

# Universal Panopticon

Julius as Authority Figure in Charles Chesnutt's *The Conjure Woman and Other Conjure Tales*

By Brittany Collins



Charles Chesnut's collection of stories entitled *The Conjure Woman*, which involve the telling of past plantation stories by an elderly former slave named Julius McAdoo to a curious white couple named John and Annie, were originally published in 1899. These stories were limited in number with only seven stories making the first edition. It was not until 1991 that American literary scholar Richard Brodhead stumbled upon a larger collection of Chesnut's short stories and published the second edition of Chesnut's work entitled *The Conjure Woman and other Conjure Tales*. These tales function under a system of two distinct narrative styles. The embedded narratives display physical and mental control of slaves by masters.

Contrastingly, the external narratives demonstrate physical and mental control obtained by Julius through his method of educating his audience of the past. Julius must relive the horrors of slavery through his narration of tales in the embedded narratives. Through this telling of interior antebellum slavery, Chesnut describes the South as a systematic structure of labor. Thus, Foucault's theory of the Panopticon parallels Chesnut's portrayal of the antebellum South. Foucault's panoptic theory of the mental gaze supports the idea of paralysis of the slave mentality when physical punishment is applied by masters and overseers. However, Chesnut inverts this model of the South in his portrayal of the external postbellum narratives. In this essay, I will argue that this inversion of panoptic-like power places Julius in complete control of the narrative situations despite the ironic exertion of physical and mental control that appears to be emitted from the internal narratives' slave owners and the main narrator John. Thus, Julius is the authority figure despite not being the narrator of these narratives through the use of specific storytelling techniques such as dialect and the trickster technique as well as irony and evoked emotion.

The antebellum South and postbellum South function in differing panoptic systems. The antebellum South represents the period of the South before the Civil War when control is displayed extensively through plantation owners. In contrast, the postbellum South represents the period after the Civil War and during Reconstruction when former slaves are able to control themselves both mentally and physically. Critic Wesley Allen Riddle explains that as African Americans were freed from slavery, they gained control over former masters and other members of white society through sharecropping, which let white society know that intense regulation and strictness "were no longer legitimate, nor were they to be tolerated by freedmen or federal agents (Riddle 53). Therefore, former slaves gain control over their personal and occupational lives for the first time; no longer where they going to be controlled by the wealthy white plantation owners and overseers nor be seen as weak, inferior individuals in the white-dominated society. Through these historical contexts, Chesnut develops his plantation and piazza societies

as a functioning Panopticon in the antebellum internal narratives and an inverted Panopticon in the postbellum external narratives.

Michel Foucault's metaphorical concept of the Panopticon plays a crucial role in the organization of Chesnut's antebellum plantation society within the embedded narratives. In this period, the plantation house itself serves as the center of activity for the society. However, in the postbellum society of Chesnut's tales, the center becomes focalized on the piazza section of the plantation home as a place for storytelling to occur. Foucault explains that a Panopticon is a 18th and 19th century architectural prison style created by English theorist Jeremy Bentham in which a tower is placed within a circular structure where cells or holding places for prisoners all face inward towards this tower (Foucault). In correlation to the physical structure itself, the antebellum plantation society is developed with a similar style. The metaphorical tower is within the fields and the overseer serves as the watchmen or eye within this structure. Surrounding this overseer are many African-American slaves who are expected to obey this single figure of power. If disobedience occurs, this overseer is given the ability to evoke pain and punishment on the slave or slaves.

Critic Jeannette S. White identifies that "Fayetteville, North Carolina" is the setting of these narratives in order to shred away the falseness of the typical presentation of the majestic South that consists of women and men leisurely drinking and relaxing all day every day (White 85). Additionally, Fayetteville is acknowledged by the narrator John in Chesnut's tale "The Goophered Grapevine" but is referred to as "Patesville" and is a center for commercial trade of goods in the geographic area. (Chesnut 32). This demonstrates the structure of this city as an economically important trading center and important to Chesnut because it is his place of birth and origin. Thus, Chesnut uses his place of birth as the background for these narratives because he is able to identify with the scenery on a personal level.

From a critical perspective, in the antebellum plantation society, an overseer or master watches the actions of slaves on the fields and these figures are centered on the "pleasure and power" of being in control according to Foucault scholar Suzanne Gearhart. (Gearhart 460). Similarly, Critic Patricia E. Johnson suggests that "Foucault makes clear that the gaze is connected to power and surveillance: The person who gazes is empowered over the person who is the object of gaze" such as the master over his slaves (Johnson 39). Thus, slaves are objects of close examination on the fields by overseers or masters. In the master's perspective, the higher amount of slave ownership, the more power an individual has in their plantation home or society. This not only enhances the amount of crops being extracted from the plantation fields, but also places the plantation owner high

on the hierarchy of the plantation society.

Early accounts of the master and slave binary occur in Frederick Douglass's *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. Mr. Covey, the slave owner who was quite poor himself, is referred to by Douglass as a serpent that is deceptive and sneaky to his slaves (Douglass). The powerful use of serpent imagery in this narrative correlates with the use of masters within Chesnut's narratives. This imagery establishes a metaphorical concept of the predator and prey, which mirrors the treatment of slave characters in Chesnut's narratives. One instance of the predator/prey concept appears in Chesnut's narrative entitled "The Goophered Grapevine." The concept of predatorial action from a master is presented when Chesnut writes, "So atter a w ile Mars Dugal" begin ter miss his scuppernon's. Co'se he 'cuse' de niggers er it, but dey all 'nied it ter de las'. Mars Dugal' sot spring guns en steel traps, en he en de oberseah sot up nights once't er twice't..." (Chesnut 36). By physically trapping slaves, the masters and overseers treat slaves inhumanely and thus, act as predators with goals of preying on slaves in order to catch them participating in forbidden behavior. This action suggests a possibility as well for biblical imagery. The masters and overseers represent the serpent that evokes temptation. Therefore, the power of masters and overseers parallels to the power of evil.

Chesnut further suggests the notion of masters and overseers as predatorial characters the narrative "Dave's Neckliss." Chesnut uses trapping imagery to describe the character Wiley when he writes, "Wiley wuz one er dese yer shiny-eyed, double-headed little niggers, sha'p ez a steel trap, en sly ez de fox w'at keep out'n it ( Chesnut 127). The language used by Julius to describe Wiley demonstrates that Julius is very familiar with traps used for animals as these same types of traps are used to catch slaves who are feared to be running away to freedom. Therefore, Chesnut uses familiar vocabulary through Julius to further display the punishment that slaves receive for not obeying their masters or overseers.

Critic Gretchen Martin also acknowledges the power of the master when she suggests, "at the top of the social hierarchy was the most carefully crafted icon of the antebellum South, the planter aristocrat..." who is the all-knowing eye of the plantation system (Martin 65). However, this notion of control dies as does the notion of the Old South being a powerful white society when the Civil War ends. Therefore, a character like Julius is able to gain control of himself in the postbellum society as well as beginning of the new era of freedom for African-Americans, which allows him to more easily become a figure of authority. The center of the panoptic thus becomes refocused from the plantation home to the piazza section of the plantation home. Chesnut displays the piazza within the narrative "The Conjuror's Revenge" when

he writes:

My wife and I were seated on the front piazza, she wearily but conscientiously ploughing through a missionary report, while I followed the impossible career of the blonde heroine of a rudimentary novel. I had thrown the book aside in disgust, when I saw Julius coming through the yard, under the spreading elms, which were already in full leaf (Chesnutt 70).

While John is bored with the mundane reading of the present, he is intrigued to view a glimpse of past life walking down through his yard. The use of nature in correlation with Julius while he walks down to John and Annie's piazza demonstrates freshness and breathe of new life coming forth into John and Annie's lives.

Literary Critic William Gleason acknowledges the refocalized center of Chesnutt's narratives as the piazza in his essay, "Chesnutt's Piazza Tales: Architecture, Race, and Memory in the Conjure Stories." Gleason suggests also that the piazza becomes the center of the narrative frames when he writes, "I have called these Chesnutt's 'piazza' tales because it is the southern piazza that becomes the central imaginative location in the conjure stories" (Gleason 35). Therefore, Julius uses the piazza area of the home to create and master his stories of the past. Gleason further acknowledges the piazza in Julius's storytelling when he suggests, "Eight of Julius's own tales are told on that same porch; a ninth begins away from the house but concludes on its back piazza" (Gleason 36). By using numerous accounts of the piazza, Chesnutt is suggesting that the piazza is an essential portion of the new postbellum society, as it distracts attention away from the once powerful plantation home as a whole. Although the panoptic location has downsized, the same amount of power is still used to catch attention. However, instead of using punishment in correlation with power, Chesnutt uses education and entertainment to allow Julius to obtain power in the narratives. This lightens the tone of both narrative frames and creates positive energy from an otherwise dark and negative force that appears within the themes of the embedded narratives.

One of the most important storytelling techniques that Chesnutt demonstrates from Julius is the use of dialect. Julius is able to capture the full attention of John and Annie extensively through his voice. Julius uses his dialectic voice to evoke emotion and reaction from both John and Annie as they are placed into the perspective of a slave in the antebellum plantation society. This strong technique is demonstrated in "The Conjuror's Revenge" when Chesnutt writes, "Fac' is, continued the old man, in a serious tone, I doan lack ter dribe a mule. I's alluz afeared I mought be imposin' on some human creetur; eve'y time I cuts a mule wid a hick'ry, 'pears ter me

mos' lackly I's cuttin' some er my own relations" (Chesnutt 71). This use of dialectic language helps Julius draw sympathy and allows John and Annie to identify with his perspective of being a former slave and receiving harsh treatment for disobedience to his master. This reflects back to Julius's experiences of slavery during the antebellum period and grasps the attention of John and Annie by evoking curiosity and persuading them into wondering more about why Julius feels this way and tempting them into visiting more of the antebellum period through Julius's perspective.

Chesnutt continues to display strong dialect from Julius throughout each usage of his voice. Julius uses humor in his dialectic voice to educate John and Annie about the superstition of the rabbit's foot in "Sis Becky's Pickanniny." Julius explains that in order to get a lucky rabbit's foot, "It has ter be de hin'-foot, suh, - de lef' 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" (Chesnutt 83). The extreme description lightens Julius's tone and invites John and Annie to listen to his story by incorporating humor in an ironic way. This humor catches the interest of Julius's audience by allowing him to covertly explain horrific stories of the past by creating lightheartedness and outrageously silly tones at the beginning of each story. Chesnutt continues to display humor in "A Deep Sleeper" when he writes, "Come on heah wid dat w'eelborrow, yer lazy, good-fer-nuthin' rascal" (Chesnutt 145). By speaking to Tom in this manner, Julius demonstrates a whimsical side that likes to joke around with younger people. This allows Julius to be approachable to other characters and mask the identity of his trickster technique. The use of masking helps slaves to become trickster figures and escape the horrors of slavery into freedom.

By using this technique, Chesnutt creates Julius as a mastermind of storytelling who can grasp attention easily. Chesnutt also uses dialect to demonstrate the wittiness of Julius in "The Conjuror's Revenge" when he writes, "You en Mis' Annie wouldn' wanter 'lieve me, ef I wuz ter 'low dat dat man was oncet a mule" (Chesnutt 72). The ridiculous notion of a human turning into a mule is automatically assumed as a false by John and Annie. However, as the story progresses and Julius tells his story, Annie is able to be influenced by Julius to influence John to buy a horse rather than a mule. This use of nonsensical humor and dialect allows Julius to take control of the situation and educate John and Annie about the treatment of mules.

Julius also explains specific details through his use of storytelling that involves the trickster technique in the antebellum embedded narratives. In "Dave's Neckliss," Mars Dugal allows Dave to read the Bible when Chesnutt writes, "Doan 'pear ter me lack readin' de Bible done yer much harm, Dave" (Chesnutt 126). This demonstrates the usage of the trickster technique as Julius explains that Dave was able to

justify with his master a method of reading the Bible. Dave outwits his master by educating himself and others to learn how to read. This gives slave characters the ability to read other objects as well such as signs, which could lead to their escape from the plantation society of the South into freedom in the North. However, Mars Dugal does not take this into consideration. Instead, he is tricked into allowing a slave to read the Bible only because it is sacred text. Thus, Julius gives freedom of education to this slave in a concealed manner in which the master is completely unaware of what he is allowing.

This concealed behavior is known as masking because African-Americans display comfort in covertly educating during the postbellum South. Julius is unable to fully and overtly educate because he is scarred by the past and the experiences he witnesses. By masking his thoughts and his intellectual identity with dialect and other signs of slave authenticity, Julius is able to be a more convincing character that can change the views of white society with stories of the past. This makes Julius a covertly authoritative and more believable character than John or Annie.

Chesnutt portrays Dave as a trickster figure who is willing to sacrifice his life for the sake of others' educations although Julius identifies him as going crazy with the ham on his neck. Chesnutt demonstrates the sacrificial behavior of Dave as a trickster figure when he writes, "he got ter gwine roun' talkin' ter hisse'f, en singin' corn-shuckin' songs, en laffin' fit ter kill 'bout nuffin" (Chesnutt 131). Dave sacrificed his personal sanity and life in order for the other slaves because he taught several fellow slaves how to read. Therefore, the personal responsibility of stealing ham although he did not actually steal the ham himself, weighs down on Dave's psyche. Therefore, the notion of being a trickster causes Dave to take responsibility for the act of stealing a ham although he does not steal it. Rather than suggesting negativity though, Chesnutt portrays Dave's suicide as a concealed sacrifice for fellow slaves because he is willing to die for the education and sake of other slaves.

In his article "Negotiating Belief and Voicing Difference," Charles Duncan identifies Julius a character of "superficial resemblance to a host of late-nineteenth century black characters" who also appears as a "risk" to the African-American society (Duncan 98). While Julius does have similar traits to Joel Chandler Harris's Uncle Remus, Chesnutt's use of the trickster technique casts away stereotypes because firstly, unlike Uncle Remus, Julius does not have a traditional African-American title unless used by someone such as Annie. However, the notion of stereotypes is disagreeable because Uncle Remus and Julius both serve as primary trickster figures in each of their respective narratives. Both Chandler Harris and Chesnutt use the trickster technique to demonstrate the ways of the Old South and give African-Americans

a reliable voice to tell the stories of slavery. This notion gives African-Americans authenticity and power in an otherwise overtly powerless society.

Chesnutt continues to utilize the trickster technique through the narrative "Mars Jeems's Nightmare," which involves the tricking of a master names Jeems Mclean by a conjure woman named Aun' Peggy. She turns him into a slave and makes him suffer the same as those who he applies suffering to. Similarly, the character Skundus from "A Deep Sleeper" is a trickster by telling his master that he had fallen asleep in the barn rather than ran away. This Rip Van Winkle-esque narrative serves as a strong example of outwitting in order to keep oneself from punishment. Critic Dean McWilliams implies that Julius's trickster notion is to grasp the attention of his white audience (McWilliams 81). By utilizing this technique, Julius is able to covertly educate his audience on the past occurrences of the antebellum plantation society in the fictional town named Patesville, North Carolina, which Chesnutt describes as a strongly-functioning white plantation community. Likewise, Critic Daniel Worden also identifies Julius the primary trickster figure within the stories (Worden 4). Julius must serve as a trickster figure in order to capture the full attention of his audience. Through his trickster techniques, Julius is able to influence change within both John and Annie.

Subsequently, Critic Claudine Raynaud explains that the story "A Deep Sleeper" is primarily based on the notion of the trickster; as it is one of the last stories within the collection and a last chance for Julius to utilize this technique (Raynaud 696). Although the correct ordering of each story is unknown because Chesnutt did not have a written order for each story to go in before publishing, the position that Brodhead places these stories in has a powerful effect on the trickster technique. "A Deep Sleeper" is a strong demonstration of the trickster technique because the main character, Skundus, is able to convince his master that he had fallen asleep for several days in a barn underneath hay. Also, Tom was supposedly asleep like Julius told John and Annie he was, but had tricked everyone and was actually consuming the biggest watermelon within the watermelon patch. Chesnutt demonstrates the trickster notion of Tom through Julius's perspective when he writes, "I b'lieve somebody didn' wake 'im up he'd sleep till jedgmen' day" (Chesnutt 144). Rather than stating that Tom had not actually been asleep, Julius goes along with the trickster idea. Therefore, Julius is the ultimate trickster figure within each of these stories.

The use of a female trickster character continues to strengthen Chesnutt's use of women in powerful roles within the post-bellum period of the South. Viney's subtle trickster abilities gives power to even the weakest women in comparison to those who work in the fields with men like Becky. Chesnutt displays Viney's trickster abilities when he writes, "She;dnubber lost it, suh. Ole Viney could 'a' talked all de time,

ef she had a min'ter" (Chesnutt 171). Viney's ability to talk when rewarded suggests that she obtained more control over herself than literally suggested within the text. Through this behavior of obtaining money from men, Viney is able to empower herself personally by using her voice only when she wants to be paid. This technique of the female trickster is clever and innovated for the postbellum South as Chesnutt gives a self-controlled voice to woman who is looked down upon by society for being a former slave and remaining submissive to her master after the end of slavery.

Julius also presents ironic control due to his past as a former slave. Critic Catherine Clinton, author of *The Plantation Mistress*, expresses irony through Foucault's method in her chapter entitled "Foucault Meets Mandingo" when she writes, "Foucault reminds us that we cannot merely read what is said, but must consider the context and tone of the discourse, often rich in irony (Clinton 224). Chesnutt adapts this technique of irony through Julius's portrayal of many characters like Dave from "Dave's Neckliss" and Henry from "The Goophered Grapevine." Dave represents the idea of irony by tricking his master into allowing him to learn how to read and educating others on how to read Christian text although slaves are forbidden to be educated. Henry is presented with irony due to his ability of becoming affected by the changing of grapevines, which have been "goophered" by a conjure woman to prevent slaves from eating grapes while picking them for their master. This strongly represents the belief of spiritual and superstitious occurrences that were carried throughout the 19th century African-American culture.

Through the portrayal of strong African-American central characters of these narratives, Chesnutt implies that it is time to bring change into the postbellum era. Thus, Chesnutt demonstrates change by showing a sense of cooperation from John and Annie to Julius as he tells his stories. John displays interest in Julius's tales in "The Gray Wolf's Ha'nt" when Chesnutt writes, "of tales of the old slavery days he seemed to possess an exhaustless store" (Chesnutt 96). John and Annie are willing to listen to his stories because they are being educated about the past. Critic Heather Tirado Gilligan refutes the idea of John as cooperative with Julius's narrative when she suggests, "Ultimately, in the character of Annie, Chesnutt advocates to magazine readers a new form of sentimentalism, a way to read racial difference that is at once thoughtful..." (Gilligan 203). Though Chesnutt directly warns the readers of the horrors of the past in his use of Julius as the narrator, he does not present a sentimental attitude. Instead, Chesnutt uses each of his stories to create a proactive voice for the future of African-American literature.

Julius does serve as a reminder of the past, but takes control of the narrative progression within the stories in Chesnutt's inversion of the Southern paradigm. This allows Julius to gain strong sympathy and evoke emotion from his audience

as he retells the cruelties of the past. Critic Lucinda Hardwick MacKethan identifies Julius as an absolute necessity of power in the postbellum South because Julius "is the central figure and most often the chief spokesman in post-Civil War portrayals of the antebellum Arcadia" (MacKethan 11). Through his sympathetic message, Julius is able to capture the full attention of Annie particularly by educating and entertaining her with his stories of the past. Although this exercise of education is limited towards the beginning of the narratives, Chesnutt certainly finds ways towards each ending to demonstrate how Annie has been affected by the telling of the past.

Chesnutt demonstrates Annie's sympathetic influence from Julius in "Sis Becky's Pickanniny" when he writes, "My wife's condition a turn for the better from this very day, and she was soon on the way to ultimate recovery" (Chesnutt 92). This wellness has a major impact on both John and Annie as Annie was very ill at the beginning of the narrative. Chesnutt demonstrates Annie's illness at the beginning of "Sis Becky's Pickanniny" when he writes, "My wife was apparently without energy enough to speak for herself" (Chesnutt 83). However, Annie mood and wellness changes after listening to the story. When Julius finishes the storytelling of the embedded narrative, Annie feels much better than before. Thus, by listening to these entertaining and enlightening stories, Annie is able to become focused on simple aspects of life that make her physically feel better.

Annie is able to sympathize with the tales because she is ill and is viewed as weak in health. Thus, she can relate to others in each narrative that have attained weakness and despair. Chesnutt continues to display Annie's emotions in "Dave's Neckliss" when he writes, "'The fact is,' she said, pensively, 'I couldn't have eaten any more of that ham, and so I gave it to Julius'" (Chesnutt 135). The story of Dave's torture with ham has such a strong effect on Annie that she is unable to finish her meal. Therefore, Julius has evoked such strong emotion from her that she has become physically unable to deny it having an effect on her. Chesnutt continues to demonstrate Annie's attention to Julius's storytelling in "Po Sandy" when he writes, "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" (Chesnutt 54). Annie is interested in Julius's stories of slavery times to the extent of referencing these stories when speaking to John. Julius is able to convince Annie to understand and believe his stories because his techniques of dialect and emotion draw in her attention.

Critic Paul R. Petrie argues that Annie is able to identify more extensively with the conditions of slavery, although Petrie never clearly suggests how this occurs (Petrie 183). This argument suggests that Annie is also a weak figure and makes her more identifiable with those directly overtaken

and controlled by slavery. In "Sis Becky's Pickaniny," Annie obtains a rabbit's foot from Julius. This allows her to have a connection to the weak characters who receive animalistic treatment within this tale because Becky is traded for a horse and must leave her child Mose behind on her former master's plantation. Julius states that if Becky had obtained a rabbit's foot, she would not have had such bad luck with her life. Annie takes this story seriously and follows the idea that Julius conveys to her through this story. Also, this story gains Annie's attention because it appears to bring life into her due to her illness making her weak. She is able to listen fully to this story and feel a connection with Becky. Although Chesnutt never clearly states any acknowledgement of children in Annie's immediate family, the notion of losing a child may be the reason why Annie is able to identify so extensively with Becky and this story. Chesnutt is masterful with his use of covert behavior. Thus, the notion of losing a child can be clearly viewed as a possibility for Annie's attachment to this story. By telling this story, Julius may be giving a feeling of peace to Annie for any losses she has had in her life.

These words are strongly influential to Annie. While both John and Annie listen to Julius's story intently, only Annie is influenced by Julius's words because she can identify with the weakness placed on Becky in the story. Chesnutt exhibits Annie's influence from hearing the story about Becky when he writes, "When I pulled the handkerchief out of her pocket, something else came with it and fell on the floor. I picked up the object and looked at it. It was Julius's rabbit's foot" (Chesnutt 93). Julius is able to convince Annie that a rabbit's foot can give good luck to those who carry one of these objects.

Chesnutt displays a strong and disagreeing attitude from John towards the notion of the rabbit's foot as a good luck charm when he suggests, "Julius, I observed, half to him and half to my wife, 'your people will never rise in the world until they throw off these childish superstitions'" (Chesnutt 83). While Chesnutt quickly demonstrates that John does not believe in the notion of luck through objects, he does not suggest the same kind of behavior through Annie's perspective. John tends to view Julius's superstitious beliefs as nonsensical because he is unable to understand the cultural beliefs of African-Americans. Julius is set in these beliefs because he is raised by African-American women and men who carry these traditions with them from ancestors. John was not exposed to this in the manner that Julius was, so John cannot understand the importance of superstitious beliefs to African-Americans and the antebellum slave culture. Thus, John automatically detests anyone who believes in these ideas as a weak person and makes the idea of John believing that Annie is a weak person appear.

While the possibility of Chesnutt portraying Annie in a misogynistic view is likely, Chesnutt stays clear from this type of portrayal because he is humanizing female individuals

rather than suppressing them. Although he is using Annie's weakness to identify with the horrors of slave life, Chesnutt is bringing awareness rather than ridiculing female characters because he displays these actions of struggle in both male and female slave characters within the embedded narratives. Chesnutt's usage of animal imagery within his tales demonstrates the suppression in which these slaves had to endure during the antebellum period. Chesnutt displays the struggle of male characters in "The Goophered Grapevine" when he writes, "Mars Dugal' sot spring guns en steel traps, en he en de oberseah sot up night once't er twice't..." (Chesnutt 36). By setting traps, the masters and overseers treat slaves in an inhumane way. All of the slaves working in these fields in "The Goophered Grapevine" are male characters. Therefore, both genders receive similar treatment. However, by displaying Becky as a slave working in the fields and various conjure women such as Aun' Peggy and Aun' Nancy, Chesnutt is empowering female slave characters. They receive equal treatment by allowing them to perform tasks that are generally male-oriented. Although there is also a male conjurer within the story, Chesnutt does not display any greater treatment between the two genders. Each conjure figure is treated with the same power and mystery as the other.

By using Julius as a self-controlling voice, Chesnutt is able to move away from minstrel traditions of male stereotypes of 19th century African-American characters that are ever-present within the South. Critic William L. Andrews implies that Julius is humanized through the stories by expressing sympathy, whimsy, and reliability as a narrator (Andrews 377). He is able to persuade John particularly through his use of storytelling in the tale "The Conjuror's Revenge." Julius is able to persuade John into getting a horse instead of a mule, although the plan backfires due to the physical disabilities of the horse. Chesnutt demonstrates the persistence of Julius towards influencing John to buy a horse rather than a mule when he writes, "Ef you makes up yo' min' not ter buy dat mule, suh," he added, as he rose to go, "I knows a man w'at's got a good hoss he wants ter sell" (Chesnutt 80). The action in which Julius stands up demonstrates taking control of the situation. Therefore, not only is Julius being influential and controlling with his voice, but also with his physical movements. This action represents covert control because the description of movement is very subtle within the text. By allowing Julius to tell the story of why he should not buy a mule, John is allowing Julius to take control of the narrative as a whole. Thus, Julius becomes the authority of persuasion and information to John as well as Annie, who has a strong amount of influence of her husband John due to her illness.

Chesnutt further displays John's acknowledgement of Julius's persuasive techniques in "Dave's Neckliss." John speaks of his view of Julius's storytelling when Chesnutt writes:

While he mentioned with a warm appreciation the acts of kindness which those in authority had

shown to him and his people, he would speak of a cruel deed, not with the indignation of one accustomed to quick feeling and spontaneous expression, but with a furtive disapproval which suggested to us a doubt in his own mind as to whether he had a right to think or to feel, and presented to us the curious psychological spectacle of a mind enslaved long after the shackles had been struck off the limbs of its possessor (Chesnutt 124).

The identification of Julius as a true reminder of the past through John's perspective demonstrates that Chesnutt suggests that John understands the struggles that Julius faces every day by reliving the trauma of slavery. By using these words, John is able to fully acknowledge the struggle that Julius must endure. Therefore, John demonstrates sympathetic behavior in a covert manner. This instance of sympathy is very empowering for Julius because John often ridicules and ignores the methods of storytelling that Julius exhibits. However, rather than being influenced to present different behavior like his wife Annie, John subtly mentions within the text that Julius has influenced him to look at slavery differently than before. As a native to the North, John is traditionally unable to understand slavery because he has never experienced the conditions until he and Annie move to North Carolina. Through Julius's perspective as a former slave, John is able to experience the past fully and understand the traumatic experiences that former slaves had to endure.

Also, Julius places John in perspective of aspects of slave culture that were not traditionally exposed to the public because of their controversy. For example, Julius openly admits that Mars Dugal was his owner in "The Goophered Grapevine." However, John notices that Julius has a peculiar complexion. Chesnutt displays John's recognition of Julius's peculiar complexion when he writes, "I had observed that he was a tall man, and, though slightly bowed by the weight of years, apparently quite vigorous. He was not entirely black, and this fact, together with the quality of his hair, which was about six inches long and very bushy, except on top of his head, where he was quite bald, suggested a slight strain of other than negro blood" (Chesnutt 34). This notion of uncertain racial identity is observed quite specifically by John because he acts as though he has never encountered someone of mixed racial identity. Therefore, John takes particularly close interest in examining Julius upon his first encounter with him in order to better understand what the true meaning of race actually is.

Therefore, he is compelled to observe more intensely as Chesnutt continues to suggest, "There was a shrewdness in his eyes, too, which was not altogether African, and which, as we afterwards learned from experience, was indicative of a corresponding shrewdness in his character" (Chesnutt 34). Although the typical definition of shrewdness may bring

a negative meaning, as though someone knows too much for their own sake, the meaning of shrewdness that Chesnutt presents demonstrates that John is fully aware that Julius is a very intelligent man through his covert behavior. However, John does appear to represent a racist tone when he suggests that Julius's intellect was not completely of African descent.

Chesnutt uses John in this way to demonstrate the skepticism of white society in the postbellum South towards African-Americans. John's skeptical behavior is presented in "Sis Becky's Pickaninny" when Chesnutt writes, "How absurd to imagine that the fore-foot of a poor dead rabbit...can promote happiness or success, or ward off failure or misfortune" (Chesnutt 83). Although John is not a native southerner, he still represents the skeptical behavior presented by the entirety of the United States after the end of the Civil War. This behavior displayed by John is best identified as skepticism rather than racism because John does not appear aggressive and rude towards Julius like many white men in the South would behave out of fear in the postbellum South.

Additionally, Julius inspires John to tell stories himself, particularly through the tale "The Dumb Witness." John uses observation to dig deeper into the tale of an old former plantation master named Malcolm Murchison and a racially mixed woman named Viney, who is treated like a slave although the time period is in the postbellum era of the South. However, John does not display the same skepticism towards racial identity that he possesses with Julius. By listening to the stories of Julius's past, John begins to be more observant of the people within the community. Chesnutt demonstrates John's storytelling when he writes, "The air was cool, the sky was clear, the stars shone with a brightness unknown in higher latitudes" (Chesnutt 162). This description of scenery sets the tone of John's story, which is overshadowed with confusion and irony due to Viney's submissiveness to Malcolm Murchison. Therefore, John has been greatly influenced by Julius's storytelling abilities and captures the sadness and despair of Viney's life as a controlled individual and the wit that she obtains to trick Malcolm Murchison.

John continues his storytelling technique by establishing a definite beginning to the story that is easy to follow when Chesnutt writes, "The Murchison family had occupied their ancestral seat on the sandhills for a hundred years or more" (Chesnutt 162). By starting the narrative telling with historical information, John is using a technique displayed by Julius to begin his story. He gives details about the Murchison family in order for a clear understanding of their lives to be suggested. This allows for an establishment of understanding the Murchison family and how Viney's life becomes mysterious and intriguing. By telling this narrative, John demonstrates how Julius's storytelling techniques have influenced his own voice.

In conclusion, Julius is the authority figure despite not being narrator of these tales. Chesnutt uses Julius as the authority to display the need for African-American authority figures in literature to create a voice for the voiceless past. This idea of Chesnutt's covert portrayal of an African-American authority figure marks the beginning of the African-American literary movement for acceptance and support in a white-dominated society that often ridicules and negates the African-American self. Foucault's theory of Panopticism maintains this notion of organized power by giving Julius covert authority through Chesnutt's use of storytelling, irony, and strong emotion evoked by multiple characters. Julius is able to gain sympathy, educate his audience, and inform a new era of the need for full equality in the changing society of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

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