

PIOTR BLUMCZYŃSKI  
JOANNA WOŹNICZAK

## FROM AN AMERICAN PLANTATION TO INTERWAR POLAND: HOW UNCLE REMUS BECAME BAM-BO THE NEGRO

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**Abstract:** This article opens with the introduction of Joel Chandler Harris and his literary output. As one of “local colourists,” Harris depicted American plantation life in 19th-century Georgia and included many cultural as well as folk elements in his works. The following analysis of his stories about Uncle Remus focuses on (1) the levels of narration; (2) the linguistic complexity of the text (the stories abound in slang and dialectal expressions); (3) the form; and (4) the folklore value. These four aspects guide the discussion of the only Polish translation of the Uncle Remus stories. Prepared by Władysława Wielńska in 1929, it was addressed to children. Therefore, the article aims to determine the profile of the translation as a children’s book, to consider it in relation to the *skopos* of the source text and to establish the extent to which it preserved the peculiar character of the Uncle Remus stories.

**Keywords:** folktale, dialect, Joel Chandler Harris, Uncle Remus, local colour

Joel Chandler Harris (1848–1908) belongs to American “local colourists” (cf. *Norton Anthology of American Literature* 1994: 7–8). This metaphor, drawing on the analogy to genre painters, seems very fitting as a description of his literary output. Though Harris was a journalist, satirist and poet, he rose to fame as the author of the Uncle Remus stories. The first story was published in 1876 in *Atlanta Constitution*, others soon followed and in 1881 Harris, encouraged by their enthusiastic reception (countless reprints in magazines across the country) and literally compelled by his readers,<sup>1</sup> published

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<sup>1</sup> Harris received more than a thousand requests for a collection of tales (see <http://www.uncleremus.com>).

his first collection of short stories, entitled *Uncle Remus: His Songs and His Sayings*, followed by *Nights with Uncle Remus* (1883), *Uncle Remus and His Friends* (1892) and *Uncle Remus and the Little Boy* (1905).

The enduring popularity of the stories as well as Harris's status in the American canon can be explained by several factors connected to the literature of "local colour." In his stories, Harris painted a detailed colourful image of his home state, Georgia – in fact, of the American South – reflecting its social, moral and linguistic specificity. He was able to masterfully capture the nuances of the Afro-American dialect and vernacular. His writings were a rich source of both dialectal and slang expressions, but at the same time gave ample insight into the plantation life. Harris celebrated not only the sociolect of black slaves but also their culture, as expressed in various songs, proverbs, dances and other traditional folk elements. Although his image of the life of slaves was excessively positive (indeed, rather utopian), it was also convincingly vivid and tinted with the sentiment for the reality which ceased to exist due to revolutionary socio-political changes (slavery in the United States was finally abolished in 1865). Between 1862 and 1866, young Harris lived on his employer's plantation (*Norton Anthology of American Literature* 1994: 445), which gave him unmediated access to the culture and language of its folk. Perhaps, then, his idealized image of the life of slaves might at least in part be attributed to nostalgic memories from that time.

The plantation culture of the 19th-century American South is embodied in the title protagonist of most stories – Uncle Remus, once a slave and then a loyal servant of a family of plantation owners. Harris depicted him as a thoroughly positive character. He is not only wise and experienced (by virtue of his old age), but also friendly, warm and caring. Always ready to help, he communicates in his stories important life truths, though never in a patronizing or moralizing tone. The little white boy, Johnny, who visits Uncle Remus every evening, seems fascinated equally by the stories and by the storyteller. His respect and admiration are obvious from the opening line of the story *Saddle and Bridle*: ... *when the little boy had finished supper and hurried out to sit with his venerable patron* .... Here Uncle Remus is portrayed as a genuine patriarch rather than as an old former slave. It must be noted that in 19th-century America the title "uncle" was also used as a condescending form of address for elderly men viewed as senile and useless. As a result, the title "uncle" is quite ambivalent: it may connote friendly intimacy, but also imply a somewhat haughty attitude, especially in view of racial divisions. Harris must have been aware of the dual meaning of "uncle," but he evidently used it in good faith.

In the stories, the author uses several levels of narration, differentiated in terms of perspective, degree of subjectivism (including access to the thoughts and intentions of the characters) and language. This diversity can be seen already in the first story, entitled *Uncle Remus Initiates the Little Boy*,<sup>2</sup> which opens the collection *Uncle Remus: His Songs and His Sayings*. At the first, external level is the “objective” and “invisible” narrator, who introduces those living on the plantation but distances himself from their perspective:

One evening recently, the lady whom Uncle Remus calls “Miss Sally” missed her little seven-year-old.

In the next several sentences the narrator develops this description from the vantage point of “Miss Sally” (note the inverted commas indicating a certain epistemic awareness), who for a moment becomes the “eyes and ears” of the reader:

Making search for him through the house and through the yard, she heard the sound of voices in the old man’s cabin, and, looking through the window, saw the child sitting by Uncle Remus. His head rested against the old man’s arm, and he was gazing with an expression of the most intense interest into the rough, weather-beaten face, that beamed so kindly upon him. This is what “Miss Sally” heard:

From now on, it is Uncle Remus that assumes the role of the narrator, as is clearly signalled by a change in register and the mode of narration, which starts to reflect his subjective judgments, opinions, and manners – in other words, his personality. This transition can hardly be missed:

“Bimeby, one day, atter Brer Fox bin doin’ all dat he could fer ter ketch Brer Rabbit, en Brer Rabbit bein doin’ all he could fer ter keep ‘im fum it, Brer Fox say to hisse’f dat he’d put up a game on Brer Rabbit, en he ain’t mo’n got de wuds out’n his mouf twel Brer Rabbit came a lopin’ up de big road, lookin’ des ez plump, en ez fat, en ez sassy ez a Moggin hoss in a barley-patch.

“‘Hol’ on dar, Brer Rabbit,’ sez Brer Fox, sezee.

It is only at this third, deepest narrative level that we encounter the broad spectrum of elements making up the local colour. Linguistically, they may

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<sup>2</sup> The text according to <http://www.uncleremus.com/initiates.html> (accessed on 4 March 2012).

be grouped into several main categories: (1) archaisms, e.g. *nigh*<sup>3</sup> (rather than *near*); (2) regionalisms, e.g. *tush* (rather than *tusk*); and (3) sociolect markers, both lexical (e.g. *dreck*) and grammatical (e.g. *she ain't saying' nothin'* rather than *she wasn't saying anything*). The largest group, however, is composed of (4) dialectisms, which contribute most prominently to the unique style of Uncle Remus' stories. This group, in turn, is dominated by phonetic dialectisms rendered in a rather peculiar spelling, which makes them immediately noticeable in the text. Without delving into a detailed analysis of the phonetic markers of the dialect (or indeed, etholect) spoken by the black community in Georgia in the 19th century, it should be pointed out that a number of them become clear only when pronounced aloud with appropriate phonological adjustments (e.g. *bimeby* – *by and by*; *fer ter keep 'im fum it* – *for to keep him from it*; *sezee* – *says he*). This is rather compelling evidence of the oral tradition that Harris drew on. It also indicates that his stories were meant to be read aloud, typically by adults to children.

The stories themselves, despite their prosaic form, immediately bring to mind the fables of Aesop, Jean de la Fontaine and Ignacy Krasicki.<sup>4</sup> Their protagonists are anthropomorphised animals who talk to one another (as well as to people), use tools, cook, live in houses, ride on horseback, have various adventures and face dilemmas. Two chief protagonists are the Rabbit and the Fox (distinguished, along with other anthropomorphised animals, by initial capitals, as opposed to “normal” animals, such as fish, used only for food). The Rabbit is the trickster-hero, who is constantly getting into trouble but always manages to conquer the difficulties. The Fox, though quite cunning, is never able to match him. This classic struggle between the apparently weaker protagonist and the stronger one is sometimes viewed as a light-hearted allusion to the conflict between black slaves and white masters. Each story features some moral, firmly rooted in “folk wisdom,” but never stated explicitly. Consequently, the didactic character of the stories is overshadowed by their prevailing folkloristic value, composed mainly of ethnic elements which contribute to the unique local colour. Perhaps the most striking of them is the ubiquitous nickname *brer* (in the feminine: *sis*), attached to the names of all protagonists, both in Un-

<sup>3</sup> All examples as quoted by Najwer 2008: 48ff.

<sup>4</sup> Ignacy Krasicki was a leading Polish Enlightenment poet, author of *Bajki i przypowieści* (Fables and Parables), published in 1779. Though they largely emulate a long international tradition reaching back to antiquity, they are distinctly Polish in colour. Until this day, some of Krasicki's lines continue to be present in the Polish collective memory as sayings or proverbs.

cle Remus' speech (but not in the descriptions provided by the "objective" narrator) and in dialogues, as in the passage quoted above. This nickname echoes, on the one hand, the egalitarian mind-set of Protestant communities and, on the other hand, ethnic solidarity of the black community. In both these groups, often cutting across one another, the titles *brother* and *sister* – here in the colloquial, shortened version – function as the default forms of address used exclusively with reference to the members of the given group.<sup>5</sup> Allusions and more or less direct references of this sort abound on various levels. As mentioned above, the Uncle Remus stories preserve the unique local colour of the 19th-century American South.

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Having considered the unique character of Harris' stories, so deeply-rooted in the reality of the source culture, we thought that their translation into Polish could prove a highly interesting research material. This intuition was confirmed, and below we present the most important observations as well as conclusions emerging from our analysis of the only Polish translation, the 84-page book entitled *O psotach kuma zająca* (On the Tricks of Brer Rabbit), translated by Władysława Wielińska and published in 1929 in Warszawa by Dom Książki Polskiej. From today's perspective, this book is so fascinating because it was published more than eighty years ago; therefore, it may provide valuable insights into how translational challenges, particularly those dealing with culture, were approached and handled in the interwar period.

The first and most general observation has to do with the genre of the translation. It is clearly addressed to children, which is confirmed by the design of the cover that, besides the title and the image of the main protagonist, the Rabbit, features an iconic representation of an owl circumscribed by the caption: *Książki różowe // Bibl. dla dzieci* (Pink books // Library for children). Such a framing of the translation explains why the author's preface was omitted altogether (Harris regularly prefaced his books with extensive historical, cultural, linguistic and methodological information) and, at the same time, it encourages a number of further translatory decisions. The book in Polish starts with a short narrative which we quote below almost in full:

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<sup>5</sup> This also brings to mind the piety of St. Francis of Assisi and his rhetoric of the brotherhood of all creation.

– Nigdy jeszcze nie nudziłem się chyba tak bardzo, jak dziś! – zawołał mały Jerzyk do siedzących przy jego łóżeczku rodziców.

– Ależ kochanie – odparła mamusia – masz przecież książeczki, zabawki, gry... Chcesz, to zagramy w loteryjkę lub domino?

– Nie, nie chcę – rzekł Jerzyk rozkapryszonym głosem. – Ach, jakże się nudzę! – zawołał znów po chwili. – Książeczki swoje znam już prawie na pamięć, a zabawki i gry nie bawią mnie już wcale! Ach, gdyby tu był choć jeden chłopczyk, z którym mógłbym się bawić, ale skąd go wziąć w tem szkaradnym pustkowiu!

I było to rzeczywiście rzeczą niemożliwą. Rodzice bowiem Jerzyka mieszkali w głębi w olbrzymiej puszczy, w Północnej Ameryce. Tatuś Jerzyka wybudował sobie wśród pięknej polany niewielki, drewniany dom mieszkalny. Obok wznosił parę zabudowań gospodarskich i począł karczować lat dookoła, zamieniając go powoli na uprawne pola. Oprócz rodziców Jerzyka mieszkali tam tylko kilku służących murzynów.

Zrozumiecie więc teraz sami, dlaczego Jerzyk nie miał żadnego rówieśnika, z którym mógłby się bawić.

Po chwili musieli rodzice zostawić Jerzyka samego, nie mogli bowiem zaniedbywać długo swych zajęć gospodarskich.

– Ach, jak ja się nudzę, Bam-Bo! – zawołał znów Jerzyk na widok wchodzącego do pokoju młodego murzyna, który przyszedł dorzucić drzewa do płonącego na kominie ognia. – (...) Jakże gorzko żałuję teraz, że nie usłużyłem tatusia i wdrapałem się na to wysokie drzewo. Ale chciałem ci koniecznie dorównać, Bam-Bo.

– Niech Jerzyk się nie martwi. Bam-Bo ma teraz chwilę czasu i opowie Jerzykowi coś wesołego.

– A co takiego? – zagadnął chłopczyk ciekawie.

– Bam-Bo opowie o psotach i figlach, jakie kum Zając płatał innym zwierzętom.

– Dobrze, dobrze, opowiedz mi Bam-Bo! – zawołał ucieszony chłopczyk.

Bam-Bo usiadł na ziemi przy ogniu, potrząsnął swą kędzierzawą czupryną, łypnął raz i drugi białkami i zaczął w te słowa: (Harris 1929: 7–10)

“I think have never been was so bored as today,” cried small Jerzyk to his parents sitting by his bedside.

“But sweetheart,” said him mum, “you have your little books, toys, games... We can play a lottery or domino if you want?”

“No, I don’t,” replied Jerzyk in a sulky voice. “Oh, how bored I am!” he cried again after a while. “I know all my books almost by heart and the toys and games are not fun anymore. If only there was a boy I could play with – but where to find him in this terrible wilderness?”

Indeed, this was an impossible thing. Jerzyk’s parents lived in the midst of a great forest, in North America. Jerzyk’s daddy had built a small wooden

house in a beautiful clearing. Around it, he had built several other buildings and then started to root out the surrounding forest, transforming it slowly into farmland. Apart from Jerzyk's parents, there were only several black servants.

Now you can understand why Jerzyk had no peer to play with.

After a while the parents had to leave Jerzyk alone because they could not neglect their household duties for too long.

"How bored I am, Bam-Bo," Jerzyk cried again seeing a young Negro enter the room to throw some wood into the fireplace. "... How bitterly do I regret not having listened to my daddy and climbing that tall tree. But I wanted to be like you, Bam-Bo."

"Let Jerzyk not worry. Bam-Bo has a moment now and will tell Jerzyk something funny."

"What is that?" asked Jerzyk with curiosity.

"Bam-Bo will speak about the tricks and pranks that Brer Rabbit played on other animals."

"Great, great – tell me all about it, Bam-Bo!" shouted the little boy in excitement.

Bam-Bo sat on the floor by the fire, shook his curly hair, winked with the whites of his eyes and started like this: (trans. P.B.)

This introduction as well as a conclusion of comparable length and a few sentences summing up several chapters are authored by the translator. They offer a framework for all stories. However, this framework only loosely corresponds to the external level of narration in Harris' work. In fact, the source text and its Polish version seem to share only the protagonists, namely a white boy, his parents (in the source text: only the mother) and a black servant. Perhaps the most noticeable are various adaptive and domesticating strategies. The little boy is known by the familiar, if somewhat old-fashioned, name *Jerzyk* (a diminutive of *Jerzy* [George]), while his mother (in the source text, *Miss Sally*) loses her name in translation and becomes simply *mamusia* (mommy). The translator is clearly fond of diminutives: they are used by the narrator (*łódeczko* [bed<sub>DIM</sub>], *głosik* [voice<sub>DIM</sub>]), Jerzyk (*chłopczyk* [boy<sub>DIM</sub>], *tatus* [daddy]) and Jerzyk's parents (*książeczki* [books<sub>DIM</sub>]; *loteryjka* [lottery<sub>DIM</sub>]) – she may be working on the assumption that a book intended for children must include such linguistic markers. The story is set in North America, which the translator-author depicts as a vast, unsurveyed and almost uninhabited terrain; at the same time, a number of familiar elements (e.g. books, domino, farm buildings, etc.) allow Polish children to identify with Jerzyk.

This strong domestication is only disrupted by the presence of “several Negro slaves,” Bam-Bo in particular. He is indeed a peculiar character, but has very little to do with his prototype, Uncle Remus, not only because of his young age. Bam-Bo is sketched with a highly schematic and often conflicting manner. This contradictory presentation is best illustrated by his speech: he tends to use quite sophisticated vocabulary while at the same time he keeps using the third person singular both for self-reference and when addressing his interlocutors. It may be an attempt to render, at least in part, the idiolect of Uncle Remus, though the effect appears rather dubious since, for Polish readers, Bam-Bo’s speech instantly brings to mind the utterances of the nearly proverbial Kali (from Sienkiewicz’s *In Desert and Wilderness*), who embodies the stereotype of verbal ineptness of the black hero. Setting aside other negative racial stereotypes (which are more striking today than eighty years ago), it should be noted that the little white boy admires the black servant chiefly for his athletic skills (especially tree climbing) and listens to his stories because he is bored and lacks other forms of entertainment. This is a rather daunting picture if we recall little Johnny’s nearly reverential fascination with the personality of elderly Uncle Remus – the attitude clearly noticeable in the original. That personality vanished in translation. One could wonder why the translator in her adaptation of this character had not retained at least the element of old age (and therefore wisdom, experience, graceful kindness, etc.) instead of the black skin. Such a narrator would have been much more convincing in psychological terms. Perhaps the translator did not want to take such a liberty with the source text? Regardless of the reasons behind this decision, Bam-Bo is only a pretext – remarkably poor – for the stories he tells.

A closer analysis of the translated stories reveals several noteworthy points. The first observation concerns different text partitioning: short original episodes are merged into larger units in Polish. Such a strategy results in greater coherence of the stories uninterrupted by frequent excursions to the higher level of narration, as is the case in the source text. Consequently, the presence of Bam-Bo throughout the book is rather scarce. In order to appreciate the style of the Polish translation, let us consider it against the following excerpt from arguably the best-known of Uncle Remus’ tales, *The Wonderful Tar-Baby Story*:

“One day ... Brer Fox went ter wuk en got ‘im some tar, en mix it wid some turkentime, en fix up a contrapshun w’at he call a Tar-Baby, en he tuck dish yer Tar-Baby en he sot ‘er in de big road, en den he lay off in de bushes fer to see what de

news wuz gwine ter be. En he didn't hatter wait long, nudder, kaze bimeby here come Brer Rabbit pacin' down de road – *lippity-clippity, clippity-lippity* – dez ez sassy ez a jay-bird. Brer Fox, he lay low. Brer Rabbit come prancin' 'long twel he spy de Tar-Baby, en den he fotch up on his behime legs like he wuz 'stonished. De Tar Baby, she sot dar, she did, en Brer Fox, he lay low."

"'Mawnin'!' sez Brer Rabbit, sezee – 'nice wedder dis mawnin'", sezee.

"'Tar-Baby ain't sayin' nuthin,' en Brer Fox he lay low.

"'How duz yo' sym'tums seem ter segashuate?' sez Brer Rabbit, sezee.

"'Brer Fox, he wink his eye slow, en lay low, en de Tar-Baby, she ain't sayin' nuthin.'

"'How you come on, den? Is you deaf?'" sez Brer Rabbit, sezee. 'Kaze if you is, I kin holler louder,' sezee.

"'Tar-Baby stay still, en Brer Fox, he lay low.'"<sup>6</sup>

Pewnego razu wziął kum Lis trochę smoły, zmieszał ją z żywicą i ugniótł coś w rodzaju czarnego ciasta. Z ciasta tego ulepił niewielkiego człowieka. Było to istne straszdyło na wróble, czarne i lepkie, aż strach! Kum Lis postanowił dać mu odpowiednie imię i po głębokim namyśle nazwał go Smoluchem.

Następnie ustawił Smolucha na skraju drogi, a sam ukrył się starannie w sąsiednich krzakach i... czekał, co z tego wyniknie. Nie czekał długo. Po chwili zjawił się na drodze kum Zając. Szedł powoli, drobnym kroczkiem, tup... tup... tup...

Wtem spostrzegł Smolucha. Zdziwił się niezmiernie i aż przystanął na tylnych łapkach. Smoluch stał wyprostowany, a kum Lis leżał w swej kryjówce.

– Dzień dobry, czarna osobo – rzekł kum Zając. – Piękną dziś mamy pogodę.

Smoluch milczał.

– Jak zdrowie? – ciągnął niezrażony kum Zając.

Kum Lis trwał w swem ukryciu i mrugał tylko złośliwie okiem, a Smoluch milczał jak zaklęty.

– Cóż to? – zapytał kum Zając. – Czyś głuchy? Bo jeżeli nie słyszysz dobrze, to zapewniam cię, że potrafię głośniejsz krzyczeć! (Harris 1929: 11–12)

One day ... Brer Fox took some tar, mixed it with turpentine, and kneaded it into some sort of black dough. From this dough he made a small man. It was a real scarecrow, black and terribly sticky. Brer Fox decided to give it a proper name; after some consideration he called it a Tar-Man.

Then he tucked the Tar-Man on the side of the road and hid carefully in the bushes nearby and waited to see what would happen. He did not have to wait long. After a while, Brer Rabbit appeared on the road. He walked slowly, taking small steps ... thump ... thump ... thump...

<sup>6</sup> See <http://www.uncleremus.com/tarbaby.html> (accessed on 3 May 2012).

Suddenly he saw the Tar-Man. Astonished, he stood still on his hind legs. The Tar-Man stood erect and Brer Fox lay in his hiding place.

“Good morning,” said Brer Rabbit. “Lovely weather we have today.”

The Tar Man did not say anything.

“How are you?” said Brer Rabbit, undiscouraged.

Brer Fox, winking maliciously, lay in his hiding place and the Tar-Man was silent as if enchanted.

“What is this?” asked Brer Rabbit. “Are you deaf? Because if you can’t hear well, I assure you I can shout louder.” (trans. P.B.)

Let us comment on the Polish translation of this passage. At the higher level of narration Bam-Bo’s utterances retain few elements of stylistic markedness, but the stories he tells are stripped of them almost entirely. In translation, the original richness of dialectical markers has become standardised, levelled out and simplified, as is typical of much literature for children. The translator, not attempting to recreate the oral character of the stories, neutralized a number of lexical and syntactic markers, including the characteristic repetitions typical of colloquial speech (e.g. *sez Brer Rabbit, sezee*). Consequently, the Polish translation is not as clearly intended to be read aloud.

At the same time, the translator seems to have striven to preserve at least some stylistic qualities of the Uncle Remus stories. Such attempts may be seen in her rendition of various onomatopoeic expressions, though not always entirely successful. In the passage quoted above, the colourful dactylic *lippity-clippity, lippity-clippity*, imitating a rabbit’s light and effortless leaps, turns into the heavy and graceless *tup... tup... tup...* Elsewhere, the translator, perhaps unwittingly, simply rewrites the English exclamation *wahoo* without trying to make it pronounceable in Polish, which to an unsuspecting reader may appear a special American incantation rather than an ordinary call used to attract someone’s attention (functionally equivalent to phrases such as *a kuku* or *hop-hop* in Polish).

Another important element of the American text reproduced in the Polish translation is the title or form of address *Brer* consistently rendered as *kum*. From today’s perspective, it is difficult to evaluate this decision, because the Polish *kum* has almost completely disappeared from common use. Some support is provided by dictionary definitions: apart from the highly specific sense of kinship relations (“a godfather to a godmother and the child’s parents or a child’s father to the child’s godparents”), *Słownik języka polskiego PWN* (A Dictionary of the Polish Language) lists the colloquial

usage, “a friend, companion, comrade.”<sup>7</sup> Despite indicating a sense of kinship and friendship, *kum* does not fully convey the idea of spiritual egalitarianism rooted in the Protestant doctrine of universal brotherhood – a crucial feature in the American context because Uncle Remus’ stories are presented against the backdrop of the southern plantation culture and the issue of slavery. As far as religious references go, this is not the only adjustment: the translator replaced the Protestant *saying grace* before a meal with a typically Catholic *odmawiać pacierz* (to say a prayer), with the word *pacierz* connoting, via metonymy, the beads of the rosary, while the original prayer, or rather a plea, *Bless us en bine us, en put us in crack whar de Ole Boy can’t fine us*, became an act of penance: *Przebacz nam wszystkie złośliwe figle i psoty, jakie plataliśmy i daj nam spocząć w ...* (Forgive us all our vicious tricks and pranks and let us rest in...; trans. P.B.; Harris 1929: 44). The decision to use a confessionally marked word rather than a neutral one, such as *modlitwa* (prayer), provides evidence of the translator’s perception of the predominance of the Roman Catholic religious tradition among Polish readers as well as yet another instance of domestication. The same strategy has resulted in introducing several intertextual references, as when Brer Rabbit in his debate with Brer Wolf quotes the final line of Ignacy Krasicki’s fable: *Wśród serdecznych przyjaciół psy zająca zjadły* (Among Dear Friends, Dogs Devoured the Rabbit; Harris 1929: 35).

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We may conclude that Władysława Wielińska’s translation functions reasonably well as a book for children – or at least it did function well when it was first published. Thanks to this version, folktales from 19th-century America, often drawing on earlier traditions, reached Polish readers and enriched the genre corpus available to them. Still, the transfer was achieved at a great cost. Figuratively speaking, in his journey from an American plantation to interwar Poland, Uncle Remus lost his identity, dignity and the key role he played in the original book. In functional translation theory, this loss is easily accounted for by pointing out the divergent *skopoi* of both texts. The original seeks to highlight and preserve the uniqueness of the American local colour in a specific socio-temporal context. It is an anthropological testimony to the social reality of the southern US in the second half of the

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<sup>7</sup> See <http://sjp.pwn.pl/lista.php?co=kum> (accessed on 18 May 2012).

19th century. The Polish version, by contrast, is meant as a simple and fairly universal didactic narrative for children. What changes in translation, then, is both the character of the text and the profile of the reader.

In the area of children's literature it is not a rare or isolated instance. "Serious" texts originally written for another purpose are often subjected to such adjustments (and suffer a necessary trivialization in the process). Similarly, Joel Chandler Harris appears a different author to the American and the Polish readers: he turns from a remarkably sharp-eyed and quick-eared cultural anthropologist to a bland story-teller, unremarkable enough for his book never to be reissued or reprinted. Finding a copy of his Polish version, *O psotach kuma Zająca*, published over eighty years ago, is not easy. We have managed to locate only two copies, one of which is a museum artefact unavailable for loan. Clearly, the first and so far the only attempt to present Harris' work to readers in Poland has failed the test of time. Furthermore, modern norms of political correctness do not bode well for potential translatory attempts: Harris' original work stirs racial and ethnic sensitivities, much as its Polish translation, though it is an interesting testimony of cultural stereotypes of the time. Does that mean that the Uncle Remus stories will remain practically unknown to the Polish readership? It is our hope that both this article and recent attempts to translate some of the stories into the Silesian dialect (cf. Najwer 2008: 83–86) will attract readers' attention. After all, in our increasingly globalized and homogenized world, various markers of otherness – in the temporal, spatial, linguistic and cultural domains – become particularly precious.

**trans. Piotr Blumczyński**

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**Dr Piotr Blumczyński** is a Lecturer in Translation at Queen's University Belfast, Northern Ireland. His areas of interest and research include ethnolinguistics and cognitive semantics, ideological and persuasive discourse, translation of religious texts, as well as translator and interpreter training. For over a decade, prior to his academic career and then alongside it, he worked as a free-lance translator and interpreter.

**Joanna Woźniczka**, a graduate in English Philology at the University of Wrocław, is interested in theory of translation as well as translation of technical, economic and legal texts.