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Cable's The Grandissimes and the Comedy of Manners

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IN 1883, while George Washington Cable was still enjoying the pleasant aftermath of having finished *The Grandissimes* (1880) and seeing it well received, he was also pondering revisions of the work. Among those revisions was simplification of the Creole dialect he had employed so successfully that Mark Twain and William Dean Howells were using it in their private conversations. Another kind of revision was suggested by his friend, the actor Joseph Jefferson, who urged him to write a play version of the novel.¹ Jefferson apparently recognized Cable's extensive use of dramatic conventions already in the novel and saw the possibilities of their further emphasis. Although Cable would later attempt dramatization of several stories, it was ironic that Jefferson should see so many dramatic possibilities in the work of a writer for whom even attending the theater was one of the "Thou shalt nots." For readers of *The Grandissimes*, however, Jefferson's suggestion provides a useful insight into the logic of action for a novel of complex and intricate relationships. Within the larger context of Joseph Frowenfeld's search into the governing realities of an essentially alien civilization there exists the pattern of the comedy of manners, and the energizing motives of his quest are those derived from that pattern. Indeed, the strategy of the comedy of manners provided Cable with the necessary set of circumstances for a novel celebrating the act of acculturation and the acquisition of new consciousness for his hero and his hero's society.

Cable's use of such a strategy has apparently been obscured by the richness of detail and event in the novel. Because *The Grandissimes* deals with the intricate relationships of relatively exotic characters in a culture alien to most of Cable's readers, emphasis in commentary

¹ Arlin Turner, *George W. Cable: A Biography* (Durham, N.C., 1956; rptd. Baton Rouge, 1966), p. 146. Hereafter cited as *Biography*.

on the novel has concentrated on the differences between the culture found by Joseph Frowenfeld in New Orleans and that of Anglo-American society. The term *Kulturroman* used by H. H. Boyesen in his correspondence with Cable as the novel was being written has dominated critical views of *The Grandissimes*. As Boyesen and later critics have used the term, it has signified a novel depicting the clash of two cultures: "a novel in which the struggling forces of opposing civilizations crystalize [*sic*] & in which they find their enduring monument."² Following that lead, William Dean Howells in 1887 thought the novel "large enough to reflect a civilization,"³ and more recently Arlin Turner, Philip Butcher, and Louis D. Rubin have agreed that *The Grandissimes* "bore out Boyesen's prediction," became "what Boyesen predicted it would be," and "was designed to be a *Kulturroman*, a novel of the clash between two societies."⁴ Other commentators have modified that view of the novel while accepting it as basically valid. To them *The Grandissimes* is also a local color novel, a novel of manners, a novel of character, a conventional romance, an historical romance in the tradition of Sir Walter Scott, a story of racial as well as cultural conflict, and a critique of Southern mores after the Civil War.⁵ Because of its complexities, Alexander Cowie thinks the novel "is actually such a *mélange* that it defies classification."⁶

Such views concentrating on the breadth and comprehensiveness of Cable's novel, however, fail to account for the dynamics of the comedy of manners also operating within the work. Cable's own views of

² HHB to GWC, March 17, 1877, in Arlin Turner, "A Novelist Discovers a Novelist: The Correspondence of H. H. Boyesen and George W. Cable," *Western Humanities Review*, V (Autumn, 1951), 346-347.

³ *Harper's Magazine*, LXXV (Sept., 1887), 639.

⁴ *Biography*, p. 90; Butcher, *George W. Cable* (New York, 1962), pp. 46-47; Rubin, "The Division of the Heart: Cable's *The Grandissimes*," *SLJ* I (Spring, 1969), 33. See also Rubin, *George W. Cable: The Life and Times of a Southern Heretic* (New York, 1969), p. 95.

⁵ John Cleman, "The Art of Local Color in George W. Cable's *The Grandissimes*," *AL*, XLVII (Nov., 1975), 396-410; Richard Chase, *The American Novel and Its Tradition* (Garden City, N.Y., 1957), p. 169; Gordon Milnes, *The Sense of Society: A History of the American Novel of Manners* (Rutherford, N.J., 1977), p. 100; Richard B. Eaton, "George W. Cable and the Historical Romance," *SLJ*, VIII (Fall, 1975), 82-94; Michael L. Campbell, "The Negro in Cable's *The Grandissimes*," *Miss Q*, XXVII (Spring, 1976), 165-178; Newton Arvin, "Introduction," *The Grandissimes* (New York, 1957), p. viii; Elmo Howell, "George W. Cable's Creoles: Art and Reform in *The Grandissimes*," *Miss Q*, XXVI (Winter, 1973), 43-53; Kjell Ekström, *George W. Cable: A Study of His Early Life and Work* (Cambridge, Mass., 1950), pp. 180-181; Rubin, *Heretic*, pp. 79, 84.

⁶ *The Rise of the American Novel* (New York, 1951), p. 557.

the novel, both while writing it and while remembering it years later, emphasize its orientation towards Creole life and the necessary plot vehicle for presenting that vision. In his letter to Boyesen on December 28, 1878, for example, he stated his intention to present a critical analysis of Creole character and manners:

I have grasped at so much[.] It is the wild, virgin soil that I have to break up; a field never plowed before. The Creole character, the Creole society, the philosophy of these things, Creole errors and defects & how to mend them, all clamoring to be treated by a tyro in a love story—Well[,] I will finish the work someday, God willing, & pray that it may not only be good, in an artistic sense, but do good in a moral sense.⁷

In "After-Thoughts of a Story-Teller," written fifteen years later, he remembered the novel in terms of plot strategy:

And, if I remember aright, the story was written without a single preliminary memorandum of its scheme.

Yet I had a scheme clearly in mind; a scheme in which one of the first things decided was how the tale should end. For the rest it consisted mainly in a choice and correlation of the characters I designed to put upon my stage. The plot was not laboriously planned. It was to be little more than the very old and familiar one of a feud between two families, the course of true love fretting its way through, and the titles of hero and heroine open to competition between a man and his friend for the one and a mother and daughter for the other. Upon this well-used skeleton I essayed to put the flesh and blood, and form and bloom, of personalities new to the world of fiction.⁸

In light of such comments, it becomes clear, as it does in the novel itself, that Cable's emphasis was on the Creole world, not the clash between Creole and American civilizations. His purpose was to depict "Creole errors and defects & how to mend them," all within the context of a love story based on the "very old and familiar [plot] of a feud between two families. . . ."

That Cable's novel, a narrated action, should be based on the model of dramatized action is not surprising in light of the realists' enthusiasm for scenic depiction in the novel in the 1870's. Like Howells and James, Cable had read his Turgenev, especially *Smoke*, and had

⁷ Quoted in Philip Butcher, "Cable to Boyesen on *The Grandissimes*," *AL*, XL (Nov., 1968), 393.

⁸ *North American Review*, CLVIII (Jan., 1894), 17.

seen the possibilities of objectively rendered action.⁹ That he succeeded in achieving this "dramatic method," despite his occasional lapses into authorial comment, can be generally seen in Newton Arvin's comment on the course of events: "[t]he story gets under way at a masked ball in the old Théâtre St. Philippe, and something of the effect of a masquerade—of the courtly, the costumed, the masked, the choreographic—is never wholly absent from the action."¹⁰ His success can be specifically seen as Frowenfeld's apothecary shop becomes the central setting of chapters 9–12, and the action provides an extended series of entrances and exits timed to reveal and conceal identities of key characters and their relationships to each other.

Where or how Cable learned to write in the tradition of the comedy of manners has not been exactly determined. Turner cites Cable's later statement to F. L. Pattee that, while he had read such French authors as Hugo, Merimée, and About, he had read more in Dickens, Thackeray, Poe, and Irving, all of whom but Poe are masters in the mode.¹¹ More than one reviewer heard echoes of Dickens in *The Grandissimes*, and Thackeray's satiric voice on social foibles sounds through Cable's hovering narrator in the novel. The shaping hands of Cable's editors and readers at Scribner's—Richard Watson Gilder, Robert Underwood Johnson, Sophia Bledsoe Herrick, and Irwin Russell—are also evident, as Turner has pointed out. They worked with Cable to clarify plot direction, character delineation, scene definition, and simplification of dialect and, in the process, cut out much social commentary to produce a work more clearly in line with literary convention.¹² In any case, from the finished work emerges the plot strategy of a comedy of manners: establishment of the code of a limited and closed society, challenge of that code by an outsider or a renegade insider or both, and a resolution either rejecting the challenger and reaffirming the code or showing the challenger successful and the code altered.

In the absence of a specifically identifiable model, however, Northrop Frye's analysis of the comedy of manners is useful for

⁹ *Biography*, pp. 80, 91. See also Edwin H. Cady, *The Road to Realism* (Syracuse, 1956), pp. 196–197 on the example of Turgenev.

¹⁰ "Introduction," *The Grandissimes* (New York, 1957), p. vi. Subsequent references to the novel will be to this edition and will be cited within the text.

¹¹ *Biography*, p. 88.

¹² *Biography*, pp. 95–98.

noting the conventions of the genre as they apply to *The Grandissimes*. The fundamental theme of the comedy of manners, Frye notes, is the incorporation, actual or potential, of a central character into society after a period of probation. The specific action develops an erotic intrigue of a young man and young woman blocked by parental opposition. Central to their intrigue is the strategy of driving out the *pharmakos*, the scapegoat or priest figure who embodies the opposition and the values of the parent generation. The movement is from one kind of society to another, the parent generation having acted as usurpers by imposing false and arbitrary values, reflected in a code of manners and beliefs, in place of a previously existing more liberal code. In light of the false code, the hero appears as a fool but has some redeeming value to allow him to remain in society. The hero's enactment of the movement from false to truer and freer, if not specifically defined, values consists of a series of discoveries and revelations analogous to a lawsuit. Both sides present opinions (differing versions of the situation) and proofs—oaths, compacts, witnesses, ordeals, and laws—as means of bringing about the desired state of society. As the movement works potentially toward reconciliation, characters move from ritual bondage to a pragmatically free version of society. In the comedy of manners, relatively greater emphasis is placed on the blocking force, the existing code, than on the order of belief to come later. The new order receives no thorough definition but is recognized as more desirable than that of the older society. Typically, a grandfather figure or his influence serves to restore the earlier code, which is consistent with that promised.¹³

The basis of comic action in *The Grandissimes* becomes evident for the reader, as for Joseph Frowenfeld, when Dark Honoré visits Frowenfeld in his apothecary shop to ask for a potion to make Palmyre love him. In the process of asking, Dark Honoré reveals that the former movement toward reconciliation in Creole society has been replaced in the opening present of the novel by a rigid and arbitrary code: Agricola Fusilier has usurped Numa Grandissime's place as spokesman for Creole society. As he tells Frowenfeld, "Numa's was a shining name in the annals" before French cession of Louisiana

¹³ *Anatomy of Criticism* (New York, 1968), p. 43. See pp. 43–49 for the extended analysis here summarized.

to Spain in 1768. During the incipient revolt of French colonists against Spanish governors, Numa had been the voice of moderation and reconciliation, and he "had held back his whole chafing and stamping tribe from a precipice of disaster . . ." (p. 108). His moment of weakness came, however, when he agreed to marry Agricola's sister despite his vow never to marry—"he had forfeited the right to wed, they all knew how." To "save the party" during a time of revolution, he had "nobly sacrificed a little sentimental feeling," and he had left to his legitimate son Honoré the obligation to "right the wrongs which he had not quite dared to uproot" (p. 109). During the two Honorés' absence in France, Numa had died and Agricola had become the "aged high-priest of a doomed civilization . . ." (p. 324). The comic action thus shows that Creole society has shifted from one order of belief to another and must return to the true order for reconciliation and restoration to occur.

As high priest and usurper, Agricola becomes the law-giver and executor of Creole society. His pronouncements formulate the code of rigid resistance to righting the wrongs envisioned by Numa and enjoined on Honoré and, in effect, constitute the blocking force identified by Frye as the principal function of the parental generation in the comedy of manners. His dicta, opportunely announced throughout the action, focus attention on "Creole errors and defects & how to mend them" rather than on the implied better order to come. In government, for example, only French officials are honest (p. 86). In discourse only French is *la belle langue* (p. 49). In knowledge of the past, "h-tradition is much more authentic than history" (p. 19). In morality, "*The—man—makes—the—crime!* The wisdom of mankind never brought forth a maxim of more gigantic beauty" (p. 227). And as priest he absolves Frowenfeld of his presumed peccadilloes with Palmyre: "*absolvo te!*" In race, "when we say, 'we people,' we *always* mean we white people" (p. 59). In learning, education is for the few, not the masses (p. 315). But Agamemnon Grandissime finally sums up the effect of the doomed code: litigation, spoliation, partition, disintegration (p. 239).

To men of Agricola's belief, Frowenfeld and Honoré are fools belatedly recognized as challengers to the code. Honoré is the legitimate heir of Numa's world, now blocked from recognition by the pretender Agricola and his party. Though he may be the *beau idéal*, Honoré knows that Agricola holds the power and influence of Numa

Grandissime until he can carry out a redemptive act to restore the former code. As Donald Ringe has noted, Honoré and Frowenfeld are complementary characters: Honoré understands the mores and manners of Creole society but cannot act without the courage of principle embodied in Frowenfeld; Frowenfeld is capable of principled action but cannot make that action effective without Honoré's finesse.¹⁴ Together they challenge the arbitrary code of the high priest Agricola, but to make their challenge effective they must carry out the intrigue of indirect action. It is appropriate, then, that on the first of their several walks or rides together, Honoré advises Frowenfeld on the necessity of subtle behavior: "Now, Mr. Frowenfeld, you see? one man walks where he sees another's track; that is what makes a path; but you want a man, instead of passing around this prickly bush, to lay hold of it with his naked hands and pull it up by the roots" (p. 39). To the extent that the reader identifies with Frowenfeld's level of knowledge rather than with Honoré's, the action of the comedy of manners concerns Frowenfeld's discoveries of the realities that call for deft intrigue. The comedy is essentially a record of Frowenfeld's discoveries in the long lawsuit of opinions and proofs, the first puzzle of which is his need to identify his Creole informant, a man who has acted out of friendship instead of instinctive Creole hostility to aliens.

Clearly Dr. Charles Keene and Raoul Innerarity serve also as Frowenfeld's informants on the backgrounds of the families and their feuds, but they cannot be identified as challengers of the Creole code. Keene's revelation of the Lufki-Humma prototype for Agricola is expository but not judgmental, and his advice to Frowenfeld to avoid entanglement with the Nancanou women signals his accommodation with Agricola's view, whatever his personal interest is in the women (p. 199). Innerarity's painting of "Louisiana rif-using to hanter de h-Union" and his credo that no quadroon, whatever his moral purity, can be a gentleman together mark him initially as a disciple of Agricola (pp. 114, 126). Frowenfeld's allies, but not co-challengers of the code, also include Aurora and Clotilde as women dispossessed by the code and Dark Honoré, Palmyre, and Clemence as its victims.

In the long lawsuit Frowenfeld's process of discovery reaches its

¹⁴ "The 'Double Center': Character and Meaning in Cable's Early Novels," *Studies in the Novel*, V (Spring, 1973), 57-58.

first climax with his defeat. Although he has heard Honoré's advice on the necessity of subtle action, he has proceeded on principle alone and has antagonized those whom he needed to persuade. After several heated debates in the apothecary shop, "Frowenfeld's really excellent arguments seemed to give out more heat than light. They were merciless; their principles were not only lofty to dizziness, but precipitous, and their heights unoccupied, and—to the common sight—unattainable. In consequence, they provoked hostility and even resentment" (pp. 46–47). In Frowenfeld the effect of his failure to win by principled dogmatism alone is to reduce him to isolation and bitterness, and he is "in sad danger of being unduly . . . Timonized" (p. 61).

Frowenfeld's recognition of the need for deft intrigue, commensurate with Honoré's advice, comes after he has observed the puzzle of people and their relationships during his evening at the Place d'Arms and his night dressing Agricola's wound from the mysterious assailant. Cable notes, "After this night of experiences it was natural that Frowenfeld should find the circumference of his perceptions consciously enlarged" (p. 102). Thereafter he learns to act in specific situations rather than debate general principles. He resolves to study New Orleans like a rare book (p. 103) and begins to study out the puzzles of specific relationships—how there are two Honorés and why one might have stabbed Agricola. He gathers more particular information during Dark Honoré's call at his shop, during his visit with the Nancanou women, and during his ride on the levee with White Honoré. During the ride he comes to understand Honoré's inability to challenge the code and risk his position and that of his family, for Frowenfeld learns as critical knowledge that a Creole's first loyalty is to family rather than to principle or to law (p. 154).

Learning the story of *Bras Coupé*, however, is the key to Frowenfeld's intrigue to challenge Agricola's world. That story, the significance of which is hinted at by the captain of the ship bringing the Frowenfelds to New Orleans (p. 10), by Honoré's statement that the black king has changed the whole course of his convictions (p. 38), by Keene's guess at a link between the stabbing of Agricola and the story of *Bras Coupé* (p. 100), by Raoul's plan to make *Bras Coupé* the subject of his second painting (p. 117), and by Aurora's refusal to tell

the story of Bras Coupé because it would make her cry again (p. 145)—that story told Frowenfeld twice in one evening by the two Honorés—becomes the basis for his subsequent strategy and serves as the climax of the plot complication. Subsequent events show Frowenfeld working out the puzzle of relationships, the key to which is contained in the Bras Coupé episode. By itself, of course, Bras Coupé's story is hardly the stuff of a comedy of manners. Rather a romance set in the middle of a social novel, like the Cass Mastern episode in *All the King's Men*, the story of Bras Coupé provides in legendary form the key knowledge from the past to guide the present. Somber and even tragic in its impact, it yet provides the necessary insight for what is to become through the challenges of Frowenfeld and Honoré Grandissime a comic action of reconciliation.

From the story Frowenfeld learns that open rebellion prompts open reprisal by Agricola and his society. That lesson is spelled out for him by Dark Honoré before the first telling: "Ah cannod be one Toussaint l'Ouverture. Ah cannod trah to be. Hiv I trah, I h-only s'all soogceed to be one Bras Coupé" (p. 196). White Honoré reaches a similar conclusion after relating the story to Frowenfeld: "You may ponder the philosophy of Bras Coupé in your study, but *I* have got to get rid of his results, me. You know them" (p. 198). That is also what Clemence learns later when she uses the image of the cut-off arm to intimidate Agricola (p. 314).

In the second half of the novel, then, through a series of moves Frowenfeld challenges the code in specific situations and in recognition of specific relationships rather than by debate of principles. First he calls on Dark Honoré to become a force of "noble discontent" for the quadroons, "laying out his means, sparingly here and bountifully there, as in each case might seem wisest," and using his cunning with "men of the prouder caste" to "show them the double damage of all oppression . . ." (p. 196). Although Dark Honoré refuses at first to act until Agricola is dead, his condition of refusal becomes a portent of Agricola's doom.

Frowenfeld's second move is to urge Honoré to restore the Nancanou property to its rightful claimants (pp. 220–221). Even though both recognize that one has "the easy part—the theorizing" and the other "the noble part—the doing," they both similarly recognize that the Nancanou property stands as a symbol of the previous Creole

world of Numa Grandissime, now usurped by Agricola to satisfy a point of present Creole pride, reinforced by economic necessity. Honoré remembers the family's claims on his father at this point and understands that the burden has been passed to him:

Explain it as you please, call it remorse, pride, love—what you like—while I was in France and [Agricola] was managing my mother's business, unknown to me he gave me that plantation. When I succeeded him I found it and all its revenues kept distinct—as was but proper—from all other accounts, and belonging to me. 'Twas a fine, extensive place, had a good overseer on it and—I kept it. Why? Because I was a coward. I did not want it or its revenues; but, like my father, I would not offend my people (p. 221).

As it was hinted in the opening scene of the masquerade ball at the Theatre St. Philippe and as it becomes clear by the time of Frowenfeld's second move, the action is that of an erotic intrigue, of a "feud between two families, and the course of true love fretting its way through" Honoré's restitution of the Nancanou property is complicated not only by his forbidden love for Aurora but equally by his ritual bondage to family loyalties.

Before Honoré can decide on his friend's recommended course of action, however, Frowenfeld finds opportunity to carry his challenge of Creole values to the high priest himself. While Agricola contemplates his coming duel with Sylvestre in terror and near collapse, Frowenfeld makes his third move by persuading Agricola to renounce the duel and sign an apology (p. 232). Frowenfeld authenticates his decision against head-on challenge and violence when he refuses to return Sylvestre's blow during their confrontation at Maspero's (p. 241).¹⁵ That Frowenfeld is successful in breaching the Creole defenses with Agricola's apology can be seen later when the Grandissimes catch Clemence carrying voodoo charms to Agricola's apartment. The Grandissimes are amazed at Agricola's hesitation in demanding further reprisals against Clemence and Palmyre and humiliate him by excluding him from their search for Palymre. "The fact was, Agricola had never got over the interview which had saved Sylvestre his life" (pp. 316-317).

¹⁵ Apparently Cable's readers at Scribner's failed to understand the force of Frowenfeld's turn against overt challenge. Arlin Turner reports that in a series of letters Robert Underwood Johnson urged Cable to have Frowenfeld "knock Sylvestre over," but Cable, knowing that Frowenfeld could not do so in light of his strategy as well as of his character, acceded to his readers' demands only to the point of having him raise his fist. *Biography*, p. 98.

The climactic move by Frowenfeld carries his intrigue into the Grandissimes mansion itself. When Raoul audaciously introduces him into the inner circle, Frowenfeld demonstrates he has learned his lesson well. Discussing ostensibly the question of "inter-marriage between hostile families," he, like the gathered Grandissimes, realizes "they were about to argue the case of Honoré and Aurora." Although no one concedes the argument, Frowenfeld has learned from Honoré that "to prevail in a conversational debate one should never follow up a faltering opponent, 'you mus' crack the egg, not smash it!'" (pp. 304-305). And the results, Cable notes, were more real than apparent: ". . . in more than one or two candid young hearts and impressible minds the wrongs and rights of sovereign true love began there on the spot to be more generously conceded and allowed" (p. 305). Frowenfeld leaves conscious that "the egg was cracked." The smashed egg, symbol of unrelenting opposition, is rather delivered to the door of Agricola's bedroom as a voodoo sign, placed there by Clemence for Palmyre (p. 306).

That Frowenfeld has succeeded in cracking the egg becomes increasingly clear as more and more Creoles give up their ritual bondage to Agricola's arbitrary code and move toward the freer, more pragmatic order that is to come. Personal and familial animosities are given up as Sylvestre, apparently persuaded by Frowenfeld's mild example, becomes his "sworn friend for life" (p. 266) and Raoul and his wife, impressed by the sympathy of Aurora and Clotilde during the wife's illness, violate generation-long Grandissime loyalties by becoming friends of the Nancanous. Official Grandissime tradition gives way to race-blind family loyalty and to economic pragmatism as the two Honorés recognize the new order in their sign *Grandissime Brothers* (p. 268). De Brahmin Mandarin, that sometime manager and guardian of the doors at Honoré's old office, whose name tells all about the effete aristocracy of the old order, becomes the apothecary's agent in the new shop owned by Clotilde, the pragmatic new generation of the Nancanous (pp. 293-294). Even during the lynching of Clemence, that failure of commitment to the old order seen in Agricola's apology to Sylvestre now operates among the Grandissimes still trying to live according to the code of duels and vengeance. Both Agamemnon and Valentine send word of their disapproval of the lynching, and Sylvestre tearfully forces the others to let Clemence down from the lynching tree (p. 321). Raoul rushes in,

demanding in his own right and on Honoré's authority that they "*shall* not" lynch Clemence (p. 323). That changes have indeed occurred becomes clear to Charles Keene upon his return from five months' recuperation in the West Indies. Walking the streets, Keene senses that it is "not the same New Orleans" (p. 294), and notes the pervading effect of Frowenfeld's principles, especially on Honoré: "... you have taken an inoculation of Quixotic conscience from our transcendental apothecary and perpetrated a lot of heroic behavior that would have done honor to four-and-twenty Brutuses . . ." (p. 301). Even the young Creoles who later decorate Agricola's grave and note the epitaph "Louisiana Forever" come to recognize that forever is "a trifle long for one to confine one's patriotic affection to a small fraction of a great country" (p. 329).

As Frye has noted, however, the writer of comedies of manners must take care that, in banishing the *pharmakos*, he not make his sacrificial figure so pitiable as to induce sympathy at the expense of the new hero. Agricola's humiliating exclusion by the extremist Grandissimes during the hunt for Palmyre achieves "banishment" of the *pharmakos* without precluding sympathy for the new order. During his death scene, then, Agricola presides over reconciliations and restitutions as a newly benign spokesman for the old order. Honoré and his mother, both heirs in their way of Agricola's world, become reconciled after being "for months estranged." Mme. Grandissime and her daughters set aside pride for affection as they embrace Aurora and weep together. Agricola forgives both "noble-hearted, foolish" Honoré and the enemies of Louisiana. Yet though Agricola dies forgiving, he shows himself still unenlightened as he invokes "Louisiana Forever." His call for Louisiana as it was before the Spanish and American cessions echoes Bras Coupé's dying invocation of Africa; both still look to old worlds as their homes and are unable to think of themselves as citizens of the new world in America.

Agricola's ultimate act of reconciliation is, however, expiatory. In revealing that he had pledged the union of Honoré and Aurora to her father twenty years before (p. 328), he also confesses the extent of his usurpation, a pledge held in secret for a generation. He has of course not only kept lovers apart but asserted the pride of punctilio over the claims of both society and economics in his arbitrary world. It requires the reasserted authority of the surrogate grandparents' genera-

tion to set values right for the new order. And in true comic tradition, marriages validate and institute the new reconciliations as the two heroes become fully incorporated into society. True also to the vision of a pragmatically free society, Aurora refuses to accept Honoré on the basis of parental promise and insists that his choice be personally and freely made.

As Cable recognized, his use of the comedy of manners provided the means for presenting serious moral and philosophical concerns. He remembered in "After-Thoughts of a Story-Teller" that "[u]pon this well-used skeleton I essayed to put the flesh and blood, the form and bloom, of personalities new to the world of fiction." That he knew what he was doing as he wrote *The Grandissimes* can be seen in his letter to Boyesen in March 1878. Like Frowenfeld, he had learned the value of conventional paths and of cracking the egg, not smashing it, as he developed a suitable vehicle for his views: "But honestly, now, I did think, as you say, that the great problem of a novel should be something beyond and above the mere puzzle of the plot, something great and thought-compelling, that teaches without telling, that brings to view without pointing, that guides without leading and allures without fatiguing, through the dimness and shadow and uncertainty of a new path out at last upon the illimitable savannahs of God's sweet, green, nourishing truth."¹⁶

¹⁶ Turner, "A Novelist Discovers a Novelist," p. 358.