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UNCLE REMUS, HIS SONGS AND HIS SAYINGS

Abstract

In spite of the fact that Joel Chandler Harris was a white author from the antebellum South, his Uncle Remus stories may be credited with preserving authentic African American speech patterns of the nineteenth century. Harris had befriended a slave, George Terrell, while working on the Turner plantation as an apprentice printer shortly before the Civil War. Terrell was a father-figure to Harris, who recalled stories he had told when he created the character of Uncle Remus. The stories arise from African folklore, and make a link between African tales. Hence we find the true African roots of the contemporary Bugs Bunny. Although the stories were sometimes used by whites to further racism, especially in a Hollywood production of 1946, and although Harris himself sometimes looked back nostalgically to the time of slavery, in fact these stories replete with trickster characters cannot be seen as anything less than African-American empowerment tales. They have rightfully been recovered by African Americans ranging from James Weldon Johnson in 1917 to jazz musicians and contemporary African American story tellers such as Diane Ferlatte. It also becomes clear that many African American writers who emphasize the oral tradition in their works may owe something to Joel Chandler Harris.

Key words: Joel Chandler Harris, Brer Rabbit, Uncle Remus, Eatonton, Georgia, Dialect Folk Tales, African American Culture and Heritage, Mark Twain, Paul Laurence Dunbar, *Songs from the South* (1946), Alain Locke, Langston Hughes, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Diane Ferlatte, William Morris, James Weldon Johnson, Eddie Vinson, Roy Buchanan, Wynton Marsalis

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Joel Chandler Harris first published *Uncle Remus, His Songs and His Sayings* in 1880.¹ He would go on to publish seven other collections of Uncle Remus stories during his lifetime and three further volumes were published after his death in 1908. But his reputation was established with the publication of the first Uncle Remus book.

Harris was born in 1846 in Eatonton, Georgia, and took to lying about his age in the 1860s, saying that he was born in 1848. Since he was a bastard child, perhaps he was intent to survive the Civil War so as to care for his mother. Either to avoid military service or to secure a job in 1862 as printer's apprentice to Joseph Addison Turner, Harris said he was born in 1848, and continued to maintain the false birthdate from that time forward (see Brasch 2000: 8, 18, 19). Turner was a lawyer, printer, and prolific reader. While working with Turner on his press, Harris lived in the home of the plantation owner and had access to his considerable library: his salary was "clothing, room, and board" (Brasch 2000: 11). In another building on Turner's plantation, located in the country and named Turnwold, they edited a paper called *The Countryman*. Joel Chandler Harris learned to set the type for the press. Harris greatly admired Turner and his benevolent attitude toward his slaves. In 1860 Turner published negro dialect verse in a short-lived periodical called *The Plantation*. It was an interesting precursor to the popularity of that dialect that occurred thirty years later in the 1890s. During his free time, Chandler could wander about or read to his heart's content. He spent a good amount of time talking to slaves, and became fond of a slave named George Terrell. It is thought that Terrell became a kind of a father figure to him, and he was the man that the character Uncle Remus was patterned after. The little boy of the stories may have been Harris or the young Joe Syd Turner (Brasch 2000: 10-11). Meanwhile, saving him from an uncertain fate, Turner listed Harris as unfit for military service in 1864. Joel Chandler Harris did not leave Turner or *The Countryman* until it became clear that the paper would no longer be printed, and in 1866, after working as a typesetter for the Macon *Telegraph*, he went to New Orleans for six months before returning to Georgia. Turner had been ruined by Yankee requisitioning on his farm and then it turned out that his Jeffersonian agrarian farmer ideal was hampered by the release of the slaves. Harris would later write about these formative experiences

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in *On the Plantation: A Story of a Georgia Boy's Adventures During the War* (1892).

Joel Chandler Harris wrote the Uncle Remus stories first as regular contributions to the *Atlanta Constitution* paper, beginning in 1878. The first collection of the stories was published in 1880 as *Uncle Remus, His Songs and His Sayings* and was illustrated by Frederick S. Church and James H. Moser. Jean Wagner who first published *Poètes noirs des Etats-Unis* in 1962 noted (I quote from the translation by Kenneth Douglass published in 1972):

Harris, who had a remarkable command of the Negro dialect of his own region, had heard Negroes tell these tales and had modified them, to some extent, in deference to the plantation tradition (59).

In *Brer Rabbit, Uncle Remus and the "Cornfield Journalist": the tale of Joel Chandler Harris* (2000), Walter Brasch has shown that Harris shared Turner's longing for a "utopian plantation society" (17). Brasch asserted: "The lure of the comfort of the plantation life, as opposed to the uncertainties and problems in Reconstruction, would be a theme that threaded its way through many of Harris's tales (46)."

And yet, Harris is the first white writer to be recognized as transcribing African-American speech and folklore. As Robert Bone noted in 1975, the subversive folk hero Brer Rabbitt provided "the missing link between the Afro-American folktale and the Afro-American short story" (Bickley 1981: 130). In fact, since the first volume of Uncle Remus tales published in 1880, considerable efforts have been made to accurately identify the folklore sources for Harris's rabbit and the various adventures he and the other animals have. Among those generally mentioned are the hare of Kenya transposed into American Slave Culture, the rabbit in Hindu traditions, and Cherokee and Algonquin folktales that also speak of a smart trickster rabbit.² As Florence Baer remarked, Harris's "early tales were collected as

² Important studies addressing the original sources of the folklore materials shared by Uncle Remus include Adolph Gerber's address to the American Folk-Lore Society (1892), John M. McBryde „Brer Rabbit in the Folk Tales of the Negro and Other Races“ in the *Sewanee Review* (1911), Stella Brewer Brookes, *Joel Chandler Harris-Folklorist* (1950), Richard Dorson, *American Negro Folktales* (1967), J. Mason Brewer, *American Negro Folklore* (1968), Florence E Baer *Sources and Analogues of the Uncle Remus Tales* (1980), and Jonathan Brennan (ed), *When Brer-Rabbit Meets Coyote: African-Native American Literature* (2003).

much as possible from former plantation slaves” (1980: 165), and since Harris collected his tales over a thirty year period, they were “bound to reflect changing values and conditions of tellers and audience” (1980: 165).

The success of the Brer Rabbit stories upon publication in 1880 was immediate. Reprints were issued in 1881, and new sets of tales were published through the 1890s. They soon received international attention as well, with William Morris weaving a fabric with a design of Brer Rabbit, and African Americans themselves desiring to print texts in dialect. Mark Twain’s *Life on the Mississippi* (1883) praises Harris in the chapter “Uncle Remus and Mr. Cable” in a humorous way, noting Harris’s refusal to read the Uncle Remus stories aloud to children who were disappointed that he was not black: “Mr. Harris ought to be able to read the negro dialect better than anybody else, for in the matter of writing it he is the only master the country has produced (Bickley 1981: 54)”. Of course, Twain must have been influenced by Harris’s use of written dialect when he wrote out the dialogues of Huck and Jim in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884). Harris received recognition from another *connoisseur* of African-American dialect: Thomas Nelson Page, who wrote in his review to the 1895 re-edition of *Uncle Remus, His Songs and His Sayings* (illustrated by Frost), that Harris was the most accomplished writer of the Negro, and that his works “were the ‘best thesaurus’ for the ‘real language’ of the old-time Negro” (Bickley 1981: xvi). However, by 1895, that was no longer strictly true, since African Americans themselves were writing and publishing in dialect, with, for example, Paul Laurence Dunbar’s poems found in *Majors and Minors* (1895). Writing in the *New Republic* in 1932, Allen Tate would argue that the public’s “conception of Harris” had been limited to “a provincial Georgian, with a genius for Negro dialect, who created a character called Uncle Remus” (Bickley 1981: 58). Tate wanted what he did not hesitate to call his “fugitive writings,” those edited by his daughter-in-law Julia Collier Harris in *Joel Chandler Harris: Editor and Essayist* (1931), to be better known (*Ibid*: 58). These writings, basically an anthology of works by Harris that are not about Uncle Remus or Brer Rabbit, reveal that Harris was an important writer during the Reconstruction period and that he wanted to help reconcile the North and the South with humor. But it is still uncomfortable to think about the Harris that grew up with slavery and who, after the war like other southern gentry, had African American household servants. Robert Bone has classed his journalistic role

as being “an active propagandist in the cause of white supremacy” (Bickley 1981: 130). As Harris continued his Uncle Remus writings, he interviewed African Americans who were working for him, as well as total strangers, to enrich the body of stories. One of the later episodes includes the story of Uncle Remus during the war, defending his white mistresses with an axe when the Union soldiers come to the plantation. I would like to think that Harris sought reconciliation between blacks and whites as much as between the North and the South, but this is not certain. However, he did not discourage people from calling him Uncle Remus toward the end of his life, as though he could slip into the skin of a black man and was not against doing so. Nonetheless, the use of the stories made by some white readers only promoted racism. There were Uncle Remus restaurants in the South where blacks were not allowed to eat.

Whether or not Harris’s heart was always in the right place, it cannot be denied that his trickster, Brer Rabbit, is a genuine fixture of African-American heritage. The French critic Jean Wagner noted, in 1962 in *Poètes Noirs des Etats-Unis*, Harris’s important role in putting the trickster character of Brer Rabbit into print. Following Bernard Wolfe’s lead in an article published in *Commentary* (July 1949), Wagner thought the Remus stories portrayed the Black man as superior to his white counterpart (Wagner 1972: 60). “Brer Rabbit was a disguise for the black man, while the white man appeared variously as wolf, bear, or other animals more noted for strength than cunning (*Ibid*: 60).” The stories show how Brer Rabbit’s trickery allows him to outwit, outwear, out-wheedle, and even kill his adversaries.

In this sense, some readers have suggested that almost in spite of the author’s nostalgic views of plantation life, Joel Chandler Harris’s Uncle Remus stories could be an excellent base text for slave revolt—or for the Civil Rights Movement. But during the first half of the 20th Century they were not. Instead they were used in advertising, to promote the purchase of Coca Cola in 1932. In 1946 the Walt Disney film production of *Songs from the South* over-simplified the stories, and focused them onto three figures, Brer Rabbit, Brer Fox, and Brer Bear. This film very conveniently eliminated most of the trickster features of the stories. Disney had purchased the rights to all of Harris’s stories in 1939, the same year that the nostalgic Old-South box-office hit *Gone With the Wind* had its premier showing in Atlanta in December. Opening with strains of the Confederate Battle Hymn “Dixieland” and shots of the Confederate flag flying over Atlanta, *Gone*

With the Wind gave the viewer the Old South. This was exactly what the white movie-goer wanted to see, as Disney had understood. The place of the benevolent old black mammy and the happy and entertaining black slave was to be given a re-run in the travesty of Uncle Remus that was *Songs from the South*.

When the film *Songs from the South* premiered in Atlanta, on November 12, 1946, several of its primary stars, including James Baskett who played Uncle Remus and Hattie McDaniel, who had been Scarlett O'Hara's mammy and was again cast as mammy figure, were unable to attend the whites' only showing. Yet, Walt Disney had performed a technical feat that it was able to market for decades: here was the first film to have animated characters appear within the photographic film sequences. And the music was purposefully planned to keep children entertained. Ray Gilbert wrote the lyrics to the film score, with the prominent song "Zip-a-Dee-Doo-Dah." The film was based on a 1905 book by Harris, and covered only three stories: "The Tar Baby," "The Laughing Place," and "The Cornfield Story" (see Brasch 278). Condemned both by the NAACP and by *Ebony* magazine that noted that Uncle Remus had become "an Uncle Tom-Aunt Jemima caricature" (Brasch 2000: 280), Disney still did not hesitate to re-release the film in 1956-8, to be withdrawn in 1970, then re-released in 1977 and 1986 (Brasch 2000: 281). It was not issued on VHS videotape for sale in the USA, but was released in 1996 in Europe and Japan (Brasch 2000: 285).

Harris's original volume of Uncle Remus Stories was divided into three parts: Legends of the Old Plantation, which contain stories told by Uncle Remus to the little boy, including some of today's best known tales such as "The Wonderful Tar Baby Story" (1880 23-25; 29-31) or "Mr Rabbit Nibbles up the Butter" (1880 75-80). In "The Awful Fate of Mr. Wolf" (1880 63-67) Brer Wolf enters Brer Rabbit's home to get away from the dogs that have been chasing him, and this after invading the home and eating several little rabbits on prior visits. The Rabbit coaxes him into a crate and then kills him with boiling water and uses his skin as a rug for his back porch. (If some contemporary reviewers have fretted over the violence in the stories, let it be remembered that fairy tales also engage with adult, and sometimes violent topics). This first section ends with "Plantation Proverbs," a series of short pithy statements in dialect.

The second section of the 1880 volume was entitled "His Songs" and included hymns (which shall be described shortly). The second section also

contained “A Story of the War” (175-188). The Final section of the book was called “His Sayings” and in this section Uncle Remus speaks about his own every-day life on the plantation (189-231), in twenty-one chapters. “A Story of the War” (175-185) related how one woman of Vermont, sister of John Huntingdon who had become a citizen of Georgia, came to visit the South, and was met by Uncle Remus at the station. Uncle Remus’s story of the war explains how he defended his white mistresses and saved his master John from certain death by cutting off the arm of one Union soldier with an axe. Miss Sally nursed the poor fellow back to life and wound up marrying John Huntingdon. This is a reconstruction tale if ever there was one—with a big smile to Yankees.

The third section, “His Sayings” related events from the daily life of Uncle Remus, and it must be this section which has given most offense to African-Americans. Uncle Remus is seen as intelligent, but the dialect makes him an object of laughter. In the first part of the book the animals are objects of laughter and Uncle Remus is a gifted story-teller. In “A Story of War” he actually fights on the Confederate Side. In the final section, he is a free black that seriously lacks grammar. The object of the reader’s laughter has shifted from the animals to uneducated African Americans. Worse yet, Remus’s voice argues against education in the chapter called “As to Education” (222-223): “Put a spellin’-book in a nigger’s han’s, en right den en dar’ you loozes a plow-hand. I done had de spe’unce un it (223).”

Before we investigate the more appropriate legacies of Harris’s transcription of folktales, including other musical adaptations of Harris’s Uncle Remus’s Brer Rabbit, let us look at the musicality of the text itself. When a writer uses dialect, he or she is in some way capturing the sound and song of a voice. In one sense, the dialect form of these tales is already a kind of music. Perhaps unbeknownst to Harris, he was preserving a voice that would disappear.

Harris also wrote songs into his texts featuring Uncle Remus. In her chapter on “Songs in the Uncle Remus stories” in *Joel Chandler Harris, Folklorist* (1950), Brookes noted that in 1880, when Harris’s *Uncle Remus: His Songs and His Sayings* was published, Sidney Lanier, also a Georgian, published *The Science of English Verse* (120). Brookes drew attention to Harris’s interest in prosody. During his apprenticeship years at the *Countryman*, Harris had the idea of collecting verse that he could publish as *Gems of Southern Poetry*. According to Thomas English, he worked on this project for five years before abandoning it (Bickley 1981: 63). Brookes

made categories for the songs in verse contained in the eight volumes of Uncle Remus stories published by Harris: Spirituals or hymns, Work Songs, Love Songs, Lullabies, Dance Songs, Play Songs, Miscellaneous (1950: 120-148). Brookes also noticed that there were many verse “fragments scattered throughout the Uncle Remus volumes. Frequently they are sung by some of the principal actors in the story” (*Ibid*: 138). Another musical feature of the stories that African Americans told was the notion of call and response, an aspect that Harris wrote into the stories (Brookes 1950: 139). Harris was also careful about the refrains to his songs, making them “more intricate than most folk songs” according to Brookes (*Ibid*: 148).

To provide an example of the way verse or song comes up in a story, chapter VI “Mr Rabbit Grossly Deceives Mr. Fox” will suffice. At the beginning of this story, the little boy’s entertainment is compared to *The Arabian Nights*, and it is noted that Uncle Remus upon hearing the child’s footsteps, engages him *in medias res* as it were through the use of verse:

Ole Molly Har’,
W’at you doin’ dar,
Settin’ in de cornder
Smokin’ yo’ seegyar (Harris 1880: 34-35)?

As mentioned above, the second part of the first volume *Uncle Remus: His Songs and His Sayings* (1880) contained nine songs, five of which are religious in nature, and two of which are play songs. One falls into Brookes’s miscellaneous category: “A Plantation Serenade”. This serenade reveals criticism of slavery as exploitation in its first stanza:

De ole bee make de honey-comb,
De young bee make de honey,
De niggers make de cotten en co’n,
En de w’ite folks gits de money (167).

Like white Americans, African Americans have had varied reactions to Harris as author and to the Uncle Remus stories. While most African Americans condemned the Disney film interpretation of the stories, reactions to Harris’s original stories were mixed. During the Harlem Renaissance and the 1930s, many writers could be said to have been influenced by Harris. Alain Locke said Harris had “rendered as much poetic justice to the Negro as an orthodox Southerner could” (Brasch 2000: 289). James

Weldon Johnson praised Harris's preservation of African American folklore in 1922, followed by W.E.B DuBois, who noted that he had translated it to a white audience (Brasch 2000: 289). Zora Neale Hurston's use of dialect may owe something to Harris (Brasch 2000: 272). By the 1930s however, Sterling A. Brown thought that Harris's black characters were stereotyped, describing only the contented slave or the free but wretched black (Brasch 2000: 289). Brown's own poetry also used dialect, but having attended Dunbar High School in Washington D.C., he would have traced this heritage directly to Dunbar. Brasch noted that Ralph Ellison "had used Brer Rabbit/Tar-Baby themes in *Invisible Man* (1952)" as did Toni Morrison in her 1981 novel *Tar Baby* (2000: 315). One gets the impression that a case might be made that would show that any person writing in dialect may have come under the influence of Joel Chandler Harris.

But there has also been clear opposition to Harris's stories. Alice Walker who, like Harris, was born in Eatonton, wrote an article, "Uncle Remus, No Friend of Mine" for *Southern Exposure* magazine (1981), in which she stated she had no respect for Harris, and that "he stole a good part of my heritage." In her town was an Uncle Remus Restaurant where blacks were not admitted.

Of course, people practicing the racism that Walker suffered from may have nostalgically interpreted the Uncle Remus stories, but was Harris himself ultimately nostalgic for the Old South? He was recording a reality he had observed and heard. The stories were distorted by his readers, perhaps, but Harris seems to have, at least in his later days, hoped for reconciliation between Blacks and Whites and North and South. Such hopes were behind his founding the journal *Uncle Remus's The Home Magazine* in 1906. While it is true that the volume published in homage to him at Christmas 1908, the year of his death, was called '*Uncle Remus': Joel Chandler Harris as Seen and Remembered by a Few of His Friends*' (ed. Ivy Lee) and seems to use the name Uncle Remus to refer to Chandler himself, this very usage may have been encouraged by Harris toward the end of his life-time.

The trickster rabbit at the heart of Harris's stories, the weaker animal that uses his head instead of brute force, is the key to thinking about the interpretations of Uncle Remus and Brer Rabbit that followed. Harris's Uncle Remus stories could stand to be re-read in the original today. Like Twain, he may have been writing against the current after all, or at the least transcribing the tales that went against the current. He understood that his readership would include whites who would not be interested

unless they thought the gist depicted a view close to what they already thought about blacks. Portraying the worth of the African-American mind to whites required its own kind of trickery, and perhaps Harris and Twain were attempting to do that very thing.

Harris's Brer Rabbit has attracted numerous homages, musical and otherwise, that have often emphasized his trickster nature. One early sign of recognition was woven into fabric, when in the 1880s, William Morris, upon reading these tales was so enchanted that he designed two rabbits facing each other, to be used in interior decorating schemes.



James Weldon Johnson wrote a poem, «Brer Rabbit, you's de cutes' 'of 'em all» that was included in his 1917 collection, *Fifty Years and Other Poems*, which contained a section of dialect poems called “Jingles & Croons.” The poem was set to music for voice and piano by Gary Bachlund (2009).

There are numerous purely instrumental representations of Brer Rabbit. In the classical music genre, Edward Alexander Macdowell's composition for piano “Fireside Tales” (Opus 61, 1902) are about Brer Rabbit, and have been recorded in performance by James Barbagallo. Eddie Vinson's jazz piece “Br'er Rabbit” was a Big Band hit in the 1940s. In the 1970s, Rhythm and Blues artist Roy Buchanan performed and recorded “Adventures of Brer Rabbit and Tar Baby” using electric guitar. The piece is instrumental, and a fine expression of musical craftsmanship. Delfeayo Marsalis, the

trombonist brother of trumpet play Wynton Marsalis and saxophonist Branford Marsalis released his third jazz album, *Minions Dominion* in 2006. It opens with a seven and a half minute piece called “Brer Rabbit”.

Storytelling interpretations, often with musical accompaniment, exist for these stories, with many available on the internet. Rich Amerson, a blues and folk musician, who must have remembered his grandparents telling these stories, recorded Brer Rabbit stories for Folkways records (Negro Folk Music of Alabama, vol.3, 1960). His voice is gravelly, recalling the old time, ungrammatical talk, that is more difficult for today’s listener to understand than the other recordings, but it is also probably the closest to the real story-telling that Harris himself heard in the 1860s and following. Amerson, when telling the story of Brer Rabbit and the Alligators uses the voice as instrument, but does not include any song or musical melody beyond the poetic repetitions or emphasis given to his voice.

Alice Walker, as mentioned above, felt dispossessed of the heritage these stories represent. One can imagine that the Uncle Remus Museum of Eatonton was not a place she enjoyed visiting as a child. Given the Disney perversions of the stories and of Uncle Remus, perhaps it is only natural that there was a lull in interest for them by African Americans during the 1960s and early 1970s. Other African American writers of that period that emphasized the oral tradition, such as Ernest Gaines, were also left in the margins of the Black Power and Black Arts movement. One of the problems for acceptance was the use of dialect.³ Langston Hughes had also registered the gap between dialect and educated speech in his *Simple Stories* in the 1950s and 1960s. But, since the 1980s, a renewed interest in Harris’s stories can definitely be discerned. Julius Lester decided to adapt the stories into modern English and brought out *The Tales of Uncle Remus, The Adventures of Brer Rabbit*, with illustrations by Jerry Pinkney in 1987. The two continued with *More Tales of Uncle Remus* (1988), *Further Tales of Uncle Remus* (1990) and *The Last Tales of Uncle Remus* (1994).⁴ Augusta

³ Two editions of the stories printed for children used dialect: *Favorite Uncle Remus* ed. George van Santvoord (1948) and *The Complete Tales of Uncle Remus* ed. Richard Chase (1955).

⁴ Other adaptations of Harris’s stories have been made by Ennis Rees who made rhyming verse of the tales in *Brer Rabbit and His Tricks* (1967), Jane Shaw in *Brer Rabbit and Brer Fox* (1973), F. Roy Johnson and F. Mark Johnson, *In the Old South With Brer Rabbit and His Neighbors* (1977), Virginia Hamilton, *The People Could Fly* (1985), Van Dyke Parks and Malcolm Jones, *Jump! The Adventures of Brer Rabbit* (1986), Anne Hesse (ed.), *Giant Treasury of Brer Rabbit* (1991)– (references from Brasch 2000: 305-312).

Baker's introduction to Julius Lester's adaptation explains that the stories are presented without the frame of Black Uncle Remus telling the stories to a white child. They are also presented with little emphasis on Joel Chandler Harris (not mentioned on the cover or title page). They modify the slaves' bent English to a modern English with a Southern Accent. These stories are intended for contemporary children.

The Adventures of Brer Rabbit led to a play and a film (also for children). The one-act play was written by Gayle Comelison, and performed at the California Theatre Center at Sunnyvale California for over 20 years (beginning in 1977). In 2006 a cartoon film version was released, directed by Byron Vaughns with screenplay by John Loy, music by Stephen James Taylor, that some saw linked to hip-hop. The voices for the animated characters were from Danny Glover, Nick Cannon, D.L. Hughley, Wanda Sykes and Wayne Brady. Danny Glover had previously recorded some of Harris's Brer Rabbit stories in children's book format (*Brer Rabbit and the Boss Lion* in 1996), and after the cartoon film, continued to do so, with Harris's unabridged story, *Brer Rabbit and the Wonderful Tar Baby* in 2007, which also incorporated musical background. This is an interesting case in that it is rare for an Uncle Remus tale to be unabridged today.

In a collection of American Folk Tales called "Walking the Winds: American Tales," commissioned and performed at the Kennedy Center in 1996, an ensemble of 15 teenage performers directed by Deirdre Kelly Lavrakas used music composed by Deborah Wicks La Puma. One of the stories is "Br'er Rabbit, Br'er Tiger & the Big Wind—A Gullah Trickster Tale." This tale, with numerous animals, takes up a kind of call and response, as in a Negro Spiritual, and the telling happens in a group, with male and female voices. The emphasis with the title, to label the tale as "a Gullah Trickster Tale" heightens the connection with African American heritage. It works quite well, but requires a high technical degree of performance and music.

Reserved for last in this list is an adaptation that works well for both adults and children. Diane Ferlatte retells the Uncle Remus tales "inscribed" by Harris and also takes some liberties with them, but unlike the warping of Walt Disney, she reinstates these stories back into the oral tradition, using music and song much in the way the oral tradition does, and emphasizing the trickster nature of the rabbit within the context of his slave origins. Ferlatte has told her stories around various schools and cultural venues in the U.S. and internationally. She shared a story

about Brer Rabbit sneaking into Mr Peddiway's garden when she spoke to a group at the Kennedy Center,⁵ which emphasized Brer Rabbit as Bugs Bunny's illustrious predecessor. This story originated in Harris's second book of Uncle Remus stories, *Nights With Uncle Remus* (1883). Ferlatte makes the story live, and shares it with the audience in a most appealing way. Ferlatte's technique as storyteller allows her to use all kinds of sounds as punctuation of her narrative and she also sings at times (in the middle of "Brer Rabbit's Dance" she sings several times, first "Going down to Mr. Peddiway's to eat some greens" and then again toward the end of the story when the rabbit sings to impress the little girl in the story. The effect is also powerful on her CD *Whickety Whack-Brer Rabbit is Back* (2006) where she is accompanied by musician Erik Pearson. These renditions of Brer Rabbit stories by Ferlatte are faithful both to Harris's idea of reconciliation and to a re-centering of the folk stories within the African American heritage. The oral tradition seems to be making a come-back, and it happens with music.

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⁵ See: You Tube, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QEoEGr955tw> (October 20, 2013)

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ЧИЧА РЕМУС, ЊЕГОВЕ ПЕСМЕ И ИЗРЕКЕ

Сажетак

Упркос чињеници да је Џоел Шендлер Харис био белац на црначком Југу његове приче о Чича Ремусу следе аутентични образац афричко-америчког приповедања у деветнаестом веку. Непосредно пред Грађански рат док је радио на плантажи Тарнер као штампарски помоћник упознао је роба по имену Џорџ Терел. Харис је у Терелу видео оца чији лик је касније инспирисао карактер његовог приповедача Чича Ремуса. Приче су потекле у африканском фолклору и успостављају везу са афричким причама. Осим тога можемо знасти да је лик Душка Дугоушка утемељен у африканској традицији. Иако су приче понекад коришћене од стране белаца да би поспешиле расизам посебно у холовудској продукцији из 1946. И мада Харис понекад гледао са носталгијом на време робова, заправо те приче које су препуне ликова трикстера представљају наставак афричко-америчке традиције. Ове приче су користили афричко-амерички аутори од Џејмса Велдона Џонсона 1917 преко џез музичара до савремених представника приповедача афричко-америчке традиције као што је Дајан Ферлет. Такође је постало јасно да афричко-амерички писци који у својим делима афирмишу усмену традицију дугују Џоелу Шендлеру Харису.

Кључне речи: Џоел Шендлер Харис, Зека Брер, Чича Ремус, Џорџија, дијалекат народне традиције, афричко-америчка култура и наслеђе Марк Твен, *Песме са југа* (1946), Тони Морисон, Елис Вокер, Дајан Ферлет, Вилијам Морис, Џејмс Велдон Џонсон.