"I AIN'T NEVER SUPPOSED TO DO THIS": Race and Narration in the Films of the Coen Brothers

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We best know the Coen brothers for their portrayals of diverse characters, eclectic collections of individuals often placed into outrageous, sometimes hilarious, situations. Whether they are jealous Texans, poor Arizonians, or working Minnesotans, the Coens' characters are unique, transcending stereotypes and emphasizing the diversity of American culture. The majority of their characters do share a common trait, however: they are mainly Caucasian males. Through their exploration of the differences in whiteness, the Coens take an active role in breaking down the myth of race as a universal truth, not as a performance. Though their analysis of local cultures draws attention to diversity in whiteness, the Coens rarely explore the boundaries of race outside of white America. This is not to suggest that the Coens never develop non-white characters or revert to social stereotypes when depicting them. Whether Meurice in *Blood Simple* or Mike Yanagita in *Fargo*, non-white characters in Coen films often appear to transcend racial stereotypes, becoming individuals in a world of outlandish characters. One character in particular, Moses, the African-American narrator of *The Hudsucker Proxy*, denies stereotypes of the African-American male promoted by Hollywood, exerting his individuality in a film particularly concerned with conformity in the business world. The amount of power Moses controls within the film, power not only unrivaled by any character in *The Hudsucker Proxy* but by any other character within the Coen universe, separates Moses from other narrators and cinematic depictions of African-Americans, elevating him to a plane of existence that denies race as regulator of social position.

To best understand Moses' position as an African-American and a narrator, we must first analyze the roles previously held by both groups in other Coen productions. *Blood*

Simple, the Coens' first film, offers a version of both. The film begins with the voice-over of Detective Visser (M. Emmet Walsh), a private investigator hired by Marty (Dan Hedaya) to spy on, and ultimately murder, Abby (Frances MacDormand), his wife, and Ray (John Getz), her boyfriend. Visser's introduction defines the location and theme of the film.

> The world is full of complainers. But the fact is, nothing comes with a guarantee. I don't care if you're the Pope of Rome, President of the United States, or even Man-of-the-Year-something can always go wrong. And go ahead, complain, tell your problems to your neighbor, ask for help, watch him fly. Now in Russia, they got it all mapped out so everyone pulls for everyone else- that's the theory anyway. But what I know about is Texas. And down here, you're on your own.[1]

Like a traditional narrator, Visser's words establish the mindset of the characters in this microcosm of Texas, as well as the general attitude of Americans in the 1980's during the Reagan administration: "you're on your own." The characters within this universe can trust no one, relying only on their own thoughts and actions: Marty wants Visser to murder Abby and Ray; Visser double-crosses Marty; and Abby and Ray, like all of the other characters, never understand each other, unable to successfully communicate.

The only apparently trustworthy character is Meurice (Samm-Art Williams), an African-American working as a bartender in Marty's bar. Meurice is the one sympathetic character in the film, helping a woman avoid Marty's advances in the bar, warning Ray about impending danger of coming back to the bar, and maintaining distance between himself and the ensuing violence. In *The Coen Brothers: The Life of the Mind*, James Mottram states that "the innocent Meurice (played by black actor Samm-Art Williams) dresses in white, but even he—if his answer-phone message from Helene Trend is to be believed—is no angel."[2] Mottram's comments about Meurice's attire insinuate that Meurice might be the one "good" person in a film focusing on the dark-side of humanity, but a message on his answering

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[1]All quotes from the films are taken directly from my viewing of them and correspond to the movies cited before the quotation.

[2] James Mottram, *The Coen Brothers: The Life of the Mind*, Dulles, VA: Brassey's Inc., 2000, p. 21.

machine concerning Meurice's disregard for a past acquaintance calls his integrity into question. Although Mottram believes the message casts a shadow over Meurice, he still maintains a higher status than the murderers and adulterers of *Blood Simple*. In a world where words are meaningless, communication is non-existent, and actions define the character, Meurice remains the one morally sound character in the Coens' depiction of Texas.

The Coens' proceeding two films that utilize voice-over narration contain an all-white cast. In fact, Moses is the only other African-American character to appear in a Coen film until their 2000 release *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* Although both of these narrators are white, Hi (Nicholas Cage) relating his own story in *Raising Arizona* and the Stranger (Sam Elliott) telling the Dude's (Jeff Bridges) story in *The Big Lebowski*, a short analysis of how they operate emphasizes the distinctiveness of Moses in *The Hudsucker Proxy*. Approximately the first ten minutes of *Raising Arizona* is organized around Hi's voice-over narration. He explains the events that have led to his present situation: his habitual incarceration for convenience-store robberies, his sense of security while in prison, and his subsequent proposal and marriage to Ed (Holly Hunter), the police photographer upon his release. Like Visser, Hi establishes the location of the action, Tempe, Arizona, and interprets the theme of the film, the crisis of parenthood. Unlike Visser, whose voice-over disappears following the introduction, Hi's voice-over remains throughout the film, constantly analyzing his dreams about the Lone Biker of the Apocalypse, Leonard Smalls (Randall "Tex" Cobb), and interpreting ensuing events. In the end, Hi even dreams into the future, predicting Nathan Jr.'s success as a football player as well as the fate of Ed's infertility and their troubled marriage. This premonition does not insinuate a special power held by the disembodied voice

of Hi, however. His vision of the future remains mere speculation, a subjective interpretation of his dreams.

Hi operates as a traditional narrator, remaining within the confines established by older films. In *Invisible Storytellers: Voice-over Narration in American Fiction Film*, Sara Kozloff identifies and analyzes common uses of voice-over narration. She distinguishes between “homodiegetic” narrators, those appearing as characters within the story, and “heterodiegetic” narrators, those who do not appear in the story. She also compares 1st person and 3rd person narrators, those who tell their own story versus those who tell someone else’s story.[3] According to Kozloff’s definitions, Hi is a 1st person homodiegetic narrator, relating his personal story through voice-over narration. Kozloff notes that

> Voice-over narrators...could never be responsible for the primary diegesis...[but] films often create the sense of character-narration so strongly that one accepts the voice-over narrator as if he or she were the mouthpiece of the image-maker either for the whole film or for the duration of his or her embedded story. We put our faith in the voice not as created but as creator.[4]

Hi initiates his story. His voice, the voice that introduces the film, generates the subsequent events. Hi’s continuous voice-over associates him with the role of the creator. The images in *Raising Arizona*, presented and interpreted through his subjectivity, emanate from his consciousness.

In *The Big Lebowski*, the Stranger operates somewhat differently than narrators in previous Coen films. Unlike Visser and Hi, the Stranger appears to be a 3rd person heterodiegetic narrator. He introduces the film as a non-character, commenting on the action and relating the story of the Dude. Like the other narrators, the Stranger introduces themes that develop throughout the film, such as the anatomy of a man and a hero. His comments

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[3] For a more intensive analysis of the differences between these types of narrators see Sara Kozloff, *Invisible Storytellers: Voice-over Narration in American Fiction Film*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988, p. 42.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 45.

equate the Dude with the evolving concept of the theme, identifying him as the protagonist with whose development the film is concerned. As a heterodiegetic narrator, the Stranger holds a more privileged position than past Coen narrators. Kozloff suggests that, with heterodiegetic narrators, "we experience a kind of merging together of narrator and imagemaker, so that the voice ultimately becomes for us the voice of the imagemaker."[5] The more frequent the narrator's voice-over, the stronger the impression that the unfolding discourse emanates from him or her. Unlike the subjectivity of vision inherent in a 1st person account of a story, 3rd person narrators maintain a certain distance from the action, providing them with an aura of objectivity and lending a more intense feeling of the narration as "truth."

Halfway through the film, however, the Stranger appears in the bowling alley and carries on a conversation with the Dude. He vanishes once again, only to reappear in the same location at the end of the film, momentarily speaking to the Dude then addressing the audience directly. He summarizes and interprets the events that have transpired, such as Donny's (Steve Buscemi) death, and foretells future events, specifically the birth of a "little Lebowski." Although these appearances are not typical actions of a heterodiegetic narrator, the Stranger is not unique. Kozloff refers to the appearance of the 3rd person narrating agent as occurring "whenever a character launches into a story in which he or she does not participate,"[6] transforming him or her into an embedded heterodiegetic narrator. She suggests that this embodiment usually occurs in films involving "*oral* epic situations."[7] The Coens' use of an embedded heterodiegetic narrator further emphasizes the theme of the film, the hero being a topic of concern since ancient civilizations. The embedding of the Stranger thus equates the Dude's quest for "justice," to save Bunny Lebowski (Tara Reid), with that of

[5] *Ibid*., p. 74.
[6] *Ibid*., p. 76.
[7] *Ibid*., p. 78.

heroes such as Ulysses, suggesting that our conception of a hero evolves from generation to generation. The Dude is a modern-day hero, a new incarnation of traditional hero-types.

Moses' positioning as a narrator parallels that of the Stranger. Moses introduces the film as a 3rd person heterodiegetic narrator, relating the story of others, a story in which he seemingly holds no position. Like traditional narrators, he indicates the time and place of the action as well as introducing the protagonist and suggesting the film's themes.

> That's right, New York, 1958. Anyway for a few more minutes. Come midnight it's gonna be 1959. A whole nother feeling...the New Year...the future. Yeah, ol' daddy Earths fixin' to start one more trip 'round the sun. Everybody hopin' this ride 'round be a little more giddy, a little more gay. Yep, all over town champagne corks is a poppin'...over in the Waldorf, big shots is dancin' to the strains of Guy Lombardo. Down in Times Square, the little folks is watchin' and waitin' for that big ball to drop. They're all trying to catch 'hold of one moment in time. To be able to say "Right now! This is it! I got it!" Of course by then it'll be past. But they're all happy, everybody havin' a good time. Well, almost everybody. There's a few lost souls floatin' around out there. Now, if y'all ain't from the city, we got somethin' here called "the rat race." Got a way of chewin' folks up so that they don't want no celebratin'...don't want no cheerin' up...don't care nothin' about no New Year's. Out of hope...out of rope...out of time. This here is Norville Barnes. That office he's steppin' out of is the office of the President of Hudsucker Industries. It's his office. How'd he get so high? And why's he feelin' so low? Is he really gonna do it? Is Norville really gonna jelly up the sidewalk? Well the future, that's somethin' you can't never tell 'bout. But the past...that's another story.

Moses' introduction establishes the exact time and location of the current action as New York City on New Year's Eve of 1958. He also stresses the film's focus on time, a prominent theme, and the rift between classes, the "big shots" in the Waldorf and the "little folks" in Times Square. Finally, Moses introduces the protagonist, Norville Barnes (Tim Robbins), instituting his actions and thoughts as the film's focus. Just as the Stranger introduces us to L.A. during the Gulf War and the Dude as the journeying "hero," Moses operates in a similar fashion, providing the audience with background information and suggesting the course of events to come, while instituting Moses as an all-knowing, objective narrator. What makes Moses atypical, however, is his race and the power he later wields within the diegesis, affecting changes while occupying a role traditionally reserved for commentary.

Film has, and continues to, play a major role in the propagation of ethnic and sexual stereotypes. Fatimah Tobing Rony, in *The Third Eye: Race Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle*, suggests that ethnographic films, providing some of the limited portrayals of racial "others" during cinema's early years, established a binarism of white (civilization) versus black (savage). In these films, the "'savages' are made to seem silly and not really dangerous,"[8] a depiction utilized as recently as the *Gilligan's Island* television show, where the "savages," always racial others, attempt to eat the castaways but, as a result of their bumbling and stupidity, fail. The "savages" of these early films, not "white" and, therefore, not "human," transformed into the ethnic of later films. Rony suggests that "the interest in indigenous peoples as Primitive was closely allied to the study of 'sociological' types such as the prostitute, the criminal, the ethnic immigrant, laborers, homosexuals, and the Irish. All of these marginal groups were seen as deficient both morally and intellectually."[9] Classification as one of these "types" placed the member of these marginal groups on a lower rung of the evolutionary ladder, relegating them to an inferior position in the hierarchy of races.

This catalogue of types included the African-American male, inserting him into a position in society closer to beast than man. Films, such as *King Kong* with its depiction of the savage inhabitants of Skull Island, visualize this relationship. The natives are bloodthirsty savages, who, ironically, pose no direct threat to the white visitors. The true threat arrives in the form of Kong, a giant ape. Though they pose no real danger, these savages are cruel and animal-like. Current manifestations of this savage-type include gang leaders and violent criminals, often portrayed as African Americans. These "savages" are hyper-emotional and ultra-violent, refusing logic and common sense, never considering the ramifications of their

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[8] Fatimah Tobing Rony, *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996, p. 85.
[9] *Ibid.*, p. 171.

actions. Like the savage, they pose only a limited threat, eventually eradicated by the civilizing force of white society.

Film not only relegates African-Americans to the role of savages, it also symbolically castrates them, denying them a position of privilege within a patriarchal system. In his article "Interracial Tensions in *Night of the Living Dead*," Robert K. Lightning analyzes the depiction of Sidney Poitier in many of his starring roles. Lightning suggests that, even though Poitier's films reflect the liberal atmosphere of 1960's America, they leave much to be desired in the realm of sexual representation of the African-American male. In films such as *A Patch of Blue* and *To Sir with Love*, "not only doesn't Poitier relate sexually to white women, he rarely relates sexually to *anyone*."[10] Although this comment reflects the inability of even liberal whites in the 60's to accept interracial relationships, it also points to another common trait of the cinematic depiction of the African-American male. Often appearing beside white women in a non-sexual relationship, such as Poitier in his films, Bo Jangles with Shirley Temple, or Danny Glover in *Driving Miss Daisy*, cinema forces the African-American male into an inferior position in relation to the Caucasian man. Their powerless status parallels that of white women and children in American society, as the equal relationship between Temple and Jangles, an older African-American man forced to dance and sing nonsensical songs in unison with a white girl, emphasizes. Thus, cinema and society castrate and feminize the African-American male, relegating him to a traditionally inferior and subordinate sphere.

If the cinematic representation of the African-American male denotes femininity, then Moses' position as a narrator should reflect that of female narrators. This position entails, as Kaja Silverman notes, a limitation of power not experienced by masculine narrators. In *The*

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[10] Robert K. Lightning, "Interracial Tensions in *Night of the Living Dead*," *Cineaction no. 53*, Toronto, Ontario: Cineaction Collective, November 2000, p. 24.

Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema, Silverman suggests that "although [the female voice-over] 'hovers' above the image track, in an invisible spatial register, it occupies the same temporal register as the other characters, and often comments upon events as they occur."[11] This differs from the male voice-over, which "speaks from a position of superior knowledge, and which superimposes itself 'on top' of the diegesis."[12] The difference between these two voices is the degree to which they are embodied. Following Michel Chion's theory of de-acousmatization, Silverman states that the voice "loses its power and authority with every corporeal encroachment," and that to "embody a voice is to feminize it."[13] Thus, not only is Moses' authority as a narrator questionable due to the traditional position of the African-American man in film, his appearance, or embodiment, in the diegesis should relegate him even further from discursive power. If *The Hudsucker Proxy* operated within the confines of cinematic theory, Moses would be completely equated with feminine space, not only because of his race, but also through his placement within the story. However, even after his embodiment, Moses never loses authority as a narrator or control of diegetic events.

Though he is African-American, Moses holds the same power theoretically controlled by white male narrators. We assume him to be the organizer of the unfolding discourse, creating events through the power of his speech, "ultimately becom[ing] for us the voice of the image-maker."[14] Kozloff suggests that the role of narrator provides the speaker with special powers. Citing past theorists of narration, Kozloff states the powers endowed upon the narrator as

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[11] Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema*, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988, p. 49.
[12] *Ibid*., p. 49.
[13] Silverman, pp. 49 & 50.
[14] Kozloff, p. 74.

1. Knowing much more than any other character in the story, or even...the outcome of every event and the nature of every existent...

2. Freedom in space and time...basically the ability to intermit scenes of different locales, or centering upon different characters, regardless of the activities of any single character.

3. Privileged access to characters' thoughts and feelings: in general, the more characters a narrator can delve into, the more we perceive him to be omniscient.[15]

At different points within the diegesis, Moses asserts each one of these powers: he knows the Hudsucker Board of Directors' plan to deflate the value of the Hudsucker stock by appointing an "imbecile" as acting president; he knows the actions of all the characters and provides us with visuals of these actions, such as the happenings in the newsroom where Amy Archer (Jennifer Jason Leigh) works and the factory where the hula hoop is produced; finally, he knows the thoughts and feelings of each character, relating how "low" Norville is feeling in the introduction, analyzing Amy's feelings, feelings she is unwilling to admit to even herself, and commenting on Sydney Mussberger's (Paul Newman) mental state at the film's end.

Like the Stranger, Moses reveals himself as a character halfway through the film, becoming an embedded heterodiegetic narrator. He, like the Stranger, also converses with one of the characters. Whereas the Stranger merely exchanges greetings with the Dude however, telling him "I like your style," Moses takes an active role in the unfolding events. As Amy spies on Mussberger through a keyhole in the clock room, Moses calls to her, interrupting her investigation. When Amy asks, "Who are you? How do you know who I am?" Moses replies, "I suspect Old Moses knows just about everything...leastways if it concerns Hudsucker." He then goes on to respond to her question concerning the Board of Directors' appointment of Norville as President of Hudsucker Industries following Waring Hudsucker's untimely demise.

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[15] *Ibid*., p. 80.

> Well, that even surprise Old Moses at first. I didn't think the board was that smart... But then I figured it out. They did it cuz they figure young Norville for an imbecile, like some other people I know...because they're little piglets. They's tryin' to inspire panic, make that stock cheap so they can snitch it up all for theyselves. But Norville, he got some tricks up his sleeve he does. You know, for kids.

He then goes on to analyze Amy's feelings, stating "why you don't even know your own self. You ain't exactly the genuine article are you Miss Archer?...Why you pretending to be such a hard ol' sourpuss? Ain't gonna never make you happy." When she declares that she is "happy enough," Moses laughs and ends the conversation. When he suggests that he knows "just about everything," Moses' words emphasize his omniscience. His comment limits this omniscience to events transpiring within Hudsucker Industries, but his knowledge of Amy's insecurities and how she portrays herself seem to deny this boundary.

As a result of their conversation, Moses veers from the traditional role of a heterodiegetic narrator. He reveals information to Amy that could potentially alter the course of the diegesis, namely the boards' scheme to depreciate Hudsucker stock. He also informs her of the imminent success of Norville's invention, "You know, for kids." Amy attempts to print the information obtained from Moses in her newspaper, but her editor (John Mahoney) refuses, stating that the story is mere speculation. However, Amy's interaction with Moses and the information he imparts irrevocably changes her understanding of her surrounding world. His analysis of her thoughts and actions also leads Amy to come to a more complete understanding of herself, forcing her to reassess her relationship to herself and others, specifically Norville. In no other Coen film, and few other films in general, does a supposedly distanced narrator affect so much change in the narrative.

If Michel Chion's theory of the embodied voice is accurate, then Moses' power should become problematized following the revelation of his physical body. Chion suggests that "*embodying the voice* is a sort of symbolic act, dooming the acousmêtre to the fate of ordinary

mortals,"[16] the acousmêtre being a sound, voice included, whose source is hidden from the audience. He refers to this process as de-acousmatization. Although his term refers to characters like the Wizard in *The Wizard of* Oz or the psychiatrist in *The Testament of Doctor Mabuse*, Silverman does connect this dis-empowerment to the embodied voice of the narrator, particularly the female narrator. When Moses reveals himself as a character within the diegesis, his omniscience should become suspect, placing him on equal terms with the other characters. As an analysis of his words following his de-acousmatization reveals, however, Moses' appearance results in no such loss of power. He maintains his omniscience throughout the remainder of the film, in the end summarizing the preceding events and commenting on the characters' futures, such as Norville going "on to rule [as President of Hudsucker] with wisdom and compassion," and Mussberger's eventual confinement in the sanitarium. Not only does Moses maintain his omniscience, he later reveals his omnipotence, actively altering the course of events to aid Norville at his nadir.

Immediately following his escape from a mob of persecutors, Norville steps onto the ledge outside of his office window on the 44th floor of the Hudsucker building, connecting the narrative to the film's introduction. Aloysius (Harry Bugin), Mussberger's right-hand-man responsible for the removal of the names of Hudsucker's dead presidents from their office door, closes and locks the window, trapping Norville on the ledge. As he attempts to reenter, Norville slips and falls, plummeting, like the previous president, Waring Hudsucker, toward the sidewalk below. Halfway through his descent, Norville suddenly freezes, suspended in midair. We then see a shot of the giant clock perched atop Hudsucker Industries, stopped, a broom stuck in the gears of the clock, and Moses directly addressing the camera, saying "strictly speaking, I ain't never supposed to do this, but have you got a better idea." As

[16] Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1999, p. 28.

subsequent shots of an immobile Mussberger and his stationary timepiece reveal, Moses has stopped time, preventing Norville from "jellying up the sidewalk." His interference also triggers the arrival of an angelic Waring Hudsucker (Charles Durning), who urges Norville to read the blue letter he forgot to deliver to Mussberger on the day he was appointed as president. The letter reveals that Hudsucker's replacement, in this case Norville, will inherit his stocks on the first of the year, acquiring a controlling interest in Hudsucker Industries and allowing him to fail and learn from his mistakes. Hudsucker directs Norville to deliver the letter in the morning, foiling Mussberger's plans to assume control of Hudsucker Industries. Moses' actions allow for this divine intervention to occur. Like a Father Time figure, Moses controls the temporal qualities of the discourse, further emphasizing his position as the image-maker. He verbally reminds us of the traditional limitations of a narrator, suggesting that he is "never supposed to do this," meaning stop the clock, but also insinuating his interference in the characters' lives. Moses overcomes these limitations, however, elevating him to a higher position than previous narrators.

During Norville's interaction with Hudsucker, Aloysius temporarily poses a threat to Moses' power. Upon seeing the stopped clock, and unaffected by the temporal stasis, Aloysius enters the clock room and confronts Moses. The two engage in a fistfight during which Moses knocks out Aloysius' dentures. Aloysius then reveals the razor sharp tool he uses to scrape the names from the president's door and attacks Moses, who must remove the broomstick from the gears to fend off his assailant. Moses defeats Aloysius and somehow (this is not revealed) places the dentures in the gears seconds before Norville crashes into the sidewalk. The dentures shatter and time resumes, leaving Norville to drop a mere two feet to safety and reassume his role as President of Hudsucker Industries. Aloysius momentarily

contests Moses' power, but the omnipotent narrator swiftly vanquishes this threat. Although he is once again physically revealed in the diegesis and asserts himself as an active force, Moses maintains his all-encompassing power, denying the affects of de-acousmatization. Following the battle, Moses physically disappears from the story, resuming his role as a voice-over narrator. His actions, however, have elevated him beyond this status, placing him as a divine power within the diegesis rather than a passive commentator. He not only surpasses the traditional role of African-Americans in cinema, but also denies the boundaries imposed on traditional white male narrators.

One could argue that the Coens overturn Moses' traditionally powerless position as an African-American man in American society to reinforce the theme of the American Dream seemingly embodied in Norville, that through hard work and perseverance anyone can acquire success. This argument, however, appears hollow when compared to the film's events. Norville obtains his position as President of Hudsucker Industries by chance, appointed by Mussberger because of his supposed "stupidity." Even the overwhelming success of Norville's invention, the Hula Hoop, does not guarantee him financial power; Mussberger's scheming almost eliminates Norville's chances of fulfilling the American Dream. Ultimately Norville requires the help of others, specifically Moses and the postmortem Hudsucker, to succeed. Also, Norville is a college-educated white male in 1950's America, a status unparalleled by Moses' position as an uneducated, African-American laborer.

The quality, or "grain" as Roland Barthes would refer to it, of Moses' voice connects Moses to Uncle Remus, another African-American narrator created by a white writer, Joel Chandler Harris, famous for relating stories concerning trouble-free country characters, like Brer' Rabbit and Brer' Bear. Moses' knowledge, however, is not limited to simplistic themes

of African-American plantation life. He fully understands the economic factors involved in the Board's plot, and even gives Amy a lesson on the "global economy." Despite the potentially subversive qualities of Uncle Remus' tales, Harris was primarily concerned with "the recording of Southern blacks' 'poetic imagination' and 'quaint and homely humor' as entertainment for whites and as a valuable anthropology of sorts, the preservation of a fading, picturesque voice."[17] His concerns reflect those of early ethnographers, eager to record the spectacle of the slowly dying "other." Not limited to commenting on the internal or present, or relating the provincial tales often associated with African-American slave culture, Moses dissociates himself from other African-American narrators, such as Uncle Remus, Ellis Boyd "Red" Redding (Morgan Freeman) in *The Shawshank Redemption*, and Eve Batiste (Jurnee Smollett) in *Eve's Bayou*, through the amount and type of knowledge that he holds. His position reflects the Coens' emphasis on individuals rather than types. In this instance, however, the individual is an African-American man, and he holds a power unrivaled by any other character in the Coen universe.

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[17] Melissa Murray and Dominic Perella, *Uncle Remus*, http://xroads.virginia.edu/~UG97/remus/selections.html, as viewed on 5-15-01.

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