy. He threatens at first to fight Bledsoe, but realizing his lowly status and lack of power, he consents instead to go to New York. Bledsoe is thus given another chance to "clip a young Negro" (p. 111) by continuing fraud and deception with the seven poison
pen letters. These letters will again involve the overall social system with which the narrator is in continual conflict and which he received a sketch of by violating his grandfather's command.

By effecting the villainy, the villain causes harm of injury to one member of a family (VIII). A part of the injury comes as a result of something the narrator is in need of, something he lacks (VIIIa). In Invisible Man, this lack takes the form of status, employment, and economic security, all of which the narrator is missing in his confrontation with Bledsoe, thus he is not able to fight back even if he genuinely desired to do so (A lack of racial pride is also involved here.). Consequently, as a member of the college "family," the narrator suffers at Bledsoe's hands; he is expelled. This function of villainy creates the actual movement of the folktale. The first seven functions are in preparation for the act of villainy, which actually begins the plot.68

In Invisible Man, the actual journey begins when the hero is commanded or dispatched (IX). Promises as well as threats play a role in this case. If the hero goes to New York, Bledsoe promises to aid him in finding a job with the letters of recommendation. Also, he implies that the hero might save money for tuition and again find favor and be readmitted to the college. On the other hand, if he doesn't consent to take this approach, in two days he will simply be expelled with no redress. Thus the hero leaves home (XI) and takes the bus to New York. As victim-hero, a series of adventures await the narrator.

The hero undergoes a series of tests in preparation for receiving
either a magical agent or helper (XII). Although Ellison's hero does not start out knowing specifically how he will return to grace, these tests provide the means to liquidating the lack he felt at the college, which is one of the steps in the return to student status. He will acquire a job and status as well as a keener awareness of racial identity. These tests, according to Clipper, involve several things.

Arriving in New York, Ellison's hero meets with several tests or trials; his meeting with young Emerson tests his masculinity, his comic failure at Liberty Paints proves him no puppet of the capitalist system, he is questioned intently by the doctors in a Kafkaesque operating room and spewed out onto the streets a new man, and he is constantly being questioned by his benefactor Mary about his values and ambitions.

The hero is also tested by Peter Wheatstraw as to his knowledge of folk materials and by implication, his folk identity. In all of these tests the hero responds in some way, usually very positively or negatively (XIII), the main accomplishment being to save himself. He retreats from Emerson and evades Mary's questions as to his race consciousness and desire to be a leader. He also tries to physically save himself in Brockway's basement, but to no avail. He cannot respond to Peter's folk idiom, but tries to save face nevertheless. Underlying all of these tests is a progression to the Brotherhood job as well as the narrator's ultimate acceptance of and pride in his racial identity and heritage.

As a further step in the progression, the narrator receives a magical agent (XIV). With the narrator, this takes the form of something that may be eaten. For example, the yam scene; the hero is em-
barrassed at first, then he feels a definite pride in his heritage. The yam also provides another function. While eating it the narrator very absent-mindedly wanders into a new section of Harlem and he reaches the whereabouts of an object of search (XV). Instead of the magic object providing transportation between two kingdoms, in a world of less space, Ellison allows a matter of blocks to suffice.

Within minutes Ellison's hero plunges into an entirely new life, the life of everyday Harlem that he had ignored during that period when he was preoccupied with establishing himself in the big city.\textsuperscript{70}

The object of search, represented by the eviction scene, turns out to be the people of Harlem, the people of the narrator's race, the common people. Herein he will find all the means to liquidating his various lacks, but some will come sooner than others.

Having found his object of search, the hero again comes into contact with personifications of the villain. They join in direct combat (XVI). The narrator takes up the cause of the common people "with his oratory, and is thus brought into conflict with the villain again . . . not Bledsoe, of course, but the same social and legal system that spawned Bledsoe and the policemen now intent on carrying out the eviction."\textsuperscript{71}

Ellison's Proppian parallels, as has been illustrated with the magical agent, are often more allegorical than synonymous. In the absence of dragons and flying horses, the functions become more mundane and less fanciful. At the same time, they become more symbolic than real. A more striking example is the function where Propp's heroes are "branded or marked" (XVII). This takes on symbolic significance
in *Invisible Man*; no actual physical wounds are inflicted. Because of his success as an orator, the hero is chosen by the Brotherhood and given, or branded with, the honorific title of "Brother." He puts the villain to route (XVIII) by championing the cause of the common people against the system. Here again, the function is more symbolic than representative of the hand to hand combat usually occurring in tales cited by Propp.

With his advent into the Brotherhood, the hero is continually triumphant (as far as speech making and causes are concerned) and becomes extremely popular. Parts of his lack are liquidated (XIX); he attains status, employment and economic security. It is only through continued contact with elements of the black folk that he will be able to feel pride racially and accept his heritage.

At the peak of his success, a return or flight becomes necessary (XX) and the hero is pursued by someone (XXI). He is pursued by the Brotherhood when he becomes too powerful; he is switched from the Harlem district. Also, he is constantly pursued by Ras's troops. Both are still representative of the villainous system underlying the hero's adventures. The hero is rescued from pursuit (XXII), that is, he saves himself by placing obstacles in the paths of the pursuers and by transforming himself into Rinehart. He finally arrives at what he considers home (XXIII)—the coal cellar. He has learned earlier that the college is no longer home. He cannot return to Mary or any of his Harlem experiences and his home with parents had no significant place in the novel from the beginning.

The tale structure conveniently ends at this juncture, but other
points are worthy of note. Ellison frequently appropriates functions that apply more to seeker-heroes than victim-heroes. For example, an object of search is usually involved with a seeker-hero locating the whereabouts of an abducted princess, a kidnapped brother or sister, etc. Thus in literature, Ellison has done something which would never occur in oral tradition. Symbolically, too, there are functions usually appropriated to seeker-heroes that appear in Invisible Man. For example, difficult tasks are proposed to the hero (XXV). He must decide whether or not to stay in the hole he calls home, to steal for a living, and to search for answers that have eluded him, e.g. the meaning of his grandfather's advice. Also, he accomplishes the task he has set of defining himself and achieving visibility. There are no material rewards for this; instead of ascending to a throne, he descends into the darkness of the coal cellar. Yet, the narrator knows himself better and writes the book about his experience, a bit of knowledge which will hopefully aid someone else. Thus his descent is really a triumph of sorts.

The combination of seeker-hero and victim-hero functions serves a very definite purpose in Invisible Man. Inherent in such a juxtaposition are two ideas: the hero can be victimized, but within his victimization lies his power to save himself. Ellison's hero is both innocent and guilty of nearly everything that happens to him. The system oppresses him, but he consents to it. The journey is a quest to the point of realization that he, like Tarp, has the power to say no.

A similar point can be made of Ellison's overall use of Proppian
structure. The folktale pattern relegates naturalism to a lowly position and essentially makes the hero responsible for his own actions. He has the power to accomplish whatever he desires simply by being polite to someone who makes a request and thereby receiving a magic agent, or by ingeniously making a correct choice, or by sheer physical strength. He has his share of defeats, but he has an inherent ability for bringing about success. Ellison felt that too much of the naturalistic, deterministic approach had been the form of black literature in the past and he sought for a new form. Invisible Man is intended to be a sharp contrast to the era of black literature dominated by Richard Wright. Ellison had seen enough of the Bigger Thomases and wanted something different. He felt Wright's approach to literature was too sociological. Ellison said of Wright: "I knew only that what I would want to express would not be an imitation of his kind of a thing" (Shadow and Act, p. 34).

On the other hand, Ellison admits his fascination for fairy tales. In the same interview, he says: "I must have read fairy tales until I was thirteen, and I was always taken with the magical quality of writing, with the poetry of it." In his acceptance speech for the 1952 National Book Award, Ellison expressed his desire to find a new mode of expression in Invisible Man.

I was to dream of a prose which was flexible, and swift as American change is swift . . . It would use the richness of our speech, the idiomatic expression and rhetorical flourishes from past periods which are still alive among us. And despite my personal failures, there must be possible a fiction which, leaving sociology to the scientists, can arrive at the truth about the human condition, here and now, with all the bright magic of a
fairy tale. (Shadow and Act, p. 113)

Not only did Ellison find the language of the fairy tale, but also the structure.

Another possible reason for Ellison's use of the folktale structure is its narrative concern with heroes. Ellison points out that when he started writing *Invisible Man*, it was as a direct result of reading *The Hero* by Lord Raglan and contemplating "on the nature of Negro leadership in the United States" (Shadow and Act, p. 177). With the folktale structure, he explores one kind of hero and how he operates in a rather restricting society.

The concept of a hero also underlies the second structural analysis of the novel. The structure of the novel has been analyzed to show that it is cast in the Homeric mold. Proving such a contention is the purpose of an article by Archie Sanders. He does not propose that there is a one to one relationship between all the characters and situations in *Invisible Man* and the *Odyssey*, but several are parallel. Both Odysseus and the narrator of *Invisible Man* tell their own stories (Odysseus for the most part, the narrator completely). Their adventures begin after a significant battle. Odysseus starts after the Battle of Troy and the narrator starts after the Battle Royal. They both encounter an "enthralling, captivating, seductive" environment. For Odysseus, it is the land of the lotus-eaters; for the narrator, it is the beauty of the college campus and the attractiveness of the college situation. At one point, the narrator apostrophizes on the beauty of the campus and his life there.
Oh, long green stretch of campus, Oh, quiet songs at
dusk, Oh, moon that kissed the steeple and flooded
the perfumed nights, Oh, bugle that called in the
morning, Oh, drum that marched us militarily at noon—
what was real, what solid, what more than a pleasant,
time-killing dream? . . . I'm convinced it was the
product of a subtle magic, the alchemy of moonlight;
the school a flower-studded wasteland, the rocks
sunken, the dry winds hidden, the lost crickets
chirping to yellow butterflies.
And oh, oh, oh, those multimillionaires! (pp. 28-29)

At the college, the narrator encounters his Homer in the black
and blind preacher from Chicago, a myth-maker who extols the virtues
of the legendary Founder. Bearing the name of the maker of the
Odyssey, Homer A. Barbee is likewise a blind myth-maker, a modern
version of the wielder of classical myth.

Odysseus is given a bag of winds by Aeolus and told not to open
it; the jealous crew does open the bag and consequently they are
driven off course from Ithaca. The narrator of Invisible Man re-
ceives the letters from Bledsoe with the admonition that they should
not be opened. When he does discover their contents, he is hurled
off course from the objective of returning to the college. He also
encounters a Circe in the person of young Emerson (the implication
that Emerson is homosexual validates the feminine parallel). Emerson,
like Circe, would like the adventurer to stay with him, in this case
to be a valet. But the narrator must, as Odysseus, continue on his
journey. The Circe figure is not vindictive, however, and offers
aid to the departing narrator. In the Odyssey, Circe had given
Odysseus strong winds to speed him on his journey. The results of
the aid the narrator receives (the job at Liberty Paints) puts him
between Scylla (the Union) and Charybdis (Brockway) and he must struggle for survival.

_Invisible Man_ also has its descent into Hades and according to Sanders, an apt title for chapter eleven would be "The Book of the Dead." In this chapter, the hospital scene occurs and the narrator is symbolically destroyed and reborn. His hallucinations and delusions are recollections of (visits with) those characters, values, and myths of his dead past. Surviving this experience, he meets an Athene in the figure of Mary and a cyclops in Brother Jack and the Brotherhood. He tries to blind the Brotherhood by following his grandfather's advice.

Finally, the narrator reaches his Ithaca, which turns out to be Harlem. The Penelope/prize turns out to be the masses of blacks in Harlem for whom there are various suitors. These suitors range from the Brotherhood to an Antonius in the figure of Ras to local politicians. The riot can be equated to the scene in the _Odyssey_ where all suitors are routed. Odysseus kills Antonius, the chief suitor, by sending an arrow through his throat. The narrator locks Ras's jaws with a spear. As Odysseus returned to Ithaca in disguise, so too does the narrator assume a disguise with the Rinehart episode.

The use of the Homeric structure allows Ellison to comment upon and satirize the existing social system in the United States. In the _Odyssey_, Odysseus must wander for twenty years because he offended the gods and reaped a cosmic vengeance. The narrator essentially does the same thing. By showing Norton the less pleasant side of Southern
black existence, he offends the gods of the college, the Bledsoes or keepers of the universal image of progressive blacks. For this offense, he is made to wander aimlessly through his early New York adventures. His wanderings, like Odysseus', are a form of punishment. The Homeric structure brings satire into the picture because the Bledsoe world view is a minute portion of several views existing in the United States; it is not the cosmic justice from which there is no appeal (but the narrator thinks so, as previously mentioned with the stereotype analogy). Godhead is an illusion in the novel, but unfortunately, this continues to escape the narrator. Odysseus' gods are merciful in addition to being just. Not so with the Bledsoes of the world. Like the Old Testament Jehovah, vengeance is ever theirs. Forgiveness is ever absent.

Another purpose that the Homeric structure serves in the novel is that of the formulation of an identity through several experiences. The narrator is constantly in the process of coming to an understanding of who and what he is. At one point, he says: "I was my experiences and my experiences were me" (p. 383). He recognizes that man is the sum of separate experiences; they define him. A structure, such as the Homeric, in which life can be spun out into a perpetual journey, serves the purpose of enabling these experiences to grow successively into a definition of self. Thus the narrator can realize near the end of the novel that all of the things he has done are a part of him.

The Odyssean journey, with its archetypal characters, also functions to reinforce Ellison's delineation of various characters. For example, the Circe parallel puts young Emerson more firmly into
the homosexual role the narrator vaguely describes. By feminizing Northern philanthropy, Ellison is again able to satirize the concept of freedom for blacks on Northern territory. Emerson simply asks the narrator to carry on his Southern tradition of servitude by becoming a valet with the possibility of not only being a body servant but being physically exploited.

Thematic unity in the work is also achieved through the use of certain folkloric concepts. The most obvious of these is the use of the scapegoat ritual. In this ritual, animals, objects, or men are made to bear the burden of guilt, sin, or evil that a given society does not wish to take upon itself. Through such a cleansing process, primitive cultures appeased the gods and diverted their wrath from the people. The burden-bearer, if an object or animal, was generally taken outside the village after the sin had been transferred to it (the animals were often killed; others were left to wander in the wilderness as sacred animals). Human scapegoats were also very often ostracized or killed as a part of or as a result of the transfer of sin. Sometimes, for a transition period of days or weeks, they were treated as kings—given the best food and drink, allowed to roam at will, etc. Then, when the appointed time of the ritual came, the populace turned against them, beat and/or mutilated them and finally killed them in order that the village might be free of sin and favored by the gods. 75

The first occurrence of scapegoating in Invisible Man is the Battle Royal scene. Commenting on this scene, Ellison says:
This is a ritual part of behavior pattern in the South, which both Negroes and whites thoughtlessly accept. It is a ritual in preservation of caste lines, a keeping of taboo to appease the gods and ward off bad luck. It is also an initiation ritual to which all greenhorns are subjected.76

By forcing the black boys to experience the desires the white men generally suppress, they maintain their sense of moral superiority. "The white men, in a drunken orgy, are releasing their suppressed desires, risking a trip into darkness, and transferring their guilt to the Negroes."77 This general departure from all established rules of conduct is a significant part of the ritual according to Frazer. All restraints of society are thrown aside.

... the extraordinary relaxation of all ordinary rules of conduct on such occasions is doubtless to be explained by the general clearance of evils which precedes or follows it ... when a general riddance of evil and absolution from all sin is in immediate prospect, men are encouraged to give the rein to their passions, trusting that the coming ceremony will wipe out the score which they are running up so fast.78

Thus the white men can be excessively licentious because the blacks will bear the guilt and punishment for what they do. In addition, the white men force the boys into a rite of exorcism through initiating them into what the white world has in store for them.79

This ritualized control of blacks by whites is a recurring theme in the novel. The particular scene of the Battle Royal has its companion scene in the Harlem riot. The crowd of rioters become scapegoats for the Brotherhood.80 The group of black rioters are being sacrificed for the sake of international propaganda and the image of the Brotherhood as exponents of the rights of the common man. The
riot will be used to show how the conditions of the capitalist system have so oppressed blacks that they must strike out in return. The fact that the Brotherhood has had a hand in initiating the riot will be ignored; it will come out looking like the gleaming knight in shining armor and the champion of the people in spite of its many sins.

Trueblood performs a similar function of exorcism for Norton and the whites around him.

Norton pays Trueblood for vicarious satisfaction of his own desires; but even more, by paying Trueblood, Norton maintains his own superiority—a financial superiority, but one that enables Norton still to consider himself a better man than Trueblood, in spite of their moral identity. Trueblood has done what Norton is too impotent of spirit to do for himself. He performs the self-defacing function of the scapegoat for the benefit of the sin-repressing whites. By paying Trueblood, Norton lets him know that he has performed the scapegoat function in a satisfactory manner.

When Norton says the Negro is his fate, he means that blacks are his potency. Trueblood has done what Norton is too impotent of spirit to do for himself. He performs the self-defacing function of the scapegoat for the benefit of the sin-repressing whites. By paying Trueblood, Norton lets him know that he has performed the scapegoat function in a satisfactory manner.

Briefly, the tables are turned at the Golden Day and the veterans perform a ritual upon Supercargo, who represents white society, for the conditions they have been forced to endure (pp. 64-65). One patient tries to get the narrator to kick the bleeding Supercargo. "Try it, school-boy, it feels so good. It gives you relief." They kick Supercargo unconscious and revive him, only to kick him unconscious again. The patients, under the guise of insanity, can perform a rite that no "sane" blacks could perform without repercussions. Seemingly, Supercargo simply loses control of the situation and suffers for it.
More importantly, however, the patients get their one chance of exorcism, to make someone or something else pay for their situations.

The novel is also unified by the grandfather's advice to wear a mask and by the realization of the narrator's dream of his grandfather at the circus. The note that the grandfather shows him—"Keep This Nigger-Boy Running"—is one of the major themes of the work. The slogan implies control and the narrator is controlled throughout. Deciphering the grandfather's advice becomes a quest in itself. Is the narrator to be a trickster, an accommodationist, or what? At every crucial point in the novel, the grandfather looms up to haunt the narrator. It is only in the Epilogue that he finally comes to grips with the enigmatic advice.

Elements of the narrator's identity which are connected to the black folk culture also unite the work. Throughout the novel, the narrator tries to rise above his cultural associations without accepting them. He does at times resort to using folklore, but he never fully accepts what it is to him. The narrator's use of words is one of the major things that connects him to black folk tradition throughout the novel. This is ironic because his primary attribute has its origins in what he rejects. His power with words is in some ways that of the black folk preacher. Like Barbee and the Prologue minister, he can effect an audience emotionally and become one with it. His evocation of the call and response technique is evident in the eviction scene as well as in his speech at the first Brotherhood rally. Like the man of words, he creates phrases on the spur of the
moment. When he asks what is happening at the eviction scene and is rebuked for his ignorance, he responds to the insulter: "Just don't beat up your gums at me" (p. 204) which he tells the reader is a "newly acquired phrase." It has the ring of the folk imagination, thus suggesting that his creativity is instinctive or close to his origins.

The narrator casts himself as Jack-the-Bear, a character of black folksong. This and similar black folksong and folktale characters appear throughout, as has been shown with the trickster analogy. The doctors in the hospital scene attempt to force the narrator to recognize his cultural beginnings with their references to characters from black folklore. "WHO WAS BUCKEYE THE RABBIT?" a doctor asks him. He thinks about it and concludes, "Somehow I was Buckeye the Rabbit" (p. 184) and his mind wanders back to the childhood rhyme.

Buckeye the Rabbit
Shake it, shake it
Buckeye the Rabbit
Break it, break it . . . (p. 184)

The question brings to mind the folklore he has grown up with, but he considers it "annoying" that the doctor has hit upon "an old identity" and denies acquaintance with Buckeye the Rabbit. He does link the rhyme to early childhood. In his collection of black folk rhymes, Talley records a similar verse of Buckeye in the nursery rhyme section.

Buckeyed Rabbit! Whoopee!
Buckeyed Rabbit! Ho!
Buckeyed Rabbit! Whoopee!
Squir'1's got a long way to go, 85
The descriptive use of the name goes along with the narrator's explanation of the "wide innocent eyes." A young child might easily have been bounced on the knee or aided in the execution of some physical activity with either one of these rhymes. Talley points out that parents often sang these rhymes to young children.

Before the questioning about folktale characters starts, the narrator recalls a couple of rhymes from his past. His grandmother told him once,

'Godamighty made a monkey
Godamighty made a whale
And Godamighty made a 'gator
With hiccys all over his tail . . .'

(p. 178)

Similarly, the narrator thinks of the nurse as a southern belle, to whom hidden little black boys sing.

'Did you ever see Miss Margaret boil water?
Man, she hisses a wonderful stream,
Seventeen miles and a quarter,
Man, and you can't see her pot for the steam . . .'

(p. 179)

Both of the rhymes take the narrator back to his Southern folk tradition, where ignorant little boys happily sang to their mistresses, and where such caste lines were more rigidly a way of life. Little black boys entertained their mistresses by creating songs of adoration or other songs in their favor. Immediately, however, the narrator pushes such memories out of his mind.

When asked about Brer Rabbit, the most recognizable of the folktale characters, the narrator responds by using two black folk traditions--the blues and the dozens.

He was your mother's back-door man, I thought. Anyone knew they were one and the same: 'Buckeye' when you
were very young and hid yourself behind wide innocent eyes; 'Brer' when you were older. (p. 184)
The recognition is internal; he refuses to give his examiners the pleasure of his recognition of cultural connections.

In Blues tradition, the "back-door man" is the violator of a married man's bed. He is the one who comes in as soon as the husband leaves home and who receives the best of the wife's attentions. He also receives the best of the food from the husband's table.88

Referring to the doctor's mother is in the tradition of "playing the dozens." This is a species of verbal contest where insults are directed at the opponent's relatives, usually the mother.89 In the Battle Royal scene, when the narrator tries to pay Tatlock seven dollars to stop the fight, he replies: "Give it to your ma" (p. 20). Thus the narrator has encountered the tradition before. In the hospital, he is only at the stage of thinking the insult. Later, in a heated confrontation with Brother Jack and the Brotherhood Committee, he makes belligerent use of the tradition. When asked where he got the "personal responsibility" to go ahead with Clifton's funeral, he instinctively responds to Jack, "From your ma" (p. 350), then catches himself. There has been a progression in the use of the dozens from thought to verbalization, but the narrator stifles it. Still, it's not complete negation because it was an instinctive response, drawing him closer to acceptance of his folk identity.

The narrator also suffers psychological upsets in connection with "soul" foods. He rejects grits and pork chops because they seem so
typical of blacks. (Ellison rejects this by having a white man order the special the narrator has rejected--pp. 135-136.) Chitterlings symbolize the most degrading of his folk associations. In one of his reactions to being tricked, he sees them as a way of humiliating Bledsoe.

... And I saw myself advancing upon Bledsoe, standing bare of his false humility in the crowded lobby of Men's House, and seeing him there and him seeing me and ignoring me and me enraged and suddenly whipping out a foot or two of chitterlings, raw, uncleaned and dripping sticky circles on the floor as I shake them in his face, shouting:

'Bledsoe, you're a shameless chitterling eater! I accuse you of relishing hog bowels! Ha! And not only do you eat them, you sneak and eat them in private when you think you're unobserved! You're a sneaking chitterling lover! I accuse you of indulging in a filthy habit, Bledsoe! Lug them out of there, Bledsoe! Lug them out so we can see! I accuse you before the eyes of the world! And he lugs them out, yards of them, with mustard greens, and racks of pigs' ears, and pork chops and black-eyed peas with dull accusing eyes. ... The weekly newspapers would attack him. The captions over his picture: Prominent Educator Reverts to Field Niggerism! (pp. 200-201)

The narrator concocts this scene while eating the first yam. Although this yam-eating act is positive, he still connects other foods with "filthy habits" and "Field Niggerism." Eating the yams, he slowly begins to accept what it means. "... to hell with being ashamed of what you liked. ... I am what I am" (p. 201). Part of his shame at having been born a black, Southern country boy is beginning to dwindle.

Other aspects of the shame remain, however. He doesn't want to accept Clifton's Sambo doll or Mary's bank. He considers them merely stereotyped images of blacks. What he doesn't realize is that Clifton has risen above the image he sells. He controls it by an invisible
black thread. Clifton realizes that as far as the Brotherhood is concerned, he has been Sambo, and only by accepting this can he transcend their evaluation of his humanity. The narrator has been Sambo too, and for a much longer time than his Brotherhood experience. Even as early as the Battle Royal, he was called "coon" and "Sambo" (pp. 18 & 21) by the drunken white men, and to the Brotherhood he has also been Sambo, the stereotyped good nigger doing as he was told.

He also considers Mary's bank as a source of humiliation, but like the doll and Tarp's leg chain, he cannot get rid of them until he correctly evaluates their significance. He almost achieves this point of awareness before falling into the hole.

And now all past humiliations became precious parts of my experience, and for the first time, leaning against that stone wall in the sweltering night, I began to accept my past and, as I accepted it, I felt memories welling up within me. It was as though I'd learned suddenly to look around corners; images of past humiliations flickered through my head and I saw that they were more than separate experiences. They were, me; they defined me. I was my experiences and my experiences were me, and no blind men, no matter how powerful they became, even if they conquered the world, could take that, or change one single itch, taunt, laugh, cry, scar, ache, rage or pain of it. (p. 383)

It still takes the riot experience and meditation in the hole to remove all traces of shame of ancestry, and the narrator learns to be ashamed only because he had at one time been ashamed.

Blues also provide thematic unity for the novel. They reflect Ellison's folk heritage as well as his professional interests. Ellison grew up with jazz and blues in Oklahoma and knew some of the then great musicians. But blues is not just a song form in the novel; it
expresses a condition of living. Of this condition of life, Ellison writes:

The blues is an impulse to keep the painful details and episodes of a brutal experience alive in one's aching consciousness, to finger its jagged grain, and to transcend it, not by the consolation of philosophy but by squeezing from it a near-tragic, near-comic lyricism. As a form, the blues is an autobiographical chronicle of personal catastrophe expressed lyrically... Their attraction lies in this, that they at once express both the agony of life and the possibility of conquering it through sheer toughness of spirit. They fall short of tragedy only in that they provide no solution, offer no scapegoat but the self.90

We could say, then, that *Invisible Man* is one gigantic blues composition. The narrator is compelled to discuss the painful details of his existence and through this discussion, to transcend their tragic implications. His chosen song to express his message is Louis Armstrong's "What Did I Do to Be so Black and Blue?" The condition of being blue is combined with blackness in a double expression of the hard life he has had to live. The lyrics to the song are as follows:

Cold empty bed
Springs hard as lead
Pains in my head
Feel like only all my life through
I've been so black and blue

Ah, Lawd

I'm white
I'm white inside
It don't help my case
Cause I know I just can't hide
What is on my face

Oh, Oh ooo

I'm so all alone
Life's just a phone
My heart is torn
Why was I born
What did I do to be so black and blue?

No joys for me
No, no company
Even the mouse
Even the mouse ran from my house
All of my life through
I've been so black and blue

Can you tell me how
How will it end
I ain't got no friends
My only sin
My only sin is in my skin

What in the world did I do to be so black and blue?
What in the world did I do to be so black and blue?

(Version by Lou Rawls, Black and Blue, Capitol)

In addition to describing the situation of the narrator in his hole, the lyrics also express a feeling of loneliness deriving not only from the combination of blackness and blueness, but also that originating with the absence of a woman. This is significant because Ellison points out that his hero is incapable of sustaining a mature love relationship.

The first two lines of the second stanza also suggest the position the narrator advocates during his Brotherhood experience: the people are united by common goals; they are the same inside. Unfortunately, this is not so from the gut level of the Brotherhood viewpoint. As far as Jack is concerned, blackness is relegated to a lowly position, thus creating further conditions for the blues.

As the narrator pursues his fateful existence, he meets other people who are also black and blue. But by some unknown strength, they
all survive, Trueblood has committed one of the greatest crimes imaginable in civilized society by impregnating his daughter. He is really in a bad state—alone and wandering, separated from his family, emotionally distraught—until one night he discovers himself.

'Finally, one night, way early in the mornin', I looks up and sees the stars and I starts singin'. I don't mean to, I didn't think 'bout it, just start singin'. I don't know what it was, some kinda church song, I guess. All I know is I ends up singin' the blues. I sings me some blues that night ain't never been sang before, and while I'm singin' them blues I makes up my mind that I ain't nobody but myself and ain't nothin' I can do but let whatever is gonna happen, happen. I made up my mind that I was goin' back home and face Kate; yeah, and face Matty Lou too.' (p. 51)

In the words of George Kent, the blues enable Trueblood to "get himself together." He comes to the recognition that no matter how bad things look, negation and withdrawal do not provide an answer. He must live with what he has done, no matter how painful it is.

At intervals, blues songs reflect the narrator's state of mind. Following the scene with Dr. Bledsoe in which he is expelled and given two days to clear out, he goes for a walk.

From somewhere across the quiet of the campus the sound of an old guitar-blues plucked from an out-of-tune piano drifted toward me like a lazy, shimmering wave, like the echoed whistle of a lonely train... (p. 112)

The train and the sound of its whistle are traditional blues symbols of being alone and lonely, of separated lovers, sadness, etc.

A similar feeling is evoked when the narrator hears Peter Wheat-
straw's song.

'She's got feet like a monkey
Legs like a frog--Laud, Laawd!
But when she starts to loving me
I holler Whooooo, God-dog!
Cause I loves my baabay,
Better than I do myself. . . ' (p. 131)93

He tries to analyze the literal images of the song, then he gets a mental picture elicited by the feeling.

I strode along, hearing the cartman's song become a lonesome, broad-toned whistle now that flowered at the end of each phrase into a tremulous, blue-toned chord. And in its flutter and swoop I heard the sound of a railroad train highballing it, lonely across the lonely night . . . God damn, I thought, they're a hell of a people! (p. 135)

In addition to eliciting the traditional symbol, this passage can also be used to illustrate the fact that the narrator still does not completely accept such singing as a part of his heritage. He concludes that "they," not "we" are a hell of a people.

According to Ellison's definition of the blues, "They Picked Poor Robin Clean" also fits into this tradition.94 Although the narrator has been "picked," he can't help but laugh because he recognizes the joke connected with it all. A bare-rumped Robin is not a very serious image. The lyrics reflect this.

O well they picked poor Robin clean
O well they picked poor Robin clean
Well they tied poor Robin to a stump
Laud, they picked all the feathers round from Robin's rump
Well they picked poor Robin clean. (p. 147)

The narrator is Robin as a result of the seven letters Bledsoe wrote in an effort to hope him to death. He sees a conspiracy with Bledsoe on one end and the Emersons on the other (pp. 147-148). In commenting
on the tune, to which jazzman Walter Page supplied the verse, Ellison writes:

It was a jazz community joke, musically an extended "signifying riff" or melodic naming of a recurring human situation, and was played to satirize some betrayal of faith or loss of love observed from the bandstand. . . . Yet the tune was inevitably productive of laughter—even when we ourselves were its object. For each of us recognized that his fate was somehow our own. Our defeats and failures—even our final defeat by death—were loaded upon his back and given ironic significance and thus made more bearable.

Thus, as Olderman points out, "Poor Robin" is an old scapegoat joke. Ellison's application is likewise that of the state of the narrator. His personal situation is so near tragic that he is forced to transfer his feeling to the real Robin situation and laugh to keep from crying at the symbolic Robin situation in which he is involved. Hence the blues application, the mixing of near tragic/near comic emotion. The narrator expresses this ambivalent state rather well.

. . . And Emerson would write in reply? Sure: 'Dear Bled, have met Robin and shaved tail. Signed, Emerson.'

I sat on the bed and laughed. They'd sent me to the rookery, all right. I laughed and felt numb and weak, knowing that soon the pain would come and that no matter what happened to me I'd never be the same. I felt numb and I was laughing. (p. 148)

The laughter must also come because the narrator consented to be Robin. He politely took his letters and went "traipsing" off to New York unquestioningly looking for better things. Thus we go back to Ellison's statement on the blues: there is no true scapegoat but the self.

Spirituals and rhymes with a religious theme are added to the blues and an expression of a tragi-comic state of existence. They
too reflect moods representing a blue situation. After the narrator's talk with Tarp upon receiving the anonymous letter, he hears a song coming through the window.

Don't come early in the morning
Neither in the heat of the day
But come in the sweet cool of the
Evening and wash my sins away. . . (p. 294)

It reminds him of times past, but at the same time, he feels calmer about the situation facing him.

After Clifton is shot, the narrator gets on a subway where he observes two nuns staring at their crucifixes. He laughs as he remembers a verse he had heard at the Golden Day.

Bread and Wine,
Bread and Wine,
Your cross ain't nearly so
Heavy as mine. . . (p. 334)

Again, he must laugh or the sheer magnitude of the situation will overwhelm him. The verse also has the making of responsibility he will later assume for his part in the Brotherhood use of blacks—"use a nigger to catch a nigger" (p. 421).

A spiritual is used to convey the feeling of the crowd at Clifton's funeral. The song, "There's !any a Thousand Gone," not only consoles the crowd, but expresses the positive attitude that Clifton is now gone from his pain. He cannot be harmed in any way any longer. Looking upon the old man who starts the song, the narrator comments:

. . . I looked into the face of the old man who had aroused the song and felt a twinge of envy. It was a worn, old, yellow face and his eyes were closed and I could see a knife welt around his upturned neck as his throat drew out the song. He sang with his whole body, phrasing each verse as naturally as he walked,
his voice rising above all the others, blending with that of the lucid horn. . . . It was not the words, for they were all the same old slave-borne words; it was as though he'd changed the emotion beneath the words while yet the old longing, resigned, transcendent emotion still sounded above, now deepened by that something for which the theory of Brotherhood had given me no name. (pp. 341-342)

The narrator finally gets objective insight into the function of such singing. Before, he has simply responded to his own situation when a blues or a spiritual evoked a feeling of loneliness or peace; now he sees the value of transcendence for the black masses. This old man has in his tradition inherited from slavery the power to soothe an aching consciousness, the ability to transcend the pains of death. Toomer was also concerned with this same power of transcendence and consolation by singing in various sections of Cane. This is especially true in "Blood-Burning Noon" where the women try to soothe their fears of impending disaster by singing.

Ellison has shown that transcendence must be a way of life for blacks. With concepts inherited from the basic culture, blacks can achieve this transcendence much easier. Singing is one way of accomplishing such a purpose. The other is by a positive acceptance of one's heritage as a foundation upon which all else is built. There is a strength in the folk culture that advocates not mere survival, but survival with a proud belief in self and in one's ability to operate in a hostile environment. When the narrator finally accepts this, he proceeds to meditate on returning to an open survival in the hostile environment.

Most of the folk materials in the novel function to educate the
narrator in his quest for visibility. The autobiographical approach to the novel entangles this function with literary ones, for the story is the narrator's story, told in order that he may fully understand how he came to be where he is.

Ellison's use of folklore reflects not only his knowledge of black folk heritage, but his familiarity with general American folk traditions, which combine native American practices with all European inherited traditions. He is true to his statement of being evaluated not just as a black writer, but as a black American writer. His tendency to combine the two traditions has been shown—incest appears in a tale from a black raconteur, black trickster attributes are given to a white man and a young black man in America finds himself following the tradition of classical Greek heroes as well as heroes of fairy tale. Ellison's use of such combinations always reflects a subtle understanding on his part and a unique enhancement of his themes and characters. He is always the conscious artist in control of the varied combined traditions he employs, yet he remains sensitive to the specific attributes of each tradition.
Notes—Chapter 3


2 Ibid., p. 72.

3 Ibid., p. xiii.

4 Ibid.


6 *Shadow and Act*, p. 172.

7 Ibid., p. 173.


10 Hennig Cohen and William B. Dillingham, eds., *Humor of the Old Southwest* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1964), pp. 388-389. Twain could have heard this tale in the folk atmosphere of Hannibal. Also, he could probably have taken it from one of the newspaper accounts circulating in the Nevada area during the time he was inspired to develop such a tale. See Fred W. Lorch, "A Source for Mark Twain's 'The Dandy Frightening the Squatter'," *American Literature*, 3 (1931-1932), 309-313.


12 In the absence of scholarly material, one can best validate this belief in conversation with members of the drug culture, which again emphasizes the oral tradition involved.


15 This technique of folk sermon combined with storytelling and call and response is a recurring device with Ellison. An excellent example occurs in the short story, "Mister Toussau," The New Masses, 41 (November 4, 1941), 19-20.


17 Ibid., pp. 141-142.

18 Ibid., p. 157.


21 Ibid.


23 Ibid.

24 A recent discovery indicates that "Peter Wheatstraw" is a name that Ellison appropriated from a blues song recorded in the 1930's. The implications of this will be discussed in the section which concentrates on Peter as trickster. For lack of any other, the name Peter Wheatstraw is used throughout the chapter to refer to the little man with the wheelbarrow full of discarded blueprints.


26 Gene Bluestein, The Voice of the Folk: Folklore and American Literary Theory (University of Massachusetts Press, 1972), p. 130.


28 Horowitz, 24.
29 Positively Black, p. 39.


31 The Voice of the Folk, p. 128.


33 Ibid., p. 307.


35 American Negro Folktales, No. 1.

36 Horowitz, 26.

37 Ibid., 27.

38 See page 184 of this chapter.

39 Shadow and Act, p. 71.

40 Ibid., p. 181


43 See Positively Black, pp. 85-96.

44 Ibid. Also Abrahams' Deep Down in the Jungle, pp. 61-85.


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47 Neal, 46.


49 Shadow and Act, pp. 45-46.

50 Wilner, 242.

51 Arnold van Gennep discusses the value of such initiation in The Rites of Passage (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960), pp. 65-115.

52 Wilner, 242.

53 Studies in Invisible Man, p. 75.


55 The Voice of the Folk, p. 130.


57 Shadow and Act, pp. 57-58.


59 The uncorrupted version of the saying appears in Ellison's "Flying Home."

60 The saying is the subject of "The Prodigal Son," a sermon in the folk tradition which appears in James Weldon Johnson's God's Trombones.

61 Olderman, 154.


63 Propp, p. 20.

64 Such an application has been presented by Lawrence Clipper—"Folkloric and Mythic Elements in Invisible Man," College Language Association Journal, 13 (March, 1970), 229-241.
65 Propp, p. 36.

66 Ibid., p. 34.

67 Propp uses Roman numerals to designate each function and Arabic numerals to give specific examples of how the function may be realized.

68 Propp, p. 29.

69 Clipper, 233.

70 Ibid., 234.

71 Ibid.


73 Ibid., 225.

74 Ibid., 221.


76 Shadow and Act, p. 175.

77 Olderman, 144.

78 Frazer, pp. 575-576.

79 Olderman, 144.

80 Ibid., 154.

81 Hays, 336.


83 Olderman, 145-146.

This rhyme has parallels in black folktales. The tale usually explains how the hickey got on the 'gator's tail. In one version, Brer Rabbit introduced the 'gator family to trouble by leading them into an open field and setting it on fire. In consequence, the smooth alligators became crinkly, or got hickey on their tails. See Charles C. Jones, \textit{Negro Myths from the Georgia Coast} (Boston and New York, 1888).

Frances Anne Kemble records observing some of this creative activity in her \textit{Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation, 1838-1839}, pp. 106-107 thus setting this tradition in the midst of slavery.

Examples of such lyrics expressing this theme can be found in Langston Hughes' \textit{The Book of Negro Folklore}, p. 395; Paul Oliver, \textit{The Meaning of the Blues}, pp. 118-120; Langston Hughes, \textit{The Book of Negro Humor} (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1966), pp. 99-100.


\textit{Shadow and Act}, pp. 90 and 104.

\textit{Kent}, 269.


I have not uncovered this same verse in songs from the blues tradition. There are, however, similar songs of distortion of the female image. In one, a man sings of a love with "legs like a kangaroo" (\textit{The Book of Negro Folklore}, p. 395). Other songs mention cross-eyed girls and those that are so ugly that when they cry, tears flow down their backs.


Olderman, 149.
I have also not been able to locate specific oral parallels for these two religious verses. They have the aura of tradition in terms of themes. Spirituals generally talk of Christ's ability to "wash sins away." Also, specific times of day—morning, noon, evening—are usually mentioned. Bread, wine, and the cross are traditional symbols of communion and burden bearing.

For two versions, see Brewer, American Negro Folklore, p. 187 and Hughes, The Book of Negro Folklore, pp. 291-292.
Conclusion

In his introduction to the folklore section of *Black Literature in America*, Houston A. Baker, Jr. writes that black American folklore provides a base for the black literary tradition as a whole. Long before literary endeavors by blacks began to change from pure imitation of their white masters to a true depiction of black experience in America, black folk expression in the form of rhymes, spirituals, work songs, etc. had already achieved this purpose. The bards of the folk reflected their condition. It was not until Dunbar and Chesnutt that black literary tradition began to do likewise and the pattern for twentieth century black literature was set. This portrayal of the reality of the black experience in America could not therefore delete the folk heritage, the first true expression of the black way of life.

For the three writers presented in the foregoing chapters of this study, folklore and folk-connected materials have been the one tie which bound them to the roots of their heritage in a portrayal of black experience in America. Their approaches are numerous and are effected by various factors, but they are all bound to the folk tradition by conscious choice. The extent to which they reflect this tradition, however, depended to a great extent upon social, political and historical conditions influencing the publishing years of each author.

Each one of the writers found the life which he was to record
surrounded by or newly delivered from a major war in which America was very deeply involved. These conditions are thus reflected in their works. For Chesnutt, who was seven years old when the Civil War ended, the universal free status of slaves was an intriguing phenomenon. It meant, or so he thought, almost unlimited possibilities for black realization in America, especially in terms of education. From his North Carolina haven, Chesnutt rapidly acquired the status of teacher and principal only to learn that his fellow blacks (the majority of them at least) were rather apathetic as far as education was concerned. They politely endured the Northern white teachers sent to Southern black schools by the Freedman's Bureau and kept their old ways of thinking and behaving, especially in relation to whites. The unwritten codes of caste in the South remained. If anything, whites were even less tolerant of blacks.

From such observations, Chesnutt wove the majority of his themes and subjects. Hence everything associated with blacks in their emancipated state but with all the traditions of slavery had to be incorporated into his literature. Ideas and characters from the black oral tradition of slavery thus survived for Chesnutt through 1887 and 1905. Black and white caste lines, blue vein societies, happy darkies, superstitions, charms, and other black-connected sentiments of the days supposedly gone by were still alive for Chesnutt and the majority of blacks in general and such was the substance of his literature.

Although his attitude towards folk materials was generally negative, Chesnutt had to choose to write about them nonetheless. They were what pleased his reading audience, the majority of which was white. And the
whites preferred the stereotype of the happy darkies such as the Manny Janes more so than the educated Dr. Millers. Also, whites preferred matters relating more to blacks rather than to interracial subjects, hence the unvarying praise for "The Wife of His Youth" and The Conjure Woman and the criticism surrounding The House Behind the Cedars and The Marrow of Tradition. The latter two involve personal relationships between whites and blacks and white critics often felt Chesnutt was out of his league, away from the subjects he knew best.

His historical time demanded that Chesnutt present black characters worthy of assimilation into white society (at least this was what middle class or near-white blacks wanted). Thus Chesnutt perhaps would like to have ignored the backwards blacks reveling in the unscientific folk culture. But whites preferred that their stereotyped ideas of blacks should not be shattered, and since they were buying the books, Chesnutt was forced to bend as much as he dared without completely annihilating his own purposes. Thus his presentation of blacks as representative of the oral culture so closely connected with slavery and white domination is very often undercut in some way. Manny Jane and Peter as happy darky stereotypes both die ghastly deaths. Rena loses a chance to marry into quality white society because she is superstitious and also because she would negate blackness for whiteness. With Chesnutt, it should always be remembered that being black is not negative in itself. A problem arises when one is at the same time black, ignorant, superstitious, and anything else which would suggest the very near slave past. Chesnutt's attitude is comparable to that of the progressive blacks at Ellison's Tuskegee-like college and their relation to True-
blood, except that instead of hiding him or driving him out, in real life Chesnutt would have wanted to bring him into the fold of progression.

The eighteen-year period between Chesnutt's last publication and Toomer's first saw a drastic change in American society. World War I sent thousands of black and white soldiers into Europe to fight for the same goals even if in separate fighting units. To the black mind, this experience was indeed an awakening. He saw parts of the world where skin color was not a stigma in itself. Also, he realized that democratic ideals were remiss in actual realization. Freedom was not an arbitrary thing in America. A black man could go to Europe and die for the sake of peace and freedom when he couldn't use a toilet marked "white" in America. With such a realization came a major part of the Great Migration, the Southern black move into Northern cities in hope of more money and more freedom. Out of such a movement, Harlem, the cultural center for blacks in the 20's, grew at an extremely rapid rate.

A new black attitude, part defiance and part mere self assertion, came into being. This was Toomer's time of observation. Historically, the times were ripe for a glorification of things black. The poor urban black became a source of great literary endeavor as reflected in Langston Hughes' Simple stories. A search for black roots and black identification became prominent and there was a strong back-to-Africa movement headed by Marcus Garvey. The times were also ripe for the publication of black material and this part of the movement aided Toomer, but his source of observation, identification and search for roots was elsewhere. To his ancestral South Toomer lovingly turned, a South which was rapidly being deprived of its blacks by the call of the North.
However, for Toomer, the North was depersonalizing in its urbanization and culturally destructive in its industrialization. Certainly it was Harlem which provided increasing possibility for things black in some ways, but Toomer looked to the culture from which the Harlemites grew in order to sing his song of blackness, to cherish a heritage and to identify with its strengths and its weaknesses.

Toomer could praise the superstitious blacks that Chesnutt had been somewhat ashamed of. He could glorify the peasants who were the true representatives of the identity of the race. He could cherish them for not corrupting their image and he could love them in a way that Chesnutt's times would not permit a black man to do. But there was conflict in a different way. Toomer could never live what he wrote. The call to join mainstream American society was too great and he wavered between blackness and whiteness throughout his life. He often lived what Chesnutt advocated in an assimilationist approach but without the positive assertion of blackness.

By the time World War II approached, the black man in Harlem and other Northern cities saw his dreams of a better life there completely shattered. The Depression years were bad enough, but now Uncle Sam wanted him to go to war again when the inequality of black and white society was everywhere evident. Ralph Ellison came into the New York of the Depression years and was also there during the war years. As a member of the WPA Writer's Project, his budding talents were variously employed. He was able to observe the black life of this time and to write sketches about it. In one such sketch, he describes an interview with a Harlem widow who is barely able to support her two children. She
is not able to get much assistance and a condition of poverty prevails. She bitterly recalls her nephew who has been killed in the war and hopes that her son, who joined in order to send her money, will not be killed.  

Black Americans had seen their dreams of the good life destroyed, but they still wanted a piece of America. Instead of naively hoping they would someday receive their share, the idea of achieving something through legal means (in contrast to the riot theory) was intensified and the movement into mainstream America continued. This movement in literature is reflected in Ellison's *Invisible Man*. Being American became equally as important as being black and Ellison very artistically weaves the two together. He saw the inheritance of the two traditions as integrated segments— which could not be separated. Thus his use of folklore reflects the dual traditions and a desire to peacefully reconcile the two. An acceptance of black folk culture paves the way for a smooth transition into the larger society with its larger folk culture.

The three different historical periods also effected the writers' use of folk material from the point of view of black humanity. Writing in the face of white assumptions of brutality and bestiality as the inherent qualities of blacks, Chesnutt sought to portray black characters who could think, feel, love, etc., as human beings. He wanted his white audience to recognize black humanity. But at the same time, he wanted to present a black humanity which was acceptable to his white audience. This implied a certain kind of thinking and feeling as well as a kind of scientific logic which rejected the unscientific and superstitious ways of the folk while at the same time presenting an humbleness reminiscent of what the black folk tradition in slavery suggested.
The twenties brought such an increase of interest in things black that a consideration of a question of black humanity was pushed into the realm of the absurd; it was taken for granted. Toomer's work reflects this assumption. Folk materials became an in depth expression of that humanity. This is what the black people have created, a lifestyle which pulses with intelligent, creative being which goes to the very heart of one kind of human experience.

For Ellison and his contemporaries, the black man had made such a move towards the mainstream that the specific forms of his humanity were again lost in the shuffle. By this time, whites were forced to be around blacks to a greater extent and since physical barriers were lessening, the whites created mental ones. The black man became "invisible," a stereotyped idea, a concept rather than an entity. He suffered psychologically for this according to Ellison and was not able to establish an identity for himself. Consequently, finding a viable black identity became the quest for Ellison's hero. Again this search turned to the folk. The black man was not crippled enough not to want to join the mainstream, but he had to re-affirm the forms of his humanity whites refused to see before he challenged them to reassess their evaluation. In the black folk culture was to be found a positive assertion of blackness, a belief in one's ability to think and act for one's self, an absence of shame in color and heritage, and an incomparable will to survive.

These external forces, historical, social, and political, caused these three writers to develop general concepts of the appearance of folk materials in their works. Within the realm of conscious creativity,
they found more specific and often much subtler ways to use the black folk culture. These literary uses of folklore and folk-connected materials, though shaped by the times, reflect a varying degree of artistic development with each writer. They all use folklore for purposes of characterization, to create folk settings, for plot development or for structural unity, but neither approach completely apes the ancestor. Chesnutt's characterization with folklore is very frequently transcriptive, that is, he takes specific items of folklore directly from oral tradition to define his characters as members of a folk culture.

When he uses superstitions, they are those of the earliest recorded beliefs of blacks in America; they are very traditional and can be found in most standard collections of black folklore. For example, Julius' belief that umbrellas should not be opened in the house or his belief that horses can see spirits can be documented in almost any extensive collection of black folklore. The items are unchanged from their appearance in the oral culture, but they still serve to define Julius as a member of a folk community.

A possible reason for Chesnutt's reluctance to alter folk items is his attitude towards the folk culture. He thinks it is basically negative and though forced to deal with it, he felt no need to be overly creative in presenting such ignorance. He could let the items speak for themselves as the embodiment of illiteracy and backwardness.

Toomer, on the other hand, characterizes more by the active functional approach, that is, he uses concepts of folklore rather than specific traditional items. He gives Barlo the features of a folk hero; instead of reproducing John Henry, he reproduces what John Henry repre-
sents. Also, he characterizes by suggestion more than with specific historical items of folklore. He suggests that his black characters are like the traditional folk by showing them in an environment which evokes the rural, illiterate, unindustrialized beginnings of black folk culture. He suggests the singing quality of the culture in terms of style and imagery as well as by the insertion of poems and songs in the book. The writing is lyrical, poetic. Concepts of singing, such as call and response, are introduced in dialogue and church services as well as in imitations of work songs. All of these elements work to suggest a constant state of song. With such a method, Toomer is able to make his reader feel a sense of the folk throughout the work.

Ellison's approach to characterization with folklore is also active functional, but with a much broader folkloristic and literary base as its source. Ellison's heroes are more myth than legend, more classical than backwoods, more universal than black. The Founder is such a character. Ellison uses concepts of classical myth to illustrate the bigger-than-life status of the Founder. He characterizes his narrator as a hero of fairy tale and classical traditions by using the activities from adventures usually assigned to such characters. Pary is shown to be a folk character not by her specific use of any superstition or tale, but by the concept of superstitious action being applied to her use of herbs and a folk narrative pattern being given to her family legend. Ellison, like Toomer, has woven concepts of folk tradition into his work instead of relying upon specific items.

Variations are also reflected in structural uses of folklore in
the works of the three authors. They allow dreams to be realized, prophesies come true, superstitions are given scientific validity, and curses are shown to have power. But even here, the folk viewpoint is at work and the extent to which each author employs such concepts is unique. Chesnutt presents his items of superstitions and dreams and very coincidentally effects their real consequences. The characters believe in their superstitions and they come true, but often in spite of art. Rena dreams her mother is ill and goes to see her. Her white lover just happens to come to her hometown and discovers her there. The dream is realized and the plot reflects the consequences of this realization from the point that the lover discovers Rena is black. Mammy Jane's charms are not enough in their mere existence; their ability to protect the Carteret baby must be tested at intervals. Coincidences such as a slap dislodging a part of a rattle from a baby's throat and preventing a dangerous operation are clothed in ambiguity and linked to charms.

The superstitious beliefs of Toomer's characters in "Blood-Burning Moon" are given credence, but with more of an artistic touch. The moon is an evil omen and the plot reveals how such an omen is realized. Logical motivation on the part of various characters allows for a natural development of plot in spite of the superstitions that are proven to be true. There is no occasional coincidence or invalidated actions as is true with Chesnutt's characters.

The dream of his grandfather becomes an unending nightmare for the invisible man, a curse which comes true, but the issue is ground more in societal relationships than in superstition. And with Ellison, as with Toomer, art is never neglected. The story makes the belief in the curse
incidental, instead of vice versa. Each of Ellison's characters involved in the "Keep This Nigger-Boy Running" theme have justifiable motivations for their actions. Value judgments of "good" or "bad" in no way minimize the motivations. Bledsoe wants to preserve his little power stronghold, Brockway wants to maintain his value to Liberty Paints, etc. Each character has more at stake than the whim, or the impulsive action which defines Chesnutt's characters.

In their explorations of folk heroes, the three writers also reflect varying degrees of treatment. Most of the heroes explored are positive renditions of the Afro-American folk hero. Even Chesnutt presents an admirable trickster figure in Uncle Julius. The trickster figure, along with strong men, great lovers, con men and god-like figures appear in the works of these three authors. Although some of these figures are aggressive and anti-social, very few are shown in any outrightly negative light. There are no true badman heroes in the works, although Rinehart and Tom Surwell border on such characters. There seems to be a reluctance on the part of the authors to explore true Stackolee or Great MacDaddy types. Reasons for this go back to social factors surrounding the years of publication for each writer. Chesnutt's assimilationist beliefs dictated that he present characters worthy of uniting with the dominant culture. Consequently, openly defiant characters from oral tradition would have presented a greater threat to Chesnutt's white reading audience if they had been included. The Ku Klux Klan was already active in an effort to suppress any seed of defiance in order to convince blacks that only a submissive, tolerant attitude could exist among them if they expected to have any kind of co-existence with whites.
Thus Chesnutt's times prevented him from exploring certain types of folk characters even if he had desired to do so.

Toomer limited his exploration of folk heroes and other characters for reasons that were also formulated by his times and his own attitude about how his folk culture should function. The search for identification with a racial heritage became a romantic endeavor for Toomer. This partially explains the beauty of creation in his singing a song of the South and his folk heritage. In his desire to romanticize, Toomer also left the ugly aspects of aggressive initiative out of his folk characters. Instead of becoming a true badman, Tom Burwell becomes a victim. The victimization is essential to the concept of romance. Here are a people who have almost been totally destroyed on every hand, but they have managed to survive with the spiritual strength derived from the soil. Therefore, they are to be exalted.

Ellison perhaps had a greater opportunity than either of the other writers to present heroes truly representative of black oral tradition, both positively and negatively, but he often universalizes. The Founder is not recognized as being great only by blacks, but by American society in general. When Ellison does present heroes from black oral tradition of the negative type, their aggressive actions are usually toned down because they are directed against other blacks, not against the system in which all blacks live. Thus Ellison, like Chesnutt and Toomer, refuses to use such characters in a direct statement of protest of the black man's condition in America, although he does comment on the general nature of American society at several points. Besides, one cannot vehemently protest that which one desires to be an integral part of.
All three writers limit their explorations of folklore to a certain extent because of the purposes they had in mind and the function which they felt their writing should serve. Where they refused to deal with true badman types, they found stereotypes fair game. Again, such a concept is mainstream and not only black. Chesnutt explores all the stereotypes which grew out of slavery and black/white relationships in an effort to illustrate to his white reading audience how absurd it is to judge all blacks in the same light. Toomer's stereotypes are fewer in kind and number than Chesnutt's. It is more degrading than romantic to remember black mamis and Uncle Toms, thus Toomer ignores any in depth consideration of such unromantic concepts. Ellison considered stereotypes also, but on the part of blacks as well as whites. The two must be balanced in the integrationist concept. Whites might make invalid judgments of blacks, but likewise do blacks make such judgments of whites and of themselves.

Even with their limitations, however, there is an obvious increase in the types of folklore used from Chesnutt to Ellison. Chesnutt remained traditional with superstitions, particularly in relation to conjuring, and folktales, especially those of a supernatural vein. To traditional beliefs, Toomer added an exploration of the singing nature of the folk; spirituals, work songs, etc. He also brought in other folk hero types besides the trickster Chesnutt had introduced. He further explored very sketchily the kind of myth that Ellison portrayed in depth. Singing too became important for Ellison along with tales, dreams, stereotypes, heroes, superstitions, myths, legends, etc. Toomer wrote of the culture en masse, and Ellison did likewise, but the progression was to a
level of subtlety in which folklore was not to call so much attention to itself as a part of the creative effort.

What these three writers have consistently refused to do, however, is to willingly tap the protest part of oral tradition and incorporate it into their works on any wide scale. There are a few instances of protest, but these are not proportional to the bulk of black folk material along the same lines. This is not to suggest any prescriptive measure for black writers, but simply an observation that these three did not choose to explore one aspect of the folk culture in any depth. They have limited themselves by propagandizing for various reasons. Chesnutt begged, "Here I am, see how wrong you were about me; now let me in." Toomer said, "In spite of what you have done to me, I'm beautiful." Ellison concluded, "Let's face and live up to the fact that we exist side by side." But never is there a demand or even a concrete indictment of the parties who exclude.

In spite of their soft approaches, however, what these three writers have shown is that folk culture is a vital part of black literary creation. Whether outrightly transcriptive or more subtly functional, the folk culture cannot be ignored. It reflects the history of a people and embodies an identity. The extent to which that identity is accepted at any given period depends on social, political and historical factors and the literature reflects such trends. With the present assertion of blackness, perhaps the folk and what they represent will find their way more conspicuously into black literature. For the responsible, creative black artist, folk materials will continue to be the tie that binds him to his black heritage in America.
Conclusion Notes


3 Ellison elaborates on his belief in folklore as a key to the assertion of humanity in Shadow and Act, p. 172.

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