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**New Orleans Stories: Translating Louisiana's Language and Culture,  
Through the Works of George Washington Cable, Kate Chopin and Alice  
Dunbar-Nelson**

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## Introduction

This thesis provides a translation and a contextualization of three “local color” short stories – “Posson Jone” (1876) by George Washington Cable, “A Rude Awakening” (1893) by Kate Chopin and “The Praline Woman” (1897) by Alice Dunbar-Nelson – set in late nineteenth century New Orleans.

I first encountered realism in my second year of Undergraduate Degree, through *(The) Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain. While reading this novel, I was immediately fascinated by Twain’s amazing writing ability, which I had already heard about but until that moment never experienced, and above all by his skilful ability at portraying different regional and social realities through the display of different dialects; the following year, I had the chance to deepen my knowledge of the “realist” masterpieces by reading some other novels such as *The Wings of the Dove* by Henry James and *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin. However, what captured my attention most was undoubtedly *The Marrow of Tradition* by Charles W. Chesnutt, which some time later became the main topic of my undergraduate thesis. Once again, the thing that attracted me most was the use of dialects, in particular of the African American Vernacular English spoken by black people in the South. During my research for the undergraduate thesis, I bumped into my first proper “local color” fiction, the collection of short stories *The Conjure Woman*, again by Chesnutt. While reading the collection, I felt the necessity to enter this world more deeply: and so I did.

What interested me more was to see if and how those particular kind of novels and stories featuring parts written in dialect had been translated. And I wondered: how can that kind of speech be translated into Italian? Is there any rule?

This was the beginning of my Master thesis’ journey.

I found out that there still is very little literature on this topic, or better an absence of a theoretically and practically coherent corpus on how to translate the parts written in dialect; it should be noted that I am not only talking about the translation of the American dialects, but of dialects in general. Although this question has been debated for a long time, there are completely different attitudes toward it – as can be seen in the second chapter of this work – and finding a suitable solution for everybody seems to be impossible: translating a text is something linked to our perception and

interpretation of the text itself – and by extension, to our perception of reality, which is unique and difficult to uniform with other realities.

I would like to contribute to this fascinating and incomplete field of studies by giving suggestions on how to deal with the specific dialects displayed in the three stories I chose – that is, the late nineteenth century Creole of Louisiana, the African American Vernacular English – AAVE –, the AAVE contaminated with French, and the Southern American English. I chose these particular stories because, along with the fact that they share the same setting area – New Orleans –, they also show an impressive variety of dialects spoken in the very same region, Louisiana.

The first thing I did when I decided to focus on prose works featuring dialect was to make sure that those texts had never been translated into Italian. Starting from those Chesnut's works that I already knew, I read other African American writers and discovered a contemporary of Chesnut, the famous poet Paul Dunbar, who also wrote some pieces in vernacular. His poems brought me to his wife, Alice Dunbar-Nelson, a “local color” writer, whose works made me discover New Orleans, something that later led me to George Washington Cable and Kate Chopin, writers whose dialect-centered works have never been translated.

After gathering and studying bibliography about the literary and historical context of the time – as for example *Race and Culture in New Orleans Stories* by James Nagel, *The Problem of American Realism: Studies in the Cultural History of a Literary Idea* by Michael Davitt Bell and Eric Sundquist's *American Realism: New Essays* –, I did some research in the field of translation theories – very helpful was Nida's work “Principles of Correspondence” – and finally studied some Italian translation of American vernaculars – e.g. *Le Avventure di Tom Sawyer* by Gianni Celati and *Le avventure di Huckleberry Finn* by Franca Cavagnoli; all together, those pieces of information brought me to shape this thesis.

This thesis is divided into four chapters. In the first chapter I discuss the cultural background of the three authors with references to the literary and historical contexts of the time.

In the second chapter, after introducing my theoretical framework, I discuss my methods of translation, as well as the difficulties that I have encountered – and the consequent solutions that I have adopted – in translating the three short stories.

In the third chapter, I present the three short stories about nineteenth century New Orleans along with some authoritative interpretations of them.

In the fourth and final chapter, I offer my Italian translation of the three short stories.

# CHAPTER I

## The Cultural Context

### 1.1. New Orleans and Its Background

After the Civil War, the South became a place of special interest for many authors – thanks also to some very successful columns of several magazines published in the North –, with the New Orleans area as one of the most explored. In fact, Louisiana had “almost two hundred years of [...] history and life, under five flags, two contrasting modes of civilization, with myriad gradations of caste, class, and race” (see Nigel, 3).

New Orleans was the place of intersection of the Old South and the New one, with all the conflicts that such a collision could create, it was the land of both poor and rich people living side by side, an urban, shining city completely dependent upon the rural area around it to survive. Most importantly, it was one of the most interesting examples, in the entire United States, of mixture of ethnical groups, religions, languages and customs and for this it could be considered as the most European city – as in no other American city the Old World had been so carefully transplanted like here. It was bilingual – the citizens spoke both French and English –, but there were also varieties of patois made up of six different languages.

There were the Creoles, descendants of the French and the Spanish, so proud of their lineage that they maintained the habits typical of those cultures, such as going to the opera and the theater, and reading daily newspapers from Paris and Madrid, pleased to be different from the ordinary *Américains*.

New Orleans was extremely fascinating for authors not only because of the different ethnicities of the population, but also for the French codes that regulated the life of the citizens – marriage and courtship, music, literature, legal system and way of behaving –, the still lasting influence of slavery and racial matters, and its ownership by three different countries.

Getting back to the origins of the city and its mixture of cultures could be helpful to better understand the context in which the three short stories that I decided to translate are set.

Before the arrivals of the Europeans in the sixteenth century, the area was inhabited by different tribes of Native Americans, whose names are still alive today in some of the cities of the Southern area of the Mississippi, eponymous – for example, in the narration written by Kate Chopin that I have chosen it is mentioned Natchitoches, a city whose name indeed derives from the Natchitoches tribe. When the Europeans little by little reached the more inland territories, French people established their control over the vast area of Canada and the majority of Midwest, surrounding the upper and central Mississippi, and expanding the dominion up to the Caribbeans and the Gulf of Mexico.

They then claimed the entire Mississippi river as their property, naming “Louisiana” after their King Louis XIV (the Sun King) and establishing their first permanent settlement near Biloxi, Mississippi. Many French citizens came to begin a new life in the recently discovered country, along with German settlers, whose territories clashed with the French ones in what was called the German Coast. Because of slavery, many slaves were brought from Africa and the Caribbean area, taking with them their languages and traditions – like the voodoo, mentioned by George Washington Cable and Alice Dunbar-Nelson in their works “Posson Jone” and “The Praline Woman” – that merged with the pre-existing ones.

Afterwards, subsequently to a violent war between the Indians and the French, France had become so weak that, even if it kept its control over the New Orleans area, it finally had to cede Louisiana to the Spanish in 1763. Even if under the Spanish domination the rules and the legislation of the country changed, – for example, it was introduced the *coartación*, the law that made possible for slaves to buy their freedom, and that it also allowed them to own a property and to enroll in the army – the changes in culture were not that significant, as the majority of the population still spoke French. However, the arrival of Spanish immigrants contributed to make the reality of New Orleans even more colorful and complex.

Forty years later, Napoleon re-established the French control over Louisiana, buying it from Spain, but he was then forced to sell the state to the United States in 1803, causing discontent in the Creole community.

Yet, who were those creoles?

In the sixth chapter of his novel *The Creoles of Louisiana*, Cable explains who could be considered “creole”. Here the passage from the book:

“What is a Creole? Even in Louisiana the question would be variously answered. The title did not here first belong to the descendants of Spanish, but of French settlers. But such a meaning implied a certain excellence of origin, and so came early to include any native, of French or Spanish descent by either parent, whose non-alliance with the slave race entitled him to social rank. Later, the term was adopted by – not conceded to – the natives of mixed blood, and it is still so used among themselves. Besides French and Spanish, there are even, for convenience of speech, “colored” creoles; but there are no Italian, or Sicilian, nor any English, Scotch, Irish, or “Yankee” Creoles, unless of parentage married into, and themselves thoroughly proselyted in, Creole society. Neither Spanish nor American domination has taken from the Creoles their French vernacular. This, also, is part of their title; and, in fine, there seems to be no more serviceable definition of the Creoles of Louisiana than this: that they are the Frenchspeaking, native portion of the ruling class” (41).

It is clear that the definition “creole” is far more complicated than we could imagine, as in this passage Cable gives his personal definition of a “creole”; Alice Dunbar-Nelson, for example has another idea of what a “creole” is. When she uses the word “creole”, she is precisely referring exclusively to people with some percentage of African blood but born in the United States.

At the beginning of the passage taken from his novel Cable in fact states that the “question would be variously answered”. There is no such a thing as a “universal” creole, only personal ideas of it.

To continue with the Historical Context, when Louisiana became American, many things suddenly changed: the official language shifted to English, the currency to the American dollar, the law to the Democratic American Constitution – even if the last change had been tenaciously fought by the admirers of the Napoleonic Code.

The slave rebellion of Haiti (1791 – 1804) brought another significant number of French-speaking immigrants – most of whom white plantation owner and colored people who had prospered in the Caribbean islands – to the Louisiana territories, followed in the immediately next years by Spanish-speaking people from Cuba, but also “Americans” from the northern regions, Irish and Polish people in search of a new life.

In 1812, Louisiana formally became a state. The new Democratic economy of free enterprise helped the newborn state to gain wealth, and the city that benefited most by the new status was

New Orleans. However, the elite of aristocrats of the city did not want to adapt to the new reality, and despised social mobility. They wanted to cling to their noble past, sighing and groaning in direction of Paris, which was still considered the cultural point of reference. In an attempt to recreate the spirit of Paris, in 1859 an enormous opera house was built, the biggest in the United States: the French Opera House.

At the beginning of the 1861, when the Civil War knocked at the door, Louisiana sided with the Confederacy, mainly because its economy depended on slavery for the growing of cotton and sugar. As the city was an important strategic point – it controlled the Mississippi river and it was one of the largest ports that traded with Europe –, the Union quickly took control over the city in 1862. When the Civil War ended, the Union troops remained in the area to make sure that the new liberties of the newly freed slaves were respected; many previous slaves gained a number of rights, even though traces of the Code Noir – the French law on the correct treatment of slaves – remained active and pivotal, but revised to account for abolition. However, many of the racially restrictive provisions remained, although African Americans were granted some new rights. Kenneth Stampp, in his book *The Era of Reconstruction: 1865 – 1877*, summarizes the overall measures of the Code as follows:

“Among their numerous provisions, the codes legalized Negro marriages, permitted Negroes to hold and dispose of property, to sue and be sued. They also took steps toward the establishment of racial segregation in public places. They prohibited interracial marriages, prohibited Negroes from serving on juries or testifying against white men, and re enacted many of the criminal provisions of the prewar slave codes” (see Stampp, 79).

According to Stampp, “the Black Codes aimed to keep the Negro a propertyless rural laborer under strict controls, without political rights, and with inferior legal rights” (Stampp in Janssen, 70). Things got even more complicated for black people after the entry into force of the Jim Crow laws, which almost cancelled all the acquired benefits; nevertheless, they were not slaves anymore, a slight improvement in their conditions.

However, it has to be noted that the Code in Louisiana conceded a better treatment to slaves than other regions did: for example, there were rules that imposed on plantation owners to register or report the death or the getaway of their slaves, and both cases had to be justified. Moreover, black

husbands and wives had to remain together, and their children could not be sold before the age of fourteen. Slaves who were tutors of white children were considered free, and all the other slaves could be freed by their master if he was twenty-five years old or older. A free slave had the same rights as a free person: the result was that there were quite a significant number of freed black men – in comparison to their number in other regions.

Even religion issues had been quite significant for the history of Louisiana. The first measure of the Code Noir, surprisingly as it may seem given its name, was the exclusion of all the Jewish people from the region of Louisiana. The only religion permitted was Roman Catholicism, and all the slaves had to be introduced to the faith – even though many of them continued to practice their own religion in secret, sometimes combining elements of the Catholic religion with elements of the African ones, creating new syncretic forms of worship that are still alive today in some areas of the world. Only Catholics could own slaves, who were forced to observe Sabbath, and could not be compelled to work on Sunday or they would be taken away by the authorities.

The laws in the Code that regulated marriage and courtship were also interesting. As I have already said, it was not possible for white and colored people to get married, nor even to have sexual intercourse— despite this, in the second case the rule was frequently bypassed. For the Creoles it was even prohibited to have a black woman as a mistress. The problem was that there were only few French women, so Creole men started to shift focus on the beautiful Native and African American women, producing quite a significant number of mixed race children. The “marriages” between a Creole and a Native American or black woman were civil unions between people of different social rank, known as “left-handed marriages” or, for French and Spanish people of the period, “plaçage”. The practice led to a remarkable amount of free women of color who, thanks to the legal agreement with a gentleman, owned houses and were provided with a monthly check. The relationships were long-running and in some cases the gentleman in question never married a white woman, but was loyal to his black mistress – in many cases a quadroon or octoroon. The children born from those relationships – free people, of course – carried the name of their father and had the right to inherit a third of their father’s patrimony. They had also the right to enter prestigious colleges, and often were educated in France; usually, when they returned home, in many cases they became quite important citizens. However, even if the “plaçage” was very common, it was not always approved. The white wives of the gentlemen involved, for example,

hated the custom, and in some cases the quadroons themselves detested the degradation coming from the fact of being treated as kind of prostitutes.

The women chosen for a “plaçage” relationship were usually very beautiful, and in many cases also well-educated. They knew about arts and social manners, and stood out in intelligent conversations, which on the contrary was not the case of most white women, who usually had not gone to school. Those quadroon women, instead, had often studied in France, as it was very difficult at the time for a black woman to attend school in Louisiana. They were refined, well-dressed and elegant, as they had to attract the attention of gentlemen to ratify the “marriage” contract. The most important events in which one could admire those beautiful ladies were the Quadroon Balls, held every Wednesday and Saturday evening. The girls were taken there by their mothers, eager to “wed” their daughters to the good catches in the ball room, who were exclusively rich Creoles. When Louisiana was sold to the United States, even American businessmen started to attend those balls and began relationships with quadroon women, which explains why in the 1840s more than the 40 percent of the properties in two areas of New Orleans – the ones in which usually the placées and their gentlemen used to buy a house – were owned by free people of color. This complex historical background, made of different people with different traditions and customs typical only of Louisiana, offered much material to “local colorists” such as George Washington Cable, Kate Chopin and Alice Dubar-Nelson. Before going more into their works, it is necessary to introduce the literary context in which the three authors were immersed.

## **1.2. Realism(s)**

By the end of the nineteenth-century, realism had become the most important movement in American literature.

It is commonly accepted that realism began in France in the mid nineteenth-century, initially as related to the fine arts, but soon spread to the other forms of art – e.g literature – and all over the world. As a reaction to Romanticism, realism opposed an ‘objective’ depiction of reality to the “fantastic”, subjective, nostalgic, romantic one, which had been propounded by romanticism, in an attempt to represent “real, every day life”, in an accurate, detailed and unembellished way.

In *The Columbia Encyclopedia* we can find the following definition of realism in literature:

“Realism, in literature, an approach that attempts to describe life without idealization or romantic subjectivity. [...] Realism has been chiefly concerned with the commonplaces of everyday life among the middle and lower classes, where character is a product of social factors and environment is the integral element in the dramatic complications (naturalism). In the drama, realism is most closely associated with Ibsen's social plays. Later writers felt that realism laid too much emphasis on external reality. Many, notably Henry James, turned to a psychological realism that closely examined the complex workings of the mind.”

Realism is often associated with novels – the most popular genre at the time – probably because, as Watt suggests, “the novel is a full and authentic report of human experience” (32). Among the most important novelists and realists in Europe we have Honoré de Balzac (1799 – 1850), Gustave Flaubert (1821 – 1880), Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821 – 1881), George Eliot (1819 – 1880) and Charles Dickens (1812 – 1870).

In the United States, the most important contribution to the definition of realism was given by William D. Howells (1837 – 1920).

At the age of twenty-three, Howells had already met Hawthorne, Emerson, Thoreau and other important writers. Hawthorne himself, in a note to Emerson, praised the qualities of the young man, which were soon demonstrated: some months later Howells wrote a campaign biography for Lincoln, and was rewarded with the office of US consul in Venice. In Europe, he had the chance to meet many other important personalities, and began to be interested and involved in realism. When he came back to the United States, he was offered the position of assistant editor at the *Atlantic Monthly*, which he accepted, becoming five years later (1871) editor until 1881. During this office, he became a pivotal critical voice, an arbiter of taste and fashion, and a strong supporter of literary realism, “the truthful treatment of material”. Lauter explains that “[...] for Howells, Realism was a democratic movement in the arts, a focus on the normal and commonplace, distinct from Romanticism or “romanticistic” fiction with its emphasis on the more ideal, bizarre, sentimental or aristocratic” (232).

Howells promoted prominent realist writers such as Henry James and Samuel Clemens, and he encouraged readers, while reading a text, to ask themselves: “Is it true?- true to the motives, the impulses, the principles that shape the life of actual men and women?” (qtd. in Lauter, 232).

We owe him much; his definition of realism seems clear, powerful and direct, and that it will enable us to understand a realist work when we encounter it. However, things are not as simple as Howells wanted them to be.

Some critics argue that there is not such a simple thing as realism. The term realism is elusive, and there are no established rules that are valid for every “realist” text.

Michael Bell, for instance, strongly opposed Howells’s idea of fixed Realism. For example, he argues that many texts classified as realist did not comply with the tenets usually associated to the movement. The closing chapter of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* shows how irrelevant “the literary ideals of William Dean Howells are to the achievement of Twain's novel”; and that the “deepest themes of [James's] realist experiment [in *The Princess Casamassima*] would seem to have nothing to do with realism” (see Bell, 56, 102). Even if it is true that he encouraged many writers, Howells did so based on his literary ideas. For example, he defines “realism” in antithesis with “art”, “style”, the “romantic” and the “literary”. Bell understands this antipathy as an effort to put some barriers to define the role of the realist novelist, which has to be a manly pursuit, in opposition with what was feminine – romantic, art, et cetera. Howells was very concerned with “the ambiguous social and sexual identity” (Bell, 26). “To claim to be a 'realist,' ” we are told, was “to suppress worries about one's sexuality and sexual status and to proclaim oneself a man” (Bell, 37).

But how can an art be an art without the use of the word “art”?

“What is Howellsian realism, after all, but a lie that claims to be truthful, a form of literature that claims not to be 'literary,' a deployment of style that claims to avoid 'style'?” (Bell, 66).

Henry James himself, one of the prominent American realist, is quite unsatisfied with Howells’ idea of throwing “the whole question of form, style, and composition into the deep sea” (Bell, 75).

To get the thing even more complicated, the problem is not only aesthetical, but also ideological. The American society of the late nineteenth-century was very complicated. From the 1860s (after the Civil War) to about 1900 the United States underwent a huge amount of changes, which had an enormous influence on the population. Starting from the Reconstruction Era, the so called Gilded Age was a period of rapid economic growth, which brought the United States to the top of the industrialized society. New railroads were built, permitting a better mobility of people and

products throughout the country; wages were increased, especially for skilled laborers, which led to a massive immigration from Europe, where wages were lower. Even colored people gained a voice in government for the first time in American history. However, the Gilded Age also masked some serious social problems, as Mark Twain pointed out in his book *The Gilded Age: A Tale of Today* – from which the name of the period was taken –: for example, the Reconstruction Era finished in 1877, leaving colored people once again disenfranchised.

Also Sundquist's *American Realism: New Essays*, problematized the discussion on realism. His introduction, "The Country of the Blue", begins with the opposition between "novel" and "romance" given by Richard Chase, based on the distinction made by Hawthorne in his introduction to *The Scarlet Letter*. According to Sundquist, the "realists" found themselves unable to handle the complex society of the late nineteenth-century America, and shape its superfluity of detail into a logical, fixed version of the "reality". In the middle of the social, economical and technological change, as Bellis observes in his review of Sundquist's book:

"the self becomes one with the things and images from which it is fabricated threatened by their shiftiness and reproducibility. And the novelist is implicated in a process of economic and linguistic "reproduction" he cannot control. Stability and order remain available to the imagination only as an escape from realism, into the "romance" from which the realists wished to break." (1258)

For Sundquist, in fact, realism always is at the point to get back to "romance". Howells would have shivered for such claim.

Bellis continues saying that

"Sundquist's opposition implies that the romance is exempt from the psychological and representational complexities of realism. But the romance is itself always vulnerable to the instabilities of signification: in *The Scarlet Letter*, for example, Hester appropriates and embroiders on the "letter," the societal symbol imposed on her. But she can never make it "her own"-it always remains part of a circulating field of signs, into which it carries her. Hester becomes the letter in a way, unidentifiable apart from it, unrecognizable to her daughter (another "sign" of her sin) unless she wears it. Even

in the romance, self and writer are enmeshed in a process of signification which remains beyond their control.” (1258)

The traditional notion of realism was most definitely attacked by Derrida, who in 1966, affirmed that all the “master narratives” were crumbling. There are no such things as “Reality”, “Objectivity”, “Truth” as formulated in the late nineteenth-century, nor a universal “realism”; we, as readers, are asked to question those terms, and reflect upon them.

To conclude, we can see that defining realism is not easy; it is a contradictory and slippery term. Probably, the best definition would be “realism(s)”: there are different ways of representing reality, and one is not better than the other.

### **1.3. Local Color**

Local Colorism can be defined as a subgenre of realism that gave importance to the representation of lesser known geographical areas, recording meticulously the values and the traditions typical of each region, and giving in the majority of the cases also a truthful picture of the social and ethnic conflicts within it.

The definition of Local Color by the *Oxford Companion to American Literature* is the following:

“In local-color literature one finds the dual influence of romanticism and realism, since the author frequently looks away from ordinary life to distant lands, strange customs, or exotic scenes, but retains through minute detail a sense of fidelity and accuracy of description.” (439)

It is evident how local color has sometimes been associated with exoticism<sup>1</sup>, nostalgia or sentimentality. For example, Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811 – 1896) and Sarah Orne Jewett (1849 – 1909) wrote about their Maine characters in a very sentimental way, as we can see in their works *The Pearl of Orr's Island* (1862) and *Country of the Pointed Firs* (1896) (see *American History from Revolution to Reconstruction and Beyond*). Even Kate Chopin was (wrongly) said to be a “lover” of exoticism: “she evokes her particular locality with the enchanting Cane River

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<sup>1</sup> Exoticism: in literature, “exoticism” is associated with “the charm and the unfamiliar”. Exotic texts narrate about distant places and different habits, in an attempt to make the readers dream about those distant cultures. For local colorist, however, being associated with exoticism cannot be considered good; dreaming about distant places is not useful to sensitize the conscience of the people to the undergoing problems of their close reality, problems that local colorists were trying to underline with their works. Many people did not understand the real aim of local color narratives, and appreciate them simply for their funny plots and vocabulary; but in doing so, they became somehow acquiescents with the problems of their close reality.

atmosphere, the quaint idioms, and the charming idiosyncrasies of the Natchitoches people. But even though she concentrated on what was then a distant, exotic community, she never emphasized the strange or remote; [...] she was concerned with the living present rather than the past” (Boriçi, “Kate Chopin: Beyond Local Color to Feminism”). It may be argued that also George Washington Cable was a nostalgic: after all, he set his stories in *Old Creole Days* some sixty years before 1870s, the period in which they were actually written. Yet, he was not: he simply knew that New Orleans was still facing the same problems it had sixty years before. “He faced the reality of racial injustice and refused to blink” (see Chambers and Watson, 114).

Local Color movement proved to be very successful in American literature from the end of the Civil War until the beginning of the twentieth-century, especially in the guise of short fiction. Historically, as Nagel affirms, “when the central elements of the humor traditions evolved into what became known as “Local Colorism”, short stories began to be widely appreciated throughout the country<sup>2</sup>” (2), thanks also to the new magazines – almost three hundred – that had recently started to spread across the nation<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Even if the origins of this genre are complex and nearly undetectable, it is highly probable that it has been influenced by the oral and written tradition of storytelling from all the different groups of immigrants that arrived in the US: it was common throughout the whole country – and peculiar of almost every different ethnical group – to share tales at the dinner table. When those stories were written down, they developed into the “yarn”, a dramatized form whose main character is a speaker, in many cases a regionalized country man who speaks in vernacular, telling a story to a bunch of people located around him (see Nagel, 2). What is funny about this type of narrative is the way in which it is told, more than the story itself. Those yarns were a very common form of entertainment, widely appreciated, throughout the whole country, especially in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Of course, implicit in those humor stories there was the fact that the readers considered themselves better than the rude main character of the yarn: they felt more educated, more sophisticated and wiser.

Other comic forms, instead, used to have as main character and narrator common people talking in their own dialect (see Nagel, 2). This is the case of Down East humor, born in Maine and New England. The speakers seemed not to grasp that there is something ridiculous in the portrait of those funny characters involved in silly events; when an outsider appears – in some cases as frame narrator – it is generally a normal, educated person of the city, who is supposed to be superior, but actually do not grasp the world he is visiting, as we can understand from the plot of the story. The amusement of those type of stories stays more in the verbal sphere than in the physical one.

On the contrary, the comic effects of the Southwestern humor rely on improbable events, irony and the skilful use of rethoric figures, such as the hyperbole, not to mention the odd characters, such as fighters, hunters, frontiersmen struggling against nature and its manifestations – usually dangerous animals. In many cases, who introduces the scene is an “Eastern” narrator, setting the stage, and then giving the floor to local characters, who are the ones that tell the odd events using their own dialect. One significant example of this kind of stories is Mark Twain’s *The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County*. Here, the narrator coming from the city finally becomes the victim of the joke, as he powerlessly listens to an endless funny story.

This kind of stories seemed to be of little significance in the American tradition, but are actually very important for the development of the Local Color movement, as it is different from region to region and use vernacular speech typical of that geographic area.

<sup>3</sup> Before the Civil War, there was only a small number of literary periodicals, among them the *Atlantic Monthly* and *Harper’s Monthly*. After the war, and with the continuous advancement of the western frontier, a huge quantity of

The most popular works at the beginning of the movement came from New England. Here, the local color writers – for the majority females – used to write about the regional agrarian setting, sometimes in a sentimental way (the already quoted case of Beecher Stowe and Orne Jewett), but including also important issues of life that could be considered as the turning point moments of their works. Among them, we can find Alice Brown (1896 – 1948), Rose Terry Cooke (1827 – 1892) and Mary Wilkins Freeman (1852 – 1930).

Male practitioners of this subgenre include Mark Twain (1835 – 1910) with his early fiction mostly set in California, which after the Gold Rush of the 1840s had become very prosperous. For North Carolina we can praise the name of Charles W. Chesnutt (1858 – 1932), while for Wyoming we have Owen Wister (1860 – 1938).

Other examples of both sexes can be Hamlin Garland (1860 – 1940) for the upper Midwest, Constance Fenimore Wolson (1840 – 1894) for Michigan – then she moved south and set her stories in a different location –, Maurice Thompson (1844 – 1901) and Edward Eggleston (1837 – 1902) for Indiana. But the most significant for this work are of course the Local Colorists of Louisiana, among them George Washington Cable (1844 – 1925), Kate Chopin (1850 – 1904) and Alice Dunbar-Nelson (1875 – 1935).

#### **1.4. George Washington Cable (1844 – 1925)**

George Washington Cable was born in New Orleans in 1844.

His mother came from a New England Puritan family, while his father was the descendant of a Virginian slaveholding family of German origin – the family name was originally “Kobell”, then “Kable” and finally “Cable”.

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magazines for stories were founded, starting from “the the *Galaxy* in 1866, the *Overland Monthly* and *Lippincott’s Magazine* in 1868, *Appleton’s Journal* in 1869, and *Scribner’s Monthly* in 1870” (see Simpson, 6). Most of this publications, in a very short time, began to sell many copies every month, particularly thanks to the very – surprisingly – appreciated regional stories. Those stories were not only restricted to the WASP elite, but to a broader public, a pivotal sign that the whole American culture was changing; for example, German immigrants could read some fiction in the *Cincinnati Republikaner* and the *Philadelphische Zeitung*. Spanish readers could enjoy *La Revista Hustrada de Nueva York*, whereas Japanese readers could explore the *Ensei*, founded in the 1890. The new arrivals from Scandinavia, most of them located in Minneapolis, had the opportunity to read some periodicals in all of their languages, and Pauline Hopkins edited a magazine for African Americans, the *Colored American Magazine*, even if some colored authors increasingly published in leading outlets such as the *Atlantic Monthly*.

As Presbyterians, the family were fish out of water in the Catholic New Orleans, and this was why Cable's ideas on race, caste and ethnical stratification were so different from the ones of his local, tradition-lovers fellows. When his father died, Cable had to leave school – at the age of fourteen – to help his family make a living; he then took a job at the New Orleans customhouse.

When he was nineteen, he enlisted in the Confederate Army and served in the Fourth Mississippi Cavalry, without knowing that this experience would provide him the basis for his most popular novels. He abandoned his regiment due to the fact that he was wounded and after the war obtained a position as a surveyor of the Atchafalaya River levees. He unfortunately got malaria and was unable to work for two years; however, in his case this was not completely a misfortune: he had in fact the opportunity to read and write, and started to contribute to a column in the New Orleans *Picayune*.

When he finally set his home in New Orleans, he worked as a bookkeeper for a cotton firm after a brief period of time in which he was a newspaper reporter.

Early in his life he began to collect African American songs (see Nagel, 18), singing them during his lectures during his whole career; he was very interested in colored people's lives, especially in the ones of the quadroon girls taken as plaçage mistresses. He was a fervent supporter of civil rights for people of color, a central theme of his life and work; in fact, in his first lecture in 1882 he touched closely the matter: he scolded the South, declaring that he had to change its ideas on plantation, slavery and social caste system.

Cable also enjoyed private, self-thought study; he mastered French and loved to read the old New Orleans city records in that language, using them later as set for his fictional narratives. The success came in 1873 with its short story “Sieur George”, published in the *Scribner's Monthly*, which eventually brought to the publication, six years later, of *Old Creole Days*. The collection of short stories consecrated him as a national, important local color writer, given also the fact that he knew so well the reality and the dialects of New Orleans. This, united with his brilliant artistic ability, made of *Old Creole Days* a pivotal book to understand the life in New Orleans at Cable's time.

In 1880 he published *The Grandissimes*, and the following year *Madame Delphine*; both the novels deal with aspects and problems of Creole life in the pre-Civil War period, including the relationship they had with colored people and the African-American exploitation. His works,

however – as we could imagine – where not appreciated much by Creoles and the southern elite in general, so in 1885 Cable decided to move with his family to Northampton, Massachusetts, where he eventually became friends with Mark Twain – with whom he had recently done a successful reading tour.

Safe from the southerners's anger, he continued to publish polemical texts on the problems of New Orleans society, such as *The Negro Question* and *John March, southerner*. At the end of his career, he decided to turn to a more romantic type of fiction, a choice that had been criticized, as it seemed to be too artificial and made only to please genteel readers and editors. Anyway, it cannot be denied that his contribute to literature is of vital importance, and that he helped to prepare the ground for modern southern writers such as William Faulkner and Flannery O'Connor.

### **1.5. Kate Chopin (1851 – 1904)**

Katherine O'Flaherty – this is her maiden name – was born in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1851. The city was founded in 1736 by some Creoles of New Orleans, and their presence was still very prominent in local institutions.

She was the daughter of Thomas and Eliza (Faris) O'Flaherty, and she was raised in a world strongly influenced by the French society – notwithstanding the fact that her father's family was Irish: her first language was French, as her great grandmother, a Creole from Louisiana who owned a shipping company on the Mississippi, lived in the house. She had been educated at the Academy of the Sacred Heart, as her wealthy Catholic slaveholding family desired. In 1870, two years after graduating, she married Oscar Chopin – a Creole businessman from Louisiana – and left for New Orleans.

She lived there for nine years, until their business failed and they were forced to leave for Chopin's plantations in Cloutierville, Natchitoches Parish. There, they also run Chopin's family store. Her husband died in 1882, leaving her at the age of thirty two and with six mouths to feed. In 1884 she moved back to St. Louis to live with her family, and she remained in the city until her death.

It is in those St. Louis years that she wrote the majority of her fictions, set almost entirely in New Orleans and Cloutierville. Her corpus is amazing, as we have to keep in mind that she had to raise six children and care about the house and the servants; but within a decade – she started writing in

1889 – she had published the majority of her works, including ninety-five short stories, two novels, twenty poems, one play, and eight essays of literary criticism.

She was part of the cultural life of the city, where she and her family were very active: they went to concerts and all the important events held in the town.

Her short stories appeared in the major magazines – such as the *Atlantic Monthly*, *Vogue* and *Century* – and from the publication of her short stories in 1889 she was counted by critics as a representative of the regional fiction supported by William D. Howells (see Lauter, 413). In 1894 she published a collection of twenty-three short stories under the name of *Bayou Folk*, and three years later she published another collection of short stories called *A Night in Acadie*. Other stories were published in the following years, but there were not gathered in a volume. Even though she mastered the short story genre so well, her masterpiece is considered to be the novel *The Awakening* (1899), the shocking depiction of an upper-class heroine who discovers herself and her sexuality. The story puts Chopin in the middle of the turn of the century debates about gender roles.

The characters in her fiction are a wide spectrum of human types: they

“range from wealthy plantation owners to poor rural Cajuns; from white Creoles to Creoles of color to African American to Native Americans to Cajun both white and of color; from urban New Orleans residents to rural farmers; from “French” Catholics to “American” Protestants” (see Lauter, 414).

The marks in all her characters that spot their religious, economical, racial and geographical settings, united with her unique focus on female identity, allows us to imagine the multiple layers of Louisiana society and the connections among regional, gender and national identity.

### **1.6. Alice Dunbar-Nelson (1875 – 1935)**

Alice Ruth Moore – her maiden name – was born the 19<sup>th</sup> July 1875 in New Orleans.

She was the daughter of a white seaman and a colored seamstress born as a slave in Louisiana. From the very beginning of her life, she had always been acquainted with diversity, as the blood that run in her veins was a mixture of African, Native American and Creole.

Her father left the family when she was still a child, and her mother raised her with a particular attention to education and social propriety. Beautiful, intelligent and a fervent Episcopalian, she

attended the Straight College – where she excelled in all subjects, above them all music – and after her graduation in 1892 she started teaching at Old Marigny Elementary School, where she remained for four years. She was well-accepted among white people, whom admired and respected her.

She then moved north, where she continued her education at Cornell University, finally taking the Master of Arts Degree, and also taught public and mission schools in New York City.

Outside work, she was interested in writing, and in 1895 she published her first collection of stories and poems called *Violet and Other Tales*. In 1897, when she was teaching at a school in Brooklyn, she met Paul Laurence Dunbar – one of the most important African American poets – and after a storybook courtship she married him in 1898. But the marriage did not last long, aided the fact that they had very different temperaments, that her family did not approve of the union and that Dunbar had severe problems with alcohol and drugs. They finally separated in 1902, four years before the death of the famous poet.

She then moved to Delaware, where she taught English and was an administrator at Howard High School. She was also on the State Republican Committee of Delaware, an association that struggled to obtain Civil Rights for free people of color.

Later, she was also a teacher at the Industrial School for Colored Girls (1921 – 1928) and executive secretary of the American Friends Inter-Racial Peace Committee (1928 – 1931). Even though she could easily pass for white – and she slightly disapproved darker-skinned, less educated or refined blacks (see Lauter, 402) – she fought a lot to erase racial discriminations. In 1922 she headed the Anti-Lynching Crusaders and with her husband Robert Nelson – whom she married in 1916 – directed and published the *Wilmington Advocate*, a newspaper against racial prejudices and capitalism. She was also a fervent feminist, and wrote and did much for colored women until the end of her life in 1935.

## CHAPTER II

### Translation Theories and Their Application

#### 2.1. What is a Translation?

Theorists have had – and are still having – quite a hard time in defining what translating means and what a translation is. Peter Newmark, in his Introduction to his book *A Textbook of Translation*, introduces clearly the problem:

“What is translation? Often, though not by any means always, it is rendering the meaning of a text into another language in the way that the author intended the text. Common sense tells us that this ought to be simple, as one ought to be able to say something as well in one language as in another. On the other hand, you may see it as complicated, artificial and fraudulent, since by using another language you are pretending to be someone you are not. Hence in many types of text (legal, administrative, dialect, local, cultural) the temptation is to transfer as many SL (Source Language) words to the TL (Target Language) as possible. The pity is, as Mounin wrote, that the translation cannot simply reproduce, or be, the original. And since this is so, the first business of the translator is to translate.” (5)

Translators should be aware that their works cannot just copy the original, but should dive into its context in order to be able to grasp the author’s intentions and adapt them through the right words and images in the language of arrival.

Eugene Nida, in his work *Principles of Correspondence*, further problematizes the concept, introducing the word “symbols”. Here is the passage:

“Since no two languages are identical, either in the meanings given to corresponding symbols or in the ways in which such symbols are arranged in phrases and sentences, it stands to reason that there can be no absolute correspondence between languages. Hence there can be no fully exact translations. The total impact of a translation may be reasonably close to the original, but there can be no identity in detail.” (see Nida in Venuti, 126)

Words are “symbols”. Carl Jung, in his book *Symbols of Transformation*, affirms that “symbols” are polisemic, not definable and not conventional; they possess comparable variants, and the more possible variants they have, the more complete and appropriate is the image they create in the mind of the subject. Claude Lévi Strauss used – in his book *A General Theory of Magic* – the word “*mana*” – an antique Austronesian word – as example to explain the concept of “symbol”: *mana* means power, but at the same time effectiveness and quality, and it can be a verb, a noun or an adjective. How can such a word be translated? And, above all, is the concept of *mana* translatable? Those are questions typical of a translator who, in the case of an affirmative response, has to decide what strategy of translation to adopt.

As regards the choice of the strategy of translation, Eugene Nida affirms that:

“No statement of the principles of correspondence in translating can be complete without recognizing the many different types of translations. Traditionally, we have tended to think in terms of free or paraphrastic translations as contrasted with close or literal ones. Actually, there are many more grades of translating than these extremes imply.” (see Nida in Venuti, 126)

Nida states that differences in translation can be explained by three fundamental elements: “(1) the nature of the message, (2) the the purpose or purposes of the author and, by proxy, of the translator, and (3) the type of audience” (see Nida in Venuti, 127).

Messages differ primarily in the degree in which content or form is the dominant consideration. Naturally, form and content cannot be separate entities, but in general the form is usually sacrificed for the sake of the content – even if in poetry there is an important focus upon formal elements, generally more so than in prose. Rarely can one put the same attention both in content and form. The purposes of the translator are also pivotal factors, as the aim of the translator actually may not coincide with the one of the original author; however, it is supposed that, at least, translators have a similar purpose to the one of the author.

“The primary purpose of the translator may be information as to both content and form. One intended type of response to such an informative type of translation is largely cognitive, e.g. an ethnographer’s translation of texts from informants, or a philosopher’s translation of Heidegger. A largely informative translation may, on the

other hand, be designed to elicit an emotional response of pleasure from the reader or listener. Translator's purposes may involve much more than information. He may, for example, want to suggest a particular type of behaviour by means of a translation. Under such circumstances he is likely to aim at full intelligibility, and to make certain minor adjustments in detail so that the reader may understand the full implications of the message for his own circumstances. [...] A still greater degree of adaptation is likely to occur in a translation which has an imperative purpose. Here the translator feels constrained not merely to suggest a possible line of behavior, but to make such an action explicit and compelling." (see Nida in Venuti, 128)

In addition to the first and second element, one has to consider the prospective audience. Different codes and languages must be used for the different types of audience: for example, one cannot use the same language in a piece for children and in one for specialists, as the tone, the register and the words employed have to be completely different. Moreover, audiences can also differ in their interests. For instance, a translation whose main aim is to encourage reading for pleasure is very different from one planned for someone who is trying to assemble a machine.

Nida affirms that "since "there are, properly speaking, no such things as identical equivalents (Belloc 1931 and 1931a:37), one must in translating seek to find the closest possible equivalent. However, there are fundamentally two different types of equivalence: one which may be called formal and another which is primarily dynamic." (see Nida in Venuti, 129).

Formal equivalence focuses primarily on the message itself, in both form and content. In those kinds of translations, the translator is interested in such conformity – in the original and the translation – as sentence to sentence, poetry to poetry, and concept to concept.

"The message in the receptor language should match as closely as possible the different elements in the source language. This means, for example, that the message in the receptor culture is constantly compared with the message in the source culture to determine standards of accuracy and correctness." (see Nida in Venuti, 129). The type of translation that matches most with this description is the so called "gloss translation".

"Such a translation might be a rendering of some Medieval French text into English, intended for students of certain aspects of early French literature not requiring a knowledge of the original language of the text. Their needs call for a relatively close

approximation to the structure of the early French text, both as to form (e.g. syntax and idioms) and content (e.g. themes and concepts).” (see Nida in Venuti, 129)

A dynamic translation, instead, hang upon the “principle of equivalent effect”.

“In such a translation one is not so concerned with matching the receptor-language message with the source-language message, but with the dynamic relationship, that the relationship between receptor and message should be substantially the same as that which existed between the original receptors and the message. A translation of dynamic equivalence aims at complete naturalness of expression, and tries to relate the receptor to modes of behavior relevant within the context of his own culture; it does not insist that he understand the cultural patterns of the source-language context in order to comprehend the message.” (see Nida in Venuti, 129)

Those are the two most common way of proceeding in translation according to Nida, but we have to keep in mind that there is a continuum between the two poles; as far as my work is concerned, I think that it can be positioned somewhere in the middle.

## **2.2. Translation of a Dialect(?)**

Nida’s theory is useful for thinking about how to translate a text featuring parts written in ‘dialect’ – the case of my three short stories – and I used it as a starting point for my work.

I was aware, from the very beginning, that I could not provide a complete formal equivalence without spoiling the entire narration; I could have translated these text by simply picking one of the Italian dialects, but that would not have been fair to other dialects and I could not have explained why exactly *that* dialect. There is indeed very little scientific literature on the translation of foreign dialects into Italian.

The first thing I did was to look at how other Italian translators translated dialects into Italian, giving priority to those who translated from texts in American English that presented the use of a dialect. Inspiration came to me from the translation of two novels originally written by Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *(The) Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Both the novels present different forms of dialects, as Mark Twain wrote in the “Explanatory” to *(The) Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*: “In this book a number of dialects are used, to wit: the Missouri negro dialect;

the extremest form of the backwoods Southwestern dialect; the ordinary “Pike County” dialect; and four modified varieties of this last”.

There are many translations of the previously mentioned novels, so I decided to mention only two of them, the most important for my work.

The first one is the Italian translation of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* by Gianni Celati. In the following paragraphs I will report the original by Twain and Celati’s translation:

‘Hello, old chap, you got to work, hey?’

Tom wheeled suddenly and said: ‘

Why, it’s you, Ben! I warn’t noticing.’

‘Say — I’m going in a-swimming, I am. Don’t you wish you could? But of course you’d druther work — wouldn’t you? Course you would!’

Tom contemplated the boy a bit, and said:

‘What do you call work?’

‘Why, ain’t that work?’

Tom resumed his whitewashing, and answered carelessly:

‘Well, maybe it is, and maybe it ain’t. All I know, is, it suits Tom Sawyer.’

‘Oh come, now, you don’t mean to let on that you like it?’ (17)

“Ehi là, ‘mico! C’è lo sgobbo, eh?”

Tom si voltò improvvisamente e disse: “Ah, sei tu, Ben! T’avevo neanche visto!”

“Di’, io sto ‘ndando nuotare, io. Teti piacerebbe mica venire? Ma teti piace più lo sgobbo eh? Eh, eh, vero, no?”

Tom contemplò il ragazzo un momento, poi disse:

“Cos’è che te chiami sgobbo?”

“Ve’, è no sgobbo stoqui?”

Tom riprese ad imbiancare e rispose distrattamente:

“Somma, può essere che è o che no è. Io so solo che gli va, a Tom Sawyer!”

“Ohuu, dàì, va’, ‘uoi mica ‘mbrogliarmi che teti piace.” (25)

This translation was useful to me because it was the example of how I did not want my work to be. First, because it was so close to the process of “formal equivalence” illustrated by Nida – coherent in form and content, so the speech is “grammatically incorrect” and with contractions as in the original – and secondly because the translator decided that the dialect in the original should have been converted into Italian as a dialect coming from Central or Southern Italy, which I have already said it is not my point, giving also the fact that, in the majority of the cases, plain Italian can accurately express the concepts in the original version: one example is the word “Mahs” (62) – “Master” –, translatable as *Padrone*; in both this dialectical English and in Italian the word means not only the person that owns you, but also the person that gives you work.

Another text that was helpful for my work was the translation of Twain’s (*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*), rendered into Italian by Franca Cavagnoli with the title of *Le avventure di Huckleberry Finn*. Even if she adopted some of the variants of Central and Southern Italy for minor characters such as the King and the Duke, she also uses an (almost) correct Italian – with some neologisms that are now considered Italian – for the characters of Jim and Huck: the two talk slightly different, but the difference is made by the fact that one is a young boy and uses expression typical of people of his age, and the other is an adult, which prefers to talk as a mature person does. As both the characters are not well educated, Cavagnoli uses for their speech a low register, adopting also contractions, as in her opinion this technique allows us to understand that Jim and Huck’s language is mainly an “oral” one (see Cavagnoli, “Introduzione”, XVIII).

What is also worth mentioning for the development of my work is that in Cavagnoli’s translation Jim addresses Huck (at the beginning) and all the other characters – of superior social strata or strangers in general – using “*voi*”, the dated and formal way used in Italy in the 1800s to speak to people generally outside the family, but in some cases also in the family itself – for example, children used the “*voi*” form to address their parents, or wife and husband could address one another with the same form; the “*voi*” has now been replaced by “*lei*”. Cavagnoli’s “*voi*” method is interesting as it helps to contestualize the narration and makes it more real.

In the following paragraphs, I will report the original text by Twain and how Cavagnoli translated it:

“By and by Jim says:

“But looky here, Huck, who wuz it dat ‘uz killed in dat shanty ef it warn’t you?”

Then I told him the whole thing, and he said it was smart. He said Tom Sawyer couldn’t get up no better plan than what I had. Then I says: “How do you come to be here, Jim, and how’d you get here?” He looked pretty uneasy, and didn’t say nothing for a minute. Then he says: “Maybe I better not tell.”

“Why, Jim?”

“Well, dey’s reasons. But you wouldn’ tell on me ef I uz to tell you, would you, Huck?”

“Blamed if I would, Jim.”

“Well, I b’lieve you, Huck. I—*I run off.*”

“Jim!”

“But mind, you said you wouldn’ tell—you know you said you wouldn’ tell, Huck.”

Dopo un pò Jim fa: “Sentite un po’, Huck, ma chi è che hanno ammazzato in quella catapecchia se non eravate voi?”

Allora gli ho raccontato tutto, e lui ha detto che è stata una bella trovata. Tom Sawyer non poteva pensare un piano migliore. Poi faccio: “Com’è che sei qui, Jim, e come ci sei venuto?” Lui non sapeva che pesci pigliare e per un minuto buono non ha detto ba’. Poi fa: “Forse è meglio se non dico niente”.

“Perchè, Jim?”

“Be’, io lo so perchè. Però voi non la fate mica la spia, vero, se io vi racconto tutto, eh?”

“Mi venga un colpo, Jim.”

“Vabbè, vi credo, Huck. Sono..sono *scappato.*”

“Jim!”

“Attento, avete detto che non farete la spia; lo sapete che avete detto che non farete la spia.”

Both the translations gave me important food for thought and helped me to start to develop my personal theory on how to translate the three short stories; however, they were not enough, as the texts I chose are a little bit more complicated; in fact, they feature parts in the Louisiana’s nineteenth-century Creole ‘dialect’. The reason why I used air quotes is because academics have been debating the question of the classification of the creole languages<sup>4</sup> – that is, if they have to be considered proper languages or dialects. Presently, the first option is gaining more and more consents.

Maria Grazia Sindoni, in her essay “Tradurre le varietà diglossiche dei Caraibi: l’inglese ed il creolo nei romanzi di Beril Gilroy e Curdella Forbes”, talks about the Creole languages in the territories of the Caribbean islands, and explains why – in general – those variants have to be considered more than a dialect: they are living languages, result of cultural bends.

“Come è noto, in ambito coloniale e postcoloniale, il fenomeno del contatto non è mai neutrale né produce esiti determinati dalle caratteristiche intrinseche alle lingue coinvolte, bensì è frutto dei rapporti di potere fra le varie culture. Nel caso specifico, il governo centrale britannico ha metodicamente anglicizzato le isole e i territori conquistati nei Caraibi, ad esempio forzando l’adozione ufficiale dell’inglese nell’amministrazione locale, burocrazia, giustizia, commercio e istruzione. Tuttavia, elementi sintattici e lessicali provenienti da altre culture – per esempio dall’Africa occidentale – sono emersi fin dai primissimi incontri, dando così vita a forme di resistenza linguistica all’oppressione imperialistica. Le lingue pidgin e creole, difatti, non sono semplicemente delle forme di tipo derivativo, ma piuttosto esempi viventi di mescolanza linguistica. I linguisti non sono ancora giunti ad un consenso definitivo riguardo allo status delle lingue creole, che però certamente non sono distinte le une dalle altre in modo chiaro, ma più realisticamente analizzabili lungo un *continuum*, un

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<sup>4</sup> Creole languages: “a language that has its origin in extended contact between two language communities, one of which is generally European. It incorporates features from each and constitutes the mother tongue of a community.” (Collins English Dictionary Online, [collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/creole](http://collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/creole))

flusso costituito da segmenti che trascolorano verso la fase successiva, sebbene siano stati fatti alcuni tentativi di classificazione, come la nota tripartizione che vede il *basileto* (configurazione creola estrema), *mesoletto* (forme intermedie) fino all'*acroletto* (l'inglese standard). L'inglese britannico, e successivamente l'inglese americano, si mescolano, in realtà come Trinidad e Tobago, Jamaica o British Guiana, a diverse lingue indigene Arawak, come Shebayo, Taino, Lokon, Garifuna, Taruma, e ad altre lingue africane (classico esempio sono quelle della famiglia Niger-Congo), asiatiche ed europee. [...] Gli studi creolistici non hanno ancora identificato con chiarezza i meccanismi e le dinamiche che sottendono alla formazione delle lingue pidgin e creole. Ad esempio, non si concorda sul fatto che un creolo debba per forza derivare da un pidgin e inoltre non si è mai raggiunto il consenso sulla inevitabilità dell'ultima fase subita dalle lingue creole, detta di *decreolizzazione*, quando cioè i connotati basilettali vengono perduti e ci si avvicina sempre di più all'acroletto, che è di norma la lingua lessificatrice, cioè quella di prestigio. Un dibattito molto pertinente in questa sede ruotava intorno alla questione se le lingue creole fossero da considerarsi *dialetti* della lingua superstrato, o lessificatrice, o se invece fossero autonome. In altre parole, ci si chiedeva se fossero o meno della varietà substandard della lingua di prestigio. Già nel 1971, David DeCamp affermava che i pidgin e i creoli avessero una loro indipendenza: «sono lingue genuine e indipendenti e non versioni maccheroniche o forme interlinguistiche corrotte di lingue standard »<sup>5</sup>” (154)

Sindoni's article not only does problematize the definition of Creole languages, but also adds an important point for my analysis: the classification of the different stages of the creole languages.

The “dialectal” features of my three short stories come from the mixture of mainly Louisiana French – a denomination that embraces the *Cajun*<sup>5</sup> French, the French language spoken in colonial Lower Louisiana and the Creole French of Louisiana<sup>6</sup> – and English. After the American purchase of Louisiana in 1803, the official language switched from French to English, and the citizens of the region had to quickly learn the new language. Still, many years after this the influences of the

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<sup>5</sup> *Cajun*: Cajuns, also known as *Acadians*, are the descendants of the original Acadians exiles from Canada, who were removed in the 1760s from their territories by the English due to the hostility between France and England; the exiled, after the expulsion, set for the majority in the territory of Louisiana.

<sup>6</sup> Creole French of Louisiana: it is a French-based creole, which arose from the interaction between French and African speakers in the eighteenth-century.

French language could be noted in the inflections of the region's speakers descending from the people whose first language was once Louisiana French. In all of the three short stories we can find those inflections in the speech of some of the major characters, as well as words coming directly from French. However, reading those stories, it was also clear that the French language was slowly disappearing – at least in the common language used in public, while in private it probably depended from family to family –: it was moving towards the *acroletto*, the standard English, foretelling the future of the Louisiana French. In fact, nowadays it has been recorded by the United States Census that in Louisiana only the 3.5 % of people above 5 years old still uses Louisiana French at home<sup>7</sup>, while at school or work English is the official language: the latter definitely won over the first.

Put in this way, the language featured in the three short stories has to be considered more that a dialect, and translated in an appropriate way. To find the best possible translation, I decided to look at some works of Italian translators who dealt with pidgins and creole languages. The work of Alberto Pezzotta *Non più tranquilli*, the Italian adaptation of *No Longer at Ease* by Chinua Achebe, helped me to further develop my translation. Pezzotta decided to use the *italics* to signal the code switching from standard English to Pidgin English, as in his opinion it is the only way to signal that the character is talking in another language; he also decided to lower the register of the speaker if he was talking in Pidgin (see Pezzotta, “Note del traduttore”, 203).

In the following paragraph I will put an excerpt taken from *No Longer at Ease* that features the use of Pidgin English, and afterwards Pezzotta's translation of it:

'Why you look the man for face when we want give um him two shillings?' he asked Obi.

'Because he has no right to take two shillings from you,' Obi answered.

'Na him make I no de want carry you book people,' he complained. 'Too too know na him de worry una. Why you put your nose for matter way no concern you? Now that policeman go charge me like ten shillings.' (34)

“*Cavolo l'hai guardato quando stavamo allungandogli due scellini?*” chiese ad Obi.

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<sup>7</sup> [it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lingua\\_francese\\_cajun](http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lingua_francese_cajun)

“Perchè non ha diritto di prendere nulla,” rispose Obi.

“*Capito perchè non voglio tirare su ‘sti sapientoni?’*” si lamentò l’autista. “*Avete studiato, ma non sapete come va la vita. Perchè ficcate il naso in una cosa che non vi riguarda? Adesso quello là mi fa pagare dieci scellini.*”

### 2.3. My Working Methods

a) Dynamic or free translation.

As I said in the first part of this chapter, my decision was to adopt a dynamic and free translation for the most part, as it would produce clearer sentences – and probably more understandable for the readers – in my Italian version; bearing in minds that the work of a translator is not only translating words and texts, but also conveying the ultimate meaning of the work in the target language: reading and interpreting is the first job of a translator.

In “Posson Jone”, for example, I converted the expression “[...] one must begin to be something” (49) into “one must begin to become someone”, *uno deve pur iniziare ad essere qualcuno*. I also changed the word “bull-fight” (53) into *corrida*, as it would not make much sense talking only about bulls if what was planned is a fight between a bull and a buffalo-and-tiger; again referring to animals, I translated “menagerie-life” (77) – literally “life in the zoo” – as “a life in which they are always exhibited”, since living in a zoo it means being exposed every day to people, so *vita in cui sono costantemente in mostra*.

Some more examples regarding the same difficulty in the same story are the following: in “looking up at the glorious sky with its great, white fleets drawn off upon the horizon” (73), “fleets” become “clouds”, *nuvole*; and in “the schooner swang slowly off before the” (89), “before” turns into “pushed by”, *sospinto*.

Turning to “A Rude Awakening”, I can add some more examples: in the very first page, Lolotte “order him [the father] from the house” (96), which I supposed it means “to order him to get out from the house”, *ingiungendogli di uscire di casa*; another case is Sylveste’s reproach of Lolotte “you want to kill a chicken” (97) for Nonomme, where I replaced the “want” with “could”, *potresti*; or again I converted the “flaky rice” (105) into a “soft rice”, *morbido riso*, as the word in Italian for “crumbly” is not correct for rice; I also changed “drive the wagon” (101) to “lead the wagon”, *portare il carro*, as the wagon is pulled by mules, and you lead them. One last example is “dey got

al'ays some'in' w'at push me" (111), which I decided to translate as *c'era sempre qualcosa che mi turbava*, that literally means "something that disturbed me", in a sense that Sylvestre was not able to rest, because the thought of Lolotte was too painful to stay motionless; it is his despair that pushes him.

b) Literal or "formal" translation.

In some cases, however, I felt the necessity to drift a little from dynamic translation, opting for a more "formal" – in Nida's terms "formal" means "faithful to the text" – adaptation, but only to preserve a metaphor or to give a better idea of how the characters speak. Some examples can be the following:

"[...] that the world is round — for example, like a cheese. This round world is *a cheese to be eaten through*, [...]" (49)

"[...] che il mondo è rotondo, ad esempio come una forma di formaggio. Questo mondo rotondo è *un formaggio che va mangiato tutto*, [...]"

"I thing you is juz right. I believe, me, *strong-strong* in the improvidence, yes." (59)

"Io dico che avete proprio ragione. Io, io credo *forte-forte* nell'imprevidenza, oh sì."

"Yaas!" replied St.-Ange; "I am *sure-sure*. I thing everybody will go to heaven." (67)

"Decisamente!" rispose St. Ange "sono *sicuro-sicuro*. Penso che tutti quanti andremo in Paradiso.

c) Translating the Dialects.

Then, my first difficulty was to choose how to deal with the parts written in dialect. For what regards those parts – two of the three short stories feature more than one dissimilar way of speaking – and the ones in Creole, I decided to translate them using a lower register than the one used by the narrating voice of the stories; in Dunbar-Nelson's story, the narrating voice corresponds totally to the praline woman, who speaks in her dialect: for her character, I adopted the same low register used for the parts written in dialect of the other two stories.

Concerning the Creole pieces, I resolved to keep the French words in the text and highlight them – to signal the code-switching and the mixture of French and English – by using the italics, without putting the entire sentence in italics as Pezzotta did, unless the Italian version of the texts would be written mainly in Roman. For instance:

“Mais non, what's dat you say? She's daid! Ah, m'sieu, 'tis my lil' gal what died long year ago.” (119)

“*Mais non*, cosa dite? È morta! Ah, *m'sieu*, è la mia ragazzina che è morta tanti anni fa.”

““*Mais certainement!* But it is not to win that I want; 'tis me conscien' — me honor!” (71)

“*Mais certainement!* Ma non è per vincere che lo voglio fare; è la mia coscienza – il mio onore!”

"Lolotte!" the old man cried out into the stillness. "Lolotte, *ma fille*, Lolotte!" (109)

“Lolotte!”, gridò il vecchio, nel silenzio. “Lolotte, *ma fille*, Lolotte!”

d) Courtesy forms/Derogatory forms.

Furthermore, a second difficulty still regarding the dialects was to decide whether to use the formal or informal way for the characters' speeches. As the stories were written in the late nineteenth century, I converted the personal pronoun “you” into the formal “*voi*” ( it is a common solution adopted by translators) which was the one used in common language in Italy at the time in which the texts were committed to paper. However, in some cases I was unsure whether to do so or not. This is the case for example of Sylveste Bordon and Aunt Minty in “A Rude Awakening”: in my Italian version, both the characters speak to Sylveste's sons using the informal “*tu*”, whereas the children address them using the formal “*voi*”. I did so because I read that it was common in late nineteenth century in Italy to address parents or older close relatives – Aunt Minty is not exactly a blood relative, but she deputise for the children's mother, taking care of them – using the “*voi*”,

but parents and older close relatives might decide to address their children using “*tu*” if they felt to do so. To Sylveste and Aunt Minty I gave this chance. For example:

"Po' li'le Nonomme; we mus' fine some'in' to break dat fevah. You want to kill a chicken once a w'ile fu Nonomme, Lolotte." (97)

“Povero piccolo Nonomme; dobbiamo trovare qualcosa che gli abbassi quella febbre. *Potresti* uccidere una gallina ogni tanto per Nonomme, Lolotte”.

As far as the derogatory forms are concerned, “Auntie” (123) is the best example. In “The Praline Woman”, “Auntie” is the term the Irishman mentioned in Tante Marie’s speech used to refer to her. At the time in which the three short stories were written – and also in the following years –, it was common to address black people using patronymics like “Uncle, Aunt, Mammy, Boy – if referring to a black man “et cetera, clearly wanting to be offensive and creating steady stereotypes. One classical example of stereotype evolved from Uncle Tom from *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe: in the novel, the black man is portrayed as a saintly, dignified slave, who always maintains a pure Christian attitude toward his own sufferings, and who dies as a martyr, whipped to death by the cruel slaveowner when he refuses to say where some runaway slaves were located. Even if we owe much to Beecher Stowe for her effort to promote abolitionism, the portrait of Uncle Tom is not truthful, but quite romanticized, so that the term “Uncle Tom” has slowly become negative, “a derogatory epithet for an excessively subservient person, particularly when that person perceives their own lower-class status based on race. It is similarly used to negatively describe a person who betrays their own group by participating in its oppression, whether or not they do so willingly”<sup>8</sup>. As black people at the time in the South were mainly oppressed and segregated, in the majority of the cases unwillingly “accepting” their condition, in the eyes of the white men they were all “Uncles, Aunties etc”, the characters of a romantic and picturesque novel, less than flesh and blood humans. Colored people themselves were in some ways used to those epithets, as can be seen in this excerpt from “Uncle Wellington’s Wives”, by Charles Chesnut:

“After supper Mr. Johnson took uncle Wellington to visit some of the neighbors who had come from North Carolina before the war. They all expressed much pleasure at meeting "Mr. Braboy," a title which at first sounded a little odd to uncle Wellington.

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<sup>8</sup> [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uncle\\_Tom#Epithet](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uncle_Tom#Epithet)” and [“merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Uncle%20Tom”](http://merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Uncle%20Tom).

At home he had been "Wellin'ton," "Brer Wellin'ton," or "uncle Wellin'ton;" it was a novel experience to be called "Mister," and he set it down, with secret satisfaction, as one of the first fruits of Northern liberty." (231)

Turning again to "Auntie", unluckily I was not able to find a word with this negative shade in Italian, so I translated it literally as *zietta* – as also did the various translators of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, where Uncle Tom becomes *zio Tom*, as can be seen in the title *La capanna dello zio Tom* – losing something from the original version.

e) "Grammatical incorrect" expressions

In the English version the parts in dialect are in some cases "grammatically incorrect" if compared to standard English, but only because it is something peculiar of those dialects – for example, in the African American Vernacular English – AAVE – of Colossus it is normal to find expressions like this one:

"[...] *dey is de fo' sins of de conscience [...]*" (63)

"[...] *sono tutti e quattro peccati della coscienza [...]*"

Nevertheless, I did not want to use grammatically incorrect Italian expressions, particularly since what interested me more was the content of the texts. Moreover, I hoped that Italian readers would find the act of reading the stories enjoyable and fascinating – which I do not think mainly grammatically incorrect works can be.

f) Outdated expressions.

Concerning time, in the original texts there were some dated words and compound adjectives that I could not find in modern English, as for example the word "plumb" (55) in "Posson Jone", that now means "lead weight", but originally meant "completely"; or the word "untell" (59) – still in "Posson Jone" – that originally meant "to make as if not counted, few" and now means "to withdraw or retract"; or the old English word "axen" (99), which means "to ask" but is now out of use. For those words, however, I did not feel expert enough on ancient Italian to find the best possible translation for the English dated words into Italian dated words, so I decided to render them in modern Italian.

g) Old toponyms and names no longer in use or forgotten.

Again with regard to time, another difficulty was to understand all the references to events, famous names – important to understand something in the texts – and expressions common at the time in which the stories were written, which have now been forgotten or have been named in a different way; this is the case for example of “Posson Jone”’s “Mr Cayetano” (53) – a circus owner that performed in the area of New Orleans – or “Place Congo”/“Congo Plains” (53, 73) – which is now Congo Square, another evidence that English language has outclassed the French one –, but also of “Major Innerarity” (49), of the Church of St. Rocque (121) – in “The Praline Woman” – and all the possible allusions suggested by James Nagel for the names of Baptiste (49) and Colossus (57) in “Posson Jone”’<sup>9</sup>.

h) Idiomatic expressions.

One more difficulty was grasping the meaning of all the idiomatic expressions, and find for them a suitable translation. For example, the word “lagniappe” (119) – a Creole American word that means “as a present” – in “The Praline Woman” – that I finally translated as *in regalo*<sup>10</sup>.

Some more examples of this kind of difficulty can be found in “Posson Jone” the word “Posson” (49) itself – which I supposed it meant Parson – and also another way of referring to him, “Misty Posson Jone” (57), which I translated with *Signor Pastore Jone*, with “Misty” meaning “Mr”; or “quitte” (59), a part of a voodoo exorcism spell – that St. Ange mentioned referring to the barrel of his father; or “*Miché*” (93) – Baptiste’s patois pronunciation of “Mr” – and “Mahs” (61) – “Master” in the language of Colossus –, the terms the two servants use to address to their masters, and also Colossus’ “roytious man” (63), which becomes “righteous man”, *uomo virtuoso*. A couple of more sentences from “Posson Jone” can be the following: “As a p’inciple I discredits de imbimin’ of awjus liquors. De imbimin’ of awjus liquors, de wiolution of de Sabbaf, de playin’ of de fiddle, and de usin’ of by-words, dey is de fo’ sins of de conscience” (63) that feature the use of mangled words and uncommon expressions such as “awjus liquors” and “de playin’ of the fiddle” – which respectively in my translation are *ottimo alcool* and *truffare* – or “you could get the game on them cards” (71), which I think it means “I do not think you can do better at cards” and I translated as

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<sup>9</sup> However, thanks to Nagel’s book, the online version of “Posson Jone’ and Père Raphaël: With a New Word Setting Forth How and Why the Two Tales Are One”, and *the Heath Anthology of American Literature* I was able to find all the information that I needed, putting them on the notes.

<sup>10</sup> Again, very helpful were the notes in *the Heath Anthology of American Literature*.

*fare di meglio a carte*; or again “you most of been doted with sumthin” (61), “you must have taken something”, which I translated as *devi esserti pigliato qualcosa*.

From “A Rude Awakening” fall into this category the word “do” (97) in the very first sentence of the story, which I translated as “dough, money”, but also Aunt Minty “low” (105) later in the text – which I supposed was the transcription of the oral pronunciation of “Hello” and that I translated as *ciao* – or “yonda” (105), Minty’s pronunciation of “yonder”, *laggiù*. One more example is the expression “you mighty cross, to-night”, which I think it means something like “you are very angry tonight” and that I translated as *sei terribilmente arrabbiata stasera*.

i) Textual variants and their impact on my translation.

Then, before actually translating all of the texts, I decided to consult at least three different authoritative books and online versions of the stories, as it could be possible that reprinting after reprinting something had been lost, or that after the first publication the author had decided to change parts of the texts. For two of the three short stories, all of the texts that I have looked at displayed the same words and paragraphs. “Posson Jone”, however, in one of the three version exhibited a difference: here and there words were missing, changing completely the meaning of the sentences. As it was an online version, unluckily I was not able to find the date of publication of this particular version of the story, and consequently I was unable to determine if the author had changed the words or if it was a mistake of the website makers. Nevertheless, looking closely at the sentences in this version, I found out that they did not make much sense as they displayed grammatically incorrect and awkward phrases also in the parts written in standard English – as in the parts written in dialect those kind of “mistakes” are common. My conclusion was then that the website creators wrongly copied the original text, so for “Posson Jone” I based my translation on the other two – identical – versions of the story.

To be more precise, for “Posson Jone” the original version in which I based my translation was the one published in 1909 by Charles Scribners’ Sons, “Posson Jone’ and Père Raphaël”; for “A Rude Awakening”, the original version is the one from *Bayou Folk*, published in 1894 by Boston and New York Houghton, Mifflin and Company; for “The Praline Woman”, the one from *The Goodness of St. Rocque and Other Stories*, published by Dodd, Mead & Co. in 1899.

j) Other Italian translations of the three authors.

One more thing I did was looking at other works by the same authors – Dunbar-Nelson, Cable and Chopin – translated into Italian, to see if these versions could help me in using a more precise Italian vocabulary for my translation. I was very surprised, though, that none of the works of Dunbar-Nelson and Cable had been translated into Italian. Luckily, for Chopin the bibliography was vast. I read the collection of some of Chopin’s short stories edited by Passigli in 2017 called *Dopo l’inverno ed altri racconti* and also the novel *Il risveglio* edited by Marsilio in 2001 – with the parallel English text. Both the pieces were useful to shape my idea of translation of the parts of the short stories written in standard English, as both the texts does not deal with parts written in dialect.

## CHAPTER III

### Three Short Stories

#### 3.1. Cable's "Posson Jone"

The text from Cable that I chose to translate is "Posson Jone", from *Old Creole Days*. The collection is crucial to understand Cable's view of the world. The stories in the book are very clever and intellectually demanding, moreover, they are all interrelated as they are set in about the same years, the ones immediately after the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 (see Nagel, 22). Setting the scene in those years allows Cable to depict the arrival of the American Yankees and of a huge number of different immigrants in search of a new life in the newly structured territory. Those new arrivals only vaguely understood the complicated tangle of the political and cultural tradition of the city – such as the Napoleonic law, the Code Noir, and the French and Spanish tradition of the *plaçage* – which form the background conflicts of *Old Creole Days*. The book is in fact skillfully built on the clash of the two different ways to see the world: the Puritan, hard-working, economic-oriented American view against the Catholic, stratified and licentious Creole one – the highest point of collision being the fate of the quadroons, long taken as mistresses by wealthy Creoles and forbidden to marry outside of their class.

"Posson Jone" is probably the most popular story from *Old Creole Days* during Cable's lifetime, "perhaps because it is a tour de force of dialect manipulation" (see Nagel, 35). Despite its success, and before being published in the *Appleton's Journal*, the story was originally refused by four important periodicals: the *Scribner's Monthly*, *The New York Times*, the *Galaxy* and the *Harper's Magazines* (see Lauter, 378). The editors were not very happy about the tale, rather offended by it: it was not to their tastes to see a drunk West Floridian parson as a prominent figure in an uprising against a circus-man, wrestling with a tiger and eventually sent to jail. What is funny is that Cable did not invent the plot out of the blue, but drew inspiration for it reading the archives of New Orleans newspapers. What I liked of the story is the contrast between the two main characters – as you can imagine, an American and a Creole: the honest, innocent and fool preacher and the confident, cunning and charming young man. The second gets the first drunk in order to steal his money, which eventually he does, but the situation is saved by

the smart parson's slave – who proves to be wiser than his master. In the story also appears the Creole's servant, a poor “yellow-skinned” man, who in the end seems to have turned crazy.

The plot is standard in local color: a simple country person arrives in the city where worldly wise swindlers take his money and leave him broken and confused. The parson's money is threatened from the first time it appears, thanks also to the traditional Creole habits of drinking and gambling. The narration is retrospective and unpredictable – which makes the story even more interesting: the narrator reports conversations, but he is unable to hear when two people move out of earshot.

The story is hilarious; nevertheless, Nagel affirms that “beneath the surface of riotous action and gross humor[...] there are masterful artistic touches in historical allusions, the subtle manipulation of point of view, the representation of dialect, and a spectrum of characterizations in what is essentially a comic narrative.” (36) I totally agree with him, the story provides much to reflect upon. For example, Nagel take the case of Baptiste – the Creole's servant – and Colossus – the parson's slave –'s names and personalities:

“Baptiste, Jules's “yellow” body servant, undoubtedly a man of mixed blood, is an accomplice in the confidence game, but he plays a stock character role in the drama, including the clichéd indication that he is wiser than his master. In fact, Jules owes him money. There is a possible allusive irony in his name because Jean-Baptiste Say was the most celebrated economist in New Orleans at the time. In *A Treatise on Political Economy* (1803), widely taught throughout the United States, he argued that supply creates its own demand. The pertinence here would be that when the parson reveals that he is carrying \$500 he inspires Jules's determination to acquire it by getting the minister drunk. The parson's servant, Colossus of Rhodes, also has an allusive name. The original Colossus was the statue of the Greek god Helios on the island of Rhodes, and it was constructed about 280 BC. [...]In contrast, Cable's Colossus is ironically small, a “short, square, old negro, very black and grotesque”, but he nevertheless serves as the protector of his master.” (36)

The old, colored, caring servant Colussus deserves a careful examination, as in these times it is important to look at positive black figures to fight against the galloping racism and to promote diversity, which I think is one of the main aim of this narrative.

Plus, I found Cable's masterful representation of vernacular very interesting: the Creole striving to speak English but falling back to French many times, the language of the parson from West Florida, the dialect of Colossus and the one of Baptiste. In fact, "on the lecture circuit, Cable was said to have been the consummate entertainer, enthralling the audience with his skill in presenting these dialects, even while sharing the stage with the most famous of the Chautauqua lecturers, Mark Twain" (see Nagel, 36). The spectrum of even minor characters presented in the story is also quite fascinating – the crowd at the intersection of Royal and Conti street which assisted at the first rescue of the money of the parson by the Creole, the crowd at the circus, described carefully –, giving an idea of the variety of people, typical of the New Orleans area.

This display of the heterogeneity of the region was astonishing to read, but very hard to translate. For this story, I adopted mainly a dynamic translation, but with some exceptions such as the already cited "strong-strong" (59) translated *forte-forte*, or "Ascismatique" (65) – which means protestant – translated as *ascismatico*. As the age of the characters is not specified, in my Italian translation they speak kind of in the same way – even if in the original their speech differs by the use of different "dialects". One of the thing that gave me more problems for the translation was the AAVE of Colussus. Luckily, the parson and the Creole's languages were easier to grasp, as their accents and pronunciation of words were more similar to the ones of standard English.

### **3.2. Chopin's "A Rude Awakening"**

From Kate Chopin, I have chosen to translate "A Rude Awakening", from *Bayou Folk*.

In this collection we have a significant example of Kate Chopin's poetics. The stories of this book were written when Chopin was no longer living in Louisiana – she had left the state ten years before –, but the accuracy is astonishing. The folk, the dialects, the unique social customs, the street addresses and the historical references are incredibly realistic. She depicted the Creole society so well, that almost every critic praised her work – something that quite surprised her, as she wrote in her diary.

"A Rude Awakening" is typical local color, for the setting, the skillful use of dialects, and the sentimental ending – the piece is in fact mainly dominated by the theme of familiar love –, even if the narrator of the story speaks standard English.

The piece narrates about a poor Cajun family that lives in the Natchitoches Parish. The father, Sylveste, is a lazy and careless parent to his four motherless children. The one who runs the house is the oldest of the children, Lolotte. Sylveste works for Joe Duplan, a wise and generous plantation owner, who is concerned about the families in the area. One day, Duplan asks Sylveste to take some cotton balls to the landing, but instead of doing so, Sylveste goes fishing. Lolotte, worried about the condition of her family – they all need food, and one of the children even more so as he is always sick – takes the wagon without saying anything and drives it to the landing. Yet during the journey sometimes goes wrong, and Lolotte disappears. Sylveste thinks she has drowned in the river, and the guilt and grief change him forever. When he finds Lolotte alive in the Duplan’s house – the plantation owner never abandoned the hope to find her, and finally located her at the hospital, where she was taken by some boatmen after she was injured falling down from the wagon – he is another man. He promises to always try to do the best for his family. Nagel focuses much on this character in his analysis, as he thinks that Sylveste is quite overestimated:

“Sylveste’s pledge to work harder in the future is certainly laudable, but Per Seyersted would seem to be a bit generous in concluding that he “has something of the true gentleman in his dignity and lack of affectation.” His transformation is thrust upon him by circumstance, not manifest from internal nobility, but it could be said of him that he exhibits genuine love for his daughter, although it takes a serious accident to reveal it.” (145)

Guilty and the tragedy of losing a child forces him to transform; and in the end he affirms that he will do his best to change, without actually promising anything. Nagel then continues with the following passage:

“Bonnie James Shaker is also overzealous in claiming that “the Bordons, a poor Cajun family living in rural postbellum Louisiana, triumphantly and harmoniously integrate themselves into hegemonic white American culture.” Sylveste’s reluctant assumption of his parental duties is a positive step, to be sure, but there is nothing “triumphant” about it nor have they achieved the status to exercise “hegemonic” power in society. They are still an impoverished clan, scratching out a living on poor soil and running odd jobs for other people, and there is no indication of significant economic status.

The rise is in moral terms, not social or financial, and such values are not dependant on caste position.” (146)

The Bordons did not change their social status, as nothing would change it.

Besides those interesting consideration on Sylveste and the Bordon’s family, what attracted my attention is the good and decent character of Aunt Minty, the old black woman. She really is concerned about the Bordon family, in fact she kills one of her own chickens to feed the poor children; she is also the one in charge of taking care of Nonomme, the sick child, and the other two brothers when Lolotte leaves for the landing with the wagon. Her kindness toward people more or less in her same condition – or maybe poorer – is something that needs to be praised. Even more so because she is black – and she seems not to be totally fond of white people, as in the end she says to Lolotte "dah you is, settin' down, lookin' jis' like w'ite folks!", which in my opinion is not exactly a compliment – while the Bordon family is white: Aunt Minty loves regardless of race and color.

For what regards the vernacular, I did not have much troubles in here, as the oral language of the characters was pretty much understandable. The words and expressions that gave me problems were the ones which I am not used to hear pronounced that way – which means, mangled or contracted – or that I did not know, as for example “co’n”(97) for “corn” and all the other already mentioned in the previous chapter. Only few words were in French, but easily recognizable.

### **3.3. Alice Dunbar-Nelson’s “The Praline Woman”**

The work I decided to translate from Dunbar-Nelson’s collection of short stories *The Goodness of St. Rocque and Other Stories* is “The Praline Woman”, a very short but really interesting piece.

The book was published in 1899, and it was the first to feature the use of the vernacular. It is pivotal to understand Nelson’s ideas, as in this work she deals with what for her were the two major interests of her life: the life of colored people in the multicultural reality of New Orleans and the role of women in American society. The collection is made of sixteen short stories, and in eleven of them we can find the use of dialect and folklore, with a special attention to the mixture of cultures that the city was at the time.

James Nagel, in his book *Race and Culture in New Orleans Stories*, affirms that “Dunbar-Nelson has sometimes been criticized for her unwillingness to write in dialect, a strong feature of her first

husband's verse" (115), but that in "The Praline Woman" she "demonstrates that she was fully capable of handling the vernacular when she chose to do so" (ibid.).

The main – and almost the only speaking – character is a black woman – Tante Marie – who sells pralines. Apparently, the protagonist of the story seems just to tell us tittle-tatters and spiels, but we have to "look beneath the surface of its speaker's patters to understand her compassion, her guile and her racist prejudices" (Lauter, 403); reading through her speech we also get an insight to her life and her family's past tragedies. The narration is basically a dramatic monologue, told by the peddler in her vernacular, as she strolls in Royal Street<sup>11</sup> in an attempt to sell her products. Given her dialect, the woman seems to be a Creole of color, as she mixes French and the variant of English typical of the black community.

Nagel also offers his interpretation and comment on the story, which is the following:

"She [Tante Marie] attempts to persuade a white woman to buy by stressing that her "chile, ma bébé" made the candies with her hands, which are "brune." Her adopted daughter is apparently also a person of color. When the white woman simply passes by, Tante Marie throws a playful curse after her: "No husband fo' you den!". But she is not only vindictive; she can also exhibit piety, compassion, and ethnic prejudice, which she feels for the "Indien squaw" and the Irish. She presents the priest with a free praline, perhaps a theological insurance policy, which causes her to remember her unanswered prayers in St. Rocque's Chapel for her dying son. She is uncomfortable about white people, especially those from the North. Her monologue reveals that the time of the action is post-Civil War since she refers to "dose Yankee dat come down 'fo' de war". Although she has no husband, she has lost two children, a daughter to yellow fever and a son to unknown causes. Her surrogate child is Didele, whom she found homeless on the street. In a sense her monologue is a slice of life on Royal Street, a revelation of commonplace characters in emotionally complex." (116)

One of the most engaging aspects of this work, however, is Dunbar-Nelson's skillful use of the vernacular. The vernacular, in fact, cannot but strike the attention. Tante Marie – the name of the woman – speaks a particular kind of vernacular, AAVE contaminated with Louisiana French.

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<sup>11</sup> located in the French quarter, where there were many antique shops and art galleries.

Dunbar-Nelson reproduces in this story the oral language of the black community of New Orleans: she writes down the words exactly how they pronounce them.

“You see dey wa'nt nobody dere. My lil' gal, she's daid of de yellow fever; my lil' boy, he's daid, po' Tante Marie all alone.” (121)

Concerning my Italian translation, for this work I adopted almost totally a dynamic translation, and even if there is only Tante Marie speaking, the language is quite interesting, as she also reports some Irish expressions.

Another reason why I decided to translate this story is the admirable ability of the writer in capturing and recreating the multicultural atmosphere of the city, as we can see from Tante Marie's speech. The praline woman is real – and through her words, also the other characters mentioned in the story; she seems to be speaking to me, maybe because in my life I have been acquainted with black peddlers trying to sell me all sorts of products, striving to speak Italian – or better, Veneto dialect – and telling me about their stories and the life they had at home.

In the next chapter I will offer my translations, supplied with notes to better explain my choices and contextualize the short stories.

## **Chapter IV:**

### **Italian Translations**

**“Posson Jone”, 1876**

**George Washington Cable**

To Jules St.-Ange — elegant little heathen — there yet remained at manhood a remembrance of having been to school, and of having been taught by a stony-headed Capuchin that the world is round — for example, like a cheese. This round world is a cheese to be eaten through, and Jules had nibbled quite into his cheese-world already at twenty-two.

He realized this as he idled about one Sunday morning where the intersection of Royal and Conti Streets some seventy years ago formed a central corner of New Orleans. Yes, yes, the trouble was he had been wasteful and honest. He discussed the matter with that faithful friend and confidant, Baptiste, his yellow body-servant. They concluded that, papa’s patience and tante’s pin-money having been gnawed away quite to the rind, there were left open only these few easily-enumerated resorts: to go to work — they shuddered; to join Major Innerarity’s filibustering expedition; or else — why not? — to try some games of confidence. At twenty-two one must begin to be something. Nothing else tempted; could that avail? One could but try. It is noble to try; and, besides, they were hungry. If one could

## “Il pastore Jone”<sup>12</sup>, 1876

George Washington Cable

A Jules St. Ange – elegante piccolo pagano – rimaneva ancora il ricordo, in età adulta, di essere andato a scuola, e di aver imparato da un frate Cappuccino<sup>13</sup> dalla testa dura che il mondo è rotondo, ad esempio, come una forma di formaggio. Questo mondo rotondo è un formaggio che va mangiato tutto, e di questo mondo di formaggio Jules ne aveva assaggiata già una discreta quantità all’età di ventidue anni.

Lo realizzò una domenica mattina mentre bighellonava all’intersezione tra Royal e Conti Street, che settant’anni prima formava un incrocio centrale di New Orleans. Sì, sì, il problema era che era stato scialacquatore ed onesto. Aveva discusso questa faccenda con il suo fidato servitore Baptiste<sup>14</sup>, il suo confidente dalla carnagione ambrata<sup>15</sup>. Ne avevano concluso che, erosi ormai fino all’osso la pazienza del *papa* ed i risparmi della *tante*<sup>16</sup>, gli erano rimaste sole queste poche opzioni facilmente numerabili: andare a lavorare – rabbrivirono; partecipare alla spedizione ostruzionista<sup>17</sup> del Maggiore Innerarity<sup>18</sup>; o tentare – e perchè no? – una bella truffa. A ventun anni uno deve pur iniziare ad essere qualcuno. Non lo invogliava nient’altro; poteva essere utile? Uno non doveva che provare. E’ un atto nobile provare; e poi, avevano fame. Se per esempio uno

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<sup>12</sup> Pastore Jone’: “Posson Jone” is Jules St. Ange’s – one of the main protagonist of the story - pronunciation of “Parson Jones”.

<sup>13</sup> Capuccino: a Catholic friar.

<sup>14</sup> Baptiste: according to Nagel (see Nagel, 37), the name Baptiste could be an ironic allusion to Jean-Baptiste Say, the most celebrated economist in New Orleans at the time. In his “A Treatise on Political Economy” (1803), he asserted that supply creates its own demand. The relevance here would be that when the minister of God reveals that he has with him \$500 he awakes on Jules the idea of getting the parson drunk in order to take his money.

<sup>15</sup> Carnagione ambrata: “yellow”, in the Color line, is the term referring to people of mixed race, the mulattoes.

<sup>16</sup> *Tante*: zia (father’s sister).

<sup>17</sup> Spedizione ostruzionista: a group of private citizens launching a military expedition to overthrow a foreign government, usually in Latin America.

<sup>18</sup> Maggiore Innerarity: from a passage of Nagel’s book (see Nagel, 36, 37):

“Audiences in Cable’s time would have remembered that John Innerarity was rumored to be John Lafitte himself, for both were privateers who were declared outlaws and redeemed themselves in the War of 1812 by coming to the defense of New Orleans by aiding Andrew Jackson in fending off the invading British army. More likely, his career paralleled that of Lafitte because a fair amount is known about his background. He came to New Orleans in 1802 when his grandfather moved his trading company away from St. Augustine and located in western Florida. John grew up in the area, learning multiple languages, including several Native-American dialects, which made him useful in trade negotiations with the indigenous people. But he abandoned trading for privateering when the English instituted the blockade. Bereft of produce to market, Innerarity joined Lafitte in running the lines of the British attempting to prevent trade with France, with whom England was at war. Jean Lafitte had ten ships he could use as pirate vessels or for filibustering, and Innerarity was in command of one of them.

“make the friendship” of some person from the country, for instance, with money, not expert at cards or dice, but, as one would say, willing to learn, one might find cause to say some “Hail Marys.”

The sun broke through a clearing sky, and Baptiste pronounced it good for luck. There had been a hurricane in the night. The weed-grown tile-roofs were still dripping, and from lofty brick and low adobe walls a rising steam responded to the summer sunlight. Up-street, and across the Rue du Canal, one could get glimpses of the gardens in Faubourg Ste.-Mariestanding in silent wretchedness, so many tearful Lucretias, tattered victims of the storm. Short remnants of the wind now and then came down the narrow street in erratic puffs heavily laden with odors of broken boughs and torn flowers, skimmed the little pools of rain-water in the deep ruts of the unpaved street, and suddenly went away to nothing, like a juggler’s butterflies or a young man’s money.

It was very picturesque, the Rue Royale. The rich and poor met together. The locksmith’s swinging key creaked next door to the bank; across the way, crouching, mendicant-like, in the shadow of a great importing-house, was the mud laboratory of the mender of broken combs. Light balconies overhung the rows of showy shops and stores open for trade this Sunday morning, and pretty Latin faces of the higher class glanced over their savagely-pronged railings upon the passers below. At some windows hung lace curtains, flannel duds at some, and at others only the scraping and sighing one-hinged shutter groaning toward Paris after its neglectful master.

M. St.-Ange stood looking up and down the street for nearly an hour. But few ladies, only the inveterate mass-goers, were out. About the entrance of the frequent *cafés* the masculine gentility stood leaning on canes, with which now one and now another beckoned to Jules, some even adding pantomimic hints

fosse riuscito a “fare amicizia” con qualche ricco campagnolo, poco esperto al gioco delle carte o dei dadi ma, come si direbbe, desideroso di imparare, avrebbe potuto aver motivo di dire un pò di “Ave Maria”!

Il sole spuntò nel cielo che già si stava schiarendo, e Baptiste lo prese come un segno di buona fortuna. C’era stato un uragano la notte precedente. I tetti con le tegole ricoperte di erbacce gocciolavano ancora; dagli alti mattoni e dai muretti in argilla si alzava un vapore che reagiva alla luce del sole estivo. In fondo alla strada, ed attraverso la Rue du Canal, si potevano scorgere i giardini in Faubourg Ste.-Mariestanding<sup>19</sup> in silenziosa miseria, come tante Lucrezie<sup>20</sup> in lacrime, cenciose vittime della tempesta. Ogni tanto, brevi raffiche di vento serpeggiavano attraverso l’angusta strada, portando con sè una forte, seppur discontinua, folata di rami spezzati e fiori sradicati, sfiorando le piccole pozze d’acqua piovana nei profondi solchi della strada sterrata, ed all’improvviso scomparendo nel nulla, come le farfalle di un giocoliere od i soldi di un giovane.

Era molto pittoresca, la Rue Royale. Lì, i ricchi ed i poveri si incontravano. La chiave girevole del fabbro strideva di fianco alla banca; dall’altra parte della strada, ranicchiato come un mendicante, all’ombra di una ditta d’importazione famosa, stava l’alquanto lercio laboratorio del riparatore di pettini. Leggeri balconi sovrastavano le file di appariscenti negozi e negozietti aperti quella domenica mattina, ed i graziosi visi latini<sup>21</sup> della classe superiore guardavano dall’alto delle loro ringhiere ferocemente appuntite i passanti al di sotto. Ad alcune finestre erano appese tende di pizzo, ad altre vestiti di flanella, ed in altre ancora si potevano notare solo le persiane scricchianti e sospiranti, che gemevano verso Parigi in cerca dei loro incuranti padroni.

Il signor St. Ange era fermo da circa un’ora a guardare su e giù per la strada. Ma erano uscite solo poche signore, abituali frequentatrici di luoghi affollati. I gentiluomini se ne stavano all’ingresso degli innumerevoli *cafés*, appoggiati ai loro bastoni, con i quali ora l’uno ora l’altro facevano cenno a Jules, alcuni aggiungendo addirittura gesti pantomimici che illustravano lo

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<sup>19</sup> Faubourg Ste.-Mariestanding: St. Mary Suburb, now called the Central Business District.

<sup>20</sup> Lucrezie: the word comes from the ancient myth of Lucretia, quoted also by Shakespeare, who dedicated her an entire poem – “The Rape of Lucrece”, 1594. Quoting by the Wikipedia encyclopedia, Lucretia was a noblewoman in ancient Rome, the wife of one of the two consuls (called Lucius Tarquinius Collatinus), whose rape by Sextus Tarquinius (Tarquin), an Etruscan king's son, was the cause of a rebellion that overthrew the Roman monarchy and led to the transition of Roman government from a kingdom to a republic.

<sup>21</sup> Latini: descendants of the Latin people; in this case stands for French and Spanish, the creole population.

of the social cup.

M. St.-Ange remarked to his servant without turning his head that somehow he felt sure he should soon return those *bons* that the mulatto had lent him.

“What will you do with them?”

“Me!” said Baptiste, quickly; “I will go and see the bull-fight in the Place Congo.”

“There is to be a bull-fight? But where is M. Cayetano?”

“Ah, got all his affairs wet in the tornado. Instead of his circus, they are to have a bull-fight — not an ordinary bull-fight with sick horses, but a buffalo-and-tiger fight. I would not miss it — ”

Two or three persons ran to the opposite corner, and commenced striking at something with their canes. Others followed. Can M. St.-Ange and servant, who hasten forward — can the Creoles, Cubans, Spaniards, San Domingo refugees, and other loungers — can they hope it is a fight? They hurry forward. Is a man in a fit? The crowd pours in from the side-streets. Have they killed a so-long snake? Bareheaded shopmen leave their wives, who stand upon chairs. The crowd huddles and packs. Those on the outside make little leaps into the air, trying to be tall.

“What is the matter?”

“Have they caught a real live rat?”

strato sociale di appartenenza.

Il signor St. Ange, senza voltarsi, disse al suo servitore che in qualche modo era sicuro che presto avrebbe dovuto restituire i *bons*<sup>22</sup> che il mulatto gli aveva prestato.

“Cosa farai con quei soldi?”

“Io!” disse Baptiste, velocemente; “Andrò a vedere la corrida in Place Congo<sup>23</sup>.”

“Ci sarà una corrida? Ma dov'è il signor Cayetano<sup>24</sup>?”

“Ah, ha perso tutti i suoi affari a causa del tornado. Doveva esserci il suo circo, invece fanno questo combattimento – e non una semplice combattimento di un toro contro<sup>25</sup>dei cavalli malati, nossignore, ma un combattimento contro una tigre ed un bufalo. Non me lo perderei –“

Due o tre persone corsero verso l'incrocio opposto, e cominciarono a colpire qualcosa con i loro bastoni. Seguirono altre persone. Potevano il signor St. Ange ed il suo servitore, che subito affrettarono il passo – potevano i creoli, i cubani, gli spagnoli, i rifugiati di Santo Domingo e tutti gli altri perdigiorno – potevano sperare che fosse un combattimento? Camminarono più velocemente. C'era forse un uomo in difficoltà? La folla si riversò anche dalle strade laterali. O magari avevano ucciso un enorme serpente? Alcuni uomini, a capo scoperto, si avvicinarono, lasciando le mogli in piedi su delle sedie. La folla si accalcava ed ammassava sempre di più. Quelli che si trovavano ai margini esterni saltellavano, provando ad essere più alti.

“Cosa succede?”

“Hanno preso un vero topo vivo?”

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<sup>22</sup> *bons*: paper money used for small change.

<sup>23</sup> Place Congo: Congo Square. This was the only place in the United States where slaves were allowed to meet up and gather. Large crowds would assemble there on Sunday, their day off, and sing, dance, and play musical instruments.

<sup>24</sup> Signor Cayetano: Cayetano Mariotini. The owner and manager of the first circus in New Orleans. Originally from Cuba, he run a circus in Congo Square from 1816 to 1818. The facility was just outside the ramparts of the city, a territory in which slaves and free men of color could celebrate on Saturday night and all day Sunday, when it was prohibited to work by the laws in the Code Noir.

<sup>25</sup> Contro: in the original it is “bull-fight with sick horses”; “bullfight” is usually a fight between a man and a bull, whose tradition comes from Spain. Here the fight is between the bull and the buffalo-and-tiger, so I translated it as “a fight of a bull against a buffalo-and-tiger”.

“Who is hurt?” asks some one in English.

“*Personne*,” replies a shopkeeper; “a man’s hat blow’ in the gutter; but he has it now. Jules pick’ it. See, that is the man, head and shoulders on top the res’.”

“He in the homespun?” asks a second shopkeeper. “Humph! an *Américain* — a West-Floridian; bah!”

“But wait; ’st! he is speaking; listen!”

“To who is he speak —— ?”

“Sh-sh-sh! to Jules.”

“Jules who?”

“Silence, you! To Jules St.-Ange, what h-owe me a bill since long time. Sh-sh-sh!”

Then the voice was heard.

Its owner was a man of giant stature, with a slight stoop in his shoulders, as if he was making a constant, good-natured attempt to accommodate himself to ordinary doors and ceilings. His bones were those of an ox. His face was marked more by weather than age, and his narrow brow was bald and smooth. He had instantaneously formed an opinion of Jules St.-Ange, and the multitude of words, most of them lingual curiosities, with which he was rasping the wide-open ears of his listeners, signified, in short, that, as sure as his name was Parson Jones, the little Creole was a “plumb gentleman.”

“Chi si è fatto male?” chiese qualcuno in inglese<sup>26</sup>.

“*Personne*<sup>27</sup>.” rispose un negoziante; “ il cappello di un signore era finito nel canaletto di scolo, ma l’ha recuperato ora. Jules gliel’ha preso. L’uomo è quello con la testa e le spalle che spuntano tra la folla. Lo vedete?”

“E’ di qui<sup>28</sup>?” chiese un secondo negoziante. “Umpf, un *Américain*<sup>29</sup>; uno della Florida Occidentale<sup>30</sup>. Bah!”

“Aspetta, zitto! Sta parlando, ascolta!”

“A chi sta parlan-?”

“Zitto sh! A Jules.”

“Jules chi?”

“Silenzio, tu! A Jules St. Ange, quello che mi deve dei soldi da un sacco di tempo. Shhh!”

In quel momento sentì la voce.

La persona che stava parlando era un uomo di statura gigantesca, con le spalle leggermente curve, come se stesse facendo un bonario e continuo tentativo di passare sotto porte e soffitti di altezza normale, ma senza lamentarsene. Le sue ossa parevano quelle di un bue. La sua faccia sembrava segnata più dalla intemperie che dall’età, e la sua fronte stretta era calva e levigata. Si era istantaneamente fatto un’opinione su Jules St. Ange, ed il fiume di parole – la maggior parte curiosità linguistiche – con cui investiva le orecchie avidi dei suoi ascoltatori significava, in breve, che era certo che il piccolo Creolo fosse un “completo<sup>31</sup> gentiluomo” tanto quanto lui si chiamava Pastore Jones.

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<sup>26</sup> In Inglese: the author used the term to underline that who was speaking was using standard English, uncommon at the time in those areas.

<sup>27</sup> *Personne*: Nessuno.

<sup>28</sup> E’ di qui?: literally “Is he/she from here?”; in the text it is written “Is he a homespun?”, but as homespun is a cloth made at home, I translated it with the previously quoted formula.

<sup>29</sup> *Américain*: French word for American, “Americano”, which in the case means someone foreign to the New Orleans community.

<sup>30</sup> Florida Occidentale: from the Florida parishes, which initially belonged to Florida but were transferred to Louisiana.

<sup>31</sup> Completo: dated word, it means “completely”.

M. St.-Ange bowed and smiled, and was about to call attention, by both gesture and speech, to a singular object on top of the still uncovered head, when the nervous motion of the *Américain* anticipated him, as, throwing up an immense hand, he drew down a large roll of bank-notes. The crowd laughed, the West-Floridian joining, and began to disperse.

“Why, that money belongs to Smyrny Church,” said the giant.

“You are very dangerous to make your money expose like that, Misty Posson Jone’,” said St.-Ange, counting it with his eyes.

The countryman gave a start and smile of surprise.

“How d’ d you know my name was Jones?” he asked; but, without pausing for the Creole’s answer, furnished in his reckless way some further specimens of West-Floridian English; and the conciseness with which he presented full intelligence of his home, family, calling, lodging-house, and present and future plans, might have passed for consummate art, had it not been the most run-wild nature. “And I’ve done been to Mobile, you know, on *business* for Bethesdy Church. It’s the on’yest time I ever been from home; now you wouldn’t of believed that, would you? But I admire to have saw you, that’s so. You’ve got to come and eat with me. Me and my boy ain’t been fed yit. What might one call yo’ name? Jools? Come on, Jools. Come on, Colossus. That’s my niggah — his name’s Colossus of Rhodes. Is that yo’ yallah boy, Jools? Fetch him along, Colossus. It seems like a special *providence*. — Jools, do you believe in a special *providence*?”

Jules remembered the roll of bank-notes and said he did.

Il signor St. Ange si inchinò e sorrise, e stava per richiamare l'attenzione, sia a gesti che con le parole, su un oggetto alquanto singolare che si trovava sopra il capo ancora scoperto dell'uomo, quando l'*Américain*, anticipandolo, con un movimento nervoso e sollevando una mano immensa, si tirò giù dalla testa un grande rotolo di banconote. La folla rise, subito seguita dall'uomo della Florida dell'Ovest, e si disperse.

“Beh<sup>32</sup>, i soldi appartengono alla parrocchia di Smirny” disse il gigante.

“E' molto pericoloso sfoggiare i soldi così, Signor Pastore Jone'<sup>33</sup>” disse St. Ange, contando le banconote con gli occhi.

L'uomo di campagna sobbalzò e sorrise, stupito.

“Come facevate a sapere che mi chiamo Jones?” chiese; e senza aspettare la risposta del Creolo, dimostrò la sua appartenenza alla Florida Occidentale inglese con ulteriori – ed alquanto incaute – espressioni linguistiche; la brevità con cui declamava l'assoluta intelligenza della sua famiglia, della sua casa, della sua vocazione, e dei suoi progetti passati e futuri poteva sembrare perfettamente artefatta, non fosse stata dettata dalla forte passione. “E sono stato a Mobile, sapete, per un lavoro per la parrocchia di Bethesdy. E' la prima volta che mi muovo di casa. Adesso non ci crederete, vero? Ma apprezzo di avervi incontrato, è così. Dovete pranzare con me. Io ed il mio ragazzo non abbiamo ancora mangiato. Come posso chiamarvi? Jools? Venite, Jools. Vieni, Colosso<sup>34</sup>. Ecco il mio negro<sup>35</sup>, il suo nome è il Colosso di Rodi. E' il vostro servitore quello, Jools? Vallo a prendere, Colosso. Sembra un miracolo della Provvidenza. Credete in un miracolo della Provvidenza, Jools?”

Jules si ricordò del rotolo di banconote, e rispose di sì.

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<sup>32</sup> Beh: “Why” in an affirmative sentence introduces a surprise statement

<sup>33</sup> Signor Pastore Jone': translated from “Misty Posson Jone'”, Jules pronunciation of “Mr Parson Jones”.

<sup>34</sup> Colosso: according to James Nagel in his book “Race and Culture in New Orleans Stories”, The Univeristy of Alabama Press, 2014, page 37, the Colussus of Rhodes was a huge statue of the Greek sun-god Helios, erected in the city of Rhodes in 280 BC to commemorate the successful defense of the city when Demetrius tried to invade it, it was considered one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Also in this name we can find a little irony: the old black man is short and small, but still able to protect his master.

<sup>35</sup> Negro: translated from “nigger”; in the case, it was not offensive, as the word started to become an insult only in the mid-nineties; in fact, the word comes from the variation of the Spanish and Portuguese noun “negro”, which comes from the Latin adjective “niger” (black).

The new-made friends moved briskly off, followed by Baptiste and a short, square, old negro, very black and grotesque, who had introduced himself to the mulatto, with many glittering and cavernous smiles, as “d’body-sarvant of d’Rev’n’ Mr. Jones.”

Both pairs enlivened their walk with conversation. Parson Jones descanted upon the doctrine he had mentioned, as illustrated in the perplexities of cotton-growing, and concluded that there would always be “a special providence again’ cotton untell folks quits a-pressin’ of it and haulin’ of it on Sundays!”

“*Je dis*,” said St.-Ange, in response, “I thing you is juz right. I believe, me, strong-strong in the improvidence, yes. You know my papa he h-own a sugah-plantation, you know. ‘Jules, me son,’ he say one time to me, ‘I goin’ to make one baril sugah to fedge the moze high price in New Orleans.’ Well, he take his bez baril sugah — I nevah see a so careful man like me papa always to make a so beautiful sugah *et sirop*”. ‘Jules, go at Father Pierre an’ ged this lill pitcher fill with holy water, an’ tell him sen’ his tin bucket, and I will make it fill with quitte.’ I ged the holy-water; my papa sprinkle it over the baril, an’ make one cross on the ’ead of the baril.”

“Why, Jools,” said Parson Jones, “that didn’t do no good.”

“Din do no good! Id brought the so great value! You can strike me dead if thad baril sugah din fedge the more high cost than any other in the city. *Parceque*, the man what buy that baril sugah he make a mistake of one hundred pound” — falling back — “*Mais certainlee!*”

“And you think that was growin’ out of the holy-water?” asked the parson.

I due nuovi amici si incamminarono rapidamente, seguiti da Baptiste e da un vecchio negro dalla carnagione scurissima, basso e quadrato, grottesco, che si era presentato al mulatto – con sorrisi sdentati ed abbaglianti – come il “servitore del Reverendo Jones”.

Entrambe le coppie animavano il percorso conversando. Il Pastore Jones discuteva della dottrina che aveva menzionato, mentre illustrava le perplessità della coltivazione del cotone, e concludendo che “il miracolo della Provvidenza avrebbe sempre agito nei confronti di quelle poche<sup>36</sup> persone che si rifiutano di pressare e trasportare il cotone la domenica!”

“*Je dis*<sup>37</sup>” rispose St. Ange “Io dico che avete proprio ragione. Io, io credo forte-forte nell’imprevidenza, oh sì. Sapete che mio *papa*<sup>38</sup>, lui, possedeva una piantagione di zucchero. “Jules, figlio mio” mi disse un giorno “farò un *baril*<sup>39</sup> di zucchero che ci farà guadagnare più di tutti gli altri a New Orleans”. Ebbene, fece il suo miglior *baril* di zucchero – non ho mai visto un uomo più attento di mio *papa* a produrre il miglior zucchero *et sirop*<sup>40</sup>”. “Jules, vai da Padre Pierre e chiedigli di riempirti questa piccola brocca con dell’acqua santa, e digli di mandarmi il suo secchio di latta, che lo riempirò con il malocchio<sup>41</sup>.” Gli portai l’acqua santa e lui la spruzzò sopra il *baril*, e fece una croce sopra il coperchio.”

“Beh, Jools” disse il Pastore Jones “Questo non fece affatto bene.”

“Non fece bene? E’ quello che lo ha reso il migliore! Che io possa morire in questo momento se quello non è il *baril* di zucchero che ha fruttato di più di qualunque altro in città. *Parceque*<sup>42</sup>, l’uomo che l’ha comprato si è sbagliato e lo ha pagato cento sterline in più – indietro – *Mais*<sup>43</sup> certamente, certamente!”

“E voi pensate che questo sia nato dall’acqua santa?” chiese il pastore.

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<sup>36</sup> Poche: “untell”, an obsolete word that means “to make as if not counted”.

<sup>37</sup> *Je dis*: Io dico.

<sup>38</sup> *Papa*: Papà.

<sup>39</sup> *Baril*: Barile.

<sup>40</sup> *Et sirop*: E sciroppo.

<sup>41</sup> Malocchio: “quitte”, which means “begone”. It is a part of a voodoo exorcism spell.

<sup>42</sup> *Parceque*: Perché.

<sup>43</sup> *Mais*: Ma.

“*Mais*, what could make it else? Id could not be the *quitte*, because my papa keep the bucket, an’ forget to sen’ the *quitte* to Father Pierre.”

Parson Jones was disappointed.

“Well, now, Jools, you know, I don’t think that was right. I reckon you must be a plumb Catholic.”

M. St.-Ange shrugged. He would not deny his faith.

“I am a *Catholique, mais*” — brightening as he hoped to recommend himself anew — “not a good one.”

“Well, you know,” said Jones — “where’s Colossus? Oh! all right. Colossus strayed off a minute in Mobile, and I plumb lost him for two days. Here’s the place; come in. Colossus and this boy can go to the kitchen. — Now, Colossus, what air you a-beckonin’ at me faw?”

He let his servant draw him aside and address him in a whisper.

“Oh, go ’way!” said the parson with a jerk. “Who’s goin’ to throw me? What? Speak louder. Why, Colossus, you shayn’t talk so, saw. ‘Pon my soul, you’re the mightiest fool I ever taken up with. Jest you go down that alley-way with this yalla boy, and don’t show yo’ face untell yo’ called!”

The negro begged; the master wrathily insisted.

“Colossus, will you do ez I tell you, or shell I hev’ to strike you, saw?”

“O Mahs Jimmy, I — I’s gwine; but” — he ventured nearer — “don’t on no account drink nothin’, Mahs Jimmy.”

Such was the negro’s earnestness that he put one foot in the gutter, and fell heavily against his master. The parson threw him off angrily.

“Thar, now! Why, Colossus, you most of been dosted with sumthin’; yo’ plumb crazy. — Humph, come on, Jools, let’s eat! Humph! to tell me that when I never taken a drop, exceptin’ for chills, in my life — which he knows so as well as me!”

“*Mais*, che altro potrebbe essere stato? Il malocchio non poteva essere, perchè mio padre si era tenuto il secchio, dimenticandosi di ridarlo a Padre Pierre.”

Il pastore Jones mostrò disappunto.

“Beh, sapete, Jools, non penso che sia stato corretto. Vi pensavo un fervente Cattolico.”

Il signor St. Ange rabbrividì. Non voleva rinnegare la sua fede.

“Sono Cattolico, *mais*” – illuminandosi per riacquistare credito verso il pastore - “non uno di quelli buoni.”

“Beh, sapete” disse Jones “dov’è Colosso? Oh. Bene. Colosso si è allontanato per un minuto a Mobile e l’ho completamente perso per due giorni. Ecco il posto; entrate. Colosso e questo ragazzo possono andare in cucina. Ora, Colosso, perchè stai gesticolando?”

Lasciò che il servitore lo prendesse in disparte e si rivolgesse a lui bisbigliando.

“Oh, va’ via!” disse il pastore con un sobbalzo “Chi mi sta confondendo<sup>44</sup>? Cosa? Parla più forte. Beh, Colosso, non dovresti dire così, suvvia. Confesso che sei il peggior sciocco con cui abbia mai avuto a che fare. Va’ lungo la via con questo servitore, e non farti vedere finchè non sei chiamato!”

Il negro lo implorò, ma il padrone insistè rabbiosamente.

“Colosso, farai come ti dico o devo colpirti, eh?”

“Oh, Padron<sup>45</sup> Jimmy, io – io ci vado<sup>46</sup>; ma – si arrischiò ad avvicinarsi – “non dovete in nessun caso bere nulla, Padron Jimmy.”

Tale era la sincerità del servitore dalla pelle scura che mise un piede nel canaletto di scolo, e cadde pesantemente addosso al padrone. Il pastore lo allontanò in malo modo.

“Vai lì, subito! Insomma, Colosso, devi esserti pigliato qualcosa. Sei completamente impazzito. – Humpf, venite, Jools, andiamo a mangiare. Humpf! Dirmi questo, a me che non ho mai bevuto in vita mia neanche un goccio tranne per le volte in cui ho i brividi – e lui lo sa bene quanto me!”

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<sup>44</sup> Confondendo: “throw me” in the sense of “confusing me”.

<sup>45</sup> Padron: “Mahs” is the African American pronunciation of the word “Master”.

<sup>46</sup> Vado: “gwine” in African American Vernacular English is the present participle of “to go”.

The two masters began to ascend a stair.

“*Mais*, he is a sassy; I would sell him, me,” said the young Creole.

“No, I wouldn’t do that,” replied the parson; “though there is people in Bethesdy who says he is a rascal. He’s a powerful smart fool. Why, that boy’s got money, Jools; more money than religion, I reckon. I’m shore he fallen into mighty bad company” — they passed beyond earshot.

Baptiste and Colossus, instead of going to the tavern kitchen, passed to the next door and entered the dark rear corner of a low grocery, where, the law notwithstanding, liquor was covertly sold to slaves. There, in the quiet company of Baptiste and the grocer, the colloquial powers of Colossus, which were simply prodigious, began very soon to show themselves.

“For whilst,” said he, “Mahs Jimmy has eddication, you know — whilst he has eddication, I has ’scretion. He has eddication and I has ’scretion, an’ so we gits along.”

He drew a black bottle down the counter, and, laying half his length upon the damp board, continued:

“As a p’inciple I discredits de imbimin’ of awjus liquors. De imbimin’ of awjus liquors, de wiolution of de Sabbaf, de playin’ of de fiddle, and de usin’ of by-words, dey is de fo’ sins of de conscience; an’ if any man sin de fo’ sins of de conscience, de debble done sharp his fork fo’ dat man. — Ain’t that so, boss?”

The grocer was sure it was so.

“Neberdeless, mind you” — here the orator brimmed his glass from the bottle and swallowed the contents with a dry eye — “mind you, a roytious man, sech as ministers of de gospel and dere body-sarvants, can take a *leetle* for de weak stomach.”

But the fascinations of Colossus’s eloquence must not mislead us; this is the story of a true Christian; to wit, Parson Jones.

I due padroni iniziarono a salire per una scala.

“*Mais*, è un insolente. Io di mio lo venderei.” disse il giovane Creolo.

“No, io non lo farei” rispose il prete; “anche se c’è gente a Bethesdy che sostiene che è un mascalzone. E’ un grande sciocco astuto. Insomma quel ragazzo ha soldi Jools, più soldi che religione, immagino. Sono sicuro che sia finito in compagnie molto brutte”. – passarono fuori portata d’orecchio.

Baptiste e Colosso, invece che recarsi nella cucina della taverna, si orientarono verso la porta accanto ed entrarono nel retro buio di un umile negozio di alimentari dove, nonostante la legge lo vietasse, l’alcool veniva venduto di nascosto agli schiavi. Lì, in tranquilla compagnia di Baptiste e del negoziante, i poteri colloquiali di Colosso, che erano semplicemente prodigiosi, iniziarono ben presto a mostrarsi.

“Anche se” disse “Padron Jimmy è istruito<sup>47</sup>, sapete – anche se è istruito, sono io quello che ha giudizio. Lui è istruito, io ho giudizio, è così che andiamo d’accordo”.

Tirò giù dal bancone una bottiglia scura e, tenendola in bilico a metà sulla tavola umida, continuò: “Per principio, disprezzo il buon alcool<sup>48</sup>. Bere del buon alcool, non onorare la domenica, truffare<sup>49</sup> ed usare parolacce, sono tutti e quattro peccati della coscienza; e se un uomo ne commette uno di questi quattro, il diavolo affila il forcone per questa persona. Non è forse così, capo?”

Il negoziante era sicuro che fosse così.

“Cionostante, badate bene”- e qui l’oratore si riempì il bicchiere fino all’orlo, e ne trangugiò il contenuto senza lacrimare neanche un pochino – “badate bene, un uomo virtuoso come un pastore di anime, ed il suo servitore, possono berne un pò se hanno problemi di stomaco<sup>50</sup>”.

Ma l’affascinante capacità espressiva di Colosso non deve sviarci; questa è la storia di un vero cristiano, ossia del Pastore Jones.

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<sup>47</sup> Istruito: “edddication” is the African American pronunciation of “education”, so “he is educated”.

<sup>48</sup> Buon alcool: African American pronunciation of the word “gawjus”, that in slang it means “beautiful”, and here I translated it as “very good”.

<sup>49</sup> Truffare: “de playin’ of de fiddle”; playing the fiddle means “to cheat”.

<sup>50</sup> Stomaco debole: “weak stomach”; “Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach’s sake and thine often infirmities.” (1 Timothy 5:23, KJV).

The parson and his new friend ate. But the coffee M. St.-Ange declared he could not touch; it was too wretchedly bad. At the French Market, near by, there was some noble coffee. This, however, would have to be bought, and Parson Jones had scruples.

“You see, Jools, every man has his conscience to guide him, which it does so in” —

“Oh, yes!” cried St.-Ange, “conscien’; thad is the bez, Posson Jone’. Certainlee! I am a *Catolique*, you is a *schismatique*: you thing it is wrong to dring some coffee—well, then, it *is* wrong; you thing it is wrong to make the sugah to ged the so large price—well, then, it *is* wrong; I thing it *is* right—well, then, it *is* right: it is all ’abit; *c’est tout*. What a man thing is right, is right; ’tis all ’abit. A man muz nod go again’ his conscien’. My faith! do you thing I would go again’ my conscien’? *Mais allons*, led us go and ged some coffee.”

“Jools.”

“W’at?”

“Jools, it ain’t the drinkin’ of coffee, but the buyin’ of it on a Sabbath. You must really excuse me, Jools, it’s again’ conscience, you know.”

“Ah!” said St.-Ange, “*c’est* very true. For you it would be a sin, *mais* for me it is only ’abit. Rilligion is a very strange; I know a man one time, he thing it was wrong to go to cock-fight Sunday evening. I thing it is all ’abit. *Mais*, come, Posson Jone’; I have got one friend, Miguel; led us go at his house and ged some coffee. Come; Miguel have no familie; only him and Joe — always like to see friend; *allons*, led us come yonder.”

“Why, Jools, my dear friend, you know,” said the shamefaced parson, “I never visit on Sundays.”

Il pastore ed il suo nuovo amico pranzarono assieme. Ma il caffè, il signor St. Ange dichiarò che non lo avrebbe toccato, perchè era disgraziatamente troppo cattivo. Al Mercato Francese, poco distante da dove si trovavano, c'era dell'ottimo caffè. Lì, in ogni caso, avrebbero dovuto comprarlo, ed il Pastore Jones era titubante.

“Vedete, Jools, ogni persona ha una coscienza che la guida, e lo fa quando”-

“Oh, sì!” gridò St. Ange “La coscienza; è la migliore, Pastore Jone’. Certamente! Io sono cattolico, voi ascismatico<sup>51</sup>; voi pensate che sia sbagliato bere caffè – beh, allora è sbagliato; voi pensate che sia sbagliato che lo zucchero costi così tanto – beh, allora è sbagliato. Io penso che sia giusto; e quindi è giusto; è solo questione di abitudini, *c'est tout*<sup>52</sup>. Quello che un uomo pensa sia giusto, allora è giusto; lo ripeto, è solo questione di abitudini. Ed un uomo non deve andare contro la sua coscienza. Buon Dio! Voi credete che potrei mai andare contro la mia coscienza? *Mais allons*<sup>53</sup>, andiamo a prendere questo caffè!”

“Jools.”

“Cosa?”

“Non si tratta del caffè, ma del fatto che è domenica<sup>54</sup>. Non si prende il caffè la domenica. Mi devete scusare, Jools, ma è di nuovo la coscienza che me lo proibisce, sapete”.

“Ah” disse St. Ange “*c'est*<sup>55</sup> verissimo. Per voi sarebbe peccato, ma per me è solo questione di abitudine. La religione è molto curiosa; ho conosciuto un uomo una volta che pensava che fosse sbagliato andare a vedere i combattimenti di galli la domenica sera. Penso sia tutta questione di abitudini. *Mais*, venite, Pastore Jone’, andiamo a casa del mio amico Miguel a prendere il caffè. Andiamo; Miguel non ha *famille*<sup>56</sup>, sono solo lui e Joe, gli fa sempre piacere vedere gli amici; *allons*, andiamo da lui”.

“Beh, Jools, amico mio, sapete” disse il pastore, imbarazzato; “non faccio mai visite la domenica”.

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<sup>51</sup> Ascismatico: literally “schismatic”, which means “protestant”.

<sup>52</sup> *C'est tout*: Tutto qui.

<sup>53</sup> *Mais allons*: Ma andiamo.

<sup>54</sup> Domenica: “Sabbath” can be Saturday or Sunday, it depends on the religion you follow. In this case I wrote “Sunday” because after it is specified that the parson never visits on “Sunday”.

<sup>55</sup> *C'est*: È.

<sup>56</sup> *Famille*: Famiglia.

“Never w’at?” asked the astounded Creole.

“No,” said Jones, smiling awkwardly.

“Never visite?”

“Exceptin’ sometimes amongst church-members,” said Parson Jones.

“*Mais*,” said the seductive St.-Ange, “Miguel and Joe is church-member’ — certainlee! They love to talk about rilligion. Come at Miguel and talk about some rilligion. I am nearly expire for me coffee.”

Parson Jones took his hat from beneath his chair and rose up.

“Jools,” said the weak giant, “I ought to be in church right now.”

“*Mais*, the church is right yond’ at Miguel, yes. Ah!” continued St.-Ange, as they descended the stairs, “I thing every man muz have the rilligion he like’ the bez — me, I like the *Catholique* rilligion the bez — for me it *is* the bez. Every man will sure go to heaven if he like his rilligion the bez.”

“Jools,” said the West-Floridian, laying his great hand tenderly upon the Creole’s shoulder, as they stepped out upon the *banquette*, “do you think you have any shore hopes of heaven?”

“Yaas!” replied St.-Ange; “I am sure-sure. I thing everybody will go to heaven. I thing you will go, *et* I thing Miguel will go, *et* Joe — everybody, I thing — *mais*, h-of course, not if they not have been christen’. Even I thing some niggers will go.”

“Jools,” said the parson, stopping in his walk — “Jools, I *don’t* want to lose my niggah.”

“Yon will not loose him. With Baptiste he *cannot* ged loose.”

But Colossus’s master was not re-assured.

“Now,” said he, still tarrying, “this is jest the way; had I of gone to church —— ”

“Nessuna cosa?” chiese il Creolo, scioccato.

“No” disse Jones, sorridendo impacciato.

“Non fate mai *visite*<sup>57</sup>?”

“Tranne qualche volta ai membri della Chiesa” disse il Pastore Jones.

“*Mais*,” disse con tono suadente St. Ange, “Miguel e Joe sono membri della Chiesa – certamente! A loro piace un sacco discutere di religione. Venite da Miguel a parlare un pò di religione. Ho una voglia matta di caffè”.

Il Pastore Jones prese il cappello da sotto la sua sedia e si alzò.

“Jools” disse il fragile gigante “dovrei essere in Chiesa adesso”.

“*Mais*, ma la Chiesa si trova vicino a casa di Miguel, sì! Ah” continuò St. Ange, mentre scendevano le scale, “credo che ogni persona dovrebbe praticare la fede che ritiene migliore – io, ad esempio, ritengo che la religione cattolica sia la migliore-. Tutti gli uomini andranno sicuramente in Paradiso se riterranno che la loro religione sia la migliore”.

“Jools” disse il buon uomo della Florida Occidentale, posando con tenerezza una delle sue enormi mani sulle spalle del Creolo mentre uscivano sul marciapiede<sup>58</sup>, “siete certo quindi di andare in Paradiso?”

“Decisamente!” rispose St. Ange “sono sicuro-sicuro. Penso che tutti quanti andremo in Paradiso. Penso che voi ci andrete, *et*<sup>59</sup> ci andrà anche Miguel, *et* anche Joe – tutti quanti, secondo me - *mais*, non se non sono stati dei bravi cristiani. Io credo anche che ci andrà qualche negro”.

“Jools” disse il pastore, fermandosi di colpo, “non voglio che il mio negro si perda”.

“Non lo perderete. Con Baptiste, non si può perdere”.

Ma il padrone di Colosso non ne fu rassicurato.

“Ora” disse, indugiando ancora “questa è proprio la via; se fossi andato per la Chiesa –“

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<sup>57</sup> *Visite*: Visita.

<sup>58</sup> Marciapiede: “*banquette*”; it is a raised sidewalk.

<sup>59</sup> *Et*: E.

“Posson Jone’,” said Jules.

“What?”

“I tell you. We goin’ to church!”

“Will you?” asked Jones, joyously.

“*Allons*, come along,” said Jules, taking his elbow.

They walked down the Rue Chartres, passed several corners, and by and by turned into a cross street. The parson stopped an instant as they were turning and looked back up the street.

“W’at you lookin’?” asked his companion.

“I thought I saw Colossus,” answered the parson, with an anxious face; “I reckon ’twa’n’t him, though.” And they went on.

The street they now entered was a very quiet one. The eye of any chance passer would have been at once drawn to a broad, heavy, white brick edifice on the lower side of the way, with a flag-pole standing out like a bowsprit from one of its great windows, and a pair of lamps hanging before a large closed entrance.

It was a theatre, sub-let to gamblers. At this morning hour all was still, and the only sign of life was a knot of little barefoot girls gathered within its narrow shade, and each carrying an infant relative. Into this place the parson and M. St.-Ange entered, the little nurses jumping up from the sills to let them pass in.

A half-hour may have passed. At the end of that time the whole juvenile company were laying alternate eyes and ears to the chinks, to gather what they could of an interesting quarrel going on within.

“I did not, saw! I given you no cause of offence, saw! It’s not so, saw! Mister Jools simply mistaken the house, thinkin’ it was a Sabbath-school! No such thing, saw; I *ain’t* bound to bet! Yes, I kin git out. Yes, without bettin’! I hev a right to my opinion; I reckon I’m a *white man*, saw! No saw!

“Pastore Jone” disse Jules.

“Cosa?”

“Glielo dico. Stiamo andando in Chiesa”.

“Lo volete?” chiese Jones, allegramente.

“*Allons, venite!*” disse Jools, prendendolo per il gomito.

Camminarono lungo Rue Chartres, oltrepassando diversi incroci, e poco dopo svoltarono in uno di questi. Il pastore si fermò un momento mentre giravano e si voltò a guardare indietro su per la via.

“Che cosa state guardando?” chiese il suo compagno.

“Pensavo di aver visto Colosso” rispose il pastore, con un’espressione preoccupata; “Credo che non sia lui, però”. E proseguirono.

La strada che avevano imboccato era molto silenziosa. Lo sguardo di un qualunque passante sarebbe stato attirato da un edificio ampio ed imponente, di mattoni bianchi, sul lato inferiore della strada, con un pennone che si stagliava fuori da una delle finestre più grandi come un bompreso, ed un paio di lampade appese fuori ad un grande ingresso, chiuso.

Era un teatro, subaffittato a giocatori d’azzardo. A quell’ora del mattino tutto era calmo, e l’unico segno di vita era un gruppetto di ragazzine scalze, ognuna delle quali con un bambino al seguito, che sostavano all’interno della stretta ombra del palazzo. Fu proprio lì che entrarono il signor St. Ange ed il pastore, mentre le giovani tate balzavano giù dai davanzali per lasciarli passare.

Poteva essere trascorsa circa una mezz’ora. Al termine di quel lasso di tempo l’intera giovane compagnia cercava di sbirciare ed origliare dalla porta, per carpire ciò che riusciva dell’interessante discussione all’interno.

“Non l’ho fatto, signore! Non vi ho arrecato alcuna offesa, signore! Non è così, signore! Il signor Jools ha semplicemente sbagliato casa, credendo che questa fosse una scuola della domenica! Niente del genere, signore! Non sono tenuto a scommettere! Sì, posso uscire. Sì, senza scommettere! Ho diritto ad avere la mia opinione; credo di essere un bianco, signore! No, signore!

I on'y said I didn't think you could get the game on them cards. 'Sno such thing, saw! I do not know how to play! I wouldn't hev a roscal's money ef I should win it! Shoot, ef you dare! You can kill me, but you cayn't scare me! No, I shayn't bet! I'll die first! Yes, saw; Mr. Jools can bet for me if he admires to; I ain't his mostah."

Here the speaker seemed to direct his words to St.-Ange.

"Saw, I don't understand you, saw. I never said I'd loan you money to bet for me. I didn't suspicion this from you, saw. No, I won't take any more lemonade; it's the most notorious stuff I ever drank, saw!"

M. St.-Ange's replies were in *falsetto* and not without effect; for presently the parson's indignation and anger began to melt. "Don't ask me, Jools, I can't help you. It's no use; it's a matter of conscience with me, Jools."

"*Mais oui!* 'tis a matt' of conscien' wid me, the same."

"But, Jools, the money's none o' mine, nohow; it belongs to Smyrny, you know."

"If I could make jus' *one* bet," said the persuasive St.-Ange, "I would leave this place, fas'-fas', yes. If I had thing — *mais* I did not soup suspicion this from you, Posson Jone" —

"Don't, Jools, don't!"

"No! Posson Jone'."

"You're bound to win?" said the parson, wavering.

"*Mais certainement!* But it is not to win that I want; 'tis me conscien' — me honor!"

"Well, Jools, I hope I'm not a-doin' no wrong. I'll loan you some of this money if you say you'll come right out 'thout takin' your winnin's."

All was still. The peeping children could see the parson as he lifted his hand to his breast-pocket. There it paused a moment in bewilderment, then plunged to the bottom. It came back empty, and fell lifelessly at his side. His head dropped upon his breast, his eyes were for a moment closed, his broad palms were lifted and pressed against his forehead, a

Ho detto solo che non pensavo avreste potuto fare di meglio a carte. Non è così, signore! Non so come si gioca! Non li prenderei i soldi di un mascalzone se li dovessi vincere! Sparate, se ne avete il coraggio! Potete uccidermi, ma non riuscirete a spaventarmi! No, non scommetterò! Morirò prima! Sì, signore; il signor Jools può scommettere per me se vuole; non sono il suo padrone”.

Qui, l’oratore sembrò rivolgere le sue parole a St. Ange.

“Signore, non vi capisco, signore. Non vi ho mai detto che vi avrei prestato del denaro per scommettere per me. Non mi aspettavo questo da voi, signore. No, non prenderò altra limonata; è la cosa più criminale che abbia mai bevuto, signore!”.

Il signor St. Ange rispose al pastore con una voce stridula, non priva di effetto; difatti, la rabbia e l’indignazione del reverendo iniziarono subito a scemare. “Non me lo chiedete, Jools, non vi posso aiutare. E’ inutile; è una questione di coscienza per me, Jools”.

“*Mais oui!* Lo è anche per me, una questione di coscienza”.

“Ma, Jools, i soldi non sono miei, affatto; appartengono alla parrocchia di Smyrny, lo sapete”.

“Se potessi fare solo una scommessa,” disse il suadente St. Ange “lascerei questo posto veloce veloce, sì sì. Se avessi pensato – *mais* non lo sospettavo questo da voi, Pastore Jone”-

“No, Jools, non lo faccia!”

“No! Pastore Jone”.

“E’ obbligato a vincere?” chiese il pastore, incerto.

“*Mais certainement*<sup>60</sup>! Ma non è per vincere che lo voglio fare; è la mia coscienza – il mio onore!”

“Bene, Jools, spero di non fare niente di sbagliato. Vi presterò una parte di questo denaro se mi promettete di uscire di qui senza ritirare la vostra vincita.”

Tutto era immobile. I bambini che sbirciavano dalla porta videro il pastore mentre sollevava la mano fino al taschino sulla giacca. Lì si bloccò un attimo, perplessa, per poi entrare fino a toccare il fondo. Ne uscì vuota, cadendo senza vita lungo il fianco. La testa gli ciodolò sul petto, gli occhi si chiusero per un momento, i suoi enormi palmi si sollevarono e premettero contro la fronte; un

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<sup>60</sup> *Mais certainement*: Ma certamente.

tremor seized him, and he fell all in a lump to the floor. The children ran off with their infant-loads, leaving Jules St.-Ange swearing by all his deceased relatives, first to Miguel and Joe, and then to the lifted parson, that he did not know what had become of the money “except if” the black man had got it.

In the rear of ancient New Orleans, beyond the sites of the old rampart, (a trio of Spanish forts,) where the town has since sprung up and grown old, green with all the luxuriance of the wild Creole summer, lay the Congo Plains. Here stretched the canvas of the historic Cayetano, who Sunday after Sunday sowed the sawdust for his circus-ring.

But to-day the great showman had fallen short of his printed promise. The hurricane had come by night, and with one fell swash had made an irretrievable sop of every thing. The circus trailed away its bedraggled magnificence, and the ring was cleared for the bull.

Then the sun seemed to come out and work for the people. “See,” said the Spaniards, looking up at the glorious sky with its great, white fleets drawn off upon the horizon — “see — heaven smiles upon the bull-fight!”

In the high upper seats of the rude amphitheatre sat the gayly-decked wives and daughters of the Gascons, from the *métairies* along the Ridge, and the chattering Spanish women of the Market, their shining hair un-bonneted to the sun. Next below were their husbands and lovers in Sunday blouses, milkmen, butchers, bakers, black-bearded fishermen, Sicilian fruiterers, swarthy Portuguese sailors, in little woollen caps, and strangers of the graver sort; mariners of England, Germany, and Holland. The lowest seats were full of trappers, smugglers, Canadian *voyageurs*, drinking and singing; *Américains*, too — more’s the shame — from the upper rivers — who will not keep their seats — who ply the bottle, and who will get home by and by and tell how wicked Sodom is; broad-brimmed, silver-braided Mexicans, too, with their copper cheeks and bat’s eyes and their tinkling spurred heels. Yonder, in that

tremito lo scosse, e cadde pesantemente al suolo. I bambini corsero via con tutti i loro oggetti, lasciando Jules St. Ange a giurare sui suoi morti, prima a Miguel e Joe, e poi al pastore che piano piano si stava rialzando, che non sapeva cosa ne fosse stato di quel denaro, “tranne se” era stato il nero a prenderlo.

Nella parte più antica di New Orleans, oltre il vecchio bastione, (un trio di forti spagnoli,) dove la città era nata e da allora invecchiata, verde grazie alla rigogliosità dell'estate Creola, assai selvaggia, si stagliano le Congo Plains<sup>61</sup>. Qui si estendeva il telone dello storico Cayetano, che ogni domenica disseminava segatura per la piattaforma del suo circo.

Ma oggi il grande intrattenitore non era all'altezza delle promesse del cartellone. L'uragano era arrivato di notte, e con un solo scroscio aveva irrimediabilmente infradiciato tutto. Il circo trascinò via la sua inzaccherata magnificenza, e la piattaforma venne ripulita per il toro.

In quel momento il sole sembrò venir fuori e lavorare per le persone. “Guardate,” dissero gli Spagnoli, alzando lo sguardo verso lo splendido cielo con le sue grandi nuvole bianche che si stagliavano all'orizzonte – “guardate – il Cielo sorride alla corrida!”

Nei sedili più in alto del rozzo anfiteatro sedevano, elegantemente agghindate, le mogli e le figlie dei guasconi, dalle *métairies*<sup>62</sup> lungo la costa<sup>63</sup>, e le donne spagnole chiacchierone del mercato, con i luminosi capelli sciolti al sole. Subito sotto si trovavano i loro mariti ed amanti con la camicia della domenica, i lattai, i macellai, i panettieri, i pescatori dalla barba nera, i fruttivendoli siciliani, i marinai portoghesi dalla carnagione scura, con i berretti di lana, e stranieri della più disparata sorta; marinai inglesi, tedeschi ed olandesi. I posti più in basso erano pieni di cacciatori, contrabbandieri e *voyageurs*<sup>64</sup> canadesi, che bevevano e cantavano; c'erano anche degli *Américains* – un vero peccato – dai fiumi più a Nord – che non se ne sarebbero stati seduti sulle loro sedie – che si passano la bottiglia, e che sarebbero tornati a casa a breve ed avrebbero raccontato quanto malvagia è Sodoma; e dei messicani con i loro cappelli a tesi larga intrecciati d'argento, le guance di rame e gli occhi da pipistrello, ed i loro speroni tintinnanti. Dall'altra parte, nella zona

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<sup>61</sup> Congo Plains: a different name for “Congo Square”.

<sup>62</sup> *Métairies*: Fattorie.

<sup>63</sup> Costa: the Ridge of New Orleans, a long stretch of high ground along the banks.

<sup>64</sup> *Voyageurs*: Viaggiatori.

quieter section, are the quadron women in their black lace shawls — and there is Baptiste; and below them are the turbaned black women, and there is — but he vanishes — Colossus.

The afternoon is advancing, yet the sport, though loudly demanded, does not begin. The *Américains* grow derisive and find pastime in gibes and raillery. They mock the various Latins with their national inflections, and answer their scowls with laughter.

Some of the more aggressive shout pretty French greetings to the women of Gascony, and one bargeman, amid peals of applause, stands on a seat and hurls a kiss to the quadrons. The mariners of England, Germany, and Holland, as spectators, like the fun, while the Spaniards look black and cast defiant imprecations upon their persecutors. Some Gascons, with timely caution, pick their women out and depart, running a terrible fire of gallantries.

In hope of truce, a new call is raised for the bull: “The bull, the bull! — hush!”

In a tier near the ground a man is standing and calling — standing head and shoulders above the rest — calling in the *Américaine* tongue. Another man, big and red, named Joe, and a handsome little Creole in elegant dress and full of laughter, wish to stop him, but the flat-boatmen, ha-ha-ing and cheering, will not suffer it. Ah, through some shameful knavery of the men, into whose hands he has fallen, he is drunk!

Even the women can see that; and now he throws his arms wildly and raises his voice until the whole great circle hears it. He is preaching!

Ah! kind Lord, for a special providence now! The men of his own nation — men from the land of the open English Bible and temperance cup and song - are cheering him on to mad disgrace. And now another call for the appointed sport is drowned by the flat-boatmen singing the ancient tune of Mear. You can hear the words —

“Old Grimes is dead, that good old soul”

più tranquilla, sono sedute le donne mulatte, con i loro scialli di pizzo nero; e lì c'è anche Baptiste; e sotto di loro stanno le donne nere con i loro turbanti, e c'è – ma poi sparisce – Colosso.

Il pomeriggio scorre, eppure il divertimento, anche se richiesto a gran voce, non inizia. Gli *Américains* diventano beffardi e fanno passare il tempo insultando e canzonando. Prendono in giro i vari latini ed i loro accenti tipici, e rispondono ai loro sguardi di rimprovero con una risata. Alcuni dei più aggressivi gridano graziosi saluti francesi alle donne della guascogna, ed un barcaiolo, tra scrosci di applausi, si alza in piedi su una sedia e lancia un bacio ad una mulatta. I marinai inglesi, tedeschi ed olandesi, come spettatori, apprezzano lo scherzo, mentre gli spagnoli sembrano minacciosi e lanciano imprecazioni sprezzanti ai loro persecutori. Alcuni guasconi, con tempestiva cautela, prendono le loro donne e se ne vanno, in una rapida successione di galanterie.

Sperando in una tregua, viene chiesto, nuovamente ed a gran voce, del toro: “ Il toro, il toro! Silenzio!”

In una delle file più in basso un uomo è in piedi e grida – la testa e le spalle che spiccano in mezzo a tutti gli altri – grida in lingua *américaine*. Un altro uomo, grosso e rosso, di nome Joe, ed un piccolo Creolo di bell'aspetto, elegantemente vestito ed in preda alle risate, vorrebbero fermarlo, ma i barcaioli, ridendo ed acclamandolo, non lo avrebbero sopportato. Ah, a causa delle vergognose furfanterie di quegli uomini, tra le cui braccia è caduto, è ubriaco!

Persino le donne riescono a capirlo; ed adesso scaglia selvaggiamente le braccia in aria ed alza la voce finchè tutta la grande cerchia lo sente. Sta predicando!

Ah! Buon Dio, un miracolo della Provvidenza ora! Gli uomini del suo stesso Paese – uomini che provengono dalla terra dell'aperta Sacra Bibbia inglese, del calice della temperanza e dei canti – lo sostengono nel compiere questa pazza sciagura. Un'altra richiesta di far iniziare lo svago prefissato viene sommersa dai barcaioli che cantano l'antica melodia di “Mear”. Potete udirne le parole –

“Il vecchio Grimes è morto, quella povera vecchia anima<sup>65</sup>”

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<sup>65</sup> “Il vecchio Grimes è morto”: “Old Grimes is dead, that good old soul”, in Italian “Il vecchio Grimes è morto, quella povera vecchia anima”. Old Grimes is a poem by Albert Gorton Greene. Cable has placed this poem several decades earlier than its publication date of 1867.

— From ribald lips and throats turned brazen with laughter, from singers who toss their hats aloft and roll in their seats; the chorus swells to the accompaniment of a thousand brogans —

“He used to wear an old gray coat  
All buttoned down before.”

A ribboned man in the arena is trying to be heard, and the Latins raise one mighty cry for silence. The big red man gets a hand over the parson’s mouth, and the ribboned man seizes his moment.

“They have been endeavoring for hours,” he says, “to draw the terrible animals from their dens, but such is their strength and fierceness, that” —

His voice is drowned. Enough has been heard to warrant the inference that the beasts cannot be whipped out of the storm-drenched cages to which menagerie-life and long starvation have attached them, and from the roar of indignation the man of ribbons flies. The noise increases. Men are standing up by hundreds, and women are imploring to be let out of the turmoil. All at once, like the bursting of a dam, the whole mass pours down into the ring. They sweep across the arena and over the showman’s barriers. Miguel gets a frightful trampling. Who cares for gates or doors? They tear the beasts’ houses bar from bar, and, laying hold of the gaunt buffalo, drag him forth by feet, ears, and tail; and in the midst of the *mêlée*, still head and shoulders above all, wilder, with the cup of the wicked, than any beast, is the man of God from the Florida parishes!

In his arms he bore — and all the people shouted at once when they saw it — the tiger. He had lifted it high up with its back to his breast, his arms clasped under its shoulders; the wretched brute had curled up caterpillar-wise, with its long tail against its belly, and through its filed teeth grinned a fixed and impotent wrath. And Parson Jones was shouting:

“The tiger and the buffler *shell* lay down together! You dah to say they

- da labbre e gole volgari, rese sfrontate dalle risate, da cantanti che lanciano i loro cappelli verso l'alto e si dimenano sulle loro sedie; il coro cresce grazie all'accompagnamento di un migliaio di scarponcini –

“Era solito vestirsi con un vecchio cappotto grigio

Che una volta aveva tutti i bottoni.”

Un uomo con dei nastri cerca di farsi sentire, ed i Latini intimano con forza di fare silenzio. Il grosso uomo rosso preme la mano sulla bocca del pastore, e l'uomo con i nastri approfitta del momento.

“Stanno tentando da ore,” disse, “di attirare i terribili animali fuori dalle loro tane, ma tale è la loro forza e ferocia, che” –

La sua voce viene sommersa. Era stato udito abbastanza da legittimare la deduzione che le bestie non si possono tirare fuori da gabbie zuppe a causa della tempesta in cui sono state confinate da una vita in cui sono costantemente in mostra e dalla prolungata fame, e l'uomo con i nastri fugge dal ruggito d'indignazione. Il chiasso aumenta. Gli uomini si alzano in piedi a centinaia, e le donne implorano di essere portate via dal trambusto. All'improvviso, come quando una diga cede, tutti quanti si riversano sulla piattaforma del circo. Si espandono rapidamente per tutta l'arena e superano le barriere poste dall'intrattenitore. Miguel viene fastidiosamente calpestato. Chi si preoccupa di cancelli e porte? Divergono ad una ad una le sbarre delle gabbie delle bestie, e tenendo stretto l'emaciato bufalo, lo trascinano avanti per le zampe, le orecchie e la coda; ed in mezzo alla *melée*<sup>66</sup>, sempre con la testa e le spalle che sovrastano tutti gli altri, più selvaggio, con la coppa del malvagio, di ogni altra bestia, troviamo l'uomo di Dio delle parrocchie della Florida Occidentale!

Tra le sue braccia reggeva – e tutti gridarono contemporaneamente quando la videro – la tigre. L'aveva sollevata in alto, la schiena dell'animale contro il suo petto, le braccia strette sotto le sue spalle; la disgraziata bestia si era raccolta come un bruco, con la lunga coda contro il petto, e mostrava la sua fissa ed impotente collera tirando fuori i denti affilati. Ed il Pastore Jones gridava:

“La tigre ed il bufalo dovrebbero giacere assieme! Se qualcuno si azzarda a dire che non

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<sup>66</sup> *Melée*: Mischia.

shayn't and I'll comb you with this varmint from head to foot! The tiger and the buffler *shell* lay down together. They *shell*! Now, you, Joe! Behold! I am here to see it done. The lion and the buffler *shell* lay down together!"

Mouthing these words again and again, the parson forced his way through the surge in the wake of the buffalo. This creature the Latins had secured by a lariat over his head, and were dragging across the old rampart and into a street of the city.

The northern races were trying to prevent, and there was pommelling and knocking down, cursing and knife-drawing, until Jules St.-Ange was quite carried away with the fun, laughed, clapped his hands, and swore with delight, and ever kept close to the gallant parson.

Joe, contrariwise, counted all this child's-play an interruption. He had come to find Colossus and the money. In an unlucky moment he made bold to lay hold of the parson, but a piece of the broken barriers in the hands of a flat-boatman felled him to the sod, the terrible crowd swept over him, the lariat was cut and the giant parson hurled the tiger upon the buffalo's back.

In another instant both brutes were dead at the hands of the mob; Jones was lifted from his feet, and prating of Scripture and the millennium, of Paul at Ephesus and Daniel in the "buffler's" den, was borne aloft upon the shoulders of the huzzaing *Américains*. Half an hour later he was sleeping heavily on the floor of a cell in the *calaboza*.

When Parson Jones awoke, a bell was somewhere tolling for midnight. Somebody was at the door of his cell with a key. The lock grated, the door swung, the turnkey looked in and stepped back, and a ray of moonlight fell upon M. Jules St.-Ange. The prisoner sat upon the empty shackles and ring-bolt in the centre of the floor.

"Misty Posson Jone'," said the visitor, softly.

"O Jools!"

"*Mais*, w'at de matter, Posson Jone'?"

dovrebbero, lo pettinerò dalla testa ai piedi con questa bestiaccia! La tigre ed il bufalo dovrebbero giacere assieme! Dovrebbero! Ora, tu, Joe! Guarda! Sono qui apposta per vederlo fatto. Il leone ed il bufalo dovrebbero giacere assieme!”

Mormorando queste parole più e più volte, il parroco si fece strada attraverso l'ondata di persone sulla scia del bufalo. I latini avevano stretto un laccio attorno al collo della creatura, e lo stavano trascinando attraverso il vecchio bastione e per una delle strade della città.

Le razze più nordiche stavano invece tentando di impedirlo, e volavano una gran quantità di pugni e spinte, si imprecava e si estraevano coltelli, finchè Jules St. Ange non si fece completamente trasportare dal divertimento, rise, battè le mani, imprecò con gioia, e si mantenne sempre vicino al coraggioso pastore.

Joe, al contrario, considerava tutte queste bambinate un'interruzione. Era venuto per cercare Colosso ed il denaro. In un momento sfortunato si azzardò ad agguantare il pastore, ma un barcaiolo con in mano un pezzo delle barriere rotte lo colpì e lo fece cadere al suolo, e la terribile folla lo calpestò, il laccio venne tagliato e l'enorme pastore lanciò la tigre sulla schiena del bufalo. In un altro secondo, le bestie erano morte per mano della folla; Jones venne sollevato per i piedi, e ciarlando delle Sacre Scritture e del millennio, di Paolo ad Efeso e di Daniele nella tana del “bufalo”, venne issato sulle spalle dei festosi *Américains*. Mezz'ora dopo stava dormendo pesantemente sul pavimento della cella di una prigione<sup>67</sup>.

Quando il Pastore Jones si svegliò, una campana stava suonando da qualche parte, annunciando la mezzanotte. Qualcuno stava armeggiando fuori dalla porta della sua cella con delle chiavi. La serratura cigolò, la porta si mosse, il secondino guardò dentro ed indietreggiò, ed un raggio di luce lunare rivelò la figura del signor Jules St. Ange. Il prigioniero si sedette sui ceppi vuoti ed i catenacci al centro del pavimento.

“Signor Pastore Jones” disse dolcemente il visitatore.

“Oh Jools!”

“*Mais*, qual'è il problema, Pastore Jone'?”

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<sup>67</sup> Prigione: “calaboza”; “calaboose”, which means “jail”.

“My sins, Jools, my sins!”

“Ah! Posson Jone’, is that something to cry, because a man get sometime a litt’ bit intoxicate? Mais, if a man keep *all the time* intoxicate, I think that is again’ the conscien’.”

“Jools, Jools, your eyes is darkened — oh! Jools, Where’s my pore old niggah?”

“Posson Jone’, never min’; he is wid Baptiste.”

“Where?”

“I don’ know w’ere — *mais* he is wid Baptiste. Baptiste is a beautiful to take care of somebody.”

“Is he as good as you, Jools?” asked Parson Jones, sincerely.

Jules was slightly staggered.

“You know, Posson Jone’, you know, a nigger cannot be good as a w’ite man — *mais* Baptiste is a good nigger.”

The parson moaned and dropped his chin into his hands.

“I was to of left for home to-morrow, sun-up, on the *Isabella* schooner. Pore Smyrny!” He deeply sighed.

“Posson Jone’,” said Jules, leaning against the wall and smiling, “I swear you is the moz funny man I ever see. If I was you I would say, me, ‘Ah! ’ow I am lucky! the money I los’, it was not mine, anyhow!’ My faith! shall a man make hisse’f to be the more sorry because the money he los’ is not his? Me, I would say, ‘it is a specious providence.’”

“Ah! Misty Posson Jone’,” he continued, “you make a so droll sermon ad the bull-ring. Ha! ha! I swear I thing you can make money to preach thad sermon many time ad the theatre St. Philippe. Hah! you is the moz brave dat I never see, *mais* ad the same time the moz rilligious man. Where I’m goin’ to fin’ one priest to make like dat? *Mais*, why you can’t cheer up an’ be ’appy? Me, if I should be miserabl’ like that I would kill meself.”

“I miei peccati, Jools, i miei peccati!”

“Ah, Pastore Jone’, è qualcosa per cui si debba piangere, se un uomo ogni tanto si ubriaca un pò? *Mais*, se un uomo si ubriacasse sempre, penso che quello sì che sarebbe contro la coscienza”.

“Jools, Jools, i vostri occhi sono oscurati – oh! Jools, dov’è il mio povero vecchio negro?”

“Pastore Jone’, non si preoccupi; è con Baptiste”.

“Dove?”

“Non vi so dire dove; *mais* è con Baptiste. Baptiste è molto bravo a prendersi cura delle persone”.

“E’ bravo come voi, Jools?” chiese il pastore, sinceramente.

Jules ne rimase leggermente stupito.

“Sapete, Pastore Jone’, sapete che un negro non può mai essere bravo come un bianco. *Mais* Baptiste è un bravo negro”.

Il pastore gemette e si lasciò cadere la testa tra le mani.

“Dovevo partire domani all’alba per tornare a casa, con lo schooner<sup>68</sup> Isabella. Povera Smyrny!”  
Fece un respiro profondo.

“Pastore Jone’,” disse Jules, appoggiandosi al muro e sorridendo, “vi giuro che siete l’uomo più divertente che abbia mai visto. Se fossi in voi, io direi, io “Ah, che uomo fortunato che sono! I soldi che ho perso non erano miei, comunque!” Mio Dio! Dovrebbe forse un uomo essere più dispiaciuto perchè ha perso dei soldi che non erano suoi? Io, direi che è un miracolo della Provvidenza!”

“Ah, Signor Pastore Jone’” continuò poi “Avete tenuto un sermone così divertente nell’arena. Ah! Ah! Vi giuro che penso che potreste fare soldi predicando quel sermone molte volte al teatro St. Philippe. Ah! Voi siete l’uomo più coraggioso, *mais* allo stesso tempo il più religioso, che abbia mai visto. Dove lo andrò a trovare un prete che faccia come voi? *Mais*, perchè non potete tirarvi su di morale ed essere felice? Io, se mai dovessi essere infelice come voi, mi ucciderei”.

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<sup>68</sup> Schooner: a sailing ship with two or more masts, typically with the foremast smaller than the mainmast.

The countryman only shook his head.

“*Bien*, Posson Jone’, I have the so good news for you.”

The prisoner looked up with eager inquiry.

“Las’ evening when they lock’ you, I come right off at M. De Blanc’s house to get you let out of de calaboose; M. De Blanc he is the judge. So soon I was entering — ‘Ah! Jules, me boy, juz the man to make complete the game!’ Posson Jone’, it was a specious providence! I win in t’ree hours more dan six hundred dollah! Look.” He produced a mass of bank-notes, *bons*, and due-bills.

“And you got the pass?” asked the parson, regarding the money with a strange sadness.

“It is here; it take the effect so soon the daylight.”

“Jools, my friend, your kindness is in vain.”

The Creole’s face became a perfect blank.

“Because,” said the parson, “for two reasons: firstly, I hare broken the laws, and ought to stand the penalty; and secondly — you must really excuse me, Jools, you know, but the pass has been got onfairly, I’m afeerd. You told the judge I was innocent; and in neither case it don’t become a Christian (which I hope I can still say I am one) to ’do evil that good may come.’ I muss stay.”

M. St.-Ange stood up aghast, and for a moment speechless, at this exhibition of moral heroism; but an artifice was presently hit upon. “*Mais*, Posson Jone’!” — in his old *falsetto* — “de order — you cannot read it, it is in French — compel you to go h-out, sir!”

“Is that so?” cried the parson, bounding up with radiant face — “is that so, Jools?”

The young man nodded, smiling; but, though he smiled, the fountain of his tenderness was opened. He made the sign of the cross as the parson knelt in prayer, and even whispered “Hail Mary,” etc., quite through, twice over.

Il campagnolo scosse appena la testa.

“*Bien*<sup>69</sup>, Pastore Jone’, ho delle buone notizie per voi”.

Il prigioniero alzò gli occhi, nello sguardo un’impaziente richiesta.

“Ieri sera, quando vi hanno rinchiuso, sono andato subito a casa del signor De Blanc per farvi uscire di prigione; il signor De Blanc è il giudice. Stavo giusto per entrare – Ah, Jules, ragazzo mio, esattamente l’uomo che ci serviva per completare il gioco!” Pastore Jone’, è stato un miracolo della Provvidenza! Ho vinto in tre ore più di seicento dollari! Guardate!” Ed esibì una massa di banconote, *bons* ed assegni.

“E vi hanno dato il lasciapassare?” chiese il pastore, guardando le banconote con strana tristezza.

“E’ qui; è valido dal momento in cui spunta la luce del giorno”.

“Jools, amico mio, la vostra gentilezza è inutile”.

L’espressione del Creolo si fece completamente vacua.

“Per due ragioni,” disse il pastore, “in primo luogo, ho infranto le leggi, ed è giusto che sopporti la pena; ed in secondo luogo - mi dovete scusare, Jools, sapete, ma il lasciapassare è stato ottenuto slealmente, temo. Voi avete detto al giudice che ero innocente; ed in nessuno dei due casi sarei un bravo cristiano (cosa che spero di poter dire di essere ancora) a “fare del male che poi potrebbe derivarne del bene”. Devo restare qui”.

Il signor St. Ange si alzò spaventato, e per un momento senza parole, davanti a quell’esibizione di eroismo morale; ma subito escogitò uno stratagemma. “*Mais*, Pastore Jone’!” – nel suo solito tono di voce acuto – “l’ordine – non potete leggerlo, è in francese – vi obbliga ad u-uscire da qui, signore!”

“E’ così?” urlò il pastore, balzando in piedi radioso – “E’ così, Jools?”

Il giovane annuì, sorridendo; ma, sebbene sorridesse, la fonte della sua tenerezza era stata aperta. Si fece il segno della croce mentre il pastore si inginocchiava in preghiera, e persino sussurrò “Ave Maria,”, eccettera, fino alla fine, per due volte.

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<sup>69</sup> *Bien*: Bene.

Morning broke in summer glory upon a cluster of villas behind the city, nestled under live-oaks and magnolias on the banks of a deep bayou, and known as Suburb St. Jean.

With the first beam came the West-Floridian and the Creole out upon the bank below the village. Upon the parson's arm hung a pair of antique saddle-bags. Baptiste limped wearily behind; both his eyes were encircled with broad, blue rings, and one cheek-bone bore the official impress of every knuckle of Colossus's left hand. The "beautiful to take care of somebody" had lost his charge. At mention of the negro he became wild, and, half in English, half in the "gumbo" dialect, said murderous things. Intimidated by Jules to calmness, he became able to speak confidently on one point; he could, would, and did swear that Colossus had gone home to the Florida parishes; he was almost certain; in fact, he thought so.

There was a clicking of pulleys as the three appeared upon the bayou's margin, and Baptiste pointed out, in the deep shadow of a great oak, the *Isabella*, moored among the bulrushes, and just spreading her sails for departure. Moving down to where she lay, the parson and his friend paused on the bank, loath to say farewell.

"O Jools!" said the parson, "supposin' Colossus ain't gone home! O Jools, if you'll look him out for me, I'll never forget you — I'll never forget you, nohow, Jools. No, Jools, I never will believe he taken that money. Yes, I know all niggahs will steal" — he set foot upon the gang-plank — "but Colossus wouldn't steal from me. Good-by."

"Misty Posson Jone," said St.-Ange, putting his hand on the parson's arm with genuine affection, "hol' on. You see dis money — w'at I win las' night? Well, I win' it by a specious providence, ain't it?"

"There's no tellin'," said the humbled Jones. "Providence

'Moves in a mysterious way

La mattinata si aprì in gloria estiva su un gruppo di villette dietro alla città, annidate sotto alberi di quercia e magnolia sulle rive di un profondo bayou<sup>70</sup>, e conosciuto come il sobborgo di St. Jean.

Con il primo raggio di luce, l'uomo della Florida Occidentale ed il Creolo comparvero sull'argine sotto al villaggio. Il parroco portava appese al braccio un paio di vecchie bisacce. Baptiste zoppicava stancamente dietro di loro; entrambi i suoi occhi erano cerchiati da larghi anelli blu, e su uno zigomo si notava l'impronta ufficiale di ogni nocca della mano sinistra di Colosso. Il "bravo a prendersi cura delle persone" aveva perso la persona che gli era stata affidata. Alla sola menzione del negro si era infuriato, e, metà in inglese, metà in dialetto gumbo<sup>71</sup>, fece discorsi sanguinari. Forzato da Jules a mantenere la calma, alla fine riuscì a parlare con sicurezza; poteva, voleva e giurava che Colosso era tornato a casa, nelle parrocchie della Florida Occidentale; ne era quasi certo; in effetti, pensava che fosse così.

Ci fu uno schiocco di carrucole quando i tre apparvero sul limite del bayou, e Baptiste indicò, all'ombra scura di una grande quercia, l'Isabella, ormeggiata tra i giunchi, che stava giusto spiegando le vele per la partenza. Spostandosi verso il punto in cui era attraccata, il parroco ed il suo amico si fermarono un momento sulla riva, restii a dirsi addio.

"Oh Jools!" disse il pastore "Supponiamo che Colosso non sia andato a casa! Oh Jules, se vi prenderete cura di lui per me, non vi dimenticherò mai – non vi dimenticherò mai, in nessun modo, Jools. No, Jools, non crederò mai che abbia preso quel denaro. Sì, lo so che tutti i negri prima o poi rubano," – mise un piede sull'asse della passerella – "ma Colosso non mi avrebbe mai derubato. Arrivederci".

"Signor Pastore Jone'," disse St. Ange, posando la mano sul braccio del pastore con sincero affetto, "aspettate. Vedete questi soldi – quelli che ho vinto la scorsa notte? Beh, li ho vinti per un miracolo della Provvidenza, no?"

"Non c'è dubbio," disse il mortificato Jones. "La Provvidenza

Agisce in maniera misteriosa

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<sup>70</sup> Bayou: in the Southern US, it can be either an extremely slow river or a boggy lake or wetland.

<sup>71</sup> Gumbo: patois, dialect of Louisiana.

His wonders to perform'."

"Ah!" cried the Creole, "*c'est* very true. I ged this money in the mysterieuze way. *Mais*, if I keep dis money, you know where it goin' be to-night?"

"I really can't say," replied the parson.

"Goin' to de dev'," said the sweetly-smiling young man.

The schooner-captain, leaning against the shrouds, and even Baptiste, laughed outright.

"O Jools, you mustn't!"

"Well, den, w'at I shall do wid *it*?"

"Any thing!" answered the parson; "better donate it away to some poor man" —

"Ah! Misty Posson Jone', dat is w'at I want. You los' five hondred dollar' — 'twas me fault."

"No, it wa'n't, Jools."

"*Mais*, it was!"

"No!"

"It *was* me fault! I *swear* it was me fault! *Mais*, here is five hondred dollar'; I wish you shall take it. Here! I don't got no use for money. — Oh, my faith! Posson Jone', you must not begin to cry some more."

Parson Jones was choked with tears. When he found voice he said:

"O Jools, Jools, Jools! my pore, noble, dear, misguided friend! ef you hed of hed a Christian raisin'! May the Lord show you your errors better'n I kin, and bless you for your good intentions — oh, no! I cayn't touch that money with

Compie i suoi prodigi<sup>72</sup>”.

“Ah!” gridò il Creolo, “*c’est* verissimo. Ho avuto questi soldi in modo misterioso. *Mais*, se tengo questo denaro, sapete dove andrà a finire questa sera?”

“Davvero non saprei,” rispose il pastore.

“Andrà al diavolo,” disse il giovane, sorridendo dolcemente.

Il capitano dello schooner, appoggiato alle sartie, e persino Baptiste, risero sfacciatamente.

“No, Jools, non dovete!”

“Beh, quindi, che dovrei farmene?”

“Qualsiasi altra cosa!” rispose il pastore; “piuttosto, datelo a qualche pover’uomo” –

“Ah, Signor Pastore Jone’, è questo che voglio. Voi avete perso cinquecento dollari – è stata colpa mia”.

“No, non è vero, Jools!”

“*Mais*, invece sì”.

“No!”

“E’ stata colpa mia! Glielo giuro, è stata colpa mia! *Mais*, qui ci sono cinquecento dollari, vorrei che li prendesse. Tenete! Non me ne faccio niente di questi soldi. Oh, mio Dio! Pastore Jone’, non dovete ricominciare a piangere”.

Il Pastore Jones era soffocato dalle lacrime. Quando ritrovò la voce, disse:

“Oh Jools, Jools, Jools! Mio povero, nobile, caro, malaccorto amico! Se solo aveste avuto un’educazione cristiana! Possa il Signore mostrarvi i vostri errori meglio di quanto faccia io, e vi benedica per le vostre buone intenzioni – oh, no! Non potrei toccare quel denaro neanche con un

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<sup>72</sup> La Provvidenza/Agisce in maniera misteriosa/Compie i suoi prodigi: “Providence/’Moves in a mysterious way/His wonders to perform”; slight modification of the Christian hymn written by William Cowper in 1773, called “God Moves in a Mysterious Way”.

a ten-foot pole; it wa'n't rightly got; you must really excuse me, my dear friend, but I cayn't touch it."

St.-Ange was petrified.

"Good-by, dear Jools," continued the parson. "I'm in the Lord's haynds, and he's very merciful, which I hope and trust you'll find it out. Good-by!" — the schooner swang slowly off before the breeze — "good-by!"

St.-Ange roused himself.

"Posson Jone'! make me hany'ow *dis* promise: you never, never, *never* will come back to New Orleans."

"Ah, Jools, the Lord willin', I'll never leave home again!"

"All right!" cried the Creole; "I thing he's willin'. Adieu, Posson Jone'. My faith'! you are the so fighting an' moz rilligious man as I never saw! Adieu! Adieu!"

Baptiste uttered a cry and presently ran by his master toward the schooner, his hands full of clods.

St.-Ange looked just in time to see the sable form of Colossus of Rhodes emerge from the vessel's hold, and the pastor of Smyrna and Bethesda seize him in his embrace.

"O Colossus! you outlandish old niggah! Thank the Lord! Thank the Lord!"

The little Creole almost wept. He ran down the tow-path, laughing and swearing, and making confused allusion to the entire *personnel* and furniture of the lower regions.

By odd fortune, at the moment that St.-Ange further demonstrated his delight by tripping his mulatto into a bog, the schooner came brushing along the reedy bank with a graceful curve, the sails flapped, and the crew fell to poling her slowly along.

palo lungo dieci piedi; non è stato ottenuto onestamente; mi dovete veramente scusare, amico mio, ma non lo posso toccare”.

St. Ange rimase pietrificato.

“Addio, caro Jools,” continuò il pastore “sono nelle mani di Dio, e Lui è davvero misericordioso, cosa che spero e confido scoprirete presto. Addio!” – lo schooner si mosse lentamente sospinto dalla brezza – “Addio!”

St. Ange si ridestò.

“Pastore Jone’, fatemi in ogni caso questa promessa: non tornerete mai, mai, mai più a New Orleans”.

“Ah, Jools, se Dio vuole, non lascerò mai più casa mia!”

“Molto bene!” gridò il Creolo; “Credo che sia il suo volere! *Adieu*<sup>73</sup>, Pastore Jone’. Mio Dio! Voi siete l’uomo più combattivo e più religioso che abbia mai visto! *Adieu! Adieu!*”

Baptiste lanciò un grido e corse immediatamente dal suo padrone verso lo schooner, le mani piene di terra.

St. Ange rivolse lo sguardo alla barca giusto in tempo per vedere la forma scura del Colosso di Rodi emergere dalla stiva, ed il pastore di Smirna e Bethesda che lo agguantava per abbracciarlo.

“Oh, Colosso! Vecchio negro strampalato! Grazie a Dio! Grazie a Dio!”

Il giovane creolo quasi si mise a piangere. Corse giù per il sentiero prodotto dal rimorchio, ridendo ed imprecando, e facendo confusi riferimenti a tutto il personale ed il mobilio delle regioni più a Sud.

Per uno strano caso, nel momento in cui St. Ange dimostrava ulteriormente la sua gioia facendo lo sgambetto al suo mulatto e facendolo cadere in una palude, lo schooner toccò leggermente la riva piena di giunchi con una graziosa curva, le vele sbatacchiarono, e l’equipaggio cadde a terra nel tentativo di farla procedere lungo la traiettoria utilizzando dei pali.

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<sup>73</sup> *Adieu*: Addio.

Parson Jones was on the deck, kneeling once more in prayer. His hat had fallen before him; behind him knelt his slave. In thundering tones he was confessing himself “a plumb fool,” from whom “the conceit had been jolted out,” and who had been made to see that even his “nigger had the longest head of the two.”

Colossus clasped his hands and groaned.

The parson prayed for a contrite heart.

“Oh, yes!” cried Colossus.

The master acknowledged countless mercies.

“Dat’s so!” cried the slave.

The master prayed that they might still be “piled on.”

“Glory!” cried the black man, clapping his hands; “pile on!”

“An’ now,” continued the parson, “bring this pore, backslidin’ jackace of a parson and this pore ole fool niggah back to thar home in peace!”

“Pray fo’ de money!” called Colossus.

But the parson prayed for Jules.

“Pray fo’ de *money!*” repeated the negro.

“And oh, give thy servant back that there lost money!”

Colossus rose stealthily, and tiptoed by his still shouting master. St.-Ange, the captain, the crew, gazed in silent wonder at the strategist. Pausing but an instant over the master’s hat to grin an acknowledgment of his beholders’ speechless interest, he softly placed in it the faithfully-mourned and honestly prayed-for Smyrna fund; then, saluted by the gesticulative, silent applause of St.-Ange and the schooner-men, he resumed his first attitude behind his roaring master.

“Amen!” cried Colossus, meaning to bring him to a close.

Il Pastore Jones era sul ponte, inginocchiato ancora una volta in preghiera. Il suo cappello era caduto davanti a lui; dietro di lui, era inginocchiato il suo schiavo. Con voce tonante si stava dichiarando un “perfetto idiota”, a cui “era stata strappata via l’arroganza”, ed a cui era stato mostrato che persino il suo negro “aveva più testa di lui”.

Colosso giunse le mani e gemette.

Il padrone pregò per avere la contrizione nel cuore.

“Oh, sì!” gridò Colosso.

Il padrone concesse innumerevoli grazie.

“Così sia!” gridò Colosso.

Il padrone pregò affinché potessero ancora “essere uniti”.

“Gloria!” gridò l’uomo di colore, battendo le mani; “essere uniti!”

“Ed adesso,” continuò il pastore, “fà arrivare a casa in pace questo povero somaro peccatore di un pastore ed il suo povero stupido vecchio negro!”

“Pregate per il denaro!” urlò Colosso.

Ma il pastore pregò per Jules.

“Pregate per il denaro!” ripeté il negro.

“E oh, dà indietro al tuo servo il denaro che gli è stato rubato!”

Colosso si alzò di soppiatto, e si avvicinò in punta di piedi al padrone che stava ancora gridando. St. Ange, il capitano, e tutta la ciurma, si fermarono a guardare con silenziosa meraviglia ciò che stava facendo lo stratega. Fermandosi solo un istante sopra il cappello del padrone per fare un sorriso di riconoscimento ai suoi osservatori stupiti, vi inserì dolcemente il denaro di Smyrna, così fedelmente compianto e per cui si era pregato così onestamente; poi, salutato da St. Ange e dall’equipaggio con un applauso silenzioso e fatto a gesti, riprese posto dov’era prima, dietro al suo padrone urlante.

“Amen!” gridò Colosso, cercando di far arrivare il pastore alla conclusione della preghiera.

“Onworthy though I be” — cried Jones.

“*Amen!*” reiterated the negro.

“A-a-amen!” said Parson Jones.

He rose to his feet, and, stooping to take up his hat, beheld the well-known roll. As one stunned, he gazed for a moment upon his slave, who still knelt with clasped hands and rolling eyeballs; but when he became aware of the laughter and cheers that greeted him from both deck and shore, he lifted eyes and hands to heaven, and cried like the veriest babe. And when he looked at the roll again, and hugged and kissed it, St.-Ange tried to raise a second shout, but choked, and the crew fell to their poles.

And now up runs Baptiste, covered with slime, and prepares to cast his projectiles. The first one fell wide of the mark; the schooner swung round into a long reach of water, where the breeze was in her favor; another shout of laughter drowned the maledictions of the muddy man; the sails filled; Colossus of Rhodes, smiling and bowing as hero of the moment, ducked as the main boom swept round, and the schooner, leaning slightly to the pleasant influence, rustled a moment over the bulrushes, and then sped far away down the rippling bayou.

M. Jules St.-Ange stood long, gazing at the receding vessel as it now disappeared, now re-appeared beyond the tops of the high undergrowth; but, when an arm of the forest hid it finally from sight, he turned townward, followed by that fagged-out spaniel, his servant, saying, as he turned, “Baptiste.”

“*Miché?*”

“You know w’at I goin’ do wid dis money?”

“*Non, m’sieur.*”

“Well, you can strike me dead if I don’t goin’ to pay hall my debts! *Allons!*”

He began a merry little song to the effect that his sweetheart was a

“Per quanto indegno io sia” – urlò Jones.

“Amen!” ripeté il negro.

“A-a-amen!” disse il Pastore Jones.

Si alzò in piedi, e chinandosi per prendere il cappello, vide il famoso rotolo. Scioccato, fissò per un momento il suo schiavo, che era ancora inginocchiato con le mani giunte e gli occhi rovesciati; ma quando si accorse delle risate e delle acclamazioni che lo salutavano dal ponte e dalla riva, alzò occhi e mani verso il cielo, e pianse come un bambino. E quando guardò di nuovo il rotolo, e lo abbracciò e lo baciò, St. Ange cercò di lanciare un secondo grido, ma gli mancò il respiro, ed i marinai caddero sopra i loro pali.

Ed ora arriva correndo Baptiste, coperto di melma, e si prepara a lanciare i suoi proiettili. Il primo mancò il bersaglio; lo schooner si girò in direzione di un lungo tratto d’acqua diritto, dove il vento era in suo favore; un altro scoppio di risate sommerse le maledizioni dell’uomo infangato; le vele si gonfiarono; il Colosso di Rodi, sorridendo ed inchinandosi come eroe del momento, si abbassò mentre la boma principale si espandeva, e lo schooner, inclinandosi leggermente verso la piacevole influenza, si mosse per un momento fruscando sopra i giunchi, e poi sfrecciò via giù per il bayou mormorante.

Il signor St. Ange rimase a lungo a guardare l’imbarcazione che si allontanava e che ora scompariva, ora riappariva oltre le cime dell’alta boscaglia; ma, quando una parte della foresta la nascose definitivamente alla vista, rivolse lo sguardo verso la città, seguito dal suo spaniel esausto, il suo servitore, e mentre si voltava gli disse: “Baptiste”.

“Signore<sup>74</sup>”.

“Sai che cosa me ne farò di questi soldi?”

“*Non, m’sieur*”.

“Beh, che mi venga un colpo se non vado a saldare tutti i miei debiti! *Allons!*”

Inziò a cantare una canzoncina allegra con l’effetto che la sua dolce metà era ora una bottiglia di

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<sup>74</sup> Signore: is the AAVE pronunciation of “Mr” according to the article “Signifying Songs: The Double Meaning of Black Dialect in the Work of George Washington Cable”.

wine-bottle, and master and man, leaving care behind, returned to the picturesque Rue Royale.

The ways of Providence are indeed strange. In all Parson Jones's after-life, amid the many painful reminiscences of his visit to the City of the Plain, the sweet knowledge was withheld from him that by the light of the Christian virtue that shone from him even in his great fall, Jules St.-Ange arose, and went to his father an honest man.

vino, ed il padrone e l'uomo, lasciandosi tutto alle spalle, tornarono alla pittoresca Rue Royale.

Le vie della Provvidenza sono davvero strane. Per tutta la vita al Pastore Jones, tra i tanti ricordi dolorosi della sua visita alla Città delle *Plains*<sup>75</sup>, venne negata la gioia di sapere che, grazie alla luce della virtù cristiana che lui emanava anche nel momento della sua più grande caduta, Jules St. Ange si era alzato e si era recato dal padre da uomo onesto<sup>76</sup>.

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<sup>75</sup> *Plains*: Congo Plains.

<sup>76</sup> E si era recato dal padre da uomo onesto: "arose, and went to his father"; compared to the Prodigal Son's statement, "I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee." (Luke 15:18, KJV).

## “A Rude Awakening”, 1893

**Kate Chopin**

"TAKE de do' an' go! You year me? Take de do'!"

Lolotte's brown eyes flamed. Her small frame quivered. She stood with her back turned to a meagre supper-table, as if to guard it from the man who had just entered the cabin. She pointed toward the door, to order him from the house.

"You mighty cross to-night, Lolotte. You mus' got up wid de wrong foot to 's mo'nin'. *Hein* , *Veveste? hein* , Jacques, w'at you say?"

The two small urchins who sat at table giggled in sympathy with their father's evident good humor.

"I 'm wo' out, me!" the girl exclaimed, desperately, as she let her arms fall limp at her side. "Work, work! Fu w'at? Fu feed de lazies' man in Natchitoches pa'ish."

"Now, Lolotte, you think w'at you sayin'," expostulated her father. "Sylveste Bordon don' ax nobody to feed 'im."

"W'en you brought a poun' of suga in de house?" his daughter retorted hotly, "or a poun' of coffee? W'en did you brought a piece o' meat home, you? An' Nonomme all de time sick. Co'n bread an' po'k, dat 's good fu *Veveste* an' me an' Jacques; but *Nonomme?* no!"

She turned as if choking, and cut into the round, soggy "pone" of corn bread which was the main feature of the scanty supper.

"Po' li'le *Nonomme*; we mus' fine some'in' to break dat fevah. You want to kill a chicken once a w'ile fu *Nonomme*, Lolotte." He calmly seated himself at the table.

## “Un brusco risveglio”, 1893

Kate Chopin

“Prendete i soldi ed andatevene! Mi avete sentito? Prendete i soldi!”

Gli occhi castani di Lolotte ardevano. La sua figura minuta fremeva. Se ne stava in piedi, con la schiena girata verso un misero tavolo da pranzo, come per difenderlo dall'uomo che era appena entrato nella casetta<sup>77</sup>. Indicò la porta, ingiungendogli di uscire di casa.

“Sei terribilmente arrabbiata stasera, Lolotte. Devi esserti alzata con il piede sbagliato stamattina. *Hein*<sup>78</sup>, *Veveste? Hein*, Jacques, cosa ne dite?”

I due piccoli monelli seduti al tavolo ridacchiarono, assecondando l'evidente buonumore del padre.

“Son distrutta, io!” esclamò la ragazza, disperata, mentre lasciava cadere le braccia inerti lungo i fianchi. “Lavorare, lavorare! E per cosa? Per sfamare l'uomo più pigro di tutta la parrocchia di Natchitoches<sup>79</sup>!”

“Ora, Lolotte, bada a quello che dici,” protestò il padre. “Sylveste Bordon non chiede a nessuno di essere sfamato”.

“Quando mai avete portato a casa un kilo<sup>80</sup> di zucchero?” ribattè la figlia con veemenza, “od un kilo di caffè? Quando mai avete portato a casa un pezzo di carne, voi? E Nonomme è sempre malato. Pane di mais e maiale vanno bene per *Veveste*, per me e per Jacques; ma per Nonomme? No!”.

Si girò come se le mancasse il respiro, e si mise a tagliare la pagnotta di mais, rotonda e molliccia, che era la portata principale della scarsa cena.

“Povero piccolo Nonomme; dobbiamo trovare qualcosa che gli abbassi quella febbre. Potresti uccidere una gallina ogni tanto per Nonomme, Lolotte”. Si sedette tranquillamente a tavola.

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<sup>77</sup> Casetta: “cabin” is a word that can hardly be translated in Italian, as it gives the idea of a wretched place, of four wooden walls coarsely put together, emphasizing the idea of precariousness.

<sup>78</sup> *Hein*: Eh.

<sup>79</sup> Natchitoches: a small city in Louisiana.

<sup>80</sup> Un kilo: “a pound of”, which is a “kilogram”.

"Didn' I done put de las' roostah in de pot?" she cried with exasperation. "Now you come axen me fu kill de hen"! W'ere I goen to fine aigg' to trade wid, w'en de hen' be gone? Is I got one picayune in de house fu trade wid, me?"

"Papa," piped the young Jacques, "w'at dat I yeard you drive in de yard, w'ile go?"

"Dat 's it! W'en Lolotte would n' been talken' so fas', I could tole you 'bout dat job I got fu to-morrow. Dat was Joe Duplan's team of mule' an' wagon, wid t'ree bale' of cotton, w'at you yaird. I got to go soon in de mo'nin' wid dat load to de landin'. An' a man mus' eat w'at got to work; dat 's sho."

Lolotte's bare brown feet made no sound upon the rough boards as she entered the room where Nonomme lay sick and sleeping. She lifted the coarse mosquito net from about him, sat down in the clumsy chair by the bedside, and began gently to fan the slumbering child.

Dusk was falling rapidly, as it does in the South. Lolotte's eyes grew round and big, as she watched the moon creep up from branch to branch of the moss-draped live-oak just outside her window. Presently the weary girl slept as profoundly as Nonomme. A little dog sneaked into the room, and socially licked her bare feet. The touch, moist and warm, awakened Lolotte.

The cabin was dark and quiet. Nonomme was crying softly, because the mosquitoes were biting him. In the room beyond, old Sylveste and the others slept. When Lolotte had quieted the child, she went outside to get a pail of cool, fresh water at the cistern. Then she crept into bed beside Nonomme, who slept again.

Lolotte's dreams that night pictured her father returning from work, and bringing luscious oranges home in his pocket for the sick child.

When at the very break of day she heard him astir in his room, a certain comfort stole into her heart. She lay and listened to the faint noises of his preparations to go out. When he had quitted the house, she waited to

“E non ho forse messo l’ultimo gallo in pentola?” gridò, esasperata. “Ed adesso mi venite a chiedere di ammazzare una gallina! Dove troverò le uova da vendere, quando ci saremo mangiati anche la gallina? Ho forse un solo picayune<sup>81</sup> in casa da scambiare, io?”

“*Papa,*” disse il giovane Jacques, “cos’era quello che vi ho sentito portare in cortile, poco fa?”

“Ecco qua! Quando Lolotte la smetterà di parlare così velocemente, ti potrò raccontare del lavoro che sono riuscito a trovare per domani. Quelli che hai sentito erano il carro ed i muli di Joe Duplan, con tre balle di cotone. Devo andare la mattina presto con quel carico all’approdo. E un uomo deve mangiare se deve lavorare; non ci piove sopra”.

I piedi nudi e bruni di Lolotte non fecero alcun rumore sulle assi ruvide del pavimento quando entrò nella stanza dove Nonomme giaceva malato e dormiva. Alzò la grezza zanzariera che stava sopra di lui, si sedette sulla sedia sgangherata accanto al letto, ed iniziò dolcemente a fare aria al bambino addormentato.

Il crepuscolo stava calando velocemente, come è normale al Sud. Gli occhi di Lolotte si fecero grandi e tondi mentre guardava la luna che sgusciava da un ramo all’altro della quercia coperta di muschio proprio fuori dalla finestra. Poco dopo, la ragazza, esausta, dormiva profondamente come Nonomme. Un cagnolino sgattaiolò nella stanza, e le leccò amichevolmente<sup>82</sup> i piedi nudi. Il tocco, umido e caldo, risvegliò Lolotte.

La casetta era buia e silenziosa. Nonomme stava piangendo piano, perchè le zanzare lo stavano pungendo. Nella stanza accanto, il vecchio Sylveste e gli altri dormivano. Non appena ebbe calmato il bambino, uscì a prendere un secchio di acqua dolce e fresca dalla cisterna. Poi si infilò nel letto accanto a Nonomme, che si era riaddormentato.

Quella notte Lolotte vide in sogno la figura del padre che tornava a casa dal lavoro, portando in tasca delle arance deliziose per il bambino malato.

Quando all’alba lo sentì muoversi nella sua stanza, avvertì in cuor suo un certo conforto. Distesa, ascoltava i deboli rumori dei suoi preparativi per uscire. Quando uscì di casa, attese di

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<sup>81</sup> Picayune: Louisiana coin.

<sup>82</sup> Amichevolmente: “socially” in a sense of “in a friendly way”.

hear him drive the wagon from the yard.

She waited long, but heard no sound of horse's tread or wagon-wheel. Anxious, she went to the cabin door and looked out. The big mules were still where they had been fastened the night before. The wagon was there, too.

Her heart sank. She looked quickly along the low rafters supporting the roof of the narrow porch to where her father's fishing pole and pail always hung. Both were gone.

"'T ain' no use, 't ain' no use," she said, as she turned into the house with a look of something like anguish in her eyes.

When the spare breakfast was eaten and the dishes cleared away, Lolotte turned with resolute mien to the two little brothers.

"Veveste," she said to the older, "go see if dey got co'n in dat wagon fu feed dem mule'."

"Yes, dey got co'n. Papa done feed 'em, fur I see de co'n-cob in de trough, me."

"Den you goen he'p me hitch dem mule, to de wagon. Jacques, go down de lane an' ax Aunt Minty if she come set wid Nonomme w'ile I go drive dem mule' to de landin'."

Lolotte had evidently determined to undertake her father's work. Nothing could dissuade her; neither the children's astonishment nor Aunt Minty's scathing disapproval. The fat black negress came laboring into the yard just as Lolotte mounted upon the wagon.

"Git down f'om dah, chile! Is you plumb crazy?" she exclaimed.

"No, I ain't crazy; I 'm hungry, Aunt Minty. We all hungry. Somebody got fur work in dis fam'ly."

"Dat ain't no work fur a gal w'at ain't bar' seventeen year ole; drivin' Marse Duplan's mules! W'at I gwine tell yo' pa?"

sentire che conduceva il carro fuori dal cortile. Aspettò a lungo, ma non udì alcun rumore di zoccoli o delle ruote del carro. Preoccupata, si avvicinò alla porta principale e guardò fuori. I grossi muli erano ancora legati nello stesso posto della notte precedente. Anche il carro era lì.

Ebbe un tuffo al cuore. Guardò velocemente lungo le basse travi che sostenevano il tetto dello stretto portico fino a dove la canna da pesca ed il secchio di suo padre erano sempre appesi. Entrambi erano spariti.

“E’ inutile, è inutile,” disse, mentre tornava dentro casa con un’espressione angosciata negli occhi.

Quando la colazione fu consumata e la tavola sparecchiata, Lolotte si voltò con atteggiamento risoluto verso i due fratelli più piccoli.

“Veveste,” disse al più grande, “vai a vedere se nel carro c’è del mais da dare da mangiare ai muli”.

“Sì, c’è del mais. Papà gli ha già dato da mangiare, perchè ho visto i tutoli<sup>83</sup> nella mangiatoia, io”.

“Allora mi darai una mano ad agganciare i muli al carro. Jacques, vai in fondo alla strada e chiedi alla zia Minty se viene a dare un occhio a Nonomme mentre io porto i muli all’approdo”.

Lolotte aveva evidentemente deciso di incaricarsi del lavoro del padre. Niente avrebbe potuto dissuaderla; né lo stupore dei bambini, né l’aspra disapprovazione della zia Minty. L’imponente donna negra<sup>84</sup> si spinse faticosamente nel cortile proprio nel momento in cui Lolotte stava salendo sul carro.

“Scendi da quel carro, bambina! Sei totalmente impazzita?” esclamò.

“No, non sono pazza; sono affamata, zia Minty. Siamo tutti affamati. Qualcuno deve pur lavorare per mantenere questa famiglia”.

“Ma questo non è un lavoro adatto per una ragazza di solamente diciassette anni; portare i muli del padrone<sup>85</sup> Duplan! Che cosa dirò a tuo padre?”

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<sup>83</sup> Tutoli: “corn-cobs”, hard core of ear of maize.

<sup>84</sup> Donna di colore: in the original text, it is written “black negress”; negress means “negro woman”, which is now considered an offense, but that at the time was simply an adjective referring to black women.

<sup>85</sup> Padrone: “Marse”; the black pronunciation of the word “Master”.

"Fu me, you kin tell 'im w'at you want. But you watch Nonomme. I done cook his rice an' set it 'side."

"Don't you bodda," replied Aunt Minty; "I got somepin heah fur my boy. I gwine 'ten' to him."

Lolotte had seen Aunt Minty put something out of sight when she came up, and made her produce it. It was a heavy fowl.

"Sence w'en you start raisin' Brahma chicken', you?" Lolotte asked mistrustfully.

"My, but you is a cu'ious somebody! Ev'ything w'at got fedders on its laigs is Brahma chicken wid you. Dis heah ole hen" -

"All de same, you don't got fur give dat chicken to eat to Nonomme. You don't got fur cook 'im in my house."

Aunt Minty, unheeding, turned to the house with blustering inquiry for her boy, while Lolotte drove away with great clatter.

She knew, notwithstanding her injunction, that the chicken would be cooked and eaten. Maybe she herself would partake of it when she came back, if hunger drove her too sharply.

"Nax' thing I 'm goen be one rogue," she muttered; and the tears gathered and fell one by one upon her cheeks.

"It do look like one Brahma, Aunt Mint," remarked the small and weazened Jacques, as he watched the woman picking the lusty fowl.

"How ole is you?" was her quiet retort.

"I don' know, me."

"Den if you don't know dat much, you betta keep yo' mouf shet, boy."

Then silence fell, but for a monotonous chant which the woman droned as she worked. Jacques opened his lips once more.

“Per quanto mi riguarda, potete dirgli quello che volete. Ma dovete tenermi d’occhio Nonomme. Gli ho cucinato il riso e l’ho messo da parte”.

“Non ti preoccupare,” rispose la zia Minty; “ho qualcosa qui per il mio ragazzo; mi occuperò<sup>86</sup> io di lui.”.

Lolotte aveva visto la zia Minty nascondere qualcosa mentre si stava avvicinando, e glielo fece tirare fuori. Era un grosso pollo.

“Da quando avete iniziato ad allevare polli di Brahma<sup>87</sup>, voi?” chiese Lolotte con diffidenza.

“Dio mio, quanto sei curiosa! Tutto ciò che ha delle piume sulle gambe secondo te è un pollo di Brahma! Questa qui è una vecchia gallina –“

“D’accordo, ma non darete da mangiare quel pollo a Nonomme. Non lo cucinerete in casa mia”.

La zia Minty, indifferente, si voltò verso la casa alla rabbiosa ricerca del suo bambino, mentre Lolotte si allontanava facendo un gran clangore.

Sapeva che, nonostante il suo ordine, quel pollo sarebbe stato cucinato e mangiato. Forse lei stessa ne avrebbe presa una porzione appena tornata a casa, se la fame l’avesse colta troppo impetuosamente.

“La prossima cosa che farò sarà diventare una canaglia,” mormorò; gli occhi le si riempirono di lacrime, che poi caddero ad una ad una sulle guance.

“Sembra proprio un Brahma, zia Mint,” commentò il giovane e scaltro Jacques, mentre osservava la donna prendere l’ottimo pollo.

“Quanti anni hai?” rispose lei, piccata.

“Non lo so, io”.

“Beh, se non sai neanche questo, è meglio se tieni la bocca chiusa, ragazzo”.

Poi calò il silenzio, rotto solo dalla monotona canzoncina che la donna mormorava mentre lavorava. Jacques aprì di nuovo la bocca.

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<sup>86</sup> Occuperò: “ten’ to”; African American pronunciation of “attend to”.

<sup>87</sup> Polli di Brahma: breed of enormous Asian chicken coming from the Indian district of Brahma.

"It do look like one o' Ma'me Duplan' Brahma, Aunt Mint."

"Yonda, whar I come f'om, befo' de wah" -

"Ole Kaintuck, Aunt Mint?"

"Ole Kaintuck."

"Dat ain't one country like dis yere, Aunt Mint?"

"You mighty right, chile, dat ain't no sech kentry as dis heah. Yonda, in Kaintuck, w'en boys says de word 'Brahma chicken,' we takes an' gags 'em, an' ties dar han's behines 'em, an' fo'ces 'em ter stan' up watchin' folks settin' down eatin' chicken soup."

Jacques passed the back of his hand across his mouth; but lest the act should not place sufficient seal upon it, he prudently stole away to go and sit beside Nonomme, and wait there as patiently as he could the coming feast. And what a treat it was!

The luscious soup, - a great pot of it, - golden yellow, thickened with the flaky rice that Lolotte had set carefully on the shelf. Each mouthful of it seemed to carry fresh blood into the veins and a new brightness into the eyes of the hungry children who ate of it.

And that was not all. The day brought abundance with it. Their father came home with glistening perch and trout that Aunt Minty broiled deliciously over glowing embers, and basted with the rich chicken fat.

"You see," explained old Sylveste, "w'en I git up to 's mo'nin' an' see it was cloudy, I say to me, 'Sylveste, w'en you go wid dat cotton, rememba you got no tarpaulin. Maybe it rain, an' de cotton was spoil. Betta you go yonda to Lafirme Lake, w'ere de trout was bitin' fas'er 'an mosquito, an' so you git a good mess fur de chil'en.' Lolotte - w'at she goen do yonda? You ought stop Lolotte, Aunt Minty, w'en you see w'at she was want to do."

"Didn' I try to stop 'er? Didn' I ax 'er, 'W'at I gwine tell yo' pa?' An' she 'low,

“Sembra proprio uno dei Brahma di *Madame*<sup>88</sup> Duplan, zia Mint”.

“Laggiù, da dove vengo io, prima della guerra” –

“Il vecchio Kentucky, zia Mint?”

“Il vecchio Kentucky”.

“Non c’è un posto come quello qui, zia Mint?”

“Hai proprio ragione, ragazzo, non c’è un posto come quello qui. Laggiù, in Kentucky, quando i bambini dicono la parola “pollo di Brahma”, li prendiamo e li imbavagliamo, e leghiamo loro le mani dietro la schiena, e li obblighiamo a stare in piedi a guardare gli altri sedersi a mangiare la zuppa di pollo”.

Jacques si passò il dorso della mano sulla bocca; ma, per paura che il gesto non costituisse un sigillo sufficiente, sgattaiolò via prudentemente e si sedette vicino a Nonomme, ed aspettò più pazientemente che poté l’imminente banchetto. E che premio avrebbe avuto!

Una zuppa succulenta, - un pentolone bello pieno -, giallo dorata, resa più densa dal soffice riso che Lolotte aveva preparato con cura sullo scaffale. Ogni boccone di zuppa sembrava portare ai bambini affamati che la mangiavano nuova linfa nelle vene e nuova vitalità negli occhi.

E non era tutto. Il giorno aveva portato con sè abbondanza. Il padre tornò a casa con un pesce persico ed una trota, scintillanti alla luce del sole, che la zia Minty grigliò deliziosamente sui tizzoni ardenti, e che irrorò con il grasso gustoso del pollo.

“Vedete,” spiegò il vecchio Sylveste, “quando stamattina mi sono svegliato ed ho visto che era nuvoloso, mi sono detto, “Sylveste, quando te ne vai a portare il cotone, ricordati che non hai nessun telone. Potrebbe piovere, ed il cotone si rovinerebbe. Meglio se vai giù al lago di Lafirme, dove le trote abboccano più velocemente di quanto ti pungano le zanzare, e così puoi prendere del buon cibo da portare ai bambini. Lolotte – che cosa farà laggiù? Dovevate fermare Lolotte, zia Minty, quando avete capito che cosa voleva fare”.

“E non ho forse cercato di fermarla? Non le ho chiesto “Cosa dirò a tuo padre?” E lei ciao<sup>89</sup>,

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<sup>88</sup> *Madame*: from French, it means “Mrs”.

<sup>89</sup> ‘low: the oral contracted pronunciation of “Hello”.

'Tell 'im to go hang hisse'f, de trifling ole rascalion! I 's de one w'at 's runnin' dis heah fambly!'"

"Dat don' soun' like Lolotte, Aunt Minty; you mus' yaird 'er crooked; *hein*, Nonomme?"

The quizzical look in his good-natured features was irresistible. Nonomme fairly shook with merriment.

"My head feel so good," he declared. "I wish Lolotte would come, so I could tole 'er." And he turned in his bed to look down the long, dusty lane, with the hope of seeing her appear as he had watched her go, sitting on one of the cotton bales and guiding the mules.

But no one came all through the hot morning. Only at noon a broad-shouldered young negro appeared in view riding through the dust. When he had dismounted at the cabin door, he stood leaning a shoulder lazily against the jamb.

"Well, heah you is," he grumbled, addressing Sylveste with no mark of respect. "Heah you is, settin' down like comp'ny, an' Marse Joe yonda sont me see if you was dead."

"Joe Duplan boun' to have his joke, him," said Sylveste, smiling uneasily.

"Maybe it look like a joke to you, but 't aint no joke to him, man, to have one o' his wagons smoshed to kindlin', an' his bes' team tearin' t'rough de country. You don't want to let 'im lay han's on you, joke o' no joke."

"*Malédiction !*" howled Sylveste, as he staggered to his feet. He stood for one instant irresolute; then he lurched past the man and ran wildly down the lane. He might have taken the horse that was there, but he went tottering on afoot, a frightened look in his eyes, as if his soul gazed upon an inward picture that was horrible.

The road to the landing was little used. As Sylveste went he could readily trace the marks of Lolotte's wagon-wheels. For some distance they went straight along the road. Then they made a track as if a madman had directed their course, over stump and hillock, tearing the bushes and barking the trees on either side.

“Ditegli di impiccarsi, vecchio inutile mascalzone! Sono io quella che manda avanti questa famiglia!”.

“Non mi sembra proprio una frase di Lolotte, zia Minty, dovete aver capito male; *hein*, Nonomme?”

Lo sguardo interrogativo sui suoi lineamenti gentili era irresistibile. Nonomme si mosse tutto dalla gioia.

“La mia testa sta così bene,” disse poi, “vorrei che Lolotte arrivasse, così glielo potrei dire”. E si girò nel letto per guardare giù per la lunga strada polverosa, con la speranza di vederla apparire come l’aveva vista andar via, seduta su una delle balle di cotone e portando i muli.

Ma per tutta la calda mattinata non arrivò nessuno. Solo a mezzogiorno un giovane negro dalle spalle larghe apparve alla vista, cavalcando nella polvere. Quando scese davanti alla porta della casa, appoggiò pigramente una spalla contro lo stipite.

“Beh, eccoti qui,” borbottò, rivolgendosi a Sylveste senza alcun segno di rispetto. “Eccoti qui, seduto in compagnia, ed il padrone Joe mi ha mandato qui a vedere se eri morto”.

“Joe Duplan avrà ragione della sua battuta, lui” disse Sylveste, sorridendo a disagio.

“Forse ti sembra una battuta, ma non è uno scherzo per lui, amico, avere uno dei suoi carri distrutti da un incendio, e la sua miglior coppia di muli imbizzarrita per la campagna. Non vorrai mica lasciargli metterti le mani addosso, scherzo o no”.

“*Malédiction*<sup>90</sup>!” gemette Sylveste, alzandosi in piedi vacillando. Rimase per un attimo indeciso; poi superò barcollando l’uomo ed iniziò a correre all’impazzata giù per il viottolo. Avrebbe potuto prendere il cavallo che era lì, ma continuò ad andare avanti a piedi traballando, con uno sguardo spaventato negli occhi, come se la sua anima avesse fissa nella mente un’immagine orribile.

La strada che portava all’approdo era poco frequentata. Camminando, Sylveste poteva facilmente scorgere le tracce lasciate dalle ruote del carro di Lolotte. Per un pezzo procedevano diritte lungo la strada. Poi le tracce divagavano, come se un pazzo ne avesse diretto il loro corso, sopra radici e collinette, strappando i cespugli e divellendo gli alberi su entrambi i lati.

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<sup>90</sup> *Malédiction*: Maledizione.

At each new turn Sylveste expected to find Lolotte stretched senseless upon the ground, but there was never a sign of her.

At last he reached the landing, which was a dreary spot, slanting down to the river and partly cleared to afford room for what desultory freight might be left there from time to time. There were the wagon-tracks, clean down to the river's edge and partly in the water, where they made a sharp and senseless turn. But Sylveste found no trace of his girl.

"Lolotte!" the old man cried out into the stillness. "Lolotte, *ma fille*, Lolotte!" But no answer came; no sound but the echo of his own voice, and the soft splash of the red water that lapped his feet.

He looked down at it, sick with anguish and apprehension.

Lolotte had disappeared as completely as if the earth had opened and swallowed her. After a few days it became the common belief that the girl had been drowned. It was thought that she must have been hurled from the wagon into the water during the sharp turn that the wheel-tracks indicated, and carried away by the rapid current.

During the days of search, old Sylveste's excitement kept him up. When it was over, an apathetic despair seemed to settle upon him.

Madame Duplan, moved by sympathy, had taken the little four-year-old Nonomme to the plantation Les Chêniers, where the child was awed by the beauty and comfort of things that surrounded him there. He thought always that Lolotte would come back, and watched for her every day; for they did not tell him the sad tidings of her loss.

The other two boys were placed in the temporary care of Aunt Minty; and old Sylveste roamed like a persecuted being through the country. He who had been a type of indolent content and repose had changed to a restless spirit.

When he thought to eat, it was in some humble negro cabin that he stopped to ask for food, which was never denied him. His grief had clothed him with a dignity that imposed respect.

Ad ogni nuova svolta, Sylveste si aspettava di trovare Lolotte a terra svenuta, ma non trovò alcun segno della ragazza.

Alla fine raggiunse l'approdo, che era un posto terribile, inclinato verso il fiume e solo parzialmente ripulito per far spazio alle sporadiche merci che di tanto in tanto venivano lasciate lì. C'erano tracce del carro, chiare fino al bordo del fiume ed in parte nell'acqua, dove svoltavano bruscamente, senza alcun motivo. Ma Sylveste non trovò traccia della sua ragazza.

“Lolotte!”, gridò il vecchio, nel silenzio. “Lolotte, *ma fille*<sup>91</sup>, Lolotte!”. Ma non arrivò nessuna risposta; nessun suono, tranne l'eco della sua voce, ed il tenue mormorio dell'acqua rossa che gli lambiva i piedi.

Guardò in giù verso di essa, colpito da ansia e da preoccupazione.

Lolotte era sparita così totalmente che era come se la terra si fosse aperta e l'avesse inghiottita. Dopo pochi giorni il pensiero comune era che fosse annegata. Si pensava che fosse stata scagliata dal carro nell'acqua durante la brusca svolta indicata dalle tracce delle ruote, e portata via dalla rapida corrente.

Durante i giorni di ricerca, l'agitazione tenne sempre sveglio il vecchio Sylveste. Quando si calmò, una disperazione apatica sembrò scendere su di lui.

*Madame Duplan*, mossa dalla compassione, aveva portato il piccolo Nonomme, di quattro anni, alla piantagione Les Chêniers, dove il bambino rimase sbalordito dalla bellezza e dalle comodità delle cose che lo circondavano. Pensava sempre che Lolotte sarebbe tornata, ed ogni giorno si aspettava che arrivasse; perchè nessuno gli aveva dato la triste notizia<sup>92</sup> della sua perdita.

Gli altri due ragazzi furono temporaneamente affidati alle cure della zia Minty; ed il vecchio Sylveste vagava per la campagna come un essere perseguitato. Lui, che era stato un tipo dalla natura pigra e votato alla tranquillità, si era trasformato in uno spirito irrequieto.

Quando pensò di mangiare, fu in una qualche umile catapecchia di un negro dove si era fermato a chiedere del cibo, che non gli veniva mai negato. Il suo dolore lo aveva rivestito di una dignità che imponeva rispetto.

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<sup>91</sup> *Ma fille*: Figlia mia.

<sup>92</sup> Notizia: “tidings”; dated word used to say “news”.

One morning very early he appeared before the planter with a disheveled and hunted look.

"M'sieur Duplan," he said, holding his hat in his hand and looking away into vacancy, "I been try ev'thing. I been try settin' down still on de sto' gall'ry. I been walk, I been run; 't ain' no use. Dey got al'ays some'in' w'at push me. I go fishin', an' it 's some'in' w'at push me worsen 'an ever. By gracious! M'sieur Duplan, gi' me some work!"

The planter gave him at once a plow in hand, and no plow on the whole plantation dug so deep as that one, nor so fast. Sylveste was the first in the field, as he was the last one there. From dawn to nightfall he worked, and after, till his limbs refused to do his bidding.

People came to wonder, and the negroes began to whisper hints of demoniacal possession.

When Mr. Duplan gave careful thought to the subject of Lolotte's mysterious disappearance, an idea came to him. But so fearful was he to arouse false hopes in the breasts of those who grieved for the girl that to no one did he impart his suspicions save to his wife. It was on the eve of a business trip to New Orleans that he told her what he thought, or what he hoped rather.

Upon his return, which happened not many days later, he went out to where old Sylveste was toiling in the field with frenzied energy.

"Sylveste," said the planter, quietly, when he had stood a moment watching the man at work, "have you given up all hope of hearing from your daughter?"

"I don' know, me; I don' know. Le' me work, M'sieur Duplan."

"For my part, I believe the child is alive."

"You b'lieve dat, you?" His rugged face was pitiful in its imploring lines.

Una mattina, molto presto, apparve davanti al proprietario della piantagione<sup>93</sup> con un aspetto trasandato e spaventato.

“*M’sieur Duplan*,” disse, tenendo il cappello in mano e guardando lontano, nel vuoto, “ho provato di tutto. Ho provato a sedermi tranquillo sotto il porticato del negozio. Ho camminato, ho corso; non mi è servito a niente. C’era sempre qualcosa che mi turbava. Sono andato a pescare, e c’era qualcosa che mi turbava peggio che mai. Per l’amor di Dio! *M’sieur Duplan*, datemi un lavoro!”

Il proprietario della piantagione gli diede subito un aratro in mano, e nessun altro aratro nell’intera piantagione scavò così in profondità come quello, nè così velocemente. Sylveste era sempre il primo ad arrivare nel campo, e l’ultimo ad andare via. Lavorava dall’alba al calar della sera, ed anche oltre, finchè le sue membra non si rifiutavano di obbedire ai suoi ordini.

La gente iniziò a porsi domande, ed i negri iniziarono a sussurrare che c’erano indizi di possessione demoniaca.

Quando il signor Duplan riflettè attentamente sull’argomento della misteriosa scomparsa di Lolotte, gli venne un’idea. Ma era così spaventato all’idea di suscitare false speranze nel petto di chi tanto aveva sofferto per la ragazza che non confidò a nessuno i suoi sospetti, se non a sua moglie. Fu alla vigilia di un viaggio di lavoro a New Orleans che confidò alla moglie cosa aveva pensato, o meglio, in cosa sperava.

Al suo ritorno, che avvenne non molti giorni dopo, si recò fuori dove il vecchio Sylveste stava lavorando duramente il campo con energia furiosa.

“Sylveste,” disse piano il proprietario della piantagione, quando si fermò un momento a guardare l’uomo al lavoro, “avete rinunciato ad ogni speranza di avere notizie di vostra figlia?”

“Non lo so, io; non lo so. Lasciatemi lavorare, *M’sieur Duplan*”.

“Per quanto mi riguarda, credo che la ragazza sia viva”.

“Pensate questo, voi?” I suoi lineamenti marcati muovevano a compassione, con i loro tratti imploranti.

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<sup>93</sup> Proprietario della piantagione: “planter”; owner of the plantation.

"I know it," Mr. Duplan muttered, as calmly as he could. "Hold up! Steady yourself, man! Come; come with me to the house. There is some one there who knows it, too; some one who has seen her."

The room into which the planter led the old man was big, cool, beautiful, and sweet with the delicate odor of flowers. It was shady, too, for the shutters were half closed; but not so darkened but Sylveste could at once see Lolotte, seated in a big wicker chair.

She was almost as white as the gown she wore. Her neatly shod feet rested upon a cushion, and her black hair, that had been closely cut, was beginning to make little rings about her temples.

"Aie!" he cried sharply, at sight of her, grasping his seamed throat as he did so. Then he laughed like a madman, and then he sobbed.

He only sobbed, kneeling upon the floor beside her, kissing her knees and her hands, that sought his. Little Nonomme was close to her, with a health flush creeping into his cheek. Veveste and Jacques were there, and rather awed by the mystery and grandeur of everything.

"W'ere'bouts you find her, M'sieur Duplan?" Sylveste asked, when the first flush of his joy had spent itself, and he was wiping his eyes with his rough cotton shirt sleeve.

"M'sieur Duplan find me 'way yonda to de city, papa, in de hospital," spoke Lolotte, before the planter could steady his voice to reply. "I did n' know who ev'ybody was, me. I did n' know me, myse'f, tell I tu'n roun' one day an' see M'sieur Duplan, w'at stan'en dere."

"You was boun' to know M'sieur Duplan, Lolotte," laughed Sylveste, like a child.

"Yes, an' I know right 'way how dem mule was git frighten' w'en de boat w'istle fu stop, an' pitch me plumb on de groun'. An' I rememba it was one mulûtresse w'at call herse'f one chembamed, all de time aside me."

"You must not talk too much, Lolotte," interposed Madame Duplan, coming to place her

“Lo so,” mormorò il signor Duplan, il più piano possibile. “Tenete duro; fermatevi, amico! Venite; venite con me a casa. C’è qualcun altro lì che lo sa; qualcuno che l’ha vista”.

La stanza in cui il proprietario della piantagione condusse il vecchio era grande, fresca, bella e profumava delicatamente di fiori. Era anche buia, perchè le imposte erano semichiusa; ma non così buia da non permettere a Sylveste di vedere immediatamente Lolotte, seduta su una grande sedia di vimini.

Era bianca come il camice che indossava. I suoi piedi ben coperti erano poggiati su un cuscino, ed i suoi capelli neri, che erano stati tagliati minuziosamente, iniziavano a disegnare piccoli boccoli attorno alle tempie.

“Sì<sup>94</sup>!” gridò d’un tratto, vedendola, stringendosi la gola rugosa mentre lo faceva. Poi si mise a ridere come un pazzo, e poi iniziò a piangere.

Piangeva e basta, inginocchiato sul pavimento accanto a lei, baciandole le ginocchia e le mani. Il piccolo Nonomme era vicino a lei, con un colorito salutare che gli serpeggiava sulla guancia. Veveste e Jacques erano lì, e piuttosto sbalorditi dal mistero e dallo splendore di tutto.

“Dove l’avete trovata, *M’sieur Duplan*?” chiese Sylveste, quando per la prima volta si asciugò gli occhi con la manica della sua ruvida camicia di cotone.

“*M’sieur Duplan* mi ha trovata laggiù in città, *papa*, lontano, all’ospedale,” disse Lolotte, prima che il proprietario della piantagione riuscisse a controllare la voce per rispondere. “Non sapevo chi fosse nessuna di quelle persone, io. Non lo sapevo, io, che un giorno mi sarei girata ed avrei visto *M’sieur Duplan* lì in piedi”.

“Era destino che tu conoscessi *M’sieur Duplan*, Lolotte,” rise beatamente Sylveste.

“Sì, ed ho capito subito che i muli si stavano spaventando quando la barca ha fischiato per attraccare, e mi hanno completamente scagliata a terra. E mi ricordo che accanto a me, per tutto il tempo, c’era una *mulâtresse*<sup>95</sup>, che diceva di essere una cameriera<sup>96</sup>”.

“Non dovete parlare troppo, Lolotte,” intervenne *Madame Duplan*, avvicinandosi per poggiare la

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<sup>94</sup> Sì: “aye”; English word to say “yes”.

<sup>95</sup> *Mulâtresse*: Donna mulatta.

<sup>96</sup> Cameriera: “chembamed”; Lolotte’s pronunciation of the word “chambermaid”.

hand with gentle solicitude upon the girl's forehead, and to feel how her pulse beat.

Then to save the child further effort of speech, she herself related how the boat had stopped at this lonely landing to take on a load of cotton-seed. Lolotte had been found stretched insensible by the river, fallen apparently from the clouds, and had been taken on board.

The boat had changed its course into other waters after that trip, and had not returned to Duplan's Landing. Those who had tended Lolotte and left her at the hospital supposed, no doubt, that she would make known her identity in time, and they had troubled themselves no further about her.

"An' dah you is!" almost shouted aunt Minty, whose black face gleamed in the doorway; "dah you is, settin' down, lookin' jis' like w'ite folks!"

"Ain't I always was w'ite folks, Aunt Mint?" smiled Lolotte, feebly.

"G'long, chile. You knows me. I don' mean no harm."

"And now, Sylveste," said Mr. Duplan, as he rose and started to walk the floor, with hands in his pockets, "listen to me. It will be a long time before Lolotte is strong again. Aunt Minty is going to look after things for you till the child is fully recovered. But what I want to say is this: I shall trust these children into your hands once more, and I want you never to forget again that you are their father - do you hear? - that you are a man!"

Old Sylveste stood with his hand in Lolotte's, who rubbed it lovingly against her cheek.

"By gracious! M'sieur Duplan," he answered, "w'en God want to he'p me, I 'm goen try my bes'!"

mano con delicata premura sulla fronte della ragazza, e per sentirle il battito cardiaco.

Poi, per salvare la ragazza dall'ulteriore sforzo di parlare, lei stessa riferì di come la barca si fosse fermata a quell'approdo solitario per prendere un carico di semi di cotone. Lolotte era stata trovata priva di coscienza vicino al fiume, caduta apparentemente dal cielo, ed era stata tirata su a bordo.

La barca aveva cambiato rotta verso altre acque dopo quel viaggio, e non era tornata all'approdo di Duplan. Coloro che si erano presi cura di Lolotte e che l'avevano lasciata all'ospedale presumevano che avrebbe senza dubbio fatto conoscere la sua identità in tempo, e non si erano più preoccupati di lei.

“Ed ora eccoti qua!” quasi urlò la zia Minty, il cui viso nero faceva capolino dalla soglia; “ed eccoti qui, bella sistemata, proprio come i bianchi!”

“Ma non sono sempre stata una bianca, zia Minty?” disse sorridendo debolmente Lolotte.

“E' vero<sup>97</sup>, piccola. Mi conosci. Non volevo offendere”.

“Ed ora, Sylveste,” disse il signor Duplan, mentre si alzava ed iniziava a camminare per la stanza, con le mani in tasca; “ascoltatevi; passerà ancora molto tempo prima che Lolotte sia di nuovo in forze. La zia Minty si occuperà di alcune cose per te finchè la ragazza non si sarà completamente ristabilita. Ma quello che vorrei dire è questo: mi fiderò a ridarvi la custodia dei vostri figli ancora una volta, e voglio che non vi dimentichiate mai più di essere il loro padre – mi avete sentito? -, di essere un uomo!”

Il vecchio Sylveste rimase con le mani posate su quelle di Lolotte, che se le strofinava amorevolmente sulla guancia.

“Per l'amor di Dio! *M'sieur* Duplan,” rispose, “quando Dio mi vorrà aiutare, farò del mio meglio!”

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<sup>97</sup> E' vero: “g'long”; it means “go along”, in the sense of “to agree or willing to accept something”.

**“The Praline Woman”, 1897**

**Alice Dunbar-Nelson**

The praline woman sits by the side of the Archbishop's quaint little old chapel on Royal Street,  
and slowly waves her latanier fan over the pink and brown wares.

"Pralines, pralines. Ah, ma'amzelle, you buy? S'il vous plait, ma'amzelle, ces pralines, dey be fine,  
ver' fresh.

"Mais non, maman, you are not sure?

"Sho', chile, ma bebe, ma petite, she put dese up hissef. He's hans' so small, ma'amzelle, lak you's,  
mais brune. She put dese up dis morn'. You tak' none? No husban' fo' you den!

"Ah, ma petite, you tak"? Cinq sous, bebe, may le bon Dieu keep you good!

## “La venditrice di praline”, 1897

Alice Dunbar-Nelson

La venditrice di praline si siede a lato della piccola, vecchia e pittoresca cappella dell’Arcivescovo<sup>98</sup> in Royal Street, e fa lentamente aria con il suo ventaglio di latania<sup>99</sup> alla sua mercanzia marrone e rosa.

“Praline! Praline!<sup>100</sup> Ah, *ma’amzelle*<sup>101</sup>, ne comprate? *S’il vous plait*<sup>102</sup>, *ma’amzelle*, queste praline sono buone, molto fresche.”

“*Mais non, maman*<sup>103</sup>, ne siete sicura?”

“Sicuro, cara, la mia bambina, la mia *petite*<sup>104</sup>, le ha fatte lei da sola. Le sue mani sono così piccole, *ma’amzelle*, come le vostre, *mais brune*<sup>105</sup>. Le ha fatte lei questa mattina. Non ne prendete nessuna? Beh, allora non troverete mai marito!”

“Ah, la mia *petite*, le prende? *Cinq sous*<sup>106</sup>, bambina, che *le bon Dieu*<sup>107</sup> vi protegga!”

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<sup>98</sup> Cappella dell’Arcivescovo: now it does not exist anymore.

<sup>99</sup> Latania: any type of fan palms typical of the Southern US and of the Caribbean islands.

<sup>100</sup> Praline: this places immediately the woman in the African American context, as in antebellum New Orleans praline candies (intensely sweet disks of sugar, butter and pecans) were usually sold by African American women in the streets of the French Quarter. We can find a similar description of a peddler in Charles W. Chesnutt’s novel “Paul Marchand: FMC”, set in the same New Orleans context:

“ One day in the spring of 1821, about ten o’clock in the morning, an old colored woman entered the *vieux carre*, or old square, with a large basket upon her head, and took up her stand in front of the porch of the *Cabildo*, or *Hotel de Ville*, or City Hall, as it was successively called under the various regimes, the beautiful old Spanish building which still faces the *Place d’Armes*, now Jackson Square. She placed her basket on the pavement, removed the clean white cotton cloth which covered it, and disposed for exhibition the contents, consisting of *pralines*, or little crisp sweet cakes, a popular Creole delicacy. She then pulled out from behind one of the columns of the porch a three-legged wooden stool, hers by right of property or prescription, and took her seat upon it by the basket.

<sup>101</sup> *Ma’amzelle*: this is how the black woman pronounces the French word *Madmoseille*, “Signorina”.

<sup>102</sup> *S’il vous plait*: Per favore.

<sup>103</sup> *Mais non, maman*: Ma no, madre.

<sup>104</sup> *Petite*: Piccola.

<sup>105</sup> *Mais brune*: Ma scure.

<sup>106</sup> *Cinq sous*: Cinque centesimi.

<sup>107</sup> *Le bon Dieu*: Il buon Dio.

"Mais oui, madame, I know you etranger. You don' look lak dese New Orleans peop'. You lak' dose Yankee dat come down 'fo' de war."

Ding-dong, ding-dong, ding-dong, chimes the Cathedral bell across Jackson Square, and the praline woman crosses herself.

"Hail, Mary, full of grace—

"Pralines, madame? You buy lak' dat? Dix sous, madame, an' one lil' piece fo' lagniappe fo' madame's lil' bebe. Ah, c'est bon!

"Pralines, pralines, so fresh, so fine! M'sieu would lak' some fo' he's lil' gal' at home? Mais non, what's dat you say? She's daid! Ah, m'sieu, 'tis my lil' gal what died long year ago. Misere, misere!

"Here come dat lazy Indien squaw. What she good fo', anyhow? She jes' sit lak dat in de French Market an' sell her file, an' sleep, sleep, sleep, lak' so in he's blanket. Hey, dere, you, Tonita, how goes you' beezness?

"Pralines, pralines! Holy Father, you give me dat blessin' sho'? Tak' one, I know you lak dat w'ite one. It tas' good, I know, bien.

“*Mais oui, madame*<sup>108</sup>, lo so che siete *etranger*<sup>109</sup>. Non mi avete l’aspetto di queste questa gente qui di New Orleans. Sembrate una di quelli Yankee<sup>110</sup> che sono venuti quaggiù prima della guerra.”

Ding-dong, ding-dong, ding-dong, suona la campana della Cattedrale<sup>111</sup> attraverso Jackson Square, e la venditrice di praline si fa il segno della croce.

“Ave Maria, piena di grazia-“

“Praline, *madame*? Ne comprate così<sup>112</sup>? *Dix sous*<sup>113</sup>, *madame*, ed una più piccola in regalo<sup>114</sup> per il bambino della *madame*. Ah, *c’est bon*<sup>115</sup>!”

“Praline, praline, così fresche, così buone! *M’sieu*<sup>116</sup>, ne volete un pò per la vostra ragazzina a casa? *Mais non*, cosa dite? È morta! Ah, *m’sieu*, è la mia ragazzina che è morta tanti anni fa. *Misere, misere*<sup>117</sup>!”

“Ecco che arriva quella pigra di una *squaw* indiana. Ma cosa è buona a fare quella? Si siede solo in quel modo al mercato francese e vende la sua polvere di sassofrasso<sup>118</sup>, e dorme, dorme dorme, come se fosse tra le sue coperte! Ehi, eccoti, Tonita, come stanno andando i tuoi affari?

“Praline, praline! Santo Padre, mi avete dato una benedizione, vero? Prendetene una, so che vi piace quella bianca. È buona, lo so, *bien*.”

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<sup>108</sup> *Mais oui, madame*: Ma sì, signora.

<sup>109</sup> *Etranger*: Straniera.

<sup>110</sup> Yankee: an inhabitant of New England or one of the northern states.

<sup>111</sup> Cattedrale: The Cathedral-Basilica of St. Louis King of France is the oldest Catholic cathedral in continual use in the United States.

<sup>112</sup> Così: in this amount.

<sup>113</sup> *Dix sous*: Dieci centesimi.

<sup>114</sup> In regalo: “Lagniappe” is the Creole American grocers’ habit of giving something sweet, like sugar or candies, to customers every time they buy something.

<sup>115</sup> *C’est bon*: Va bene.

<sup>116</sup> *M’sieu*: the woman pronunciation of the French word *Monsieur*, “signora”.

<sup>117</sup> *Misere, misere*!: from French, in English can be translated as “Lord have mercy!”; in Italian we have a similar expression, “Misericordia” coming from the union of two Latin words, “miserere” (mercy) and “cor” (heart), which could be translated as “mercy in your heart”, but here I thought it would be better to keep the French.

<sup>118</sup> Polvere di sassofrasso: element typical of the Louisiana cousine, it is powdered sassafras, the base for the “Gumbo”, the state official soup.

"Pralines, madame? I lak' you' face. What fo' you wear black? You' lil' boy daid? You tak' one, jes' see how it tas'. I had one lil' boy once, he jes' grow 'twell he's big lak' dis, den one day he tak' sick an' die. Oh, madame, it mos' brek my po' heart. I burn candle in St. Rocque, I say my beads, I sprinkle holy water roun' he's bed; he jes' lay so, he's eyes turn up, he say 'Maman, maman,' den he die! Madame, you tak' one. Non, non, no l'argent, you tak' one fo' my lil' boy's sake.

"Pralines, pralines, m'sieu? Who mak' dese? My lil' gal, Didele, of co'se. Non, non, I don't mak' no mo'. Po' Tante Marie get too ol'. Didele? She's one lil' gal I 'dopt. I see her one day in de strit. He walk so; hit col' she shiver, an' I say, 'Where you gone, lil' gal?' and he can't tell. He jes' crip close to me, an' cry so! Den I tak' her home wid me, and she say he's name Didele. You see dey wa'nt nobody dere. My lil' gal, she's daid of de yellow fever; my lil' boy, he's daid, po' Tante Marie all alone. Didele, she grow fine, she keep house an' mek' pralines. Den, when night come, she sit wid he's guitar an' sing,

Tu l'aime ces trois jours, Tu l'aime ces trois jours,

Ma Coeur a toi, Ma Coeur a toi,

Tu l'aime ces trois jours!"

"Ah, he's fine gal, is Didele!

“Praline, *madame*? Mi piace il vostro viso. Perché siete vestita di nero? Il vostro bambino è morto? Prendetene una, solo per sentire che gusto ha. Avevo un bambino una volta, era cresciuto tanto così, ma poi un giorno si è ammalato ed è morto. Ah, *madame*, ha quasi spezzato il mio povero cuore. Ho acceso una candela a San Rocco<sup>119</sup>, ho detto il rosario, ho sparso acqua santa attorno al suo letto; stava proprio disteso così, con gli occhi aperti a fissare il soffitto, poi ha detto “*Maman, maman,*” ed è morto! *Madame*, prendetene una. *Non, non*<sup>120</sup>, niente *argent*<sup>121</sup>, prendetene una per amore del mio bambino.”

“Praline, praline, *m’sieu*? Chi le ha fatte? La mia ragazzina, Didele, ovviamente. *Non, non*, io non ne faccio più. La povera *Tante*<sup>122</sup> Marie è diventata troppo vecchia. Didele? È una ragazza che ho adottato. L’ho vista un giorno per strada. Camminava così: ogni volta che il freddo la colpiva, rabbriviva, così le ho detto “Dove sei stata, ragazza?” e lei non me lo poteva dire. E poi si è messa a zoppicare vicino a me, ed è scoppiata a piangere! Così l’ho portata a casa con me, e ha detto che si chiamava Didele. Sapete, non volevano nessuno là. La mia ragazzina era morta di febbre gialla; il mio ragazzino, anche lui morto, e la povera *Tante* Marie era tutta sola. Didele è cresciuta bene, fa le faccende di casa e le praline. E poi, quando arriva la sera, si siede con la sua chitarra e canta,

*“Tu l’aime ces trois jours, Tu l’aime ces trois jours,*

*Ma Coeur a toi, Ma Coeur a toi,*

*Tu l’aime ces trois jours!*<sup>123</sup>”

“Ah Didele, che brava ragazza!”

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<sup>119</sup> San Rocco: a small chapel in the city of New Orleans connected with Catholic and Voodoo practices.

<sup>120</sup> *Non, non*: No, no.

<sup>121</sup> *Argent*: Soldi.

<sup>122</sup> *Tante*: in Italian it can be translated as “zia”, and in English “aunt”; I found very interesting that the word “aunt” will consequently become in the text the offensive “auntie” of the Irishman, which gives an idea of complete separation of the two words; I guess it is the same of the word “nigger”: if it is someone from inside the black community that says it, it is not considered offensive, while from a person outside the community it certainly is.

<sup>123</sup> *Tu l’aime ces trois jours, Tu l’aime ces trois jours, Ma Coeur a toi, Ma Coeur a toi, Tu l’aime ces trois jours!*”: as I said in the note before, for some words I decided to keep French. The song is one of them, as translated it loses its sense. In English would be translated as: “You love him those three days, You love him those three days, My heart is for you, My heart is for you, You love him those three days!”; in Italian as “Lo ami in questi tre giorni, Lo ami in questi tre giotni, Il mio cuore è per te, Il mio cuore è per te, Lo ami in questi tre giorni!”.

"Pralines, pralines! Dat lil' cloud, h'it look lak' rain, I hope no."

"Here come dat lazy I'ishman down de strit. I don't lak' I'ishman, me, non, dey so funny. One day one I'ishman, he say to me, 'Auntie, what fo' you talk so?' and I jes' say back, 'What fo' you say "Faith an' be jabers"?' Non, I don' lak I'ishman, me!

"Here come de rain! Now I got fo' to go. Didele, she be wait fo' me. Down h'it come! H'it fall in de Meesseesip, an' fill up—up—so, clean to de levee, den we have big crivasse, an' po' Tante Marie float away. Bon jour, madame, you come again? Pralines! Pralines!"

“Praline, praline! Quella nuvoletta, sembra che porti la pioggia, spero proprio di no.”

“Ecco che arriva per la strada quel pigrone di un’irlandese. Non mi piacciono gli irlandesi, a me, *non*, sono strani. Un giorno un Irlandese mi ha detto “Zietta<sup>124</sup>, perchè parli così?” ed io gli ho risposto “E perchè allora tu dici ‘Per Dio e per Gesù Cristo<sup>125</sup>?’ No, non mi piacciono proprio, a me!

“Ecco che arriva la pioggia! Adesso devo andare. Didele, lei mi starà aspettando. Come viene giù! Cadrà nel Mississippi, e lo riempirà, sù-sù giusto fino a raggiungere l’argine, che poi si creperà<sup>126</sup>, e la povera *Tante Marie* sarà trascinata via dalla corrente. *Bon jour*<sup>127</sup>, *madame*, siete di nuovo qui? Praline, praline!”

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<sup>124</sup> Zietta: quite hard to translate the word “auntie”, as it is an offensive way of referring to African American women. White Americans usually address African American people using words generally used to refer to relatives and acquaintances only when they want to be offensive – e.g in the case of “mammy”, or for example “boy” when referring to adult African American men. The same here with “auntie”, but in Italian I translated it simply as “auntie”, with any pejorative sense.

<sup>125</sup> Per Dio e per Gesù Cristo: “Faith” and “Bejabbers” are two swear words originally from the Irish; “Be Jabers” stands for “By Jesus”. The two expressions usually go together, and the second is sometimes replaced by “Begorrah”, which is another way to say “By Jesus”.

<sup>126</sup> Creperà: from the English word “crevasse” coming from the French word “crevace”, which here is pronounced “crivasse” by the black woman.

<sup>127</sup> *Bon jour*: from French, it means “Good morning”.

## Conclusion

“Translation is not a matter of words only: it is a matter of making intelligible a whole culture.”

Anthony Burgess

“In its happiest efforts, translation is but approximation, and its efforts are not often happy. A translation may be good as translation, but it cannot be an adequate reproduction of the original.”

George Henry Lewes

“There can never be an absolutely final translation.”

Robert M. Grant

The statements above well represent what my journey into the world of translation has been so far. I used to imagine the world of translation as a stable, neat universe, where the only things one needed to know were the language in which the text was written and the language in which you wanted to translate it. And yet translation is more than just words – even if words are absolutely important; translators need to be aware also of variables such as authorial intention, cultural context of production, and cultural context of reception. Translators have to convey the characteristics of the original one in the target language, being aware that their works are not the perfect reproduction of the original, as some words and concepts cannot be entirely translatable – as for example is the concept of “cabin” (97) that I found in Chopin’s story. As Newmark told us, “the first business of the translator is to translate”.

Moreover, there cannot be such a thing as a perfect ultimate translation of a text, because our way of approaching and interpreting reality is unique and changeable, but also because we, as humans, are vehicles of ideologies that inevitably influence our perceptions of the original text itself.

Those changeability and uniqueness are the things that keep this complicate world so alive and interesting, as study after study we can always go beyond the previous works and “perfect” them, especially in such a field as the translation of a “dialect”, so perfectible and moot.

So, this is not the end of the journey, but only a stop-over of it.

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