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Author(s): Michael C. Berthold

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"The peals of her terrific language": The Control of Representation in *Silvia Dubois, a Biography of the Slave Who Whipped Her Mistress and Gave Her Freedom*

Michael C. Berthold

Villanova University

In the bumptious, mythologizing obituary that prefaces the Schomburg Library edition of C. W. Larison's *Silvia Dubois, A Biography of the Slave Who Whipped Her Mistress and Gave Her Freedom* (originally published in 1883), the brilliantly Rabelaisian career of the work's titular heroine is limned:

She is said to have been 122 years old "beyond doubt." She was for years the slave of a man named Dubois. Then she was sold to a man who kept a hotel, where she became famed for her feats of strength and for the prize fights in which she engaged. One day she got angry at her mistress and nearly killed her. She picked up her child and fled across the Susquehanna and tramped all the way to Sour Land Mountain, where she lived the rest of her life. Her fondness for fighting, for liquor, and her profanity soon made her notorious. All her children died but the youngest; who remained with her mother, and is eighty years old. It is said that she inherits all her mother's pugilistic prowess, and has maimed many men.¹

In this folkloric resume of might and gigantism, Dubois spurns her culture's tyrannies of decorum, station, and femininity. Her transgender combat and independent maternity reject male prerogative and protection; her very public notoriety (her fighting, drinking, and vernacular outspokenness) overturns both the expected obeisance of the "good" slave and the genteel anonymity of the "true" woman. As carnal centenarian, Dubois seems to defy temporality itself.

Dubois's narrative, however, actually unfolds as a colloquy between herself and C. W. Larison, a New Jersey doctor, educator, and publisher who transcribes and fashions the interview, and it is the nature and problematics of this colloquy that I wish to consider here. In

part, *Silvia Dubois* might be annexed to a larger tradition of American captivity writing that plays out analogous embroiling dialogues between custodial editors and textualized captives: Cotton Mather and Hannah Dustan, for example, or William Lloyd Garrison and Frederick Douglass. This particular text, however, is unique for its specific negotiation and staging of the great hegemonic divide between an unlettered black woman and a professional white man. While Dubois's equivocal yet startling self-empowerment occurs within the authoritative male frame she disrupts, Larison's more predictable attempts at maintaining superintendence underline not only some inveterate masculine will to power, but also the anxieties that are the bedrock of his various professionalisms. These anxieties also typify larger Reconstruction and post-Reconstruction anxieties of race and class.

Larison, a zealous advocate of spelling reform, printed *Silvia Dubois* in his own phonetic alphabet of some fifty letters with diacritical markings for use in the classroom, and the encounter between Larison and Dubois is best experienced through the book's special orthography. Although Jared C. Lobdell, who edited the Schomburg *Silvia Dubois*, does append a facsimile of the original to the volume, his own version of the text translates rather than reproduces it. Lobdell chose to normalize Larison's spelling, to omit his preface, to abridge a few of his remarks, and to rearrange the order of the book's sections (3-4, 18-19). Although such editorial decisions enhance the text's accessibility, Lobdell does not account for this methodology, and his *Silvia Dubois* both flattens and fractures the colloquy and Larison's peculiar narrativization of it. Lobdell is not misguided in emphasizing "the material for social history" that *Silvia Dubois* provides or in reminding that Dubois's reminiscences are "good reading" (19, 20), but in Larison's original text a very literary social history and the machinations behind the folklore and the fun are much more clearly discernible.

Contradiction coheres in Larison's very sympathies for Dubois. He admires and fears the "force" that she epitomizes (3, 4).² At least nascently, Larison is able to articulate a relatively progressive theory of history, relational and materialist, that values the specificity of a narrative such as Dubois's: "no history of our country can be complete, nor of much value as a record of the lives of a people that does not chronicle, at the same time, the doings of the great and the small, the rich and the poor, the proud and the humble, the exalted and the abject, the virtuous and the vicious" (101). But Larison's limitations as a historian have to do with the way, as the proceeding manifesto suggests, his very liberalism entwines with a litany of spurious, hier-

archical oppositions that reify a Dubois as "small," "abject," or "vicious." Along the lines of a formulation by Hazel Carby in *Reconstructing Womanhood* (25), Larison's representation of Sylvia's "force" valorizes her autonomy and her defiance of the fragility and submissiveness at the heart of the cult of true womanhood while, at the same time, signifying and amplifying her low class and her racial exoticism.

Behind Larison's colloquy with Dubois is a biography of nervous upward mobility suggesting how his presentation of himself in *Silvia Dubois* might serve as a compensatory act for earlier humiliations and exclusions. Larison was born in 1837. His father, Benjamin, was a farmer who was not interested in higher education for Cornelius, his second son, and Larison had to pay his own way through the Pennsylvania College of Medicine in Philadelphia. His mother, Hannah, was a "rigid disciplinarian," "a well-proportioned, muscular woman of medium height, with considerable strength and endurance" (Weiss 16). Larison once saw her carry a three hundred and twenty pound sack of salt twenty-five yards from a wagon and up a flight of stairs. Perhaps some of Larison's awe in the presence of Dubois's force derives from such recollections of his own mother.

The schooling prerogatives Larison incarnates throughout *Silvia Dubois* and, in fact, the special alphabet he employs to tell Dubois's story are rooted in his own trials as a schoolboy. In his 1896 "Reminiscences of School Life," Larison remembered the vain humors of his schoolteacher, "'a mixture of pomposity, foolishness, weak-mindedness, narrow mindedness, conceit, deceit, and tyranny,'" and the regular whippings he received at the hands of this savant (Weiss 28). Pronunciation, in particular, came hard to Larison, who refused to learn the pronunciation of words that were not pronounced as printed, and his teacher once announced to the class that no one was as stupid as Cornelius. In the design of his own later orthography, in which no word of the language has more characters than it has oral elements, Larison exorcises some of the ghosts of his schoolboy past.

If, as a schoolteacher himself (beginning in 1856), Larison avoided some of the pretensions of his own instructors, he retained a belief in the necessity of disciplinary severity and acquired a habit of euphemism for describing such practices—a whipping became a "counter irritation to the fundamental part," a rod was alchemized as "five feet of flexible sapling" (Weiss 29, 31). However potential a preserve of order, the schoolroom for Larison was a site of practical chaos demanding vigilant patrol; when his pupils tracked in mud or spat tobacco juice on the floor, Cornelius made them clean it up.

To maintain his wary classroom authority, Larison sometimes resorted to a kind of pedagogical terrorism. In a particularly disturbing episode, he confronted a black girl named Sarah, of "prodigious strength" and "extraordinary dexterity," whose antics mocked her teacher and convulsed her classmates:

Someone during recess had left on the floor, in front of his desk, the top of a peach tree lately cut from the grafted stock in a nearby nursery. The stem had divided into more than a dozen sprangles, from fifteen to twenty inches long. As he descended from his desk he grasped the stem and went sternly down the aisle, grabbed her top-knot, pushed her head over the desk and applied the young tree to her back and shoulders. Her calico dress split under the force of the blows. In trying to break away she pulled the desk loose from the floor. Cornelius W. Larison then whacked her all the harder. She tried to grab his hand to loosen it from her top-knot. All the while she was being beaten with the tree until blood showed on her back, shoulders and arms. Finally she became as limp as a rag. The scene ended and everyone became quiet and attentive to their lessons. (Weiss 45)

Although Larison felt some shame at having engaged in such a "brawl," he was commended for his action by one of the school trustees and continued to do battle with Sarah, "coerced but not subdued" (Weiss 45). Somewhat later, Sarah

was reciting grammar before his desk one day when she suddenly glared at him. Quickly, before she could move from her position and grapple with him, he grabbed her hair with his left hand, pulled her across the desk toward him and slapped the side of her face with the palm of his right hand. Then followed another struggle, with Cornelius pulling her across the desk and smacking her across the head and any other part of her that was handy. She finally became limp and fell to the floor. Thereafter Sarah was complacent and devoted to her studies. This exhibition also had a good effect upon the other students—so Cornelius said. (Weiss 46)

Episodes such as the above are the violent heart of nineteenth century slave narratives, and their particular violence has to do with the staunch repetitiveness, in this case of Larison's blows, whether with the whip or his own hand. In each instance, Larison's victory is signalled by his rendering Sarah "limp"; her body made docile, she can serve as an object lesson for the rest of the class. There seems to be as well, especially in the first instance, an erotic charge for Larison in his power over the body of Sarah, the split calico dress suggestive of a punitive ravishment. But Larison's rabidity in the course of these

beatings points to nothing so much as his tenuous mastery over his pupils, his provisional sovereignty in the classroom. As a response to the impudence and force of one black woman, the beatings reverberate for *Silvia Dubois*, manifesting Larison's panic at the prospect of being womanhandled, especially by a black woman.

Larison received his medical degree in 1863, and, recalling his pedagogical treatment of Sarah and anticipating his biographical treatment of Dubois, he displayed a rather excessive willingness to work on the bodies that came under his investigation. As a medical student (as if replicating Victor Frankenstein's "workshop of filthy creation"), Larison "purchased human bodies from whatever source he could" and "dissected everything that came his way" (Weiss 35, 36). When lecturing to his medical classes, he often used the skull of a woman who had been his laundress. Although some remembered him as a kind and considerate physician, particularly in obstetrical cases, other patients thought he was inclined to "experiment" with his patients as subjects.

"What manner of man," asks Lobdell, "was this Cornelius Wilson Larison" (16)? A crank, answers Lobdell, hard-working and imperious, Victorian but "quirky," of wide but largely self-taught learning, florid in style. Interested enough in local history to seek out a Sylvia Dubois, Larison brings to the interview a characteristic melange of curiosity and arrogance, of benevolence and narcissism, and the resultant text reminds that his professionalisms, shifting, contradictory, always under construction, are roles that he is playing. A portrait of Larison in Weiss's biography of the doctor, flanked by a skeleton and a globe, perhaps captures Larison's idealization of himself as New World explorer of cosmos both micro and macro. But, more exactly, the props suggest Larison's desire, apart from his ambivalent achievements, to be *recognized* as someone who dissects and conquers. From a more historicized perspective, Larison seems to mirror what Eric Foner has described as the "activist state" that "came to embody the reforming impulse deeply rooted in postwar politics" (xxvi) as well as postwar fears of the anarchic potentialities of an "unbridled democracy" (497) given over to ignorance and vice. Foner, in fact, details how liberal reformers of the North were particularly susceptible to disenchantment with Reconstruction policy (497).

Throughout *Silvia Dubois*, in any case, Dubois at her most provocative obviates Larison's reciprocating authority as both "doctor" and "author." Early in her interview with him, she posits physicians as colonizers who "go right for the guts" and the doctor/patient relationship as calculated mutual hostility: "A big dose of calomel...and then the war is begun. These doctors, they've got no mercy on

you,...'specially if yur black. Ah! I've seen 'em, many a time, but, they never come after me, I never gave 'em a chance" (36). Protectingly opaque or comfortably unknowing, Larison merely laughs, overlooking a barbed critique of himself and the biases of his profession.

Perhaps more crucially, Dubois dismisses any formalization of herself as Larison's biographical subject and whatever legitimization such a text would bring. When Larison asks Dubois if he "might print and publish anything" that she recounts to him, she replies with a matter of factness that suggests her indifference to his vehicles of registering and disseminating her: "If you think what I tell you is worth publishing, I will be glad if you do it," but, most importantly, "T'-wont do me no good" (37). In these memorable words, Dubois declares the impertinence, for her, of identity discovered or immanent in textuality. She may be "ambitious to be free" (45), but she is not ambitious to be either written or writerly and disavows any inextricable association of autonomy and text. In her indifference, as well, to the fact that she cannot read, she unapologetically evades the literacy that Henry Louis Gates argues is "Western culture's 'trope of dominance' over the peoples of color it has subjugated" (165). These resistances of Dubois to lettered ratifications of her independence would almost seem to call the very genre of the slave narrative, where learning to read and write is often the ritualistic preamble to the flight to freedom, into account.

Nevertheless, because of Larison's special alphabet, *Silvia Dubois* immediately and visually manifests "the terrain of language" that, as Carby has argued, is always "a terrain of power relations;" Carby's observation that this "struggle within and over language reveals the nature of the structure of social relations and the hierarchy of power" is particularly appropriate for *Silvia Dubois* (17). Speaking through Larison's hieroglyphs, Dubois's voice interrogates the desire for literacy, literariness, and standardization that the orthography makes visible. The book is a sustained dialectic between Dubois's patois and Larison's orthography, her orality and his logocentrism, the typeface itself breaching what the colloquy would conjoin. In its projection of a linguistic world of perfect correspondences and regularity, Larison's orthography aligns politically with the "taste" and classicism of the "highest and broadest culture"—categories he evokes in his preface (5)—that are unavailable to Dubois herself. Moreover, such a program implicitly endorses a frequently voiced postwar concern that wise government and leaders of "'intelligence and culture'" would be displaced by charlatan regimes headed by the "'ignorant classes'" (Foner 499).³

More specifically, the linguistic contest of the text centers on Larison's phobia about Dubois's profanity. Although in his preface he apologizes for her profanity as an element of the text that "I most cordially despise, and sincerely deprecate," Dubois's mild "hells" and "damns" are, in truth, fairly infrequent and unobtrusive. Rather, Dubois's profanity is necessary to Larison as the field in the text where he can cultivate his difference from her, fetishize her otherness, and maintain the power relation her force threatens to collapse. With an emphatic rhetorical doubling, the profanity, writes Larison, is "peculiar to herself" and "foreign to me" (4).

Typically, Larison attempts to contain the linguistic autonomy of Dubois he feels responsible for unleashing, as in his ambivalent description of how she "extemporaneously and without hesitation, coins an overflow of self-explaining compounds, that seem to fully meet the demand even of her extreme cases" (39). As a legislator of discourse, Larison seems to feel an almost palpable terror in the face of Dubois's generative capaciousness, his terror of her "overflow," a terror of a particularly female linguistic discharge. It is, moreover, a demonic power, rife with magic and malice, that Larison attributes to Dubois's "overflow"; the "peals of her terrific language," he later notes, "rent the crust of the earth somewhere near where she sat," and "fumes from the infernal regions" seem to fill her apartment (79). His criticism of her "extreme cases" is also undermined by his own syntactical breakdowns, the tautology of "extemporaneously and without hesitation" and the split infinitive "to fully meet." But Larison does acknowledge that there is validity as well as chaos to Dubois's linguistic inventiveness; her "compounds," after all, are "self-explaining," and he may well envy her this innate lucidity. A reviewer of a later work of his, *The Soul: Whence?—Whither?*, in fact criticized his style for its "'flood of words which do not convey concrete impressions'" (Weiss 230),⁴ the flood metaphor here ironically rehearsing Larison's own reading of Dubois's "overflow."⁴

The fundamental perils of Larison's colloquy with Dubois are intimated by his journey to her home; to reach her, he must leave the main road, and the way to her house is "very crooked" (20). Upon arrival, as if recovering himself in the familiar routine of the medical examination, he makes Sylvia and her surroundings the objects of clinical scrutiny, surveying the room "critically" and scanning Dubois "closely" (24-25). His extraordinarily manual assessment of the house is particularly revealing; obsessed with the building's interstices, he passes his hands and his fingers along and within the open spaces among its logs. These gropes and probings, as Mary Gossy has theorized (5-17), implicate Larison's own male production

of meaning as a narratological desire to explore and claim some perceived gap or void in Dubois herself: house, that is, as vulva and unwritten story. Larison, fittingly, notes the lack of whitewash on Dubois's walls, a whitewash that his own pen will come to provide.

Larison initially perceives Dubois herself as a "dusky form" (24), and his narrative never entirely foregoes this first apprehension. Although he begins his classification of her with the comforting observation that her head is tied with a handkerchief, "after the usual manner of colored ladies" (24), even the racial and gender markers of this stereotype disappear as he annexes her to a pseudo-clinical discourse; diagnosing Dubois's "nervo-lymphatic temperament," Larison makes no conscious mention of either her race or her sex. What ensues in Larison's exposition after this double erasure, an extended account of local children's fears of Dubois, further suggests how this "dusky form" unmans him. His terror, like that of the children, stems from Dubois's threatening to kidnap and swallow alive those she finds disagreeable. Recalling his uneasiness about both Dubois's drinking and orality, Larison's figuration of her as amorphous but devouring maw plays out his more general anxieties about being consumed by her.

Much of the subsequent text is devoted to the corporeal autonomy of Dubois, her literal strength and combat, that Larison acknowledges and dreads. Dubois thrashes her way to freedom: "she engaged alike man or woman, black or white—beast or bird" (60). But her body, as well, stands as its own record of the slavery she survived and moved beyond. In one of the most striking moments of the narrative, she tells Larison of the time her mistress "leveled" her with a fire-shovel and broke her "pate" and invites him to "put your fingers here, in the place where the break was, in the side of my head, yet" (59). Replies Larison,

Hereupon I examined Sylvia's head, and found that, at some time, long ago, the skull had been broken and depressed for a space not less than three inches...there is, to this day, a depression in which I can bury a large part of the index finger. (60)

This examination (or penetration) revises and intensifies Larison's probing of the open spaces of Sylvia's house, and it contrasts richly with a well-known moment from Frederick Douglass's *Narrative* where Douglass imagines a synthesis of his slavery past and authorial present: "My feet have been so cracked with the frost, that the pen with which I am writing might be laid in the gashes" (271). Heedless of the pen, however, Dubois orchestrates her storied self by allowing

Larison palpable knowledge of her scars, implying that, despite the clinical and authorial probings she permits, her body remains an irrefutable text outside his contexts. "I tell the truth" (73), she declares later in the narrative, reanimating that commonplace of the slave narrative through her force and vocality.

The freedom Dubois obtains through her strength, her whipping of her mistress, for example, to liberate herself, is essentially matrilinear. It is her mother, originally, who is "ambitious to be free" and bequeaths this desire to her daughter. Dubois's domestic arrangement with her own daughter embodies a female household that is complete despite lacking a male presence. Her withholding of information from Larison, particularly regarding her husband and the conception of her children, generates loopholes or gaps, as in Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, where she further maximizes her autonomy and resists male agency.⁵ Some witnesses, in fact, suggest to Larison that her strength and combat are somewhat misleading: "tradition states, that Sylvia was neither quarrelsome nor aggressive. On the contrary, she was decidedly a peace-maker; and some of her most noteworthy feats were accomplished when suppressing a row, or, parting combatants" (61).

Larison, in fact, warms to Sylvia in part because, once he opens the veil of her bawdiness, he finds something of a latter-day Puritan whose sense of modern waywardness mirrors his own. "To find one better bottomed upon the Calvinistic faith," notes Larison, "is not easy." "Providence knows best," says Sylvia; "He sends to you whatever He wants you to have, and you've got to take it, and make the best of it" (93). Sylvia's own discourse often partakes of the larger tradition of the American jeremiad, a tradition, again, that assuages Larison. For example, on the state of her mountain community, Sylvia informs Larison that "The niggers and whites all live together. The whites are just as good as the niggers, and both are as bad as the devil can make 'em" (41). Or, laments Sylvia, "If the folks now-a-days would live as we used to, the'd be a good deal stronger, more healthy, and wouldn't die so soon. They eat so many dainties; too much sugar, too many sweet puddings and pies...and they drink too much coffee and tea" (89). At points such as these in the text, Larison seems to enlist Dubois in the cause of his own conservative civics, the America of the perfectly regulated classroom.

Despite, or perhaps because of, her Calvinism, Dubois ably makes her way in this world, and, in besting men physically, she not only revenges herself on the gender that would subordinate her, but, in fact, comes to master a masculine economic discourse as well. For example, in learning to use a skiff better than "any man on the Susque-

hana" she earns "many a shilling" that would otherwise have entered the pockets of male pilots (50-51). Dubois achieves what Houston Baker has described as an "economic expressive strategy" designed "to negotiate the dwarfing spaces and paternally aberrant arrangements of Western slavery" (31).

But to the end, Larison needs to harness Sylvia's various, dangerous expressive strategies, and his text concludes not with the colloquy proper, but with several addenda through which he can effect a recovery of the positionality that the *tete-a-tete* with Dubois unsettles. In the "Gleanings" that are the penultimate chapter of the text, he relates the history of Put's Old Tavern, a tavern that for Larison, like the schoolrooms in which he taught, becomes a synecdoche of social pandemonium. The tavern milieu is Larison's nightmare America, where scoundrelism prevails, class distinctions blur, and races intermix, and it is in this episode that Larison gives most heated expression to his postwar culture's forebodings about the disruptive power of a citizenry unprepared for freedom and incapable of decorously exercising its political rights.

The original owner of the tavern, Put himself, is said by Larison to be "industrious" and "far-seeing," but, "freshly liberated from bondage," he is also "unschooled in ethics" and "had not a just appreciation of freedom and morality" (107). At his tavern, Put assembles a "speckled host," including the "mountain bandit," "every gambler who dwelt within a radius of many a mile," "negroes in rags," "the drab in brocade," "the mechanic in satin," and "the farmer gamester." This crew intermingles "as though every element of distinction had been removed, and the business of life was only hilarity," and Larison attempts to chronicle the essential depravity of this "speckled host" through the cock-fights that are its delight and ritualistic center (108).⁶ Throughout this section of the text, class and racial prejudice, in keeping with a formulation of Foner's (497-98), reinforce one another, as Larison distances himself from the lower order gamesters and mechanics as well as from the "negroes in rags," who are indicted particularly for their "indecent songs" and "boisterous profanity." "A more appalling and a more disgusting scene, I never witnessed," proclaims one of Larison's sources for the account; Larison hints at even greater atrocities, but "the rest is too dark to be told" (110). Dubois herself, moreover, once owned Put's Tavern, and Larison's relief that the tavern was "burned to ashes" (Larison makes no inquiries about the nature of the fire) precludes any sympathy for her complaints "of the loss of property incurred by the conflagration" (111). For Larison, the idea of a propertied Dubois, presiding over an American Sodom, is insupportable.

In a subsequent "last visit" to Dubois, in the book's final chapter, Larison seems able once again to configure race and gender along lines that comfort him. Leading her with a question about whether or not she could still dance, Larison elicits an answer that drains her of specificity: "A good fiddle," replies Dubois, "always startles the negro,—even if he's old" (119). In this minstrel stereotype, that recalls Larison's initial erasures of Dubois, the generalized "negro" is not even identified as female. The statement, moreover, undercuts earlier assertions from Dubois about the sensuous pleasure she took in dancing. In fact, her own talent for dancing, Dubois's commentary suggests, links her to General George Washington, "the most beautiful dancer in America" (55); the hegemonic divide that Larison bridges between herself and Washington is what Larison is intent on re-opening. Larison, as if hoping once and for all to fix the volatilities of Dubois, also asks her to sit for a photograph to serve as the frontispiece of his book, and in the picture she becomes the manageable colored lady in the handkerchief that was Larison's initial stereotyping of her; juxtaposing this engraving with the photograph of Larison with skeleton and globe provides a visual shorthand for the nature of Larison and Dubois's colloquy. Larison concludes his text, finally, with a speech about the need for a negro church in Dubois's neighborhood, an institution surely intended to keep the specter of Put's Tavern at bay.

Although the control of representation in *Silvia Dubois* is hardly unidirectional, it is the intentionality of Larison, the recorder, that dominates.⁷ Because of his authorial superimpositions, we have to wonder to what degree, finally, we hear Dubois's voice at all. Unlike, say, the Latin-American testimonial narrative that John Beverley has written about, Larison makes no attempt to erase or diminish his own function as author, and he is unconcerned with any possible articulation, in tandem with Dubois, of some common program or agenda. Despite the cogency of its presentation of the fantastic tumult of Dubois's drives, the text reminds, as Beverley suggests (26), that a narrative infused with demotic lore is not necessarily itself a demotic cultural form. Perhaps the work is proto-American, and implicitly conservative, in its delineations of the fundamental individualisms of Dubois and Larison himself.

Notes

1. The obituary is from 1988, but no information about its source or author is provided.
2. Quotations from *Sylvia Dubois* are taken from the facsimile of Larison's original text that Lobdell appends to his edition. I have normalized the spelling.

The pagination of the facsimile is separate from that of Lobdell's assemblage of the text.

3. Foner is quoting here from articles in *The Nation* from the late 1860s and early 1870s.
4. The reviewer's name was Thomas Talbot Lodge.
5. See Valerie Smith for a persuasive reading of the "loophole" in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*.
6. Put's Tavern for Larison, as in the world of Geertz's "Deep Play," is a world gone "cock crazy," and, as Geertz of course points out, the cocks might be "ambulant genitals with a life of their own" and "magnifications of their owner's self" (417, 419). In Larison's own remarkable phrase, "the concoction of a cock-fight" (108), the repetition of "cock" itself seems to arm him against the "pollution" of Put's Tavern and whatever unmaning has accrued at the side of Sylvia.
7. Still, the centrality of Dubois to Larison's text is noteworthy, and the text is more judicious than many early twentieth century histories of the Reconstruction, particularly those of the Dunning school, where blacks, whose incapacity is always underlined, play almost no actual role in the narratives (Foner xx).

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