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CARNIVAL, CONVENTS, AND THE CULT OF ST. ROCQUE: CULTURAL SUBTERFUGE IN THE WORK OF ALICE DUNBAR-NELSON

by

SIBONGILE B. N. LYNCH

Under the Direction of Elizabeth J. West

ABSTRACT

In the work of Alice Dunbar-Nelson the city and culture of 19th century New Orleans figures prominently, and is a major character affecting the lives of her protagonists. While race, class, and gender are among the focuses of many scholars the eccentricity and cultural history of the most exotic American city, and its impact on Dunbar-Nelson's writing is unmistakable. This essay will discuss how the diverse cultural environment of New Orleans in the 19th century allowed Alice Dunbar Nelson to create narratives which allowed her short stories to speak to the shifting identities of women and the social uncertainty of African Americans in the Jim Crow south. A consideration of New Orleans' cultural history is important when reading Dunbar-Nelson's work, whose significance has often been disregarded because of what some considered its lack of racial markers.

INDEX WORDS: Alice Dunbar-Nelson, African American literature, 19th century African American women, New Orleans fiction, Carnivalesque

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SIBONGILE B. N. LYNCH

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2012

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2012

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DEDICATION

To Jacqueline Charlene Brackens, I feel closer to you now than ever before. I hope I make you proud.

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For motivation, perseverance, and the dogged strength and energy to pursue such an endeavor at my age, I give thanks to the Creator. For inspiration, humility, stubbornness, and the gumption to believe this was ever even possible, I give thanks to the many ancestors on whose shoulders I am humbly lifted.

Frederick J. Lynch has been more supportive and understanding than any wife could ever ask. He is my rock, and for this, I am grateful.

I was determined to work with Dr. Elizabeth J. West from the moment we had our initial conversation about my dreams of becoming a graduate student. Her quiet wisdom keeps me in awe, and her scholarship inspires me to do better. I am grateful for her guidance, her professionalism, and for the opportunity to work with a scholar whose dedication to 19th century African American literature ignites inquiry.

To Dr. Carol Marsh-Lockett, your encouragement, kindness, and willingness to share your experiences have been invaluable.

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And to all of my family, friends, and colleagues who suffered with me through this arduous and worthwhile journey that now, at this hour, seems but a blink of the eye.

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INTRODUCTION

Just how much literary influence New Orleans novelist Grace Elizabeth King wielded in the writing life of young, ambitious Alice Ruth Moore is indeterminate, but the themes in their work of Creoles, Catholicism and Mardi Gras are often interchangeable. Whether or not King knew of the up and coming, "bright and racy" Alice, who was twenty years her junior, is uncertain, but it is likely that Moore was aware of the seasoned, Southern author who "wrote with great perceptiveness in fiction about her own time and about the history of her city and region."[1] In 1895 King published *New Orleans: the Place and the People* in 1895, the same year that Moore published her first collection of short stories, *Violets and Other Tales*. A major factor in the reception of the two works was that the French Creole educated King, happened to be a close acquaintance of Mark Twain, and had the privileged to receive beneficial exposure for that association. Nevertheless, it is King's *New Orleans* that Alice Dunbar-Nelson later quotes in the first paragraph of "People of Color in Louisiana: Part One," a historical piece she published in *The Journal of Negro History* in 1916. Both King and Dunbar-Nelson studied historian Charles Gayarré's *History of Louisiana* (1866) in their own research of the colony's history. From King, Dunbar-Nelson references a passage concerning the "jealous and fiercely-guarded distinctions," among African descendents in colonial New Orleans, regarding the degree of Caucasian blood that would cause one to be an acceptable citizen of the New World.

These distinctions provide some basis for the uncertain ethnicities of King's and Dunbar-Nelson's characters, for New Orleans was culturally diverse and infamous for its miscegenation,

[1] Bush, Robert, ed. *Grace King of New Orleans: A Selection of Her Writings*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973. Print.

and racial distinctions often determined one's status and place in the society. Sometimes questionable ethnicity and Catholicism cross paths for female protagonists in the work of both writers. For example, in King's "The Little Convent Girl," published in *Century Magazine* in 1893, a young, Catholic nun returns on a slow boat to New Orleans to meet the mother that she was denied as an infant. The unnamed girl was sent north and banished into a convent by her father, until his death, "on account of some disagreement between the parents," and she was never allowed to have any contact with her mother as long as he lived (151). The girl's "complexion", King writes, "Was sallow, a pale sallow, the complexion of a brunette bleached in darkened rooms" (Bush 151). During the journey the shy, timid young nun, in mourning for her father, was entertained and treated with kindness and respect by the captain and crew of the boat. All of the passengers and crew knew her story and grew fond of "the little convent girl". So when her mother came to collect her, they "all wanted to say good-by" and "to see the mother who had been deprived of her so long" (155). Truly, they were all taken aback to learn that the little convent girl's mother was "Colored!" (155).

"The Little Convent Girl" bears some resemblance to Dunbar-Nelson's "Sister Josepha," who, along with her ethnic ambiguity, is also hidden away in a convent. "Sister Josepha," who had once been called Camille, was brought to the convent as an orphan, "a child without an identity" who spoke "in monosyllabic French" (*Works* 157). The exotic "Sister Josepha" is described as a "glorious tropical beauty," with "intuition of the quick, vivacious sort which belonged to her blood" (158-59). As she begins to mature, the beautiful Josepha becomes curious about the world and overcome with wanderlust. She falls in love "briefly" with a young soldier whom she encounters during the celebratory services for the one hundred year old Cathedral in

Jackson Square. She contemplates escaping the convent, a "home of self-repression and retrospection" to "fell into the world" on the chance that she might encounter the young soldier again (168). But Josepha's plans of escape weaken when she is faced with the reality about "how hard it would be for her in the world, with no name but Camille, no friends, and her beauty" (170). Dunbar-Nelson reiterates the vulnerability of Josepha's femininity, as well as her ambiguous nationality, as though they were a curse. She asks herself, "Who am I? What am I?" and comes to understand the dilemma of her beauty and her uncertain ethnicity, "for she could never tell from whom or whence she came (171). On the day she is to escape, defeated, "Sister Josepha" goes to confession, and vanishes "behind the heavy door," choosing instead to stay within the confines of the Sacred Heart Convent (172).

Both King's and Dunbar-Nelson's work demonstrate those blurred distinctions that constituted one's social position, however, because she herself was a *colored* woman, Dunbar-Nelson was expected to portray her characters as the stereotypical blacks that readers had come to know. As King was considered "one of the few [southern writers of her time] who achieved excellence in both history and fiction," it would seem that Alice Ruth Moore was in line to make her mark as a prolific writer of New Orleans fiction and history, as well as drama, poetry, and essays (Bush 3). Despite her significant body of publications, Alice Dunbar-Nelson's early work has often been rejected by critics, because although the writer is of African, European, and Native American descent, many felt that her stories bared little resemblance to what was considered black life. Hers were not the prescribed or prototypical tales of dejected, plantation darkies with broken English, but more often she wrote about Creole life in New Orleans at the turn of the century; a multi-cultural, multi-lingual world whose history was as connected

to Europe as it was to the New World, if not more so. The author's fair complexion, education, and middleclass upbringing likely rendered her privy to this world, and as a result her fiction demonstrated a familiarity with its customs and characteristics. However, because she self-identified as a colored woman she was expected to write in a style that reflected the homogenous black identity that American audiences grew accustomed to reading about after the publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriett Beecher Stowe.

Only in a country obsessed with absolutes about black and white would there be some apprehension over shades of gray. That Dunbar-Nelson's characters are often "brown," "Creole," and speaking in "monosyllabic French," have thrown detractors of her work off balance. Her fiction, for some, does not prove radical enough to qualify as a protest against the injustices that African Americans experienced in the American South. And for some, her failure to showcase her black identity in her personal writings makes her suspect as a member of the race. On the contrary, and given what must have been, the precariousness of her position as an independent, educated, *woman* of color in the deep south during Reconstruction— with a desire to make a living as a writer to boot— Dunbar-Nelson cleverly imbues her writing with enough of the "folk culture"[2] of New Orleans and the irony of Mardi Gras for the whole country to see it's marked reflection of bigotry and inequality.

Who might suspect that in a city well known for its Mardi Gras festivities, the persona of carnival, occupies a distinct role in the consciousness of the community? Philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin demonstrates, through his study of the medieval carnival and the work of French

[2] In the introduction to *Rabelais and His World*, Mikhail Bakhtin discusses the characteristics of "folk culture" (5). It is "a boundless world of humorous forms and manifestations [which] opposed the official and serious tone of medieval ecclesiastical and feudal culture. In spite of their variety, folk festivities of the carnival type, the comic rites and cults, the clowns and fools, giants, dwarfs, and jugglers, the fast and manifold literature of parody—all these forms have on style in common: they belong to one culture of folk carnival humor" (4).

Renaissance writer, François Rabelais, that the significant characteristics of carnival are established in order to remind the people of their humanness and their vulnerabilities. It allows for the ridicule of those in power and admonition from those who are demoralized. Dunbar-Nelson's fiction is often laced with the characteristics of carnival and its incongruity. And it is in the distinct language of carnival where the opposition to the then familiar American mores dwells—in the "folk culture" and through the ambiguous characters of her work—and their language— is where the commentary against social injustice lies.

As it turns out Bakhtin's linguistic and poetic theories, and his analysis of discourse, introduced in the late 1960s, speak to many previously "excluded, rejected, or ignored dimensions of black American writing" (Peterson 764). In the essay, "Response and Call: The African American dialogue With Bakhtin," Dale E. Peterson contends that Bakhtin's "particular style of discourse analysis and "'sociological poetics'" emerged at the same time as an expressed frustration aimed "at the failure of old and new modes of literary analysis to acknowledge the expressive power of marginalized and uncanonical forms of articulation" (761). Black authors who had once been excluded from "the canon of black authorship" and accused of "crossing-over from," or "double-crossing" genuine black representation were reassessed and re-examined (764). Peterson explains that,

> University-trained critics literally sounded the utterances of previously suspect writers and found in them a subtle transcription of the slave culture's crafty oral modes of public expression. The irreverent double-talk that American blacks had gotten away with in spiritual, blues, and tale telling was now found to be present in the most markedly 'literary' texts within the African American narrative tradition. Once that uncovering dis-

> covery was made, it became possible to re-evaluate black texts that engaged in all manner of verbal play and cross-cultural duplicity. (764)

Now it is necessary to re-examine the double-talk of Dunbar-Nelson's Creole dialect, brown-skinned southern bells, and yellow-washed religions, as she becomes the trickster figure in the annals of regional writing, and 19th century American literature. Her fiction blurs the color line and works its magic in stories of an old south that at once conjures mixed emotions and fascinates us with its warmth, rhythm, and exoticism.

Finally, Dunbar-Nelson often makes a mockery of womanhood through characters who are made to undergo some self-deprecation and humiliation for any attempt to assert any autonomy or endure social embarrassment either for the love of a man, or for perhaps some symbolic gender role reversal. For these women on the margins, any effort to achieve a white, Victorian standard of womanhood is fruitless, unless it is to be achieved through the incarceration of Catholicism.

"CREOLES OF ANY COLOR"

In "Matters of Interest Among the Colored People," an article written for *The Atlanta Constitution* in 1896, H.R. Butler writes, "*Violets and Other Tales* by Miss Alice Ruth Moore is an excellent work and shows that the brain of the author is fertile with gems of poetic thought." [3] But the ornaments of "poetic thought" are laced with the energy and expression of the burgeoning movement of African American women spawned in 1890 with the publication of Frances W. Harper's, novel *Iola Leroy*. A host of African American women were engaged in an intellectual and rhetorical struggle, both fictional and nonfictional, to confront the challenges facing the black community and to work for the advancement of the race. An organized movement of black women was developing throughout the country creating a period that was "one of intense activity and productivity for Afro-American women" (*Reconstructing Womanhood* 96).

This movement of black women coincided with an era in the history of the Southern United States when racism in the country was considered to be the worse than at any other time after the Civil War. Coined the "nadir of American race relations" by historian, educator, and activist Rayford Logan, this period between the end of Reconstruction in 1877 and through the early 20th century, was characterized by violence and intimidation perpetrated on African Americans by former Confederates who resisted the social and political gains of blacks after the Civil War. Black schools were burned and teachers often murdered.[4] The Ku Klux Klan was organized and worked to suppress black voting and organization by terrorizing families through-

[3] Butler, H.R. "What the Negro is Doing." *The Atlanta Constitution* (1881-2001), Feb. 23, 1896: Proquest Historical Newspapers *Atlanta Constitution* (1868-1945).
[4] Lowen, James. *Lies My Teacher Told Me*. New York: Touchstone, 1995. Print.

out the south. Jim Crow legislation was passed creating a system of legal racial segregation in public and private facilities, rendering blacks systematically segregated and politically disenfranchised. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) reported that the number of lynchings reached an all-time high with nearly 3,500 people being killed between 1889-1922. [5] Activist Ida B. Wells published a scathing, systematic study on the subject of lynching in 1895 titled *A Red Record*, which nearly cost her life.

In 1895 Alice Dunbar-Nelson (Alice Ruth Moore) published her first collection of short stories and essays, *Violets and Other Tales,* the same year in which the first Congress of Colored Women of the United States assembled in Boston. A year later, the National Federation of Colored Women and the National League of Colored Women joined together to become the National Association of Colored Women (NACW), of which Alice Dunbar-Nelson was a member. Scholar Hazel V. Carby writes that, "Thus, for the first time, Afro-American women became nationally organized to confront the various modes of their oppression" (*Reconstructing Womanhood* 96).

These were among some of the most prolific African American women in the country who organized, through the women's club movement, to combat racism, sexism and to work for racial uplift. Many were the daughters of slaves; many were mothers, teachers, domestic workers, and many were writers who lent their talents towards these efforts. Among them were Ida B. Wells, Anna Julia Cooper, Frances E. W. Harper, and Mary Church Terrell. While there is no indication that Dunbar-Nelson was personally associated with all of these women, she was likely part of the same coterie, and was most certainly influenced by many of them.

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[5] Estes, Steve. *I Am a Man!: Race, Manhood, and the Civil Rights Movement*. University of North Carolina Press. 2005. Print.

Dunbar-Nelson was still a very young writer in 1893, when the seasoned Cooper and Harper spoke at the World's Congress of Representative Women as part of the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. In 1896 she was secretary of the Women's Era Club of Boston, the same year that the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) was formed, of which she was a charter member, along with Mary Church Terrell. In 1899, at the end of the decade that scholar Frances Smith Foster coined the "Black Women's Era,"[6] Dunbar-Nelson published a second collection, *The Goodness of St. Rocque and Other Stories,* a year before the publication of Pauline Hopkins's novel, *Contending Forces*. Harper, Hopkins and Dunbar-Nelson were among only a handful of African American women writing fiction during a time when, "Organizing to fight included writing to organize,"—when all art was propaganda (Carby "On the Threshold"). Dunbar-Nelson's freshmen fiction efforts are light-hearted and regional when compared with the decidedly political domestic novel *Iola Leroy,* which conveys the life of the "tragic mulatta" heroine following the Civil War, or Ida B. Wells' anti-lynching manifesto, *Southern Horrors*. These women were older and more experienced activists, lecturers and writers. But the impact of her association with these women through club movement is reflected in her essays on women's and racial issues, and later, anti-lynching and anti-war dramas.

Though Dunbar-Nelson never published a full-length novel during her lifetime, her short stories address similar issues that were the focus in black women's writing during post-Reconstruction. The stories she wrote depicting lovelorn girls competing for the same lover in

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[6] Coined the "woman's era, the black woman's renaissance of the 1890s" by Hazel V. Carby in 1987, and in 1993 Frances Smith Foster reclaimed it as "The Black Woman's Era". Carby, Hazel V. "Slave and Mistress: Ideologies of Womanhood under Slavery."*Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1989. Print. Foster, Frances Smith. "'A Woman Question and a Race Problem': The Black Woman's Era." *Written By Herself: Literary Production by African American Women, 1746-1892.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993. Print.

"The Goodness of St. Rocque," to the new, independent working woman questioning the sanctity of marriage in "The Woman," to an adventurous girl who dares to masquerade as a male "troubadour of lovely form," in "Carnival Jangle," all constitute what Wilson J. Moses coins "genteel domestic feminism" (*Black Women* 964). Moses attributes this term to novels written by black women during post-Reconstruction that demonstrate "woman-centered agency" (Tate 232). Some African Americans believed that full acceptance into American society would be brought about not only through "protesting racial injustice," but also through the assimilation of the "genteel standard of Victorian sexual conduct" (Moses 964). Novels written by black women in the late 19th century reflected this perspective, and this idea is perpetuated in the fiction of Alice Dunbar-Nelson.

However, the provincial work of Dunbar-Nelson's early fiction was written with the particular details and expressions of her native New Orleans as the backdrop. The author is regularly compared with other late nineteenth century regional and local color writers who incorporated the racial milieu of New Orleans society in their work, however: local color literature by women was often looked upon inauspiciously by contemporary critics. Yet, contrary to the short stories of Grace King or Kate Chopin, Dunbar-Nelson's tales of Creole washer women, French violinists and young girls masquerading during Mardi Gras takes on a decidedly subversive spirit when viewed through the lens of the American South, Reconstruction, the Women's Era of the 1890s, Jim Crow and the escalating problem of the color line. Judith Irwin-Mulcahy writes that for African American writers, not only did "regional writing provide a point of access for their literature" to be accepted into the "mass-periodical market," but it served as a "plat-

form for deliberating national structures and recasting American social history for a people largely kept outside the official discourse" (122).

A consideration of New Orleans' cultural history, therefore, becomes a crucial element when reading Dunbar-Nelson's work, whose significance has often been disregarded because of— what some consider— its lack of racial markers. In this study I endeavor to illustrate how, unlike other black writers of this period who sought to free themselves from the obligation of the public's beloved plantation genre (made popular by Harriett Beecher Stowe, Charles W. Chesnutt and George Washington Cable, for example) and yet, desired marketability and literary acceptance, Dunbar-Nelson's fiction assumes a subversion disguised behind the mask of regionalism. And when viewed through the lens of philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin's study of folk culture and the humor in the work of French Renaissance writer, François Rabelais—and his "Discourse on the Novel"—Dunbar-Nelson's fiction becomes an innovative and radical effort to expose the social contradictions of late 19th century New Orleans through its "zone of direct contact with developing reality" (*Dialogic Imagination* 39).

Not until the 1980s does Dunbar-Nelson's fiction begin to receive the critical attention it so rightly deserves. This shift occurs, in part, due to the activity among African American scholars and professors during the Black Arts movement (BAM) of the sixties pushing for Afro-American studies in university curriculums. Prior to the Black Arts movement, which was considered the artistic arm of the Black Power movement taking place for roughly a decade between 1960 and 1970 English language literature was dominated by white authors. The literary canon contained virtually no representation or ideas from black or ethnic voices and cultural viewpoints had little or no worth in the eyes of the academy. After the movement, not just Afri-

can American, but many ethnic voices found a place in the literary canon and English departments throughout the country. Burgeoning black author, Alice Walker, for example, single-handedly resuscitated Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* in the late seventies. Other scholars like Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Nellie Y. McKay and the late black feminist, Barbara T. Christian have done much to revive many manuscripts authored by black writers who might have otherwise faded into obscurity. And, indeed, The Schomburg Library of Nineteenth-Century Black Women Writers, a series published by the Oxford University Press, which includes work by Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins, Amelia E. Johnson, and Alice Dunbar Nelson, documents the work of gifted, many black women writers who contributed to the American literary landscape, but who, like Dunbar-Nelson, were barred from the canonical tradition likely because of their gender and ethnicity.

Born of a black mother and white father in 1875 New Orleans, a city easily cosmopolitan with its influx of African, French, Spanish, Irish, and Haitian transplants, Alice Dunbar- Nelson's early life was shaped by this cultural mix. Rich, indeed, was the soil from which this prolific writer would produce numerous short stories, essays and poetry that document Creole life in the late nineteenth century. Her elegance and refinement contributed to her popularity and appearances in society pages, and in 1897, Fannie Barrier Williams wrote in *Godey's Magazine* that Dunbar-Nelson was "a little woman of many accomplishments. She is not only a bright and racy newspaper correspondent, but has published a book of delightful sketches and charming bits of poetry".[7] Charming though they were, those "delightful sketches" frequently reflected

[7] Williams, Fannie Barrier. "The Colored Women of To-Day." *Godey's Magazine* (1892-1898), Jul 1897: American Periodicals Series Online.

the diverse racial climate of New Orleans at the turn of the century along with its complexity and internal turmoil.

In 1896, the Supreme Court upheld that state laws requiring the segregation of races in public facilities provided that the qualities of those facilities were equal. The idiom, "separate but equal," was the result of the Louisiana state law passed in 1890 that insisted upon separate accommodations for blacks and whites. This was most certainly problematic in a city where not only every complexion had its representation, but where miscegenation among the races was infamous. In a discussion on plaçage, a well-known institutional arrangement which allowed prominent white men in New Orleans to live with their quadroon lovers in a kind of common-law marriage, James W. Blassingame contends that the "most unique feature of race relations in antebellum New Orleans was the pervasiveness of miscegenation" (*Black New Orleans* 17). As a daughter of New Orleans, and of a biracial union, the irony was not lost on Dunbar-Nelson.

Founded as a French colony, New Orleans was ceded to Spain in 1763, and reverted back to France in 1801. By the time of the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, when the territory was sold to the United States, the population of New Orleans included Americans, French, Spanish, Creoles, Irish, Germans and Africans. Among the Africans, Dunbar-Nelson tells us in her two-part study of the "People of Color in Louisiana,"[8] published in *The Journal of Negro History*, "were jealous and fiercely-guarded distinctions: griffes, briqués, mulattoes, quadroons, octoroons, each term meaning one degree's further transfiguration toward the Caucasian standard of physical perfection" (361). That her mother, Patricia, who had been a slave, was part African

[8] The essay, "People of Color in Louisiana," was published in two parts in The Journal of Negro History. The first part was published in October 1916, and the second was published in January of 1917. All subsequent references made to this essay will be from both.

and Native American, and her father, Joseph Moore, the seaman, was presumably Anglo-Saxon, (but could have easily been French or German), has made Dunbar-Nelson, and her fiction, racially suspect in the eyes of some critics. In the essay "Brass Ankles Speak" she candidly discusses the social torment she endured at the hands of darker skinned classmates and co-workers for having a complexion that rendered her a "half white nigger" (*Works Vol.2*). She and others who looked like her found some comfort in each other's company, but was often accused of "organizing a "'blue vein'" society," of being "mistresses of white men," of being "lesbians," or of hating and plotting against dark-skinned black people (*Works Vol.2*). Her fair skin and, perhaps regional sensibilities, drew similar criticism regarding her fiction with one reviewer suggesting that her work had "no characteristics peculiar to her race."[9]

Current scholarship on Dunbar-Nelson began with Gloria T. Hull's discovery of a veritable treasure of the writer's work, the account of which Hull documents in the essay "Researching Alice Dunbar-Nelson: A Personal and Literary Perspective" (1980) in the journal *Feminist Studies*. It is ironic that Hull saw the advantage of such a find and seized upon it much in the same way that she later accuses Dunbar-Nelson of taking advantage of her late husband's literary name. But, despite the fact that she had to "impose [herself] and become a bit of a nuisance," scholars of African American women writers are grateful; for Hull's fortune is our own (315). Ms. Hull describes her find as "a trove of precious information—manuscript boxes of letters, diaries, and journals; scrapbooks on tables; two unpublished novels and drafts of unpublished work in file folders; clippings and pictures under beds and bookshelves" (315).

[9] The New York *Ecclesiastical Review*, February 1900. Taken from the chapter notes in *Color, Sex & Poetry* (221).

Hull's find ultimately led to the editing and publishing of *Give Us Each Day: The Diary of Alice Dunbar-Nelson* in 1984 which documents the daily life of the writer from 1921, during the time she co-edited and published the *Wilmington Advocate* newspaper, through 1931 and her third marriage to journalist, Robert J. Nelson, whom she married in the spring of 1916 (*Works* lviii). Hull's extensive work on the author has operated somewhat to re-introduce Dunbar-Nelson to modern readers, and positions [Hull] as the foremost biographer and scholar on the writer. Hull also includes a peculiarly antagonistic biography of Dunbar-Nelson in the book, *Color, Sex, & Poetry: Three Women Writers of the Harlem Renaissance* (1987), in which she writes about two other black women writers, Angelina Weld Grimke and Georgia Douglas Johnson. All three women she writes about were of mixed racial heritage, and all three challenged notions of women's roles through their poetry and prose.

Throughout the biography Hull seems to sardonically charge Dunbar-Nelson with prejudice against dark skinned blacks, suggesting that Dunbar-Nelson suffered from a "split authorial personality" and "confusion" about her blackness, despite her zealous work exposing "the racism on Mississippi levees…praise for black sororities and fraternities for fostering race pride… her immersion in a black oratorical tradition… and her political activity on behalf of the race" (*Color, Sex & Poetry* 19-20). She also accuses the writer of being overbearing in her marriage to Paul Dunbar, (who was himself of a dark complexion). Hull reports that besides badgering Paul about his behavior, the people he should associate with and the places he should frequent less often because of the clientele, Alice Dunbar-Nelson "could also be manipulative, inquisitive, and dictatorial" (*Color, Sex & Poetry* 44). As well, Hull criticizes Dunbar-Nelson for capitalizing on the Dunbar name after Paul's death from tuberculosis in 1906. The two were never di-

vorced, but had been estranged for 4 years by the time of his passing. Hull charges that despite their estranged relationship, in the aftermath of Paul Dunbar's death "the world gave respect to her as his wife, sending her numerous condolences, requests for information and souvenirs, and commercial propositions. Her career as his widow was officially launched" (*Color, Sex & Poetry* 47). In 1988, Hull edited and wrote the introduction for the Schomburg Library series of *The Works of Alice Dunbar-Nelson*, a three-volume collection of the author's works which includes her first two volumes, *Violets and Other Tales* and *The Goodness of St. Rocque and Other Stories*, and many previously unpublished pieces, like the short story, "Stones of the Village."

Alice Ruth Moore married Paul Laurence Dunbar, the "Poet Laureate of the Negro race," in March of 1898, and began what some believed was a charmed, literary union. Despite her own literary efforts, (including a Master's thesis at Cornell on the influence of Milton upon Wordsworth, work in the social justice and women's suffragette movements, and numerous columns in the *Pittsburg Courier*, *Washington Eagle*, *New York Sun*, etc.), marriage to Paul solidified her status as his wife, and widow, after his death. A notice in the October 1898 issue of *The Ladies' Home Journal* reports, "Paul Laurence Dunbar, the negro poet, married Alice Ruth Moore, who also has literary tendencies, having issued a volume called "Violets" a few years ago. She was a school teacher in New Orleans and afterward in New York, but now resides in Washington, where her husband is employed in the Congressional Library". Her second volume of short stories, *The Goodness of St. Rocque and Other Stories*, was published as a companion volume to Paul's *Poems of Cabin and Field* in 1899. With women's suffrage in question at the turn of the century, perhaps most people assumed Alice Dunbar-Nelson would forego her own ambitions to simply support her husband's efforts. Indeed, she had to resign her teaching

position when they married, for even with a college degree, it was understood that the man would be the sole bread winner. Most reception for *The Goodness of St. Rocque* was supercilious, at best, but one encouraging review in the *Philadelphia Post* in 1900, in an article titled "Paul Dunbar's Gifted Wife", the writer remarked "that the foremost writer of his race should be rivaled in the telling of short stories by his wife makes the appearance of Mrs. Paul Laurence Dunbar in the field of literature a matter worthy of note" (*Color, Sex & Poetry* 49).

Though Dunbar-Nelson would go on to edit and publish both *Masterpieces of Negro Eloquence* (1914) and *Dunbar Speaker and Entertainer* (1920), she would not publish another work of fiction. And, like many early black women writers, her work was allowed to go out of print. As Gloria T. Hull suggests in her biographical account of Dunbar-Nelson's life, were it not for her husband, she might scarcely be known. It is largely a result of Hull's efforts, then a neophyte professor of black American literature and scholar of black feminist criticism at the University of Delaware, that interest in the fiction of Alice Dunbar-Nelson gained potency in the 1980s.

The Goodness of St. Rocque and Other Stories was published a year after her marriage to Paul. Published as a companion volume to Paul's *Poems of Cabin and Field*, *The Goodness of St. Rocque* maintains the Louisiana Creole distinction reminiscent of the work of George Washington Cable and Grace King. Perhaps, it is her maturity as a writer, or even her experience as a woman married to a celebrated poet, which accounts for "longer, more developed and better overall" stories than those in *Violets* (*Color, Sex, & Poetry* 50). Yet, one contemporary reviewer admonished it for its lack of "characteristics peculiar to her race," and Hull contends that the stories are "separated from her black experience (*Color, Sex, & Poetry* 52). It is an unfortunate,

and perhaps an unfair assessment, that Hull's interpretation of Dunbar-Nelson's life and work only serve to perpetuate the idea that the writer was somehow ashamed of her African ancestry, suggesting that Dunbar-Nelson instead, "would much rather have been taken as a descendant of Louisiana's (preferably free) gens de couleur, those mixed-blood, 'colored' people who considered themselves superior to pure Negroes, especially those who had been slaves" (*Color, Sex, & Poetry* 34). Hull comes to this conclusion based on the lack of "emphasis" on "slave ancestry among her personal data," and because Dunbar-Nelson was fair-skinned enough to pass as a white woman (*Color, Sex, & Poetry* 34).

Fortunately, scholarship on Dunbar-Nelson's work in the 1990s began to move away from biographical sketches of the writer, and instead take a closer look at the themes prevalent in her work. Still focusing primarily on the early fiction— gender, race and class become the topics for examination, given the cultural landscape of mid-century New Orleans. In "Race and Gender in the Early Works of Alice Dunbar-Nelson", Violet Harrington Bryan makes the long neglected distinction between white Creoles and Creoles of color in New Orleans culture. Bryan asserts that Dunbar-Nelson "cleverly" disguises Creoles of color, "for her reading audience as Creoles of any color," and that Dunbar-Nelson understood that "racial distinctions meant little in terms of essential Creole attitudes" (121). Bryan's work evaluates Dunbar-Nelson's fiction with regard to the social context in which the writer's work evolved— an area where Hull's work falls short, and thus the antagonistic view of what is perceived as the author's racial ambiguity. Kristina Brooks goes even further in "Alice Dunbar-Nelson's Local Colors of Ethnicity, Class, and Place". She challenges Hull and other critics who contend that Dunbar-Nelson's char-

acters are “racially indeterminate,” asserting that it is because of the reader’s “unfamiliarity with Dunbar-Nelson’s native city and its singular history of tripartite social stratification” (4).

Characters in the early fiction of Dunbar-Nelson are as diverse as was the Crescent City, while many of the stories quietly reflect their social positions and circumstances. In New Orleans there were three distinct racial classes: black, white and *gens de couleur libres*, or free people of color, who were allowed privileges and liberties not granted to black slaves or Americanized blacks. After the Emancipation Proclamation, when the distinction between slave and free vanished, the *gens de couleur libres* no longer enjoyed their privileged status, and a community of self-proclaimed Creoles remained as an “ethnic classification in New Orleans” (Brooks 5). This Creole population undoubtedly inhabit the pages of Dunbar-Nelson’s work, and while her audience may view them as “Creoles of any color,” the narratives most often lend themselves to reflect the lives of blacks— some slave, some not—living in the undeniable Jim Crow south (Bryan 121).

In her essay “Identities in Crisis: Alice Dunbar-Nelson’s New Orleans Fiction” Jordan Stouck also takes into consideration the history of the term “Creole” (270). Stouck considers recent Caribbean ideas about creolization in Post-Colonial theory that, while located in “Caribbean history and racial identity”, can also be used to describe numerous conditions of “cross-cultural exchange” (269). Dunbar-Nelson’s work challenges Caribbean ideas of creolization because of the ambivalence of identity, caused by the history of race relations in America. Instead of the creative potential of creolization lauded in Caribbean theories, Stouck points to the “repulsion that would greet any creolizing conflation of Southern racial and ethnic groups” (270). Stouck points out that no longer was French tradition the only main element of New Orleans

"Creole identity" after 1803, and as a result, "racial distinctions" became even more important (270). She asserts that within the "American context," the term "Creole…marked both racially and ethnically…undermines any certainty about what Creole identity means" (271). These racial and social elements were already firmly in place at the time of Dunbar-Nelson's birth in July of 1875. Combined with the religious dogmas of Catholicism, introduced by French and Spanish cultures, the esoteric spiritualism of African and Haitian Voodoo, and the French/Catholic influenced medieval Feast of Fools festival, (later celebrated in New Orleans as Mardi Gras), Dunbar-Nelson's origins, either personal or literary, cannot be compared with, or viewed as part of a monolithic or homogeneous notion of what it meant to be black in America at the turn of the century.

In a discussion on "The Formation of Afro-Creole Culture," Gwendolyn Midlo Hall asserts that while the term Creole has often been "redefined over time for social reasons and has many meanings," it comes from the Portuguese word *Crioulo* which specifically means "a slave of African descent born in the New World," and was used to "distinguish American-born from African-born slaves" (60). In other words, "all first-generation slaves born in America and their descendants were designated Creoles" (60). In great detail Brooks discusses the indetermination of ethnicity in the term Creole, and suggests that, but for its "Louisiana nativity," and a "slightly apparent" African connection, Dunbar-Nelson purposefully creates characters whose racial identities are undefined and unfixed[10]. In this way, not only does Dunbar-Nelson free the reader from having to make a distinction, and thereby relinquish his or her prejudice, but she introduces a heterogeneous community of Americanized blacks who were not slaves living on a

[10] "People of Color in Louisiana," (143-44).

plantation. There were free African Americans even before the Civil War—even in Louisiana—who led lives very different from those depicted in the beloved plantation stories. (In Louisiana, there were also Creole families that owned slaves as well.) That Dunbar-Nelson disregards "the attribution of a fixed race or ethnicity to Creole identity" in her fiction does not mean that she is indifferent to her own multi-racial, or African, ancestry as Hull suggests. Nor does it indicate a disdain for African Americans with dark complexions. Rather it evokes the same kind of "nonliterary nature" about her work as Bakhtin suggests about Rabelais: the "nonconformity of [her] images to the literary norms and canons predominating" at the end of the 19th century (*Rabelais* 2). Her stories imply that there is not one, homogeneous, black life, and suggests a sophistication afforded to one who has been exposed to such a cosmopolitan environment. Furthermore, Dunbar-Nelson cleverly positions herself as a regional writer who is targeting an audience that is even more complex and diverse as her New Orleans menagerie.

In the story, "Mr. Baptiste," where a historical conflict between Irish longshoremen and black stevedores serve as the backdrop, Dunbar-Nelson introduces her audience to the diminutive character, Mr. Baptiste, who is "small," "Creole," and "Latinised" (*Works* 111). The 1892 New Orleans labor riots provides the racial dispute that underscores the tale, when British shippers used black workers as a replacement for striking white workers to load cotton bales on the ships (Brooks 13). Baptiste is an unassuming, conciliating, and unintimidating figure who makes his way by gathering the discarded fruit from steamships that move between "New Orleans and Central and South American ports" (*Works* 112). He is a marginalized character, relying on the good graces of his clients who, in exchange for the fruit, will cook a meal for him. But Baptiste is devastated when the striking Irishmen threaten his livelihood; they will leave the

fruit will be left to rot. His obvious delight at the sight of the "glossy black skins" of the Negro stevedores… at work" proves fatal to the French-speaking Baptiste (120). The Irishmen view the black stevedores as a threat to their livelihood, and they are offended when the "little fruit-eater" shows his support for the "scabs" (118-119). Although the Irishmen recognize Baptiste as "'that damned fruit-eatin' Frinchman,'" Dunbar-Nelson finally reveals to her audience that he is also "brown" (122). When the Irishman, McMahon, observes Mr. Baptiste encouraging the Negros, he admonishes him saying, "'Cheerin' the niggers, are you?'" and throws a "brickbat at the Creole, Baptiste (122). The resulting "great ugly gash in his wrinkled brown temple" proves deadly for Mr. Batiste (122).

Judith Irwin-Mulcahy contends that Baptiste is "ethnically indeterminate and socially amorphous," but his marginal existence, brown skin, and his willingness to support the black dock workers suggest that he is not "indeterminate" nor "socially amorphous" to anyone familiar with the racial structure of New Orleans in 1892 (123). On the contrary, Brooks insists that in a "riot, based on fixed racial divisions, Mr. Baptiste's ethnicity emerges as a salient and dangerous fact" (13). He is, instead, representative of many light-skinned brown people who found themselves on the periphery of society in the Jim Crow south, many of whom learned that the loss of their special status as *gens de couleur libres* relegated them to the ranks of African Americans.

But as Hull enthusiastically reminds us, "Despite" [her] "New Orleans heritage of mixed blood and light skin, it is necessary to remember that" [Dunbar-Nelson's] "position in America was always that of a colored/Negro/black person" (*Color, Sex, & Poetry* 52). And, as such, she is not simply an observer and recorder of New Orleans life, but she is positioned as a participant

in this multi-ethnic, multi-racial environment. Despite her self-identification as a colored woman, in an environment such as was New Orleans, Dunbar-Nelson was situated to manifest a DuBoisian "double-consciousness," in her writing and in her life. Hull alludes to some embarrassment about her ancestry for which Paul Dunbar would tease her. That fair-skinned, educated Negros who could speak French fared better socially was likely to her advantage, and it is speculated that the writer occasionally passed for white. In the essay "Brass Ankles Speaks," Dunbar-Nelson expounds on the pain she endured in the black community for being a "white nigger," and how she, and others like her, were ostracized by co-workers as a young teacher for her complexion, which may have contributed to any "confusion" about her identity. In the essay "Speaking in Tongues: Dialogics, Dialectics, and the Black Woman Writer's Literary Tradition," scholar Mae Gwendolyn Henderson writes that, "The interlocutory character of black women's writings is…not only a consequence of a dialogic relationship with an imaginary or 'generalized Other,' but a dialogue with the aspects of 'otherness' within the self" (344).The experiences of that duality combined with the diversity of cultures in New Orleans provides the catalysts for, and manifests in Dunbar-Nelson's work as characters with uncertain identities, and characters with many identities. In "Speaking in Tongues," Henderson discusses "simultaneity of discourse," in which she suggests the importance of reading text by black women in ways "which perspectives of race and gender, and their interrelationships, structure the discourse of black women's writing" (344).

CARNIVAL AND CULTURAL SUBTERFUGE

Given the vertical division of Dunbar-Nelson's New Orleans, its hierarchical history, its diverse and dialectical voices, various communities and customs, much of her early writings can be represented as being similar to the novel, which Russian philosopher, Mikhail Bakhtin famously defined as "a diversity of social speech types, sometimes even diversity of languages and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized" ("Discourses in the Novel" 262). With this definition in mind, and also Bakhtin's study of folk culture, folk humor, and the language of the marketplace in the work of French Renaissance writer, François Rabelais, I will attempt to expose the innovative and radical efforts of this "Post-bellum, Pre-Harlem"[11] writer. Of the work contained in *Violets and Other Tales* and *The Goodness of St. Rocque*, the short stories "Violets" and "The Goodness of St. Rocque" are the most often anthologized. But, for my purposes here, I will examine two of Dunbar-Nelson's lesser known stories, "A Carnival Jangle," and "The Praline Woman," both of which so cleverly encapsulates the spirit of carnival, incorporating the language and voice of the people from which Alice Dunbar-Nelson emerged, but which also depict experiences that, while they may not be common and clichéd, are authentic expressions of African American life.

But first, however, the carnivalesque, is not simply the event of a Mardi Gras with all of its pomp and circumstance. "Carnival," says Bakhtin, "is not a spectacle to be seen by the people" for "they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people" (*Rabelais* 7). There is a duality that exists in the presence of the carnivalesque, and Dunbar-

[11] Charles W. Chesnutt coined this phrase in reference to the artistic period between Reconstruction through about the 1920's, just before the Harlem Renaissance. *The Journals of Charles W. Chesnutt*. Ed. Richard H. Brodhead. Durham: Duke University Press, 1993. Print.

Nelson expresses that duality as well in the story of "Little Miss Sophie," although, at first, it may only be recognizable to those familiar with the workings of the institution of plaçage (*Works* 137). In medieval Europe, "protocol and ritual based on laughter" mirrored the "serious official, ecclesiastical, feudal, and political cult forms and ceremonials" (*Rabelais* 5). Bakhtin says, it was a completely different, nonofficial, extraecclesiastical and extrapolitcal aspect of the world, of man, and of human relations; they [countries of medieval Europe] built a second world and a second life outside officialdom, a world in which all medieval people participated more or less, in which they lived during a given time of the year. If we fail to take into consideration this two-world condition, neither medieval cultural consciousness nor the culture of the Renaissance can be understood (*Rabelais* 6).

Indeed, this "double aspect of the world and of human life existed" in 19th century New Orleans, and in no way was this better expressed than in the institution of plaçage. As stated earlier plaçage allowed well-to-do white men to live openly with their black lovers and biracial children, sometimes culminating in marriage, often ending when the young man has decided to settle down with a white, legal bride, and leaving the Negro woman behind to fend for herself. These "consensual unions…not recognized by the law, most" of which "were of short duration," between white men and black women were generally arranged through popular, nightly quadroon balls (*Black New Orleans* 18). At these parties, white men would attend, with the expressed purpose of choosing a black woman to court, and make financial arrangements with her parents, including the purchase of a home for the young concubine. While these arrangements were often viewed as prostitution by some, James Blassingame asserts that they were more like "common-law marriages," and were accepted by many in New Orleans society (18).

Plaçage is the second life, the life outside of "officialdom," that "double aspect" of race relations in New Orleans which recognized that physical and sexual attraction is not limited to within one's racial group, despite any social or legal stigmas. Blassingame informs that there were many situations in which interracial "couples lived together without ever taking marriage vowels," and that numerous "plaçages were permanent unions" in which the couple genuinely loved one another (18).

Unfortunately, this was not the case for Dunbar-Nelson's "Little Miss Sophie," a "poor little Creole old maid" who is introduced in the beginning of the story as "alone, crouching in a little, forsaken black heap at the altar of the Virgin" (*Works* 137). Though her current neighbors can only speculate about her history, Miss Sophie had once been the "dusky-eyed fiancée" in a "little Creole love-affair" with Neale, whose recent, legal, marriage to a white woman has been complicated by the loss of his job, and his fortune. She came into the community, they say, "…five years ago, robed in crape, and crying in great sobs that seemed to shake the vitality out of her" (141). Miss Sophie was clearly smitten with Neale, who obviously did not take the relationship seriously. His acquaintances are overhead saying, "You know how Neale is with his love-affairs, went off and forgot the girl in a month" (145). Neale, however, can only regain his lost fortune by producing a "certain quaint Roman ring" to prove his identity. The "ring," of course, was given to his "dusky-eyed fiancée," and Neale is too ashamed to seek her out and ask for the ring back (145).

Whether or not the two cohabitated is not known, but because she is called his "fiancée," and because he presented her with such an important family heirloom, suggests that the "little Creole love-affair" was more than a passing fancy (145). Here is the "two-world condi-

tion" that must be considered in order to fully understand the New Orleans society of Dunbar-Nelson's early life, and of her fiction (*Rabelais* 6). Not only were these interracial relations common in New Orleans, before and after antebellum, but numerous "black-white marriages" took place "in spite of the antebellum law prohibiting them" (Blassingame 19). This activity took place in the face of the law, as a mockery to any law that would attempt to stringently segregate any emotional bonds between interracial lovers. This, indeed, was the "second life," the life outside of "officialdom" that was race relations in New Orleans (*Rabelais* 6). But although Miss Sophie's "love-affair" was one of "short duration," she still holds Neale in high esteem. So much so that when she overhears of his troubles, she works herself, as a seamstress, into an early grave in order to retrieve the ring from a pawnshop, and return it to him, so that he may have a prosperous life with his wife, despite Miss Sophie's own misfortune. They story conveys, however, that Miss Sophie "had not always been poor and old and jaded-looking; but reverses must come…" and the ring had been pawned in order to ease the hardship of her father's misfortune (146).

Even in the story of "Little Miss Sophie" there is the pageantry and excitement of carnival during "Christmas Eve on Royal Street" on which "amid the cries and yells, the deafening blow of horns and tin whistles, and the really dangerous fusillade of fireworks" Miss Sophie hurries through to the pawn shop to retrieve the ring (149-150). In countries where Carnival is celebrated, Christmas is but a prelude to the long carnival season.

Although there is no definitive documentation to substantiate the claim, Mardi Gras has its origins in the Parisian Carnival of the Renaissance period, and the seed for the idea is believed to have been planted when the French navy set foot on Louisiana soil in 1699 (Gill 27).

And while it is widely accepted as a very public and open festival where anyone can participate, the upper crust of New Orleans have always understood that the importance of the festival has to do with the "annual reaffirmation of social eminence over merit," particularly through the establishment of organizations known as carnival *krewes*, of which the Rex Krewe and the Comus Krewe reign surpreme (13). These *krewes* were created via social organizations and mutual aid societies, and the social and financial status of its members was a direct correlation to the hierarchical structure of the French monarchy which it represented.

With regard to Francois Rabelais, Bakhtin discusses the nature and importance of "folk culture" and "originality expressed" therein during the Renaissance and Middle Ages. These "forms" and "manifestations" of humor were in opposition to "medieval ecclesiastical and feudal culture" (Rabelais 4). These forms, expressed through a variety of ways, including "folk festivities of the carnival type…and vast and manifold literature of parody," are connected in that they are all part of the "culture of folk carnival humor" (4). Again, as such they are a kind of reflection of society which was a "completely different, nonofficial, extraecclesiastical and extrapolitical aspect of the world, of man, and of human relations…a life outside of officialdom," which in itself becomes a subversion of reality (6). The expressions of the folk culture that Bakhtin describes have three clear-cut forms: "Ritual spectacles", "comic verbal compositions," and "various genres of billingsgate" (5).

"Ritual spectacles" involved the festivities and pageantry, that is most commonly associated with the events of carnival, (such as "the merry jangle of bells in the air, an all-pervading sense of jester's noise, and the flaunting vividness of royal colours" that opens "Carnival Jangle"), which contributed to the overall atmosphere of carnival and "agricultural feasts" (5). An

"oral and written" lampooning of the language of the dominant culture, (Latin in the case of Rabelais), and the colloquial constitute the "comic verbal compositions" (5). This aspect of Dunbar-Nelson's fiction lends to her writings the charm and quaintness associate with regional or local color literature. And with a variety of coarse or vulgar speech in the form of curses and oaths, these elements make up demonstration folk culture; folk carnival (5).

Through these manifestations of folk culture, the carnivalesque, a term coined by Bakhtin, then indicates, in literature, a subversion and release from the standards and values of the status quo by way of humor and disorder. Bakhtin suggests that modern representations of folk humor is deficient because it ignores the ambivalence of carnival laughter: that while it is "gay" and "triumphant," it is also "mocking" and "deriding," and that " he who is laughing also belongs to it;" is essentially laughing at himself (*Rabelais* 12). Bakhtin also makes the distinction between the medieval carnival of Rabelais's world and Mardi Gras as the "commemoration of sacred history or of a saint," for the former, and "the last days before the Lent" season for the latter. Nevertheless as a multi-conscious descendent of New Orleans, and a double-conscious, African American, Dunbar-Nelson's fiction is nothing if it is not filled with the ambivalence of a nation still wrestling with the legacy of slavery. There is not always, in every tale, a blatant demonstration of all these manifestations of carnival in Dunbar-Nelson's early fiction, for she manages to maintain the genteel Victorian façade through which African Americans would endeavor to achieve equality. But therein lies the youthful effort of Alice Ruth Moore to mock and undermine a culture that would discriminate based on one's complexion or racial inheritance or class. Overall the stories represent a duality in the New Orleans life of the writer—the mirrored

view of society reflected in the forms and manifestations of folk humor— the same duality that is carnival.

"A Carnival Jangle" was one of three short stories published in both *Violets* and *The Goodness of St. Rocque*, and both versions are included in volume one of *The Works of Alice Dunbar-Nelson*, edited by Gloria T. Hull. A comparison of the two in this volume show few differences save for syntactic ones, and the French dialogue is not italicized in the *St. Rocque* version. In "Carnival Jangle," a young girl, Flo, is persuaded by Mephisto—the Prince of Darkness, the devil—to abandon the group of people she is masquerading with during carnival, and to masquerade with him and his friends instead. The story begins with a cavalcade of people, of celebration and of joyful disarray on the morning of Mardi Gras—Fat Tuesday. "The streets swarm with humanity—humanity in all shapes, manners, forms, laughing, pushing, jostling, crowding, a mass of men and women and children, as varied and assorted in their several individual peculiarities as ever a crowd that gathered in one locality since the days of Babel. It is Carnival in New Orleans…" (127). The "diversity of social speech types," which Bakhtin characterizes as a feature of the novel, is implied with Dunbar-Nelson's use of the biblical "Babel" (127). The word Babel, believed to have its origins in the Hebrew language, signifies confusion. It is associated with the story in Genesis which tells of a time when all men spoke the same language, and in doing so, they collaborated to build a city with a tower that would reach to heaven. The Lord observed this and, because he believed them to be overly ambitious, decided to make it so that men could not communicate with one another[12].

[12] "[6]And the Lord said, Behold, the people *is* one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do. [7]Go to, let us go down, and there con-

Carnival in New Orleans, is not unlike Carnival throughout its history; there is merriment, pandemonium, or as they say in Trinidad, bacchanal. In those societies for which Carnival is a community celebration, observed during the season preceding the Catholic Lent, it is as much a part of the cultural consciousness as is Christmas for most Americans. In short, it is in the blood. Not only would Carnival be a vital part of Dunbar-Nelson's regional and personal ethos, but it is no surprise that the carnivalesque should be a natural element of her early work. It is an opportunity to speak truth to power, because during Carnival, everyone is considered equal (*Rabelais* 10). Additionally, "people who were usually divided by the barriers of caste, property, profession, and age" are permitted to mingle freely during this time (*Rabelais* 10). It is within this literary milieu of the carnivalesque that young Alice seizes an opportunity to distinguish herself from other local color writers. Included in "Carnival Jangle's" parade of masqueraders are, "jesters and maskers, Jim Crows and clowns, ballet Girls and Mephistos, Indians and monkeys…" (128).

Clowns, devils and Indians are popular carnival character motifs most anywhere Carnival is celebrated. But, "Carnival Jangle" is published for the first time in 1895, just as the Jim Crow laws are being challenged in the Supreme Court with the case of Homer A. Plessy *vs*. Ferguson, where the court upheld a Louisiana law requiring separate railway coaches for whites and blacks. The Jim Crow laws were a system of state and local laws passed between 1876 and the mid-1960s, primarily in the Southern states, which allowed for the legal segregation of African Americans. Not only did it mandate that public facilities for blacks and whites be separate, but there was also a set of etiquette norms that governed black behavior in the presence of whites.

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found their language, that they may not understand one another's speech" (*The Holy Bible, Authorized King James Version*. Thomas Nelson Publisher, Gen.11:6-7).

The term “Jim Crow” was a racial epithet based on a minstrel character created by an out of work actor who performed the character in blackface makeup (Pilgrim). A Jim Crow masker is an undeniably American attribute of Carnival! Nowhere else in the world that Carnival is celebrated would there be someone masquerading as Jim Crow. Furthermore, while Dunbar-Nelson’s experience as a black woman in New Orleans might have been very different from a black experience in North Carolina, Jim Crow was Jim Crow all over the south. So, even if a sharecropper on the east coast had never heard of Mardi Gras, he/she knew what Jim Crow meant.

One hugely familiar carnival motif is that of the clown or jester, “characteristic of the…culture of humor” (*Rabelais* 8). The role of the clown, the fool, or the jester during carnival is to criticize and mock the government, and he could do so without any fear of retribution. The jester is also sometimes a symbol of common sense and honesty, but in New Orleans, during Mardi Gras, the jester has become a symbol of rebellion. But the jester is not simply a colorful, “funny” character visible in carnival processions. Bakhtin explains that “they were the constant, accredited representatives of the carnival spirit in everyday life out of carnival season” (8). In other words, the jester is a constant reminder of the purpose and necessity of carnival in the life of the people—to remind them of the ironies, the inconsistencies and the dual nature of reality. The jester can also be equated to the trickster figure in African American literature.

Through Dunbar-Nelson’s “indeterminate” ethnicities of her characters and their marginal lives, she employs race, or rather ethnic uncertainty, to mock the racial legacy which weakens the American society that created it. Race, and its ambiguousness in a community plagued by miscegenation, is the trope by which Dunbar-Nelson reflects the absurdity of this,

the foundation for marginalizing those whose lives are affected by it, including her own. The notion of race as jester is the trope and the trickster –race becomes the perpetual Carnival jester that pokes fun at how a nation, that defines degrees of complexion (griffes, briqués, mulattoes, quadroons, octoroons, etc.) to determine a person's value, could take itself seriously.

That Dunbar-Nelson's work did not reflect the experience of down-trodden, Southern plantation blacks may have contributed to the scant recognition from contemporary critics. America still fancied the plantation stories made popular with the publication of Harriett Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and stories by Joel Chandler Harris, and New Orleans author, George Washington Cable. The passivity of black characters and black Southern dialect was still popular with white audiences even as late as 1899 when Charles W. Chesnutt published *The Conjure Woman*. Both Chesnutt and Paul Laurence Dunbar desired to write what they believed was more serious literature, and to leave behind the Southern dialect stories for which they became popular. Ironically, in a letter to Paul in May of 1895 Dunbar-Nelson wrote,

"You ask my opinion about the Negro dialect in literature? Well, frankly, I believe in everyone following his own bent. If it be so that one has a special aptitude for dialect work why it is only right that dialect work should be a specialty. But if one should be like me—absolutely devoid of the ability to manage dialect, I don't see the necessity of cramming and forcing oneself into that plane because one is a Negro or a Southerner" (*Color, Sex, & Poetry* 52).

As a result of that literary stance, Dunbar-Nelson may have alienated herself from the market, but she also did not allow herself to be pigeonholed into a genre based on her ethnicity. Unlike her popular, black, male contemporaries, Dunbar-Nelson saved herself the frustration and wrote the stories that she wanted to write. What is more, Alice Dunbar-Nelson did, in fact,

have a propensity for dialect as illustrated in "Carnival Jangle" when a "wizened" and "yellow" merchant of carnival costumes asks Flo, "But, the demoiselle wishes to appear a boy, *un petit garçon*?" (130). *Mai oui!* French, Creole dialect is one of the dialects of 19th century New Orleans—even among blacks.

Dunbar-Nelson further demonstrates her adeptness with the use of the French, Creole dialect in the short story, "The Praline Woman," in which a Creole woman "sits by the side of the Archbishop's quaint little old chapel on Royal Street" peddling pralines (175). That the story opens with a nod to the church through its mention of the "Archbishop's…chapel" is significant in that Carnival is linked to the feasts of the church. However, the carnivalesque calls for a "suspension of all hierarchical precedence;" that is the "existing religious, political, and moral values, norms, and prohibitions" (*Rabelais* 9-10). Any other references to the church are only alluded to with regards to "The Praline Woman;" when the cathedral bell chimes, "the praline woman crosses herself," and begins a "'Hail, Mary, full of grace'"—which is interrupted by the resumption of business (*Works* 176). The story is thus told from the point of view of the "Praline Woman," who in her capacity as a merchant represents the marketplace and the common language associated with this "atmosphere of freedom, frankness, and familiarity" (*Rabelais* 9-10). Dunbar-Nelson's "Praline Woman" is a representation of African American life in New Orleans, despite the ignorance of her critics. Violet Harrington Bryan makes the long neglected distinction between white Creoles and Creoles of color in New Orleans culture ("Race and Gender" 121). Bryan asserts that Dunbar-Nelson "cleverly" disguises Creoles of color, "for her reading audience as Creoles of *any* color," and that Dunbar-Nelson understood that "racial distinctions meant little in terms of essential Creole attitudes" (121).

Though the complexion of the "Praline Woman" is never mentioned, we know who she is because she tells us near the end that the "I'ishman," whom she dislikes says to her, "'Auntie, what fo' you talk so?'" Because whites did not use courtesy titles of respect when referring to blacks, they often addressed older blacks as "Auntie" or "Uncle" as a sort of feigned reverence for their age. As well, the "I'ishman" references her speech, and indeed it is also because of her language that we know who she is. That she calls herself "Po' Tante Marie," uses the broken, "ma'amzelle," (instead of the proper, mademoiselle), and combines her patois with, "Sho', chile, ma bébé, ma petite, she put dese up hissef," suggests a deliberate effort, on Dunbar-Nelson's part, to disguise the conditions of blacks with the quaint, exotic façade that would captivate her readers.

"The Praline Woman" is cleverly imbued with what Bakhtin calls "carnival laughter," which is the "festive laughter…of all the people" (*Rabelais* 11). It is a collective laughter intended for everybody, and is "ambivalent", but sardonic and disparaging (*Rabelais* 11-12). Dunbar-Nelson employs this laughter throughout Tante Marie's dialogue with her potential customers as she tries to get them to purchase her wares, she says, "Pralines, pralines. Ah, ma'amzelle, you buy? S'il vous plaît, ma'amzelle…You tak' none? No husban' fo' you den!" Comical, perhaps, but it is also very near a curse from a possible disciple of Marie Laveau. Dunbar-Nelson invokes the famed New Orleans Voodoo priestess, who had only just died in 1895, by calling the "Praline Woman" by her name. And, we are privy, as well, to Tante Marie's personal feelings as she acknowledges other ethnic groups in the community. Under her breath she mentions, "Here come dat lazy Indien squaw…She jes' sit lak dat in de French Market an' sell her file, an' sleep, sleep, sleep…" or when she says, "Here come dat lazy I'ishman down de strit. I don't lak'

I'ishman, me, non, dey so funny" (176-178). Indeed, Dunbar-Nelson's "carnival laughter" is not, as Bakhtin asserts, in response to a "comic event," but a disguise for the disdain of the oppressed (*Rabelais* 11). This "frank and free" communication, which generally happens during carnival time, is a "temporary suspension, both ideal and real, of hierarchical rank" was an exceptional exchange that could not take place in "everyday life" (*Rabelais* 10). It is a "special *carnivalesque*, marketplace style of expression" that Dunbar-Nelson utilizes in her work, to camouflage the derision, and allow Tante Marie some autonomy. In fact, Tante Marie's customers, whom she regards as "'ma'amzelle'" and "'M'sieu," have no sovereignty in the story as we never hear them speak. In the "marketplace" their perspective is irrelevant. At the same time, she appeals to a reading audience who would prefer to see the miserable and struggling, colored woman in the market as old-world, picturesque, or quaint (*Rabelais* 10).

Fannie Barrier Williams may have believed Dunbar-Nelson's collection to be simply "a book of delightful sketches and charming bits of poetry,"[13] but there is a subversion which masquerades as amiably and good-natured as the young Alice Ruth Moore herself, with her "modest and unassuming ways, cultured and refined manners and brilliant attainment" (*Color, Sex & Poetry*35). She introduces and utilizes the *carnivalesque* in African American literature as a caricature of American attitudes toward race. As one of very few black women writing fiction in the late 19th century, (Pauline Hopkins, Frances E.W. Harper and Amelia E. Johnson were others), Dunbar-Nelson's stories, which embody the elements of "folk culture" and the attributes of carnival, were able to *pass* for local color.

[13] Williams, Fannie Barrier. "The Colored Women of To-Day." *Godey's Magazine* (1892-1898), Jul 1897: American Periodicals Series Online.

CONVENTS AND CULTS

Although the theoretical inclination of this essay is not expressly feminist, a discussion of Dunbar-Nelson would be remiss without the consideration of her female characters who are conventional by all appearances, but whose thoughts and actions are often not. Frequently in Dunbar-Nelson's stories where independent and/or headstrong women figure prominently, irony is the trope of choice, as their autonomous thoughts and actions often lead to their un-happiness— or to their banishment into the convent, which I will discuss later. The writer comes of age at a time when women, black and white, were making their voices heard, especially regarding the anti-lynching and suffragette movements in which the writer was active. Ironically, Dunbar-Nelson is a very young woman, writing at the end of the Victorian era, where the ideology of the "cult of true womanhood" has dominated for the last decade. Indeed it is a "transitional" period "when Victorian ideas maintained force, but when social and legal changes were widening women's lives and increasing their participation in paid labor" (*Color, Sex, & Poetry* 40). On the contrary, black women defined their own meanings of womanhood which included intellect, education, and morality. However, Shirley J. Carlson writes in "Black Ideals of Womanhood in the Late Victorian Era," that additionally, "the ideal black woman…displayed a strong community and racial consciousness, often revealed in her work-whether paid or unpaid-within the black community. Self-confident and out-spoken, she was highly esteemed by her community which frequently applauded her as a 'race woman' and role model for young people" (62). Young Dunbar-Nelson was, without a doubt, influenced by these "race women," and spent a great majority of her life responding to the duties of her sororal, political, and community affiliations.

Gloria T. Hull reveals that later in her life, even after her third marriage to newspaper-man, Robert J. Nelson, as an independent spirit, the writer often struggled to meet financial obligations. However, Dunbar-Nelson's life appeared to be filled with the adventures of an independent woman as expressed in the story simply titled, "The Woman" (*Works* 21). The story begins in third person in which the manager of a literary club gazes "sternly upon the young man" and poses the question of "whether woman's chances for matrimony are increased or decreased when she becomes man's equal as a wage earner?" (21). Even with the subsequent challenge of the women in the office, an answer to the inquiry is only challenged when the story abruptly switches to first person. Then the writer, "Moi?" proceeds to answer what the young man would not (21). It is interesting to note that the fiery and unconstrained retort of "Moi?" was expressed four years before Dunbar-Nelson was to meet and marry, poet, Paul Lawrence Dunbar, and virtually shelve her career to support his. The narrator admits that she "said nothing," but that the answer to the manager's question was already in her mind; that "the average working woman of to-day" would more or less be burdened by a husband and children. It is clear that the writer views life as a self-sufficient woman as most desirable, and even seems an advocate of the alternative lifestyle for late Victorian women. Single women are free to travel, study, and spend their own money, and even "her cares, her money-troubles, her debts, and her scrimpings …only make her independent, instead of reducing her to a dead level of despair" (22). No wonder that Fannie Barrier Williams thought her "bright and racy". The author's thinking in "The Woman" reflects the changing attitudes of women at the end of the 19th century. Furthermore, "Moi?" contends that marriage is "based on a desire to possess the physical attractions of the woman by the man, pretty much as a child desires a toy, and an inate

love of man, a wild desire not to be ridiculed by the foolish as an 'old maid,' and a certain delicate shrinking from the work of the world" (26).

The narrator contends, unrepentantly, that women who do marry are lazy, and independent women are, more or less, respected and admired by men, "even at a distance," but "that in itself is something" (27). It would seem that young, determined, Dunbar-Nelson was bound for a long and successful career as an educator and a writer. At nineteen she was already an accomplished columnist for the *Journal of the Lodge* and teacher in the New Orleans school system, and "a brilliant and versatile writer" (*Color, Sex & Poetry* 35). She was often noted for her "modest and unassuming ways, cultured and refined manners and brilliant attainment," which contributed to her popularity and appearances in society pages (35). Yet, the narrator relinquishes, admitting that even "sensible" women often succumb to romance. Indeed, no matter how independent or powerful the female is, "when the right moment comes, she will sink as gracefully into his manly embrace…and cuddle as warmly and sweetly to his bosom as her little sister who has done nothing else but think, dream, and practice for that hour" (28). This, Dunbar-Nelson concludes, "comes natural, you see" (28). And it came natural for her as well for she married Paul on March 8, 1898, and moved with him to Washington, D.C., virtually putting her career on hold.

Conversely, the fates of many of Dunbar-Nelson's female protagonists are frequently left in the hands of a patriarchal representative who seeks to repress the individuality and sexuality of the female subjects who are generally "small" and "brown". That repression is sometimes exercised with the assistance of the Catholic Church, a "Mother Superior," or "stern duena aunt" as in the stories of "Sister Josepha" and "Odalie". Dunbar-Nelson was not Catho-

lic, but Catholicism, like Voodou, claims an indubitable place in the history and social fabric of New Orleans. The writer worked briefly for the African Methodist Episcopal Church, but through much of her work she demonstrates a reserved familiarity with both Catholicism and the occult. Hull explains that the author "evinced an awareness of meta-realms of experience beyond the visible world which was rooted in her mother's Obeah beliefs and enhanced by her own attention to the spiritual arts" (*Works* xlv). Dunbar-Nelson was progressive-minded with regard to religion, often delving into spiritual disciplines that combined some form of Christianity with the metaphysical such as her practice of Unity, "a system of meditation, mind control, practical positive thinking, and collective support," and the Master Key, a similar, but less religiously traditional practice (*Give Us This Day* 44). The mid-eighteen hundreds saw the arrest of many free women of color, such as the famed Marie Laveaux, for their participation and leadership roles in the practice of New Orleans Voodou sects. Many of these women were socially prominent, influential business leaders with followers from all three levels of the New Orleans tripartite system (Fandrich 190). Like these "Defiant African Sisterhoods," who achieved an autonomy and liberation in the practice of Voodou in New Orleans in the mid-century, Dunbar-Nelson uses subtle revelations of the occult to give her female protagonist some minute authority over their lives. Like the "Defiant African Sisterhoods," they exercise this authority by negotiating their gender to make their way in a changing Victorian world that often determined women's choices both publically and privately. Conversely, outside the New Orleans circles where Voodoo practices took place, the occult had a negative connotation because of its connection to African slaves. This autonomy was limited, however, by Dunbar-Nelson's effort to adhere to the assimilation of the "genteel standard of Victorian sexual conduct" that some Afri-

can Americans believed would gain the community full acceptance into mainstream American society (Moses 964).

Tension between the two religious systems are prevalent in stories such as "The Goodness of Saint Rocque," and "Sister Josepha," in which Dunbar-Nelson expresses the duality of Bakhtin's carnivalesque throughout the stories. In "The Goodness of Saint Rocque" both Manuela and Claralie are competing for the same man, Theophilé. Both women belong to the same Creole community, both are Catholic, but Manuela is described as "dark," while Claralie, "dat light gal," is "blonde" and "petite" (3-8). Although both women are Catholic, each appeal to the local conjurer, a "wizened yellow woman," for *advice* on how to "ween" the affections of Theophilé. Each woman is counseled to make a "nouvena" to St. Rocque. St. Roch, (spelled both ways), a neighborhood in New Orleans, is named for the Shrine and Cemetery of Saint Roch, patron of good health.

During the height of the yellow fever epidemic in 1867 and 1878, a parish priest, Rev. Peter Leonard Thevis, prayed to St. Roch for the health of his community, and in return he would build a chapel and cemetery in honor of the saint. Reportedly no one in the parish died from yellow fever, and the shrine began to receive many seeking the help of St. Roch for various "afflictions, diseases and deformities" (strochproject.com). In "The Praline Woman" the protagonist, Po' Tante Marie loses two children to yellow fever, she says, "'I burn candle in St. Rocque, I say my beads, I sprinkle holy water roun' he's bed;" even after making a novena to the saint (*Works* 177). And she sympathizes with her customers giving, "lagniappe fo' madame's lil' bébé," for those who have lost children, no doubt to the epidemic as well, as the disease knew no class distinctions (178).

In addition to being the patron of good health, the name of St. Roch has traditionally been invoked for the successful acquisition of a spouse. Purportedly, on Good Friday girls routinely made trips to the St. Roch chapel after "a local legend, which promised a husband before the year was out to the maiden who said a prayer" and offered a small donation (strochproject.com). This legend, by the time Dunbar-Nelson was writing, was fully entrenched in the community.

Interestingly, the author's invocation of the color yellow suggests the presence of the occult. In Voodoo the color yellow represents the spirit of Legba who is often called upon as an intermediary between earth and the spirit world. He is often depicted as Saint Lazarus, or a small decrepit old man who walks with a cane. Not only is the "Wizened One" described as "yellow," but on the walkway to her dwelling, "one little step was scrupulously yellow-washed," as is the floor of the room in which she holds the séance (7-8). And the night Theophilé leads her "to the head of the table, at the right hand of maman," Manuela is wearing a "pale yellow gown" (14). Again, both women are Catholic, and both are advised to summon St. Rocque in the affairs of their hearts. However, as an extra measure for Manuela, the "Wizened One" offers her a charm to wear around her waist, "Den you mek prayer at St. Rocque an' burn can'le" (9). While in itself suggests some form of *magic,* making novenas to saints is a common Catholic practice. Conversely, the tale insinuates a more powerful magic in that Manuela is to make the novena to the saint only *after* she has worn the charm on her person. It is the magic of the charm, and perhaps the "pale yellow gown" which gives Manuela the confidence to "ween" her man. This duality of Catholicism and Occultism feels, at first, conflicting, and might prove to be so, for someone not accustomed to a twofold religious environment such as what Dunbar-

Nelson must have experienced as a resident of New Orleans neighborhoods. And that religious duality is later evident when she pursues the nontraditional Christian disciplines of Unity and the Master Key.

In “A Carnival Jangle,” the protagonist, Flo, is persuaded by Mephisto, the Prince of Darkness, the Devil, to leave the comfort of her “tame” gang and play mas’ (masquerade) with him and his friends. He takes her into a dive, where the merchant is an old, Wizened, yellow troll with an annoying voice, to find a costume. Remember that the color yellow denotes the presence of the occult. It so happens that the only costume available is one that will cause her to look like a boy, a “troubadour of lovely form”. This decision, to masquerade as a male is a fatal one. After coming upon a group of Mardi Gras Indians, one of the Indians mistakes Flo for a rival and stabs her with a knife. Had Flo played it safe, and continued to perform in the role of her gender, her life might have been spared. Here Dunbar-Nelson employs a throwback from the Victorian idea that women remain the “Angel in the house,” or suffer the consequences. To go out into the world employing the ideas, skills, or perhaps, even social mannerisms of men will result in failure. Surely some might suggest that it was Dunbar-Nelson’s own ambitious, headstrong, and independent spirit—qualities that might have been more acceptable of men—that caused some strife in her personal life. Indeed it is her willful nature that Hull suggests that contributed to the issues in her marriage to Paul Dunbar (*Color, Sex, & Poetry* 44).

CONCLUSION

Violets and Other Tales and *The Goodness of Saint Rocque and Other Stories* were the only collections of short stories published by Alice Dunbar-Nelson, but both convey a poetic, insightful, and historical view of the tripartite social structure that was 19th century New Orleans from a black, female perspective, as few African Americans, and even fewer black women were writing fiction at the same time. Her critics contended that her work had, "no characteristics peculiar to her race," but that is because the country was confused—suffering a self-induced psychosis— and perhaps in denial, about who was black and who was not, based on its own "one-drop"[14] definition of blackness. White reading audiences were accustomed to black characters as being "either tragic mulattoes or happy plantation slaves," and because of this critics, as recently as 1987, felt that Dunbar-Nelson's fiction was "separated from her black experience" (*Color, Sex, & Poetry* 52-3). But given the New Orleans' record of miscegenation, its profound influence of European, African, and Caribbean culture, the social and political implications of Carnival, and also its brief legacy of racial tolerance, Dunbar-Nelson's "black experience" was likely profoundly different from what many had been conditioned to recognize.

Imagine that in 1895 there was no television, no internet, and no way to otherwise envisage the lives of others except through travel, personal experience or hearsay. It might be easy to conceive that people, who are generally the same, live generally the same kinds of lives. But then, as now, even for African Americans, there was no homogenous black existence; which

[14] The "one-drop" rule is an idiomatic term used to describe those with any African ancestry. It was implemented as a law under the Racial Integrity Act of 1924, and essentially meant that any person with just "one drop of black blood" was deemed to be legally black, and therefore subject to the discrimination and inequality that came with that status.

means that an experience of life in Louisiana might be very different from that experienced in New York, California or South Carolina. There are many black experiences, and Alice Dunbar-Nelson's was just one. She identified herself as a colored or black person, and likely experienced, within society, what others in her position experienced. Therefore, her fiction is not separate from, but wholly encapsulates *her* black experience, and certainly many others with similar racial and regional backgrounds. And to suggest that *Violets* or *St. Rocque* does not represent her black experience negates her life.

The diverse, social phenomenon that was New Orleans before and after the Civil War, the dual pervasiveness of Catholicism and African and Haitian Voodou, and the French inspired Mardi Gras, influenced the lives of many Africans who found themselves in the region of Louisiana. The influx of African, Irish, German, Italian, Spanish, and French created a cornucopia of language and diverse speech patterns that inspired Dunbar-Nelson's early efforts. And while many of her characters are indeed racially or ethnically undefined and unfixed it allowed her to creatively express and portray the lives of many marginal individuals who might have otherwise gone unnoticed. Additionally, it introduced her work to an audience anticipating the quaint regional stories from local color writers.

Rabelais and His World or the carnivalesque was not introduced into the literary mainstream until 1968, and Alice Dunbar-Nelson was only rediscovered in the 1980s. But Bakhtin's revelations about the medieval and renaissance carnival life transcends time to connect and correlate almost flawlessly to the conditions of New Orleans after Reconstruction. The city's connection to the Parisian Renaissance carnival and the folk culture and humor of medieval carnival life opens up the study of Mardi Gras and its function in the lives of those native of and

attached to the rich history of New Orleans. As Carnival is celebrated in many parts of the world, and its mirrored-view reflects not just those cities in which it takes place, but it exposes the double-life of people everywhere. Likewise, Mardi Gras is not simply a New Orleans thing, but the principles and spirit of Mardi Gras reveal the schizophrenic relationship America has with itself over the issue of race. Yet, "Carnival is the people's second life, organized on the basis of laughter"—that ambivalent folk humor which allows us to mock and admonish ourselves, even as we acknowledge our ridiculousness (*Rabelais* 8-12).

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