

**“STONES IN THE QUARRY” AND FICTION IN GEORGE WASHINGTON  
CABLE’S STRANGE TRUE STORIES OF LOUISIANA**

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Since I began to attend the Milan Symposium in 1990, I have become increasingly aware of the benefits of attending conferences that are NOT entirely dedicated to what one specializes in. As a "literary person", whatever that is, I had been accustomed to conferences at which topics such as deconstruction and master narratives and schemes of versification were debated in great (and often raucous) detail. However, at my first Milan Symposium, in 1990, I felt with a certain degree of bemusement that I was among people who spoke an entirely different language. It would be easy to draw rough caricatures of us all, as participants in this Symposium, representing us as two mutually suspicious and antagonistic camps, with number-crunching, graph-drawing historians on the one hand and horn-rimmed, effete aesthetes with their heads in the literary clouds on the other, glowering at one another as we devour our *spaghetti alle vongole*. To do so, however, is not the aim of this paper; I feel that what we have in common is far more important than the differences that separate our disciplines. Indeed, in my own work as an interpreter of literary texts, I have always felt that an understanding of the historical setting in which a text appears is vitally important for both critic and reader. Perhaps for this reason, I have often found the papers presented at previous editions of the Symposium stimulating. Some I enjoyed immensely; others I disagreed with totally. Very rarely, however, was I bored. What was very salutary indeed is that listening to papers presented by historians made me look more closely at my own work and question the ways in which it is similar or different to what I was hearing.

I have chosen to discuss George Cable, Southern historiographer and writer of fiction, because his career illustrates in vivid fashion just how fluid the boundaries separating literary and historical discourse really are. In order to do so, I begin by discussing certain aspects of the post-structuralist theory of Hayden White, which I then apply to Cable's text *Strange True Stories of Louisiana*.

In his book *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, and most particularly in the chapter titled "The Fictions of Factual

Representation", Hayden White explores the generic boundaries of literary and historical texts. He begins by re-affirming the premise that

...historians are concerned with events which can be assigned to specific time-space locations, events which are (or were) in principle observable or perceivable, whereas imaginative writers-poets, novelist, playwrights-are concerned with both these kinds of events and imagined, hypothetical or invented ones.<sup>1</sup>

However, there are areas in which these two discourses overlap. According to White, though historians and imaginative writers may choose to foreground different kinds of events, their discursive forms - and their objectives - may be the same. In addition, in spite of the superficial differences one can observe, one can also observe the recourse to similar strategies or rhetorical techniques.

Regarding the aims of the writer of fiction and the writer of history, White affirms that both attempt to present a verbal image of reality. The novelist, however, may do so indirectly or figuratively, while the historian does so "...by registering a series of propositions which are supposed to correspond point by point to some extra-textual domain of occurrence or happening." (TD 122) Nonetheless, as theorists such as Roman Ingarden have pointed out, the fictional text inevitably contains references to persons, places and events which exist beyond the text.<sup>2</sup> White thus concludes that part of the conflict is between two concepts of truth, that is the truth of correspondence or of the referentiality of the historical text to extra-textual elements, and the truth of coherence (the ways in which the elements in the text cohere to form a vision of reality). Nonetheless, as White indeed points out, even this distinction can be misleading; for obvious reasons, the historian must strive for textual coherence, just as the writer of fiction must include elements which correspond to extra-textual reality. He thus concludes that "...all written discourse is cognitive in its aims and mimetic

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<sup>1</sup> Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, Johns Hopkins UP, Baltimore, 1985. p.121. Future references to this book, abbreviated TD, will be inserted parenthetically within the text.

<sup>2</sup> See Roman Ingarden, *Das Literarische Kunstwerk*, trans. Albin E. Beau, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Lisbon, 1965.

in its means," adding, "In this respect, history is no less a form of fiction than the novel is a form of historical representation." (*TD* 122)

According to White, the opposition of history to fiction is a legacy of nineteenth-century positivist thought; he affirms that prior to the French Revolution, historiography was viewed as a branch of rhetoric and its "fictive" nature generally recognized. In this perspective, "truth" was not equated with "fact", but rather with facts inserted within a conceptual matrix. Thus, in order to represent the truth adequately, one was obliged to use imagination or creativity. However, in the nineteenth century, truth was increasingly identified with fact and fiction was seen as the opposite of truth. The historical text thus came to be seen as the representation of fact, while fiction purportedly represented the realm of imagination and unreality. Thus, the typical nineteenth-century historian's ideal was objectivity; that is to say, to purge his/her text of any signs of personal or subjective opinion (as though this were possible) and to reject any hint of what might be construed as literary and thus unreal.

These conflicts are illustrated in particularly vivid form in the texts of Southern writer George Cable, whom one could call a man of letters with the sensibility of a historian or a historian with literary sensibilities. Cable was born in 1844 in New Orleans to relatively affluent middle-class parents. His father, also named George Washington Cable, was an entrepreneur with interests in sawmills, grocery firms and brickmaking, as well as steamboats. At the time of the family's arrival in New Orleans in 1837, the Creole elites retained social supremacy but were steadily relinquishing political and commercial control of the city to Anglo-American settlers. The young Cable grew up in a city known not only for its cosmopolitan character but for its floods, its outbreaks of yellow fever and cholera, and racial conflict. Due to his father's business reverses and premature death in 1859, Cable was forced to leave school and go to work in the New Orleans customs house. This job, however, came to an end with the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861, and Cable worked for a time as cashier in a wholesale grocery firm. His family were staunch Confederates, and when New Orleans was occupied by General Benjamin Butler, the Cables refused to swear allegiance to the United States, which caused them to be expelled from the city. Cable thereupon enlisted in the Confederate cavalry. Though he was only a slight boy of eighteen weighing little more than a hundred pounds, he fought bravely and was twice wounded. As a young man with a pronounced intellectual bent, he was hardly the typical Confederate soldier, and used his spare time to read widely, to sketch, and to think about the justice of the cause he was supposed to be fighting for. His biographer Philip Butcher has

suggested that it was perhaps at this time that Cable began to question the right of states to secede and the justice of slavery as an institution.<sup>3</sup>

When the War ended, Cable held a succession of minor jobs, as accountant, grocery clerk and errand boy, Shortly after his marriage to Louise Bartlett, he began to write a column called "Drop Shot" for the *New Orleans Picayune* dealing with literary matters and public affairs; occasionally, it included Cable's own poetry.

From 1871 on, Cable worked not only as a columnist but also as a reporter. When his column came to an end, he combined excerpts from it into a manuscript, which he characterized as presenting scenes and characters typical of New Orleans. Scribner's turned it down nonetheless, in spite of Cable's offer to pay for the cost of an edition. In 1872 he wrote a series of articles on charities and churches of New Orleans, which brought him into contact with colourful archival material housed in the Cabildo (the seat of local government), the Cathedral, and at City Hall. One unsigned article in the *Picayune*, titled "A Life-Ebbing Monography", published on December 24, 1871 and attributed to Cable by his biographer Arlin Turner, uses material from local records to recount the story of a white man who cut his own veins in order to mix his blood with that of a mulatto woman so as to be able legally to marry her.<sup>4</sup>

During the Carnival of 1873, Cable had the good fortune to meet the members of a delegation from *Scribner's Monthly*, one of whom, Edward King, became his literary mentor, Little by little, Cable began to publish his stories in national periodicals such as *Harper's* and *Appleton's Journal*, whose editors in the aftermath of the Civil War were eager to reduce sectional frictions by publishing local colour fiction. Nonetheless, the editors of these publications were quick to turn down anything that even hinted at controversy; "Bibi", the tragic story of an African prince sold into slavery, was turned down by several magazines due to what they perceived as the violence and horror of some of its episodes, which might shock the sensibilities of younger readers (cf. *GWC* 25). The publication of his short stories did, however, bring Cable a measure of national recognition, enabling him to publish a collection of his fiction, *Old Creole Days*, in 1879. In the same year, his novel *The Grandissimes* began to appear in serial

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<sup>3</sup> Philip Butcher, *George Washington Cable*, Twayne, New Haven, 1962. p. 23. Future references to this work, abbreviated *GWC*, will be included parenthetically within the text.

<sup>4</sup> See Arlin Turner, *George Washington Cable*, LSU Press, Baton Rouge, 1966. pp. 50-51. Future references to this work, abbreviated *GWC* 2, will be included parenthetically within the text. Cable mentions this same episode in *Strange True Stories of Louisiana*, giving a schoolteacher (probably Dora Miller) as his source.

form in *Scribner's Monthly*, and was published as a book in 1880. Philip Butcher has commented, in terms that are unkind but in some senses accurate, that

Cable's basic plot line is always melodramatic. He had great difficulty in creating a convincing hero, and never conceived a noble protagonist who was not a wooden, posturing puppet... His plots and his leading characters, superficially exotic but fundamentally identical with the stereotyped, genteel figures of conventional popular literature, are expressions of the romantic side of Cable's personal character. All the greatness of *The Grandissimes* must be attributed to the G. W. Cable who was social critic, historian, and reformer. The exciting minor characters, the vivid re-creation of the fullness of life in a bygone era, the incisive social commentary - these are really the body of the novel and the sources of its strength. (GWC 46)

In all fairness to Cable, however, it should be observed that in order to get his fiction into print he was often forced (as has been stated earlier) to conform at least outwardly to the finicky conventions of gentility which governed the editorial policy of mass-market publications. *The Grandissimes*, in its courageous portrayal of the quadroon and octoroon castes and most particularly of the African prince sold into slavery, Bras-Coupé (a recycled version of the short story "Bibi", which we have already mentioned), depicts in graphic form the marginalization to which African-Americans were subject in nineteenth-century New Orleans. Bras-Coupé is no innocuous figure: he knocks his owner down with one blow and casts a voodoo curse on the plantation. When he is finally captured, his ears are cut off and he is barbarically tortured. But when he is dying and a priest asks him if he knows where he is going, he replies defiantly, "To Africa".

In the following years, Cable published a group of novels, prose sketches and political essays which brought him national prominence, such as *Madame Delphine* (1881), *Dr. Sevier* (1883), *The Creoles of Louisiana* (1884) and "The Freedman's Case in Equity", in defence of Negro rights,

(1885). The last two titles stirred up intense polemic; the Creoles of New Orleans felt that they had been held up to ridicule in *The Creoles of Louisiana*, while “The Freedman’s Case in Equity” led the *New Orleans Times Democrat* to print vitriolic quotes from nine Southern newspapers who accused Cable of being “anti-Southern and a traitor to his section” and of selling out in order to please Northern readers. This latter accusation was exacerbated by Cable’s decision to move with his family to Northampton, Massachusetts, this same year.

In November 1888, Cable began to publish his *Strange True Stories of Louisiana*, first in serial form in *Century* magazine and then as a book. In these texts, we can see in particularly vivid form the conflicts between Cable the historian and Cable the writer of fiction. Since 1883, he had been collecting documents such as letters, diaries, court records, legal reports, and newspapers clippings, with an eye to demonstrating his conviction that true stories were often more interesting - and indeed more bizarre - than fiction.

In his Introduction to *Strange True Stories of Louisiana*, titled “How I Got Them”, Cable remarks: “True stories are not often good art. The relations and experiences of real men and women rarely fall in such symmetrical order as to make an artistic whole.” Here we are reminded of Hayden White’s distinction between fact (verifiable events occurring in the real world) and fiction (the creative arrangement of these facts into coherent whole). Cable continues,

Until they have had such treatment as we give stone in the quarry or gems in the rough they seldom group themselves with that harmony of values and brilliant unity of interest that result when art comes in - not so much to transcend nature as to make nature transcend itself.<sup>5</sup>

In *Strange True Stories of Louisiana*, according to their author, these diamonds in the rough have needed little polishing:

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<sup>5</sup> George Washington Cable, *Strange True Stories of Louisiana*, La Pelican, Gretna, 1994. Future references to this work, abbreviated STS, will be included parenthetically within the text.

Within the last few years there have dropped into my hands by one accident or another a number of these natural crystals, whose charms, never the same in any two, are in each and all enough at least to warn off all tampering of the fictionist... They are mine only by right of discovery. From various necessities of the case I am sometimes the story-teller, and sometimes, in the reader's interest, have to abridge; but I add no fact and trim naught of value away.(STS 2)

After this, he reveals his sources. Three of the texts in Cable's *Strange True Stories of Louisiana*, "The Young Aunt with White Hair", "Alix de Morainville" and "The Adventures of Françoise and Suzanne" came from a friend of the author, Madame Sidonie de la Houssaye, a widow from St. Mary Parish. Another, "Attalie Brouillard", was suggested by a local judge, and "Salome Muller, the White Slave", based on a case argued before the Louisiana Supreme Court, was brought to Cable's attention by a friend living in New Haven. The remaining texts are the "War Diary of a Union Woman Living in the South", sold to Cable by Mrs. Dora Miller (which she was unable to publish in her own name due to the fact that she had returned to teaching in New Orleans and feared retaliation from the local school board) and "The 'Haunted House' in Royal Street".

The last and darkest story, "The 'Haunted House' in Royal Street" came to Cable from several different sources. Harriet Martineau, in *Retrospect of Western Travel* (published in 1836), speaks of an episode which had occurred two years previously in New Orleans, in which an aristocratic Creole woman, Mme. Lalaurie, had received the New Orleans gentry at scintillating dinner parties in one part of the house while torturing nine of her slaves in another.<sup>6</sup> Cable then employed James Guthrie, a lawyer friend, and Mrs. Miller to research the matter in newspapers and documents of the era and to interview people who had actually witnessed the event itself (*GWC* II 240). The resulting tale is a fascinating mixture of historical reference and authorial (or editorial) intervention.

Cable's narrative begins in the first-person, from the perspective of a putative guide to New Orleans:

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<sup>6</sup> According to Cable's biographer Arlin Turner, Mme. Lalaurie and the mistreatment of her slaves had been mentioned in E. Bunner's *History of Louisiana*. See Arlin Turner, *GWC* II, p. 240, footnote 16.

When you and \_\_\_\_\_ make that much-talked of visit to New Orleans, by all means see early whatever evidences of progress and aggrandizement her hospitable citizens wish to show you. And yet I want this first morning walk that you two take together and alone to be in the old French Quarter. (*STS* 192)

He thus establishes an atmosphere of intimacy and complicity with his readers, while reinforcing his own position as the New Orleans insider who is privy to the *real* facts. Cable then strolls with his readers down the Rue Royale and to the house itself, climbing up to the belvedere. As he looks out over the New Orleans landscape, he recurs to rhetorical techniques such as flashbacks or analeptics to whet the reader's interest: "...It is the old Bayou Road to the lake. It was down that road that the mistress of the house fled in her carriage from its door with the howling mob at her heels." (*STS* 198-199) Turning around and looking at the slanting roofs, he invites his reader to "...think-from whichever one of these slopes it was - of the little fluttering, be frocked lump of terrified childhood that leaped from there and fell clean to the paved yard below." (*STS* 199) He then mentions that a friend of his, on passing the house, had thought she saw a ghostly form in the belvedere, but then had concluded that it was only a trick of the moonlight. He then concludes, "Would that there were no more reality to the story before us." (*STS* 199) As we can see, Cable has skilfully prepared the reader for the horror of the tale which follows and at the same time has categorically affirmed its veracity.

He then embarks on the story itself, which is by all accounts a gruesome one. Cable begins by citing notarial records establishing Mme. Lalaurie's ownership of the house, which she purchased on 30 August 1831 from E. Soniat Dufossat. He describes Mme. Lalaurie as having been married three times, to Messieurs Lopez and Blanque, and finally to Dr. Louis Lalaurie, and as having two daughters from her first marriage. However, he establishes the fact that Mme Lalaurie was clearly the most prominent member of the family and thus responsible for what went on under her roof: "...Her husband was younger than she...The graces and graciousness of their accomplished and entertaining mother quite outshone his step-daughters as well as him." (*STS* 200). Cable points out that Mme



Lalaurie manages her own business affairs, and of her ten slaves nine are housed in one wing of the house. He cites newspaper accounts (namely an article from the *New Orleans Bee*) describing her dwelling as an "...elegant house, filled with furniture of the most costly description" (quoted in *STS*, 201) and portrays the movement of carriages on the road to Bayou St. Jean, with the charming Mme. Lalaurie driven by her "...sleek black coachman." (*STS* 202)

Cable conjectures that a Creole friend, on viewing such a scene, would scornfully reject the possibility that such an enchanting creature could possibly mistreat her slaves, referring to the coachman as though he were livestock: "Look at that driver; his skin shines with good keeping. The truth is those jealous Americans" (*STS* 202) - This enables Cable to explain to his readers the reasons that Mme. Lalaurie was able to carry on with her sadistic activities despite widespread public rumors that she kept her slaves chained in the darkness, in a state of virtual starvation. The writer mentions that a Creole neighbour, M. Montreuil, had attempted to inquire into the matter, without success, and that an "American" lawyer had sent a young employee of his to Mme. Lalaurie's house to call her attention to Article XX of the Black Code forbidding the mistreatment of slaves.

All of this was to no avail, and Cable goes on to tell us of an episode in which Mme. Lalaurie had pursued an eight-year old slave girl up to the belvedere with a whip in her hand; the child, according to a witness living in an adjoining house, had thrown herself from the roof to the paved courtyard far below and was buried in a well in the same courtyard hours later. After a superficial investigation of this matter by the authorities, Cable states that Mme. Lalaurie was forced to sell her slaves at auction, but they were sold back to her by her relatives once more. He adds, "Let us believe that this is what occurred, or at least was shammed; for unless we do we must accept the implication of a newspaper statement of two or three years afterwards, and the confident impression of an aged Creole gentleman and notary still living who was an eye-witness to much of this story, that all Madame Lalaurie ever suffered for her misdeeds was a fine." (*STS* 205-206) He remarks that under the law, all Mme. Lalaurie could have been accused of was assault, and that after all, "the child was a slave." As a decent man, Cable finds it hard to believe that the authorities of his city could be callous enough to let off the murderer of a child, whether slave or free, with a mere fine. It is clear, however, that he is revolted by the willingness of New Orleans society to look the other way and by its reluctance to condemn one of its own. His revulsion is evident in the irony of the following statement:

If she was insane, then why did not her frequent guests at table suspect it?...All that society knew was that she had carried her domestic discipline to excess, had paid dearly for it, and no doubt was desisting and would henceforth desist from that kind of thing. Enough allowance can hardly be made in our day for the delicacy society felt about prying into one of its own gentleman or lady member's treatment of his or her own servants. Who was going to begin such an inquiry?...And so time passed, and the beautiful and ever sweet Madame Lalaurie - whether sane or insane we leave to the doctors...continued to drive daily, yearly, on the gay Bayou Road, to manage her business affairs, and to gather bright groups around her tempting board, without their suspicion that she kept her cook in the kitchen by means of a twenty-four-foot chain fastened to her person and to the wall or floor. (STS 207)

Matters finally come to a head when this same cook sets the house on fire, in a desperate appeal for help. When the neighbours come to help put out the fire, they find the slaves in chains. Cable quotes the editor of the *Advertiser*, a local newspaper:

We saw...one of these miserable beings. The sight was so horrible that we could scarce look upon it. The most savages heart could not have witnessed the spectacle unmoved. He had a large hole in his head; his body from head to foot was covered with scars and filled with worms! The sight inspired us with so much horror that even at the moment of writing this article we shudder from its effects. Those who have seen the others represent them to be in a similar condition. (STS 210-211)

Cable goes on to describe the subsequent search for bodies and the finding of the skeletons of two slaves, including that of the child who had fallen from the belvedere.<sup>7</sup> The remaining seven were given food and drink by the crowd, but this sudden generosity had the effect of causing the deaths of two more. The remaining slaves were housed in the local jail. Here we can see Cable's irony and anger once more: "The others were tenderly carried - shall we say it - to prison; - to the calaboose. Thither 'at least two thousand people' [the quotation marks lead us to conclude that Cable is quoting another source, probably a newspaper account] flocked to see, if they might, these wretched sufferers." The crowd then advances on the house with the purpose of lynching Mme. Lalaurie, but she manages to escape. Cable cites *L'Abeille* and *The Courier*, as well as eyewitnesses, to describe the destruction of the house and its contents at the hands of the mob. But the local authorities quickly put an end to the matter when the crowd suggested going to the houses of others suspected of treating their slaves in similar fashion. Cable remarks dryly,

But against this the highest gentility alertly and diligently opposed themselves. Not at all because of sympathy with such cruelties. The single reason has its parallel in our own day. It was the fear that the negroes would thereby be encouraged to seek by violence those rights which their masters thought it not expedient to give them. The movement was suppressed, and the odious parties were merely warned that they were watched. (*STS* 217)

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<sup>7</sup> Harriet Martineau's account is equally harrowing: "Of the nine slaves, the skeletons of two were afterward found poked into the ground; the other seven could scarce be recognized as human. Their faces had the wildness of famine, and their bones were coming through the skin. They were chained and tied in constrained postures, some on their knees, some with their hands above their heads. They had iron collars with spikes which kept their heads in one position. The cowhide, stiff with blood, hung against the wall; and there was a stepladder on which this fiend stood while flogging her victims, in order to lay on the lashes with more effect. Every morning, it was her first employment after breakfast to lock herself in with her captives, and flog them until her strength failed." Harriet Martineau, *HWT*, pp. 265-266.

The fear of a slave rebellion, the nightmare of every Southern slaveholder, quickly overcame any humanitarian scruples or feelings of guilty conscience which the spectacle of Mme. Lalaurie's cruelty may have awakened among the elites of New Orleans.<sup>8</sup>

Cable then follows Mme. Lalaurie's path through notarial records to Mandeville, and subsequently through letters to Mobile and to Paris. He goes on to cite New Orleans notarial files to trace the succeeding owners of the house until the times of Reconstruction. Paradoxically, Mme. Lalaurie's former home had become a racially integrated school for young women. Cable describes an idyllic June day when he himself attended the school's annual examination; he mentions the fresh young faces and the racial diversity of the students, ranging from what he calls "unadulterated Caucasian purity" to "preponderating African tincture" to "pure negro blood." He remarks,

There, in the rooms that had once resounded with the screams of Mme. Lalaurie's little slave fleeing to her death, and with the hooting and maledictions of the enraged mob, was being tried the experiment of a common enjoyment of public benefits by the daughters of two widely divergent races, without the enforcement of private social companionship...From such enforcement the school was as free as any school is or ought to be. The daily discipline did not require any two pupils to be social, but every one to civil, and civil to all. (STS 222).

With the rise of the White League and its increasing influence in New Orleans politics, however, this egalitarian project soon came to an end. One of Cable's sources for this part of the story is Dora Miller, the widow whose

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<sup>8</sup> According to Harriet Martineau, "The crowd at first intended to proceed to the examination of other premises, whose proprietors were under suspicion of cruelty to their slaves; but the shouts of triumph which went up from the whole negro population of the city showed that this would not be safe. Fearing a general rising, the gentlemen organized themselves into a patrol, to watch the city night and day till the commotion should have subsided. They sent circulars to all proprietors suspected of cruelty, warning them that the eyes of the city were upon them. This is the only benefit the negroes have derived from the exposure." Harriet Martineau, *Retrospect of Western Travel*, Saunders and Otley, London, 1838. p 267.

diary is included in *Strange True Stories*, who was a teacher at the school and presumably an eyewitness to the events that occurred when a mob from the White League arrived to remove the pupils with Negro blood from the school. The principal reluctantly assembled the students in Madame Lalaurie's former dining room, where, says Cable, "a frieze of angels ran round its four walls, and oddly, for some special past occasion, a legend in crimson and gold on the western side bore the words 'The Eye of God is on us.'" (STS 227) Nonetheless, the eminently unangelic White Leaguers began to call the name of each student. Cable uses direct speech to ridicule their motivations and to show just how specious their accusations were. One student claims Indian blood, and is allowed to stay, as are "...a girl very fair, but with crinkling hair and other signs of negro extraction" (STS 228) who reminds the White League that she is the sister of a prominent Democratic official, as well as "... a bold-eyed girl of much African blood" (STS 228), who alleges Spanish blood and tells the mob that her brother will call on them to prove it. Here, Cable skilfully portrays the White Leaguers as not only venal but cowardly. Not all students are able to resist; others burst into tears as the White Leaguers exclude them from the school. This expulsion was temporarily overturned, but with the advent of a Democratic school board only pupils of white or Indian blood were allowed to remain. Finally, in 1882, the house on the Rue Royale became a Conservatory of Music, and here Cable's account comes to an end.

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George Washington Cable's *Strange True Stories of Louisiana*, as we have seen, exemplifies some of the difficulties one may encounter in distinguishing between historiography and fiction. His text exhibits some of the characteristics of historiographic discourse, as we can see in his use of archival material; he cites notarial records, first-person eyewitness accounts, travel narratives (Harriet Martineau's *Retrospect of Western Travel*) and newspaper sources, specifically articles from the *New Orleans Bee* (which he also cites under its French name, *L'Abeille*), the *Advertiser*, and the *Courier*. At the same time, however, we can point out certain features in *Strange True Stories* which would allow us to classify it as a literary or fictional text, namely Cable's strong and at times intrusive authorial presence, his use of direct speech and dialogue, his recourse of analepsis

(flashback) or catalepsies (literally leaping forward into the future), and the profusion of adjectives and adverbs which characterizes his prose.

Returning to Hayden White's concepts, we can see that Cable indeed is a historian in that he is concerned with an event which can be assigned to specific time-space locations (the Rue Royale, New Orleans, in the 1830s) and to an event which was observable and perceivable. At the same time, he is a writer of fiction in that, to borrow his own metaphor, he has given a certain rhetorical polish to this particular rough historical gem; combining facts creatively in order to transmit his view of the truth of this event. What is undeniable is that Cable writer of fiction and Cable historian both pursued the same objective: to denounce the hypocrisy of the New Orleans elites regarding matters of race, and to help create a new mentality among decent Southerners of all races, so that events like those which took place in the house on the Rue Royale might never happen again.