REGIONALISM IN THE FICTION OF ERNEST J. GAINES

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CHAPTER I

A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF ERNEST J. GAINES

Ernest J. Gaines is becoming a prominent black writer. This thesis will cover three facets which seem prevalent in his works: regionalism in his fiction, the quest for a black hero, which parallels the author's reflections of his experiences in Southern Louisiana, and finally, the motifs emerging in his fiction. In viewing these aspects, certain major areas of literature will be covered—characterization, setting, plot, and symbolism. Before proceeding, it is necessary to give a brief biographical sketch of the author to view the influence of the Southern Louisiana region in the author's life and in his fiction.

Ernest James Gaines was born January 15, 1933. He grew up on False River in Pointe Coupee Parish in Louisiana, where the river played a very big part in the lives of people at that time because people got as much food from the river as they got from the earth. ¹ His early childhood was not unusual. It was greatly influenced by two aspects which repeatedly appear in his works; an elderly lady and his experiences of the plantation fields. He reflects and comments on his early childhood.

I worked hard as a child. I went into the field at the age of nine. And as I said there was nothing unique

or exceptional. Everybody did. Some were even younger than that—six or seven. So I had a lot of work. And at the same time being a child, I had a lot of fun. I played ball. I had brothers and sisters whom I loved and who loved me. I had an aunt that loved me very much. I had the average sort of childhood experiences as far as having love...brothers, sisters, family, etc. These were very happy moments. And of course, the other things were very painful. The other things like segregation, you learn to accept early and had to go through life with it.¹

Gaines was raised by his great-aunt Miss Augusteen Jefferson. He remained with her until he was fifteen; then, he left for California. He speaks about her in an interview:

She'd crawl over the floor as a child six or seven months old might crawl over the floor. But her arms were strong. She'd cook for us—we'd bring the things to the stove for her and set it on a little table in front of her, and she'd mix the things up. She could make break, bake our bread—we had the old wood stoves then. She could wash our clothes: she sat on a bench and leaned over the tub and used the washboard, you know those old time things. She could sew our clothes. She used to use the sewing machine. She could not use her feet, but she could use her hands—how she ever did this I really don't know. You know those old things with the pedal down here—she would reach down and do this with her hands, because there was no way to run it. It was one of these old machines, probably one of the oldest ones. I wish I knew where it was today—if I could find it, I'd keep it forever. Besides that, she used to go into the little garden to work among her vegetables. She'd crawl over the floor, out of the house, down the steps into the yard, into the garden. Other times, she would crawl into our back yard to pick up pecans.²

¹ Sharon Spence, Interview with Ernest J. Gaines during the meeting of the Clark College Seventh Annual Workshop, Atlanta, Georgia, April 1976.

Miss Augusteen Jefferson never walked a day of her life, yet, her
courage was inspirational and impressive on a young child. With such
a picture of strength in his life, one can easily understand the con-
viction that Gaines had in his life and later declared to himself that
he would be a writer. The success of his conviction is clearly stated
It reads: "To the Memory of my beloved aunt, Miss Augusteen Jefferson,
who did not walk a day in her life but who taught me the importance of
standing."¹

The influence of his aunt is reflected in Gaines's fictional
characters of elderly ladies: Aunt Charlotte, Madame Bayonne, Aunt Fe,
Miss Julie Rand, Miss Jane Pittman, who become spokesmen of experience
and vision. Similar figures assisted Gaines in understanding the
elderly, their position and viewpoints; especially in the history of
pre-Civil War and post-Civil War years.

She *has seen it* and
watched it happen around her. I think she knows what is
there. She is the voice of experience. She is every-
where and because of my aunt--these people *are not my aunt; but
because she did raise me, because of her age and her condition, you had
people coming to us all the time. They were, more often than not, old
people who came around. Being the older child around, I
had to serve water, make coffee, whatever, look after
them. So I was always around old people.²

The inward strength of his aunt and her friends evolve into blueprints

¹ Ernest J. Gaines, "Dedication," *The Autobiography of Miss Jane

² Spence, *loc. cit.*
for Gaines's common black folk hero who appears to be absent in the literary history of Afro-Americans. There has been established the noted literary figures of Richard Wright's Bigger Thomas of *Native Son* and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*. However, Gaines makes the simple black folk visible who have through the years formed the backbone of Afro-American history.

Gaines gives his fiction a historical function doing for the past what "regular" history cannot do--presenting the voices of the common people, giving us a sense of immediacy and the feeling of the places where people live. When we see through the eyes of Miss Jane and the friends who help her tell her story, we get a truth about the past that cannot be expressed through conventional historical analysis.1

It is the black man's endurance through slavery, as seen in Miss Jane Pittman, which has not been accurately printed in literature. Endurance was the source of the common black hero, as seen in Gaines's Aunts, Miss Augusteen Jefferson and Octavia. Their absence in literature gave rise to Gaines's protest against black and white southern writers of the past.

I'm disagreeing with the kind of writing that has been written about me, and, by both blacks and whites. I'm protesting against those who can find only problem people among my people, because I knew heroes. My aunt was the greatest hero who ever lived on this earth. So I have a hero right there! So, no matter what people can say about problem people, I have known a hero personally and I've known many others. King [Martin Luther King, Jr.] was a great hero. Many of the poor farmers, poor black farmers I knew were great heroes. I have another aunt--Octavia was a great heroine. So I've known many heroes. So I am protesting against. I don't write to protest. I'm not protesting against anything. I'm just writing

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about heroes, but I do find it is a form of protest. I
do find it is a form of rebellion because neither white
or black have. Many of our most important black writers
have felt that the black man was the victim rather than
a hero. They created very few black characters. ¹

The protest is directed against those who have criticized his characters,
whom Gaines believes to represent a truer picture of the common black
man. The poor farmer's problems foreshadow the heroism of the individ-
ual. The heroism is to endure and survive in a system which opposes
him. Gaines protests against the black stereotyping of problem
characters created by white and black writers alike. Gaines does give
credit to a few black writers who have created some authentic characters
as opposed to those who have not. Gaines speaks about the possible
influence of black writers as opposed to southern white writers in
regards to truer presentation of black characters.

What I'm thinking about as major writers, I'm thinking
about Jim Baldwin, Ellison, and Wright, at the moment, and
even John Williams. . . . I think Toomer would have
influenced me not with his characters, but with his nar-
rative. He has great narrative power and I'm pretty sure
that if I had read that prose when I was starting out he
would have had as much influence on me or more. In view
of the prose-poetry or poetry-prose, whatever it is, I
think, this man, was as advanced or further advanced as
Gertrude Stein or Hemingway, because Cane was produced
before Hemingway had written anything. But this man used
a kind of language that Gertrude Stein probably wished
she could use. I do feel even now that Gertrude Stein's
people were kind of false, quite good, but I find them
false. And I do not feel at all that what Toomer was
doing was false.²

¹
Spence, op. cit.

²
Ibid.
Hence, it is the truer presentation of simple black folk that has significant value in revealing the actual life of the black man through fiction. The endurance of simple people who had lived through the cruelties of slavery and the trials of daily life is black heroism. Therefore, Gaines establishes one of his objectives as a writer to depict heroes of the type he has known since childhood.

Gaines's experiences and early education were typical of the plantation of the thirties and forties. In the "Author's Note" preceding "A Long Day in November," he comments on the simple aspects of plantation life viewed in the story, and his memories of the circumstances under which he attended school.

I was born on a plantation like the one in this book, and I can still remember people going out into the fields. A Long Day in November could have happened in the late 1930's and the mid 1940's. There was a one-room school house on or near every plantation, and all classes were taught by one teacher. An older boy or girl would build the fire in the heater and see that the schoolhouse stayed warm all day.

Gaines received an eighth grade education in this system. Gaines continued working in the fields picking Irish potatoes until he was fifteen, then he left for California in 1948. At this time, technological and economic changes were occurring within the plantation system.

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Gaines acknowledged the end of plantation field life brought about by technology and the consequent labor and economic problems for field workers.

Machinery now has taken over the cane cutting that people used to do by hand. One cane cutting machine operated by two or three men can cut as much cane as fifty men could cut by hand. So people who used to go into the fields with their cane knives have had to seek work elsewhere.

About the only people still living on the plantations now are old people who are too tired and too burden-laden to pick up and start all over again. They live on welfare, and they raise a few chickens, one or two pigs, and they raise a little garden beside or behind the house.

Life as described in A Long Day in November is just about gone. Technology has destroyed it, and I think all for the best. The work on the plantation was hard and tedious. There was not much else to do but go into the fields and work, come home to rest, then go back to work again. Technology . . . took this work and forced the people off the land.1

Within those fifteen years, Gaines worked in the fields, received an elementary education in the plantation school system, and most importantly, stored memories and experiences which remained with him into adulthood. One memory he has remembered and talked about in an earlier interview2 was a church play he presented at the age of twelve. This wedding play was in imitation of a play he had seen at a Catholic school in New Orleans. When he returned home, he read several magazines


looking among the one-act plays and advertisements for a similar sketch. After locating a sketch and combining it with his strong impressions of the New Orleans play, Gaines acted as writer, director, make-up man, and did everything to produce this ten to fifteen minute play. Some of his personal pleasure in this adventure can be felt in his retelling of the play.

I remember another little thing about that play. My sister, Louise, was in it. My sister, Louise, is very fat and very little. I had seen this thing done in black face. Black people had come down in New Orleans and they put it on in black face. They were supposed to be country Southern people. Of course, they were sophisticated in New Orleans. So when they did it in black face, I had to do it in black face, too. Here I was a little boy about twelve years old with all this shoe polish on my face and white shoe polish on my mouth. We weren’t talking much better than they the country people were. Anyway, I had this stuff on everybody’s face... I did all this. I put on Louise’s face. Louise had a little white mouth and little white eyes.¹

Traces of this occasion are seen as Gaines later puts reference to the little play in the character of Jimmy—"The One," who presents a play in the novel, The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman.²

At the age of fifteen, Gaines left Southern Louisiana and went to California. There was no adequate school near his relatives’ house in Southern Louisiana, so Gaines decided to join his mother and stepfather in California. So with his resolution, he flagged a bus to New Orleans and took a train to Crockett, California in the San Francisco Bay area,

¹ Spence, loc. cit.

across from Vallejo, California. In Vallejo he united with his mother, Andrea, and his stepfather, Ralph Norbert Colar, Sr., who was a merchant marine. There Gaines attended Franklin Junior High School, Vallejo High School, Vallejo Junior College, and then, San Francisco State College.

Vallejo was a new environment for Gaines. Although he sought comfort in new friends, he missed the South. The Government Housing Projects, and California, itself, provided Gaines the opportunity to meet and merge with a variety of people. He made friends with whites, blacks, Chicanos, Filipinos, Japanese, and Chinese. However, during the year of 1949, Gaines started to become involved with a youth gang. His stepfather sternly stated his objection to these companions and said not to continue this relationship. At this point, Gaines began to visit the library of Vallejo.

It was here in the library that reading triggered Gaines's first attempt at writing. His nostalgia for the South brought out of him a novel. This was an unpublished work entitled *Barren Summer.*

I decided to write a novel myself. I wrote it in one summer, I was sixteen. It was probably the worse novel, the worse number of pages that anyone could possibly call a novel. I'm sure it was. I sent it to a publisher in New York and they sent it right back. I knew nothing though. I had not read anything. I had not any kind of help or any kind of direction toward the proper way of reading. I had nothing like that.

Even after this first failure in the literary world, Gaines was still

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2 Laney, *op. cit.*, p. 4.
determined to become a writer. Ridiculed by his relatives and friends because of his fancy wish, in the face of such a rejection, Gaines continued to read and started writing every day to strengthen his determination.

When Gaines finished Vallejo Junior College, finances for continuing college had dwindled to nothing. At that time, Gaines was drafted into the army for a two-year period from 1953 to 1955. After the army, he returned to California, making San Francisco his home. The G. I. Bill, which paid him one hundred and ten dollars monthly, gave him funds to continue college and he entered San Francisco State College in the year 1955. Gaines, up to this time, had continued his reading and writing. It was at San Francisco State that he began his real study of authors. He read the great literary figures and learned from each of them; however, something was lacking in the representation of the black peasantry or the Southern black-American.

I didn't see us in the Southern writers. I didn't even see myself in the Russian writers, although the Russians came close. So I began to try to do it myself and, of course, I went back to my childhood to write about. I suppose that most writers, when they first start out, try to write about their childhood.¹

In returning to his childhood to write, it would seem that Gaines was formulating a theory of literature or a different approach to the art of writing. However, in response to a question asked in an interview he has indicated otherwise.

No. No. I have no theories on writing. I try to put out a theory every now and then, but I keep forgetting

what I have written down. But I do think the early childhood experiences are more lasting on writers. Those early experiences you never get away from. They are with you forever. Whatever the writer is, he will always draw from this. I'm thinking of . . . Joyce's *Portrait of a Young Artist*, that type of thing. Older black writers have avoided this like the plague of the South. They wanted to avoid their past. I think it is a tragedy that most of our black writers avoided this because it was so painful.  

With the early history of black Americans embedded in slavery, the pain is understood. More often than not, the bravery and strength of the black Americans overcame these oppressive circumstances. Many southern white writers were not able to capture these circumstances of slavery and still lacked an understanding of the struggle and situations that occurred. Gaines acknowledged that often the strength of the black American was recognized in characters created by a white writer, William Faulkner; but Gaines had a different opinion.

Faulkner, I suppose, had created more heroic black characters than many of our major black writers. He may not care about his interpretation of a hero. He might not care about that at all, but he still created some pretty strong black characters. I'm thinking about the African and *Red Leaves*. I'm thinking about Lucas; I'm thinking about Dilsey. I might not like them, but they are very strong people.  

According to Gaines, Faulkner's Dilsey still was a skeletal presentation of black Americans in, during, and after slavery. He stated that Faulkner lacked a deeper understanding of the Black American's view of the situation, specifically, the intimacy between a black man and woman.

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1 Spence, *loc. cit.*

2 Ibid.
Faulkner had to have a different interpretation or outlook than I; for example, to compare Dilsey to Miss Jane Pittman. Faulkner sees Dilsey as someone in the kitchen, or someone walking away from the house, or coming toward the big house, whereas I go into Miss Jane's house. Miss Jane's relationship with Ned, I see there, their kind of relationship which Faulkner could never have imaged...I'm thinking about a scene right now in The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman when Joe and Miss Jane first leave Boone for the Clyde Plantation, a plantation where Joe Pittman is able to break horses; and how they have that unspoken communication when they're sitting by the fireplace. These are the kind of things that Faulkner would not have attempted to write about with a young black woman or a young black man. He would not have attempted that kind of thing. And these are kind of different interpretations that Faulkner and I have, although I have learned much from him. But the intimate relationship between characters, I don't know if he has any type of intimate relationship between any of his characters.  

In trying to achieve a truer presentation of black peasantry of the type he was later able to achieve seen in Joe and Jane Pittman, Gaines continued to write during his two years at San Francisco State. He had several short stories published in the college journal, Transfer, "The Turtles" and "The Boy in the Double-vested Suit." In each of these stories, Gaines broached a major theme of his work, the father-son relationship. Both stories are concerned with growing up. In "The Turtles," the fathers of two adolescent boys attempt to teach their sons about the sexual activities of manhood. The second story is based on a younger son's personal feelings towards his father's relationship with a woman who might become his step-mother. In both stories the narration is given from the son's viewpoint. This technique becomes prominent in Gaines's work.

Upon graduation from San Francisco State in 1957, although Gaines

1 Ibid.
worked at various jobs, his determination to be a writer grew even stronger.

When I graduated from State in '57, I gave myself ten years. I said, in ten years I must be a writer or I don't know what else I'll do with my life. I don't know what I'd do—become a farmer?¹

Gaines had already excluded the idea of being a teacher because it would not allow him time to write or do anything else. He was writing, by this time, approximately four to five hours a day. He heard of a creative writing fellowship, the Wallace Stegner Award, at Stanford University which supported and assisted young, unpublished authors. The regulations stipulated that three short stories or a part of a novel be submitted. Gaines submitted the stories published in the college paper, Transfer, and another story, "Mary Louise." This last short story broached another theme of Gaines's work, the polarity of the past and present and their effect on characters. Holding onto rural dreams of marriage, Mary Louise, a simple country girl, waits for her childhood love to return, only to find him greatly changed by influences of the present times. Through her, Gaines illustrates the simplicity of rural life shattered by change.

Gaines received the Stegner Award in 1958. With the award money, he attempted to rewrite the novel, Barren Summer, which he had written at sixteen. Barren Summer was revised into Catherine Carmier. In 1959, he received the Joseph Henry Jackson Award on the strength of Catherine

¹ Laney, op. cit., p. 6.
Carmier, as an upcoming author. The regulations were the same as for the award in 1958. The award was to be given to an author of unpublished non-fiction, prose, or poetry under the age of thirty-five, and residing in Northern California for at least three years. The amount of money was two thousand dollars and it was offered annually.

Catherine Carmier was published in 1964. This novel was the "only one, out of four novels, that Gaines had published." The remaining novels referred to were written about California and, according to Gaines, "were very bad; because my heart may have been in it, but my soul was not." The unpublished manuscripts are in the archives of the San Francisco State Library.

Gaines had many frustrations in the creation of Catherine Carmier. He had to find an appropriate title. He deleted settings and activities of characters. "We had several titles, A Little Stream, another was Barren Summer and several other titles I have forgotten." Gaines explained that the title was changed in the course of revisions and deletions:

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4 Spence, loc. cit.
That *Barren Summer* was an earlier version. That's when its title was *Little Stream*. There's a stream of water where they (Catherine, Lillian, and Della Carmier) get into a fight. But when I moved from the little stream, the fighting was no longer necessary. You see I had them living further back in the fields when they were living around the stream. And once I moved them away from the stream, I still wanted the separation. I put them behind the trees which still symbolized a barrier between the two—the lighter-skinned and the darker-skinned women.¹

In the final publication of the novel, the Carmiers are moved once again from the stream and the back fields to an overseer's house on the Grover's plantation. The racial prejudices of the family are continued between the mulattoes and Creoles of the Carmier family.

However, the title, *Catherine Carmier*, still seemed inappropriate. Numerous revisions had shifted the focus of the novel greatly between Catherine Carmier and Jackson Bradley. The plot appeared to be divided among the characters of Catherine, Raoul Carmier (her father) and Jackson. Gaines commented that the story was originally to center around the history of a simple Creole family; but Jackson's presence turned the plot into a "Romeo-Juliet" theme, another frequent theme in Gaines's works.

I had been writing this book for a very long time and I had no title for it until the day I sent it off to the publishing house. I had called it several things including some titles I don't think should be put on paper. I had been trying to write this novel for about two years. I didn't know anything about writing a novel when I first started, so it had given me a lot of trouble. I simply ended up calling it *Catherine*. When I sent it to my editor, Hiram Haydn, he told me that I should give it a second name, so I simply called it *Catherine Carmier*. The book was much longer in earlier versions and it had much more to do with Catherine and her family than it did with Jackson; though Jackson was the central character, much

¹Ibid.
more of the action concerned Catherine, her background, and her family.\textsuperscript{1}

With the publication of \textit{Catherine Carmier}, Gaines's dream to become a writer began to materialize and to slowly become a reality. The award monies were gone and he had not obtained the needed literary recognition as an author to exist solely on his works and to continue writing. To make the dream more tangible, Gaines worked at various jobs which would allow him to have time to write. "He worked at the Post offices, set type in printing shops and held a variety of other jobs, but all the time he would devote at least five hours a day to writing."\textsuperscript{2}

His financial difficulties during this period of his life echoed the familiar stories of many struggling young artists.

Now it was early spring of '66. I had very little money; I had practically no money at all; I had been sponging off my friends and my brothers for drinks, and I had not bought one drink for them in over a year. I had not given my poor mother a birthday present, a Christmas present, or a Mother's Day present in over two years. My girl had dropped me quite a while ago--a normal thing, I feel, when a man is unable to buy a hamburger in a place like MacDonald's. I needed the money; I needed money badly. But I didn't want to go out, on an eight-hour day job that would take me from my writing.

I wanted the money, but I wanted to earn it by writing and by writing only. Now, if that was the case, I had to get something done. There had to be another novel in me somewhere that a publisher would accept.\textsuperscript{3}


\textsuperscript{2} Beauford, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 16.

\textsuperscript{3} Fitzgerald and Merchant, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 331-32.
The second novel was *Of Love and Dust* (1967), which was an extension of one of Gaines's short stories, "Three Men." "Three Men" was one of the few short stories that Gaines had published in various magazines and anthologies during the sixties; the others were "Just Like a Tree,"¹ "A Long Day in November,"² and "The Sky is Gray."³ However, in order to have these published together in one volume, a novel had to be written first.

I had to write a novel right away in order to get these stories published . . . After I had written those stories, and tried to get them published, but I couldn't get them published. I didn't know how in the world I was going to write a novel. I had no novel in mind. I had nothing in mind, and then, there was this story here. ["Three Men"]

Ah, yes. We'll continue this story here.⁴

This demonstrates some of the frustrations of a young author and the problems of publication. In this instance, the novel was the only route to the later publication of *Bloodline* (1968). Gaines realized and firmly believed that those short stories were the finest written work. In acknowledgement of his success, Gaines was awarded a two-year book contract with Dial Press. Gaines spoke of those two events:

But exactly ten years later, [after his graduation] in '67, I published *Of Love and Dust*, which was rather successful; it began to get some notice and during that time I published three stories. "A Long Day in November," "Just Like

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¹ "Just Like A Tree," *Sewanee Review* 71 (Fall 1963), pp. 542-68.


⁴ Spence, *loc. cit.*
a Tree," and "The Sky is Gray." I had published these stories by the time my second novel came out. Then, I published the collection of stories, Bloodline. I always knew my stories were better than anything else I had written. When Of Love and Dust was published I told the publishing house, give me a two-book contract because these stories are going to make it for me. They might not make money, but they will make me a name. So they gave me a two-book contract. And they have been successful. "The Sky is Gray" has been anthologized twelve to fifteen times.¹

Both publications arrived within his ten year allotment for success as a writer.

With the publication of Of Love and Dust, Gaines did start the uphill climb towards recognition as a writer. Interviews became frequent as critics began to take interest in this new novelist. Questions were directed to the origins of his works: comparisons with other authors, actual formation of characters, plot, style, and the like. In response to these numerous questions, Gaines disclosed that several of his works came directly from experiences and incidents of his life. These experiences are reflected in Of Love and Dust and two stories--"The Sky is Gray" and "Bloodline"--in the collection of short stories called Bloodline.

"Three Men" and Of Love and Dust were based upon Gaines’s knowledge of the peonage system used in the South and his witness to an actual knife-fight. According to Gaines:

The inspiration for Of Love and Dust was a blues song sung by Lightin’ Hopkins, entitled "Mr. Time Moore’s Farm." It was a particular verse that remained in his mind for ten years. The lyrics were, "The worst thing this blackman ever done, when I moved my wife and family to Mr. Time

¹Laney, op. cit., pp. 6-7.
Moore's Farm. Mr. T. M. Mood's man never stand and grin, say if you keep out the graveyard, nigger, I'll keep you out of the penitentiary.1

Peonage was the system by which debtors or prisoners were forced to labor for their creditors or for persons who leased their services from the state. Far too frequently, Afro-Americans became entangled in this vice of capital control and far too often became its victim.

In the novel, I mention having the plantation owner bond my young killer out of jail and putting him to work in this field. This was a normal thing in the forties. Some of our best southern gentlemen did it. This was still going on in the fifties. And as late as 1963, when I was in Louisiana, a friend of mine pointed out a black youth who had killed another black youth and had been bonded out and put to work only a few days later. The only catch here—when the prisoner, the convict, found himself bonded out of jail—was that he usually spent twice as much time on the plantation than he would have spent in the penitentiary. Many times he found himself working just as hard, and maybe even harder, and there was nothing he could do about it, because the day he decided to run, the white man was going to put the sheriff on his trail again.2

Therefore the peonage system continued the bondage of slavery in another form. In "Three Men" and Of Love and Dust, Gaines depicts how the protagonists of his stories were charged with murder when only acting in self-defense.

The knife-fight that influenced these pieces of fiction was an actual event which occurred on a visit by Gaines to Baton Rouge in 1958, the year following his graduation from San Francisco State College.

1 Fitzgerald and Merchant, op. cit., p. 331.

2 Fitzgerald, op. cit., p. 332.
Explaining what happened, Gaines says:

My friend and I went to this bar, and in this bar I saw a fight between two young men. This bar is surrounded by fields—cane, corn, cotton, and most people who come here are from the country or from small towns not far away. They come to drink; they come to dance; they come to gamble; they come to fight; they come to steal your woman. They come to steal your man; they come knowing they might end up in jail that night, but still they come. They come to forget the hard work in the fields all week, and they come to accept whatever fate is awaiting them. If nothing terrible happens, then the night has been somewhat a success; if something bad does happen, then these things are expected in a bar such as this. So it was here that I saw the knife-fight between the two young men. Fortunately for both, the fight was stopped before either was fatally wounded.¹

Gaines employed this situation and setting in Of Love and Dust when Marcus Payne tells Jim Kelly of the killing of Hotwater over a woman in a red dress:

... . . .But by the time the nigger got out his knife, he had got out his own, too. He said let the nigger get two good whacks at him (he always believed in playing fair, himself); then he threw that knife into the nigger's belly far as he could. He said his hand was red when it came back. But by then the police was there, dragging him to the car.

... . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

"They was probably there all the time," he said, "But they just wanted to see one nigger kill another one. What they care."²

As Gaines speaks of his personal experiences, it is easy to see how he utilized particular situations to draw realistic pictures of the Southern Louisiana life style in his works.

¹ Ibid., p. 331.

"The Sky is Gray" and "Bloodline" are two short stories which parallel Gaines's experiences by retelling these experiences in fiction. In "The Sky is Gray," James, a young boy of eight, has a toothache and must go to Bayonne to have the tooth removed. The circumstances of Gaines's own life become background for his works as in "The Sky is Gray:"

Yes, I had a toothache when I was a child at that age, and I had to ride the bus, just as he [James] rides. At that time, on a bus in the South, you had a little sign hanging over the aisle and it said "White" on one side and it said "Colored" on the other side, and you had to sit behind that little sign. I went to a Catholic school in this town, which I call Bayonne in the story. I also could not eat uptown. There was no place to eat: whether it was cold or sleet or rain. . . . There was no place to warm a child eight years old. To do it, a mother had to take him back of town, which was about a mile, 3/4 of a mile, something like that, and there was no transportation unless someone picked you up when they saw you walking by. You have that in my story. I also knew about the dentist's waiting room, the cluttered little place that might be full of people waiting to have dental help. Of course, there were all black people in here; the whites were sitting someplace else. So I had gone through all that. This is why I knew what a child would experience. As a writer I was interpreting the feeling of this child at the time I myself was 30 years old, but I did know the experiences that he would have gone through. I knew the things that he was going through, yes.¹

In "Bloodline" the importance of entrance into the Laurent house through the front door instead of the back entrance was based on an experience Gaines had had after his name become well-known in his home region in Louisiana. In the short story the entrance symbolizes equality; for Gaines, it was also a matter of procedure. Gaines had received an invitation to visit the home of some white residents whom his aunt had

known and worked for. On inquiring how she entered the house, she said, "the backdoor."\(^1\) Gaines informed her to forget it and give an excuse for his not coming.

Gaines frequently has had to defend his characters and prove they were not direct imitations of literary greats. The character of Miss Jane Pittman, and often the aunts in Gaines’s fiction, are continuously compared by literary critics to Faulkner’s Dilsey. Miss Jane and Dilsey, according to critics, present equally the universals of strength and endurance. Gaines, however, unlike Faulkner, has a deeper understanding of slavery and the past and its effects upon black Americans. The difference in the two authors’ view of the past provides the distinction between the development of the two characters.

Faulkner sees in the past an admirable simplicity and strength, whose resting place is the ancient wilderness. That past is not without its evil, but by far the greater evil for Faulkner is the intrusion of the new into the old, to the destruction of the former. Gaines’s conception of the past does not simply and diametrically oppose that of Faulkner. Had it done so, he (Gaines) would not have mistaken Faulkner’s forms as appropriate vehicles for his own fiction. Gaines’s vision entails a deep conflict of values.\(^2\)

The values most strongly visible in Miss Jane Pittman are values of equality and freedom. In Faulkner’s *Sound and Fury*, Dilsey, a black woman accepting the code of slavery without objections, survived. In Gaines’s interpretation of this period in Miss Jane Pittman, the system

\(^1\) Spence, *Loc. cit.*

of slavery is constantly challenged. Miss Jane's life story proves to be more authentic in revealing the desires of her people for achieving independence and equality and a willingness to fight for both. Miss Jane's life is directed to the need for change. Initially, her energies are aimed towards ending slavery during the Civil War years and later against segregation in the Sixties Civil Rights Movement.

Just as Jane Pittman is compared to Faulkner's character, Dilsey, Gaines's characters, Proctor Lewis and Marcus Payne ('Three Men' and Of Love and Dust respectively) are compared to Hemingway's characters, Jake Barnes and Frederic Henry (of Sun Also Rises and A Farewell to Arms). The four male characters all show a stoic indifference to their surroundings and existing situations in society in the struggle towards manhood. In the following quote, Gaines explains the extent of Hemingway's influence as a great writer of the fifties; however, the stoicism portrayed in Hemingway's character did not influence the development of his two characters, Proctor and Marcus.

The stoicism in these characters Proctor and Marcus was not because of Hemingway's influence on me. I was writing these stories during the time when young blacks were standing up against the establishment. They were no longer doing what everyone thought they ought to do, whether it was the white man, or the law, or their own black people. So, that was an influence. Then I also knew a guy on whom I based Proctor Lewis. This guy had been involved in a killing; three men had jumped him and he had killed one with a knife. He had been working as a mechanic for a white man and when he was thrown in jail his boss came to get him out. But he told him that he would serve his time. So these characters were not necessarily influenced by Hemingway at all.1

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1 John O'Brien, op. cit., p. 81.
Although Gaines admits that he benefited from studying the works of other writers, he feels that he has drawn a truer representation of black Americans who as his characters are not stertopic in his works.

Experimenting with either the same plot or characters from various points of view is a technique of Gaines's style. 

Catherine Carmier, "Three Men" and Of Love and Dust stand as three examples of fiction based on the same story whereas in The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman and "Just Like a Tree" one has character development through viewpoints of others, all within one piece of fiction. The novel gives the possibility of exploring theme and situation; the second short story allows for greater exploration of characterization.

Catherine Carmier is the final version of Barren Summer and Little Stream, in which the triangular love-affair focuses on Jackson Bradley, Catherine, and Raoul Carmier. Within this novel, the love affair between Mary Louise and Jackson Bradley demonstrates Gaines's experimentations with the same theme. "Mary Louise," a title given for an earlier short story which Gaines wrote while he was in college, was also incorporated in a revised form as a section of Catherine Carmier. In both, the theme is the traditions of the past versus those of the present with Mary Louise representing the past, and Jackson Bradley the present. In the short story and novel, the plot is a brief reunion after five years have passed between Mary Louise and Jackson. However, in the short story more character development is found in the relationship of Mary Louise and Jackson Bradley. Mary Louise's expectations of marriage are

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defined by her childhood memories and the fancies of a southern rural girl. Jackson, returning for a visit, is greatly changed by his removal from the rural setting and his exposure to urban life. He has no intentions of marriage. In learning of this, Mary Louise's dreams are shattered. She is lost in her small world since her marriage will not occur due to Jackson's change. Mary Louise is moved to a minor role in the novel, but she is a more mature woman and accepts the truth and Jackson's change. Although there is a difference in character development, Mary Louise is pulled between the forces of the past and present. Her entrapment by past tradition does not, or will not, allow Mary Louise to leave her surroundings embedded in the southern rural life. Gaines has retained this aspect in both the short story and the novel.

"Three Men" and Of Love and Dust exemplify again Gaines's experimentation in depicting different genres of fiction centered on the same theme.

Yes, that's the same story. A story where the youth killed another one. In the novel, Of Love and Dust, the youth comes out of jail and they put him in jail for a night or so. He's taken out of jail, put on his plantation for the duration of time he would have spent in a jail. But of course, he'll end up working much, much longer than that; maybe two to three times, maybe four or five. Maybe the rest of your life you'll be working for these people. Now, I wanted to take a different approach and that's when I used "Three Men" story. . .

Gaines's experimentation with techniques is visible in "Just Like a Tree" and The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman. Both fictional works explore character development through various narrators in the selection.

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1 Spence, loc. cit.
Aunt Fe in "Just Like a Tree" is sketched for the reader by the various viewpoints of the characters, the old and the young. The older characters represent the past, whereas several of the young are either of the past or the future, rebelling against the past. Only in the last selection of the short story when Aunt Fe speaks for herself is there a peaceful co-existence of the past and present. In The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman, the same technique of different narrators is used to tell Miss Jane's history.

Another eminent aspect of Gaines's fiction is the father-son relationship theme, which Gaines himself acknowledges "as the proverbial battle between father and son. A theme I play around with in almost everything I write."¹ In Gaines's first short stories, "Turtles" and "Boy in the Double-Vested Suit," there are strong prevailing images of fathers. The father images become more important as the son needs a guideline to measure his manhood. Bloodline, Gaines's collection of short stories, is centered around the struggle for manhood, for the most part without a father. Only in "A Long Day in November" is there a father present, even though the image is not as strong as in "Turtles" and "Boy in the Double-Vested Suit." In Catherine Carmier, three generations focus on father-son relationships: Robert Carmier, father of Raoul, and, then, his son, Mark. The Chapter, "The Hunter," in The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman concerns a son's search for his father. "The Hunter" is a full grown man who accentuates the importance of various guides for manhood. At present, Gaines is writing another

¹ Laney, op. cit., p. 8.
novel, *In My Father's House*, which centers on a father's search for his son. "In this case the black man and his son were separated in slavery and they have been trying to reach each other since then. That's the central theme in this particular book."¹

While Gaines is working on the completion of *In My Father's House*, he continues to lecture on college campuses and to work towards the publication of those works written during his college years, perhaps under the title *Four College Stories.*²

Because all his works thus far are set in Louisiana, many critics have questioned Gaines about other locations for his stories' settings. Gaines has made attempts at writing about regions of California, but he has found himself uncomfortable with the California area and has chosen, therefore, to write about aspects that reflect his early home background.

"Being able to work, do my work--that, I'm proud of. I think one of the greatest things that has happened to me, as a writer and a human being, is that I was born in the South, that I was born in Louisiana. Because when I grew up on a plantation in the late thirties and forties, I'm pretty sure it was not too much different from the way things could have been when my ancestors were in slavery. Oh, we could do a few things more. But that I went through that kind of experience--there's a direct connection between the past and what is happening today; I'm very fortunate to have had that kind of background."³

In the study of Gaines, this background is an essential part of his

¹ Ibid., p. 9.

² Spence, *op. cit*.

being a writer. Being reared during a transitional period for the South has allowed Gaines to view situations of slavery, reconstruction, and the present. His early development in the South emerges as a deeper understanding of the forces operating in his characterizations; representing the simple, yet, heroic lives of the rural black Americans. His personal experiences and consciousness of his surroundings are developed into his fiction to reveal the constant struggle of manhood as seen, for example, in James of "Sky is Gray" and Marcus Payne in Of Love and Dust. The circumstances surrounding his characterizations are real; therefore, they are authentic. This authenticity separates Gaines from an imitator of literary greats and makes him an author of new creations. His characters have more dimension, since there is more substance in their existence during the cruelties of slavery. In the history of the South, his rural people are heroes.

The author's feelings for Louisiana lead to a visible and possible study of Gaines as an author of the regionalist tradition. When Gaines speaks of Louisiana, his sentiments for the land and that which is distinctly a part of Louisiana is felt:

I think that Louisiana's probably the most romantic and interesting of all Southern states--the land, the language, the colors, the bayous, the fields—all these things together, make it an extremely interesting place. If I were to come from any southern state, I think, Louisiana is the one that I would choose. And I'm glad I came from here. I'm glad I came from here.¹

Gaines's strong attachment to Louisiana, revealed in this comment, strengthens the argument for his abilities as a regionalist writer, his

success in capturing the characters indigenous to this region, the setting and distinctive themes, further attests to his capabilities as a strong regionalist writer.
CHAPTER II

REGIONALISM IN GAINE'S FICTION

Just as Sherwood Anderson conceived *Winesburg, Ohio* and William Faulkner invented Yoknapatawpha County, Gaines created Bayonne Parish located near Louisiana's capital, Baton Rouge. Gaines's intimacy with the Southern Louisiana region, his writing abilities, coupled with his association with the area, provides numerous themes, plots, setting, and characterizations unique to the community of Bayonne Parish. The qualities of these literary aspects of this area permit an evaluation of Gaines as a regionalist writer. Regionalism is a quality in literature which is the product of its fidelity to a particular geographical section, accurately representing its speech, manners, history, folklore, or beliefs.¹ A brief history of Louisiana, preceding the discussion of regionalism in Gaines's fiction, will confirm the author's use of the area's background for his rural setting. Synopses of his fictional works will precede analysis of setting, themes, plots, and characterization in the Bayonne Parish.

Until its boundaries were defined, Louisiana stood as a mass of wilderness rich in sources and beauty. Later, as boundaries were marked upon the map, water held a large portion of the land. It served as an avenue of transportation and provided food for the early settlers of the

area. The Mississippi River constantly supplied the Delta with rich, black, fertile soil which became a major attraction to colonists. As the wealth of the land increased, struggle for land control occurred among the Europeans and the American Indians. At this point, Louisiana's history was similar to that of all areas being developed by Spain, England, and France. However, France demonstrated the most strength and the French influence is strongly felt today in various areas of Louisiana. Even more important in Gaines's fiction are the French distinctions (Originals, Cajuns, Creoles) which were created by and perpetuated since the first generations of Louisiana settlers who are characterized by Gaines.

Of more significance in the rural Louisiana setting employed by Gaines is the migration of the Acadians. The Acadians, French descendants residing in Nova Scotia, were forced into exile by the British in the 1700's.¹ They migrated to Louisiana. They were assimilated by the other Frenchmen who were already permanent settlers, along with the Spanish colonists. However, social distinctions were created between the original settlers and the migrants. Creoles were descendants of the first French or Spanish settlers of Louisiana, the "originals.² "Cajuns" (from Acadians) became the name for the French agarians. Because of this


acceptance by the Originals, the French Acadians did not remain aloof or a separate group. They mixed blood, combining with the "originals from the mother country (France)."\textsuperscript{1} Yet, the social standing of the Cajuns, as times changed, was lower than that of the successful white-Anglo Europeans who later established themselves in Louisiana. At the same time, as the Cajun's social standing was lowered in relation to the successful white-Anglo European, a greater bridge of social distinction occurred between the "Originals" and the Cajuns. The Cajuns eventually were considered the poor agarians and French of poor quality and background, a theme frequently used in Gaines's characterizations.

More important to our purposes is the black American's history in this state. Although similar to earlier plantation life structure throughout the Southern states, slavery had a different flavor here. Until 1699, black Americans enjoyed equal status to their white counterparts.\textsuperscript{2} After this date, however, the state introduced and enforced the "Code Noir," which successfully replaced the use of Indians and indentured servants with black labor and slavery. Introducing a caste system in regards to the state's black Americans, the meaning of the term "creole" was changed from "original" to "produced in the colonies" or "simply home grown."\textsuperscript{3} Negroes born in the colonies were referred to

\textsuperscript{1}
Ibid., p. xix.

\textsuperscript{2}

\textsuperscript{3}
as "Creole Negroes," in contrast to the imported slaves. The latter were called "basals" because they were supposed to be wild.¹

Historically, Louisiana had developed and applied many colorful terms, expressions and localism to distinguish various "enclaves" of colored people. The various grades of colored people owe their distinctive origin to French influence in Louisiana. It was early social custom that gens de couleurs were a class apart, separated from and superior to the negroes. So meaningful did these designations become until among the Negroes themselves there were closely guarded distinctions--mulattoes, quadroon, octaroons, griffes--each term meaning one more generation's elevation toward perfection of white blood.²

The Creole Negroes had an identity all of their own. "The persistance, moreover, of the French and Spanish influence in Louisiana exposed the Negro to environmental factors quite different from those which played upon the race elsewhere in the Union."³ Many were quite wealthy, owning large plantations with numerous slaves, and equaling in education, refinement, and culture their white fellow-citizens. For example, in New Orleans a class of rich families of color became known as "Cordon Bleus."⁴ The distinction of the Creole Negroes is another significant fact in Gaines's characterizations of the Louisiana area.

¹ Ibid.


⁴ Ibid., p. 28.
The Creoles, white and Negro, continued to intermingle socially. Catholicism was the major religion accepted by the people. Yet, Vodun, entering with the migration of West Indians and the transportation of black labor into Louisiana, became established in New Orleans and later spread into the surrounding areas. With the annexing of Louisiana, with the Louisiana Purchase in 1801 and the ratification of statehood in 1812, Yankees came to Louisiana in constantly increasing numbers. The influx of the newcomers was looked upon with disfavour by Creoles—both white and Negro (Gens de couleur), who were in customs, sympathy and interest thoroughly French. With the entrance of the white Americans, the impressions of slavery were soon made, leaving a mark which to this day has not completely faded.

Ernest J. Gaines took these aspects of slavery, especially the racial distinctions, and incorporated them into the development of his stories and novels. The rural setting of Bayonne Parish provides the historical influence of Gaines's characters. The rural setting provides the themes for Gaines's fictional works. These thematic contours are: manhood, the father-son relationship, the male-female relationship, social relationships, vodun and religion.

During Gaines's college years, 1956-1958, the following short stories were published: "The Turtles," "Boy in the Double-Breasted Suit," "Mary Louise" and "Grandpa and the Haint." Each one is situated

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Rousseve, op. cit., p. 28.
in the southern rural community of Bayonne Parish. "The Turtles"¹ and the "Boy in the Double-Breasted Suit"² demonstrate the father-son relationship, which is a frequent theme in a majority of Gaines's works. "The Turtles" is built around the lives of two adolescent boys and their various tests of manhood by their fathers. The youth, Max and Benny, are taken on the first part of their testing, a fishing trip. The story's setting at the pond and the activities of fishing are determining factors of their growth towards manhood. These factors oppose the possible methods of urban testing of manhood and support regionalism in the short story.

While fishing, the boys' obedience to their fathers indicates their growth. Max, whose mother is deceased, feels very strongly about the nature of their father-son relationship. Benny appears to be very childish and still babied as Max himself tries to assist Benny in the test. At the fishing pond, the turtles symbolize Max's movement in the test of manhood. Max, who understands how to deal with turtles, is successful in unhooking turtles from the fishing line and has no fears of the creatures. However, Benny's repulsion represents his failure at the first stage of the test.

Upon their return from the pond, the fathers have selected the final test for the boys. This entails a visit to the home of Mrs. Brown,

¹ Ernest J. Gaines, "The Turtles," Transfer (1956), pp. 1-9. All quotations taken from this publication.

² Ernest J. Gaines, "The Boy in the Double-Breasted Suit," Transfer (1957), pp. 2-9. All quotations taken from this publication.
who is not accepted by the women of Bayonne Parish. The boys are un-
aware of their fathers' purpose in bringing them there.

At the house, Max is forced by his father to remain with Mrs. Brown's
niece until he has performed sexual intercourse with her. When it is
Benny's turn to go into the house, his actions reveal his immaturity. He
acts fearful and repulsed as he was earlier with the turtles at the
fishing pond. His refusal to obey his father is humorous, and yet,
tragic because Benny has failed all tests that day and has shamed his
father. Max, on the other hand, has entered manhood by successfully
obeying his father. In the closing words between the father and son,
Max is now judged as a man by his father.

My old man and I started walking again.
"I guess you think you're a man, now?" my old man
said.
"Sir?"
"You heared me," my old man said.
"No sir," I said, "I didn't think I'm a man."
"Well, you are," my old man said. (p. 9)

The sexual act epitomizes in the father's mind that Max is a man.
Regionalism in this story appears in the manner of testing manhood in a
small rural Southern community. The turtles imply growth toward manhood.
Bravery is exemplified by obedience to the father's instructions and
wishes. The father-son relationship is strengthened. In successfully
obeying his father's request, Max is no longer an adolescent, but a man.

The theme of manhood in the Southern Louisiana region is continued
in Gaines's collection of short stories in Bloodline.¹ Each short story

¹
Ernest J. Gaines, Bloodline (New York: The Dial Press, Inc.,
1968). All references are found from this publication.
indicates the various dimensions of manhood and how manhood is determined according to beliefs, habits, and manners of the Louisiana people. Gaines himself speaks about the arrangement and purpose of the short stories:

The first story is told by a six-year-old child. The second story is told by an eight-year-old child. The third is by a nineteen-year-old. The fourth story is by someone in his earlier twenties. The final story is told by many characters. I definitely arranged these stories in this order because there is growth. In the first story, "A Long Day in November," a six-year-old child can only see a certain amount of things, he can only interpret a certain amount of things. That's why his story is limited physically to the plantation. By the time he's eight years old in "The Sky is Gray" it's time for him to get out of the quarters. He ends up in a small Southern town where he sees a little bit more. Though he does not understand much more than the six-year-old. In "Three Men" the boy is nineteen and has committed murder. Of course, his experiences are much broader than the first two boys'. From there you go to "Bloodline" where Copper Laurent has traveled much more than Proctor Lewis in "Three Men." He has not seen just the brutality that the young black can suffer in the South, but he has seen what the world has done to men everywhere. By the time you come to the last story there is much more experience to interpret. You have both older women and older men. You have the point of view of the white woman. There are many different experiences coming into the story. So there is a constant growth from the first to the last story.¹

As each stories' narration is finished, the progression of manhood is more visible in the exposures and experiences, inside and outside of Bayonne Parish. This theme of manhood is epitomized in The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman, which will be discussed later within this chapter.

The first story, "A Long Day in November," is told by six-year-old Sunny Howard. Through his eyes, his parents' marital problem, which is over the purchase of a used car, is interfering with their male-female

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relationship and with the family stability. The plot is about a small rural tenant husband who, although in poverty, has collected and saved for this used car, symbolizing the entrance of the materialistic world into the rural community of Bayonne Parish. The problem arises when Eddie Howard places too much attention on the car as opposed to his wife and child. The wife, Amy, fed up with her husband's behavior, leaves home and goes to her mother's, Gran'mon. In an attempt to gain his family back, Eddie tries first to speak with Amy. This fails because of her mother's intervention. She immediately seizes this moment to find a more suitable man as husband for Amy. With knowledge of this, Eddie's second attempt is with the Pastor, Reverend Simmons. He agrees with Sonny's grandmother and gives no aid to Eddie. Finally, Eddie seeks assistance from the Hoodoo woman, Madame Trouissant. Her advice is to burn the car. The burning of the car is his measurement of manhood.

Eddie's behavior introduces him as a family man, but a weakling. Frequently through his son's narration, he is seen crying. He cries when Amy refuses to respond to his sexual gestures. Her response "Get love from what you give love . . . You love your car. Go let it love you back." (p. 13) He seeks consolation in his child.

Daddy comes across the floor and sits down on the side of the bed. He looks down at me and passes his hand over my face.
"You love your daddy, Sonny?" he says.
"Uh-huh."
"Please love me," Daddy says.
I look up at Daddy and he looks at me, and then he just falls down on me and starts crying.
"A man needs somebody to love him," he says. (p. 13)

When shot at by Gran'mon, Eddie cries before seeking the Reverend. Even
in the advice from Madame Toissant, he falters and rejects her explanation that his neglecting his wife has forced her to leave him.

"She's not happy where she is," Madame Toissant says. "She's with her man," Daddy says. "You don't have to tell me my business," Madame Toissant says. "I know where she is. And I still say she's not happy. She much rather be back in her own house. Women like to be in their own house. That's their world. You men done messed up the outside world so bad that they feel lost and out of place in it. Her house is her world. Only there she can do what she want. She can't do that in anybody else house—mama or nobody else. But you men don't know any of this. Y'all never know how a woman feels, because you never ask how she feels. Long's she there when you get there you satisfied. Long's you give her two or three dollars every weekend you think she ought to be satisfied. But keep on. One day all of you'll find out." (p. 61)

Eddie does find out the importance of her words. He burns the car.

The car's destruction becomes similar to a circus attraction as all the people of the community watch. Gran'mon, speaking for the community, claims: "I just do declare, ... I must be dreaming. He's a man after all." (p. 71) His manhood is sacrificing for his family. Amy, desirous only of Eddie's love and kindness and a father for her son, returns home. She insists that Eddie punish her to prevent any possible ridicule by the people and humiliation for her husband. She is proud of her man.

The relationship between Amy and Eddie illustrates the value of marriage in the small rural community. Regionalism in this story is Eddie's manhood determined by his sacrifice of the car for his family. Even though the car is important and significant in the rural community, the family unit is valued higher in the plantation life of Bayonne Parish. Eddie's seeking a solution to his marital problem first through the church and then the Hoodooist supports the people's belief that either the church
or vodun will solve their problems. In Eddie's case, the advice of the
Hoodooist does. He is now a stronger family man.

The "Sky is Gray" is told by eight-year-old James. James is forced
into manhood because his father is always at war. He must provide a
strong male image for his smaller brothers and sisters. His first stage
of manhood is dramatized in the toothache. Though he is in pain over the
tooth, he cannot cry since crying symbolizes male weakness, just as crying
does for Eddie Howard in "A Long Day in November." To ease James's pain,
the mother seeks the aid of a hoodooist. The hoodooist fails, so with
very little money, she decides to take James to the dentist in Bayonne.
The trip occurs on a cold wintry day. Regionalism again is shown in the
mother's seeking aid of the hoodooist, before seeking the aid of profes-
sionals. Her beliefs of the Hoodooist as a solution parallels other
rural people's beliefs in voodooism.

In the dentist's office of Bayonne city, James is exposed to rural
viewpoints toward education and the church through the characterizations
of the preacher and the college student. Education is to question 'every-
thing in life," (p. 95) as opposed to religion which is total acceptance
without questioning. In the confrontation between the preacher and the
college student education has a stronger position as opposed to the
church doctrine represented by the pastor. During the verbal combat,
the student's questions about education and religion weaken the pastor's
position and the church's purpose in the community.

"Show me one reason to believe in the existence of a God,"
the boy says.
"My heart tells me," the preacher says.
"My heart tells me," the boy says. "My heart tells me.
Sure, 'My heart tells me.' And as long as you listen to what
your heart tells you, you will have only what the white man gives you and nothing more. Me, I don't listen to my heart. The purpose of the heart is to pump blood throughout the body, and nothing else." (p. 96)

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

"I'm not mad at the world. I'm questioning the world. I'm questioning it with cold logic, sir. What do words like Freedom, Liberty, God, White, Colored mean? I want to Know. That's why you are sending us to school, to read and to ask questions. And because we ask these questions, you call us mad. No sir, it is not us who are mad." (p. 97)

Continuing his argument, the boy defines the church's function as perpetuating the white man's enslavement of black men.

"You believe in God because a man told you to believe in God," the boy says. "A white man told you to believe in God. And Why? To keep you ignorant so he can keep his feet on your neck." (p. 97)

In order to save himself and the church from complete humiliation, the preacher physically strikes the student on the cheek. Using the church doctrine of turning the other cheek, the student allows the preacher to strike him again. The college student restates his attitude towards the church and that the preacher's actions have not "changed a thing." (p. 98)

"Things change through action." (p. 102)

In the conflict between the student and the pastor, James sees the changing values and attitudes towards religion and education in a white racist world. James himself has experienced the racism of the small rural area on the bus ride, with signs indicating white and colored. A lady in the dentist's office explains how segregation has operated for years: "I been round them whites a long time--they take you when they want to. If you is white, that's something else; but we the wrong color." (p. 103) Forced to leave the dentist's office, James and his mother walk the streets, experiencing more subtle examples of racism
and oppression on this cold sleeting day. They roam up and down the streets until it is time to return to the office, only to find the door is still locked. As they continue to walk, James remembers the conversation of the Hoodooist and his Auntie who tells how they suffer more since the army took his father and did not give money to support the family. The child's suffering due to poverty is clearer as he stands, desiring basics such as food and clothing, which the family cannot afford. As they continue to move through the streets, their isolation and the economic despair accentuates the plight of the family and their oppression during the war time.

The guideline for manhood is provided in the character development of James's mother, who is molding him into a man. She teaches him that he is somebody regardless of the circumstances surrounding their lives. Her encounter with the elderly white woman demonstrates how segregation functions; but one can still maintain dignity. One way is by rejecting charity. The elderly lady who has observed the wandering of James and his mother calls them into her store for food and warmth. James's mother, a proud woman, tells James to do a service for payment of the food; she balks at simply accepting charity. She, the mother, in repayment for the heating of herself and her son, decides to repay by buying meat. A conflict occurs because the elderly woman tries to be even more charitable, but her charity is met by the strong independence of James's mother.

"You sell salt meat?" she (James's) mother says. "Yes."
"Give me two bits worth."
"That isn't very much salt meat," the old lady says. "That's all I have," Mama says.

The old lady goes back of the counter and cuts a big piece off the chunk. Then she wraps it up and puts it in
a paper bag.

"Two bits," she says.

"That looks like awful lot of meat for a quarter," Mama says.

"Two bits," the old lady says. "I've been selling salt meat behind this counter twenty-five years. I think I know what I'm doing."

"You got a scale there," Mama says.

"What?" the old lady says.

"Weight it," Mama says.

"What?" the old lady says. "Are you telling me how to run my business?"

"Thanks very much for the food," Mama says.

"Just a minute," the old lady says.

"James," Mama says to me. I move toward the door.

"Just one minute, I said," the old lady says.

Me and Mama stop again and look at her. The old lady takes the meat out of the bag and unwraps it and cut 'bout half of it off. Then she wraps it up again and jugg it back in the bag and gives the bag to Mama. Mama lays the quarter on the counter.

"Your kindness will never be forgotten," she says.

"James." she says to me.

We got out, and the old lady comes to the door to look at us. After we go a little piece I look back, and she's still there watching us.

The sleet's coming down heavy heavy now, and I turn up my coat collar to keep my neck warm. My mama tells me turn it right back down.

"You not a bum," she says. "You a man."

Manhood is endurance and survival in the white racial world. James endures the physical suffering exemplified in the toothache; but he must prepare for the social suffering of the community.

Regionalism occurs in the attitudes and beliefs found in Bayonne Parish. The importance of these values are expressed in the characterizations of the preacher, representing the church; the college student, representing education; and James's mother, representing dignity and manhood which will shape James into a strong man in the rural community. His experiences in Bayonne prepare him for manhood.

In "Three Men" manhood is determined by rebellion against the white
racist system. Proctor Lewis, who has murdered a man in self-defense, is sought for the offense. He runs. However, his decision to turn himself in is his first step towards manhood. The police take him into custody and place him in a jail cell with a fifty-year-old murderer, named Munford Bazille, and a homosexual, Hattie Brown. While in jail, Proctor has to make his second decision between being bonded or serving his time in prison. Although his mother is dead, Proctor seeks her courage and strength in making this decision about his life.

Munford Bazille forms a fatherly image for Proctor. Munford tries to explain himself to Proctor. In his explanation, he speaks of the system, and the creation of such men as himself and Hattie Brown.

"Been going in and out of these jails here, I don't know how long," Munford said. "Fifty, fifty years. Started out just like you--kilt a boy just like you did last night. Kilt him and got off--got off scot-free. My pappy worked for a white man who got me off. At first I didn't know why he had done it--I didn't think; all I knewed was I was free, and free is how I wanted to be. Then I got in trouble again, and again they got me off. Didn't wake up till I got to be nearly old as I'm is now. Then I realized they kept getting me off because they needed a Munford Bazille. They need me to prove they human--just like they need that thing Hattie over there. They need us. Because without us, they don't know what they is. They don't know what they is out there. With us around, they can see us and they know what they ain't. They ain't us. Do you see? Do you see how they think?

... . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

"No, you don't know what I mean," he said. "What I mean is not one of them out there is a man. Not one. They think they men. They think them men 'cause they got me and him in here who ain't men. But I got news for them--cut them open; go 'head and cut one open--you see if you don't find Munford Bazille or Hattie Brown. Not a man one of them. 'Cause face don't make a man--black or white. Face don't make him and fucking don't make him and fighting don't make him--neither killing. None of this prove you a man. "Cause animals can fuck, can kill, can fight--you know that?" (pp. 136-137)
In regards to the creation of Hattie Brown, Munford's words reecho the college student's attitude ("The Sky is Gray") towards the church's function of enslaving the black man.

"... the cradle when they send that preacher there to christen you. At the same time he's doing that mumbo-jumbo stuff, he's low'ing his mouth to your little nipper to suck out you manhood. I know, he tried it on me. Here, I'm laying in his arms in my little white blanket and he suppose to be christening me. ... This preacher going, "Mumbo-jumbo, mumbo-jumbo," but all the time he's low'ing his mouth toward my little private. Nobody else don't see him, but I catch him, and I haul "way back and hit him right smack in the eye. I ain't no more than three months old but I give him a good one. ..."

"...But they don't stop there, they stay after you. If they miss you in the cradle, they catch you some other time. And when they catch you, they draw it out of you or they make you a beast—make you use it in a brutish way. You use it on a woman without caring for her, you use it on children, you use it on other men, you use it on yourself. Then when you get so disgusted with everything round you, you kill. And if your back is strong, like your back is strong, they get you out so you can kill again. ... But not everybody and up like that. Some of them make it. Not many—but some of them make it." (pp. 140-141)

With the knowledge and truth of Munford's words, Proctor has to make the decision whether to be a Munford or a Hattie.

Seeing a fourteen-year-old boy who has been caught and beaten for stealing prompts Proctor's decision.

I knewed I was going to the pen now. I knewed I was going. I knewed I was going. Even if Medlow came to get me, I wasn't leaving with him. I was go'n do like Munford said. I was going there and I was go'n sweat it and I was go'n take it. I didn't want have to pull cover over my head every time a white man did something to a black boy—I wanted to stand. Because they never let you stand if they got you out. They didn't let Jack stand—and I had never heard of them letting anybody else stand, either. (p. 152)

Proctor is going to stand and to fight the system. He refuses to become
a Munford or a Hattie. Regionalism is shown by the effects of laws upon the black man in the small rural area. Proctor has more conviction in his decision to fight than Eddie's decision to burn his car. Eddie sacrifices only a machine for his family; Proctor sacrifices his life for liberation from the racist system.

In "Bloodline" manhood is liberation for black men and the removal of suffering from oppressed people. Copper Laurent, age twenty or twenty-one, fathered by a white man, Walter Laurent returns from a war to his birthplace intent on inheriting his father's land near Bayonne Parish. His exposure to the world during the war, with its potential for the traumas of shell-shock, has made him aware of man's universal brutalities. He decides to settle on the Laurent land and use the land as a base to teach and revolutionize black men in the South. However, he has a confrontation over the land with his Uncle Frank Laurent. The land represents power; Frank Laurent represents the old Southern code of land and law. Therefore, through tradition, Copper cannot inherit the land because he is a mulatto. The land has become a burden to Frank Laurent.

The plantation had taken all that hardness out of him when the others died and left it there for him to manage. It was too heavy for him. When something's too heavy, it makes most people wild animals or it breaks them. The land had broken Frank. It had aged him too fast. It had given him two heart attacks—and the next one was going to kill him. (p. 165)

He would prefer to give the land's ownership to Copper instead of his only surviving niece, a ruthless white woman with no compassion for the old Negro tenants living on the land. However, even as Frank Laurent faces the cause of his death, the land, he is prevented by old southern
codes of land and law to allow a transition of ownership to occur between
him and his mulatto nephew, Copper.

There is a clash between two proud men regarding past tradition.
Frank Laurent desires to see Copper; however, the meeting must occur by
Copper's entrance through the back door. Copper insists on the front
doors, like a man and not like a servant. The front door symbolizes the
equality of the men which the Southern code prohibits. Frank, in a con-
versation with Felix, his fieldworker, explains the tradition of the
code and why such a situation cannot occur in his life time.

"Even if they didn't lynch him, I wouldn't let him come
in through that front door," Frank said. "Neither him,
nor you, nor her over there. And to me she is only the
second woman I've had the good fortune of knowing whom I
can call a lady. But she happens to be black, Felix, and
because she's black she'll never enter this house through
that door. Not while I'm alive. Because, you see, Felix,
I didn't write the rules. I came and found them, and I
shall die and leave them. They will be changed, of course;
they will be changed, and soon, I hope. But I will not be
the one to change them." (p. 199)

Frank sends several groups of men to bring Copper to him; but with war
strategies, Copper defeats them. It is through the eyes of the defeated
men that Copper is defined as crazed and having no sense of human worth.
"They (human beings) don't mean no more to him than a dog or snake."
(p. 195) Regardless of comments made about Copper's character, a
meeting does occur between Frank and Copper.

Copper informs Frank of his intentions to revolutionize the black
men, mentally and not by brutality which the white man had used to de-
humanize the black man.

Those are your creations, Uncle--the chains and sticks.
You created them four hundred years ago, and you're still
using them up to this day. You created them. But they
were only a fraction of your barbarity--Uncle. You used the rope and the tree to hang him. You used the knife to castrate him while he struggled with the rope to catch his breath. You used fire to make him squirm even more, because the hanging and the castration still wasn't enough amusement for you. Then you used something else--another creation of yours--that thing you called law. It was written by you for you and your kind, and any man who was not of your kind had to break it sooner or later. . . . I only used a fraction of your creations. You have imbedded the stick and the chain in their minds so so long, they can't hear anything else. I needed it to get their attention. I think I have it now--and I won't have to use it any more. From now on I'll use the simplest words. Simple words, Uncle; a thing you thought they would never understand. (p. 209)

Copper must revolutionize and liberate his people from this "suffering" (p. 213) His exposure to this oppressive suffering seen while he was in the war creates Copper's position as "general" of liberation. The depth of Copper's words forces Frank Laurent to comply with the early statements about Copper's insanity if he plans to liberate the people by himself. Frank tries to woo Copper into a more understanding position by revealing his sufferings within the Southern code. His declaration has no effect on Copper who informs him he is leaving but will return later. "Tell my aunt I've gone. But tell her I'll come back. And tell her when I do, she'll never have to go through your back door ever again." (p. 217) Regionalism occurs in the suffering created by the Louisianian code that governs the lives of Frank and Copper Laurent. In their characterizations, Gaines has captured two compassionate and proud men trapped by tradition. One is white and the other is black. Frank is willing to die in defending the Southern code; whereas Copper's manhood is the destruction of that same Southern code.

"Just like a Tree" continues the manhood theme with liberation of
the black people. Preceding the short story is the Negro spiritual, "I shall not be Moved," which helps to formulate the strength of the characterizations of Aunt Fe and Emmanuel, both operating as statements towards black manhood. Protest activities led by Emmanuel have upset the rural community and resulted in a home bombing which killed a woman and two children. Since Aunt Fe lives near the bombing, her safety becomes a great concern of her daughter, Louise. Louise, along with her city-bred husband, decides to move Aunt Fe up North. The community people oppose her daughter's decision and blame Emmanuel for the entire situation.

The story is told in sections by various characters. In the section entitled "Etienne," the speaker gives the reason of the family's immediate conflict over Aunt Fe's removal; they blame Emmanuel and his protesting activities. Yet, through further explanation, the blame is removed from Emmanuel to the greedy nature of the Southern white man who developed the existing black-white relationship which Emmanuel is only responding naturally as a man desirous of liberation from the vicious cycle of oppression of the black man.

The boy [Emmanuel] come in, and soon, right off, they get quiet, blaming the boy. If people could look little farther than the tip of they nose--No, they blame the boy. Not that they ain't behind the boy, what he doing, but they blame him for what she [Louise] must do. What they don't know is that the boy didn't start it, and the people that bombed the house didn't start it, neither. It started a million years ago. It started when one man envied another man for having a penny mo' an he had, and then the man married a woman to help him work the field so he could get much 's the other man, but when the other man saw the man had married a woman to get much's him, he, himself, he married a woman, too, so he could still have mo'. Then they start having children--not from love; but so the children could help 'em work so they could have mo'. But even
with the children one man still had penny mo' 'an the other, so the other man went and bought him a ox, and the other man did the same--to keep ahead of the other man. And soon the other man had bought him a slave to work the ox so he could get ahead of the other man, and the other man went out and bought him two slaves so he could stay ahead of the other man, and the other man went out and bought him three slaves. And soon they had a thousand slaves apiece, but they still wasn't satisfied. And one day the slaves all rose and kill the masters, but the masters (knowing slaves was the men just like they was, and kind o' expected they might do this) organized theyself a good police force, and the police force, they come out and killed the two thousand slaves.

So it's not this boy you see standing here 'fore you, 'cause it happened a million years ago. And this boy here's just doing something the slaves done a million years ago. . . . (pp. 244-45)

However, Aunt Fe understands Emmanuel and gives her consent to his struggle. "Good-bye Emmanuel," she says. She looks at him a long time. "God be with you." (p. 247)

Just as Emmanuel must continue the fight started against the black man's enslavement, Aunt Fe must end her journey of life with death. Since her daughter's decision to take her to the North, Aunt Fe is conscious of her coming death and that she will not leave her home in the South, even though she has suffered and endured the injustices of the Southern slave world. She informs Aunt Lou, her dearest friend, that she is not leaving. She dresses for bed, sings her termination song, prays beside her bed, and then, dies peacefully. Her death completes Gaines's cycle of life and growth which began in the small six-year-old Sonny Howard. Emmanuel's character continues the theme of manhood in the South. Manhood comes through sacrifice for each male character found in the short stories; as indicated in Eddie's burning of the car, James's suffering on a cold wintry day, Proctor's rebellion against
prison, Copper and Emmanuel's fight for liberation through protest. The
selfhood of each is finalized in Aunt Fe. The location of her death and
other characterizations in Bayonne Parish verifies the regionalism in
the Louisiana terrain found in Gaines's fiction.

Of Love and Dust\(^1\) continues the themes of selfhood and liberation
in the character of Marcus Payne, who like Proctor Lewis, is serving
time in prison for murder. However, Marcus is bonded to Marshall
Herbert's plantation at his grandmother's request. His existence on the
plantation is a continual struggle to prove his manhood. Marcus's con-
lict with the Cajun overseer, Sidney Bonbon, turns into a personal
vendetta which ends in Marcus's death. Marcus's first attempt is to
steal Bonbon's black mistress, Pauline Guerin. He fails. His attention
then turns to the overseer's wife, Louise Bonbon. Marcus and Louise
fall in love. They plan to escape together. Marshall Herbert's agree-
ment with Marcus to kill Bonbon provides assistance for Marcus and
Louise to escape. However, Marcus is tricked by Marshall Herbert. In a
physical combat, Marcus is killed by Sidney Bonbon. Regionalism is
demonstrated in the characters of Marcus Payne, Sidney Bonbon, and
Marshall Hebert who each upholds the traditional social strata and
relationships that existed between a Black, a Cajun, and a White where
the Black and the Cajun, pitted against one another, were controlled
directly or indirectly by white power.

While serving his time on Marshall Hebert's plantation, Marcus is

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\(^1\) Ernest J. Gaines, *Of Love and Dust* (New York: The Dial Press,
Inc.), 1967. All quotations are taken from this publication.
stamped as a different breed of man and as an alien because of his urban background. A conversation between his grandmother, Miss Julia Rand, and Jim Kelly, a hired hand reveals Marcus's distinctive manhood as opposed to those who crumble under white power and law. He is an extension of the manhood seen in Proctor Lewis; a man who does not bend to the twisted laws of the Southern Louisiana code. Through their words, death appears to be the victor over black manhood.

"I hate to see him come there," she [Miss Rand] said.
"But that pen can kill a man. There ain't much left to you when they let you go."
"That plantation can do the same to some people," I [Jim Kelly] said.
"Yes, that's true," she said thoughtfully, "But you got the open air, and you got people who care around you."
"He'll make out all right if he takes orders," I said.
"But he'll have to take orders there."

"I'll advise him," I said. "But I can't make him do what he don't want to do. I'll do my best." (pp. 11-12)

Marcus's urban life makes it almost impossible for Jim Kelly to advise him. Marcus's words echo the coarseness of Munford Bazille towards the system of laws, especially when Marcus explains his abduction by the police. "They [police] was probably there all the time. . . . But they just wanted to see one nigger kill another one. What they care?" (p. 53) This bitterness that Marcus inherits in the ghetto urban life makes it harder to change so as to accept rural complacent attitude towards their oppressive life situations. For example, the description of Marcus's clothing demonstrates an urban background as opposed to the rural clothing, rejected by Marcus because they did not represent him or his manhood.

I [Jim Kelly] saw Playboy Marcus coming out of the yard.
He had on a short-sleeve green shirt and a pair of brown pants. No hat—not even a hankie round his neck. He had on a pair of brown and white dress shoes. (p. 25)

In a later conversation with Jim Kelly, Marcus states why he refuses to wear the rural clothing.

"If I was you, I'd pick up some clothes at the store this evening," I [Jim Kelly] said.
"You mean that shit I see y'all wearing round here?"
he asked.
"Yes that's the shit I'm talking about," I said.
"I'll never put that convict shit on my back" he said. "I'm used to silk."

Marcus never conforms to the rural setting. His actions protest against the social code and racial distinctions created by tradition. Marcus refuses to wear the khaki field worker clothing. The rural people saw him as a troublemaker and "Black trash" as his relationship with Louise Bonbon grew deeper. Marcus was a doomed man, then, because he had overstepped the racial barriers of white-black relationships. His physical attack on Sidney Bonbon was his last attack against what he viewed as white enslavement; an attack to break the chain of bondage. Freedom does occur for Marcus; it is death. Regionalism is seen in Marcus's strangulation in the Louisianian status system that denied him his urban lifestyle and his manhood.

In the characterization of Sidney Bonbon, Gaines has captured the French Acadian or Cajun people of Louisiana. Being migrants to the Louisiana region, they are to be distinguished from the original French settlers. However, through time the Cajun's social standing became one of impoverishment that created gaps between them and the wealthy French Originals on the one hand and the Creole Negroes on the other. With the entrance of the successful white-Anglo European, the Cajun's social
standing was well established as poor white tenant farmers or as overseers on large plantations. Often a precarious position, it was sought by the Cajuns because it meant a higher social status.

Although *Of Love and Dust* is set during the first two decades of the twentieth century, the position of overseer remained the same as during slavery. Because Cajuns held this position, the Anglo-whites, Creoles and Negroes directed their hostilities toward them. The wealthy Anglo-planter looked at Cajuns as servants and low paid workers. The Negroes despised Cajuns and successful Creole Negroes thought themselves superior to the Cajuns. However, even locked into position, the Cajun's desire for nobility and success are visible in Sidney Bonbon's position as overseer obtained through the murder of Marshall Hebert's brother at Marshall Hebert's request (*Of Love and Dust*, pp. 214-17). The murder established a security bond for Bonbon's job as overseer. Bonbon's description illustrates the Cajun's history as a poor, deprived people and the Cajun's moral degeneration.

Bonbon was a simple man and a brutal man. . . . He was brutal because he had been brought up in a brute-taught world and in a brute-taught time. The big house had given him a horse and a whip (he did have a whip at first) and they told him to ride behind the blacks in the field and get as much work out of them as he could. He did this, but he did more: he fell in love with one of the black women. He couldn't just take her like he was supposed to take, like they had given him permission to take her—no, he had to fall in love. (p. 67)

In the relationship between Sidney Bonbon and Pauline Guerin, more complexity is given to Bonbon's Cajun characterization. He is a human

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1 Dart, *op. cit.*
being needing love, and a man, like Marcus Payne, crossing the Southern code's racial barrier. Bonbon, as an overseer has special privilege granted, but his relationship with Pauline Guerin supersedes the social standards as Sidney neglects his wife for a black field woman. Just like Marcus, Sidney Bonbon is ostracized by the hatred of the rural community people. The ostracism of Sidney Bonbon forced him into a more rugged character who supports this reputation and his position by carrying a gun:

You could see the print of it [gun] under his shirt. He needed it everywhere he went. He needed it around his own Cajuns. He needed it around these mulattoes who didn't know him at all. He was a man who needed a gun no matter where he was. (p. 144)

The relationship between Pauline and Sidney alienates him from other Cajuns. Several were approached by Marshall Hebert with propositions to kill Sidney. His rapport with the Marshall is weakened by his excessive stealing from Marshall Hebert's profits to support his two families; Pauline and her twins and his wife, Louise and Tite.

Louise Bonbon's characterization portrays the female Cajun. She represents the backwood's Cajun farm girl who married early in life before maturing into adulthood.¹ Her history and appearance parallel the hardships and deprivation of the Cajun families. Her situation in marriage and the harshness of her early family life is revealed in her personal description.

When Louise first came off the bayou from around Lake

¹ Lauren C. Post, "Courtship and Marriage," *Cajun Sketches from the Southwest Louisiana* (Louisiana State University Press, 1962), pp. 146-152.
Charles, she didn't know anything. She didn't know where she was, she didn't know who she was, she hardly knew why she was here. She was fifteen then—that was ten years ago but she acted like somebody eight or nine. She acted like a week-old calf that was led to a new pasture. . . . (p. 162)

Frequently, her fears caused her to run away, but she was always returned to Bonbon. In her last attempt to run away from Bonbon, her father and brothers brought her back and threatened her with beatings if she continued this behavior. Louise's hatred towards her family and her marriage form her desires for revenge.

Louise was about twenty-five, but she was the size of the average twelve- or thirteen-year-old girl. Most of the time she wore skirts and blouses instead of dresses. She wore sandals instead of shoes. She never wore socks or stockings unless it was winter. Her hair was yellow (the same color with that hay in August) and her face was more cream-color than it was white. Her sad eyes were the only thing about her that made you feel Louise wasn't a child. They had too much sorrow, they had seen it much too long. (p. 119)

In the daylight she looked even older. Her skin had the color of a ripe prune. But her eyes were still quick, sharp, piercing and knowing. (p. 112)

She knew Bonbon had not found love within their marriage and had sought love in the quarters. Her affair with Marcus Payne began as childish revenge; however her relationship supplied the key to her husband's removal by Marshall Hebert. Since the Cajuns refused to kill Sidney, Marcus Payne became the solution to Hebert's problem. The disgrace of his wife's relationship with a black man would automatically force Bonbon off the plantation. Her family would kill Bonbon for allowing such a situation to occur.

Marshall Hebert's characterization quickly captures the Southern wealthy Anglo attitude toward Cajuns and Negroes which exemplifies the
regionalism of social stratum. Marshall Hebert is the greedy "Redneck" whose drunkenness parallels his destroyed morals. The ugliness of his character is seen through his appearance.

Marshall was a big man with a red face and light blue eyes. He was a heavy drinker and even now he looked half-drunk. Winter and summer he wore a seersucker suit and a panama hat. (p. 83)

Just as his state of drunkenness and clothing remained constant throughout the years, so Marshall Hebert's position consistently supports the hierarchy of the racial barriers and victims of social position in Louisiana. The indoctrination of Southern codes clarifies his actions throughout the novel. His arrangement with Sidney Bonbon, a Cajun, to murder his brother indicates the general attitude that Cajuns are simple servants. Therefore, Bonbon remains locked in his social position by laws governing the poor whites. Jim Kelly, one of the characters of the book, claims:

Bonbon was nothing but a poor white man, and sometimes you could go to the rich man for help. But where did you go when it was the rich white man? You couldn't go to the law, because he was the law. He was police, he was judge, he was jury. (pp. 197-198)

The double-crossing in his agreement with Marcus Payne continues the attitudes of the rich towards the Negroes, who were considered as tools, as slaves. Bonbon's consciousness of Marshall Hebert's scheme summarizes the Cajuns' alienation, as well as the Negroes' position created by the Southern social strata. Bonbon clarifies the various roles: "We little people, Geam. They make us do what they want us to do and they don't tell us nothing." (p. 258) Regionalism is seen in these characterizations; Marcus Payne, continuing the theme of manhood in the South;
Sidney Bonbon, capturing the Cajun's history; and Marshall Hebert, supporting the social strata and the victimization of the Southern rural people by the racial system.

"Mary Louise" is a short story that illustrates Gaines's writing skill in characterization. In this story, the difficulty in determining the time the story takes place coincides with the theme of time in the character development of Mary Louise. The plot focuses on a reunion between Mary Louise and Jackson Bradley after ten years. Mary Louise has remained in the rural community. Jackson Bradley has left the rural community and has become exposed to urban life.1

The setting surrounding Mary Louise's world has not changed. The people remained the same, and their manners and habits in the country life have not changed; such as pumping water from well, etc. In this small world Mary Louise's character is created. She has for the last ten years held onto childhood memories and fancies of marriage to her childhood sweetheart, Jackson Bradley. As she observes her childhood friends, Joe and Veta, who were also childhood sweethearts who married in adult life, Mary Louise firmly believes that the same will occur between her and Jackson. At first her expectation seems worthwhile. Her remaining in the rural community supports her reason to wait for Jackson; if she left she might lose him. "I wanted to go, and I didn't want to go. If I went and left him there I was sure to lose, then. But if I stayed, there was always a chance." (p. 28)

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1 Ernest J. Gaines. "Mary Louise," Transfer (1957), pp. 27-42. All quotations are taken from this publication.
However, with the coming and meeting with Jackson Bradley, Mary Louise's behavior appears to be childish and her mental growth locked in the traditional setting. After ten years away from the rural community, Jackson appears to the reader more matured and developed into adulthood. The change is noticed by the people and they report this to Mary Louise. Apparently, he is so changed that her father and she cannot talk reasonably about him. Mary Louise avoids her father and any discussion regarding Jackson. "I knewed if I had stayed back there he was going to say something 'bout Jackson again, and God knows I didn't want to hear no more of his squabbling." (p. 28) Being seen with other women indicates he is no longer interested in his childhood sweetheart. Yet, Mary Louise continues to remember Jackson as he was at the age of twelve and as her childhood sweetheart who has returned to marry her.

When they meet, their differences in growth are obvious. Jackson's concept of time verifies the changes that occurred as time has passed; that "time changes people." (p. 41) Mary Louise denies this when she cannot accept the change in Jackson Bradley. Instead of accepting the importance of his word, she runs away from the changed Jackson back into the house and into her locked world.

I turned and started running toward the end. I was crying too hard to watch where I was going, and I stumbled and fell. I got up and started running again. I didn't know why I was running; I just had to run. (p. 42)

Even there, Mary Louise continues to hold her childhood beliefs that Jackson will still stay and marry her.

Regionalism is incorporated into the characterization of Mary Louise and the setting. The Louisiana setting emphasizes how time has not
changed her rural community. Change is not visible in her surroundings. Mary Louise, fearing her loss of Jackson, has remained in the community. She did not take the opportunity to leave. Her character is understood as she prefers to stay in her small closed world. The rural situation surrounding Mary Louise helps Gaines to form a more believable character.

Catherine Carmier's Creole family continues to exemplify regionalism in Gaines's fiction through the setting and characterization of Louisiana people. The plot is about the triangular-love affair between Catherine Carmier, Raoul (her father), and Jackson Bradley. Just as in "Mary Louise," Jackson has left the rural community and has been exposed to urban life. In his return, he resumes a relationship with Catherine, who was a childhood playmate and sweetheart. However, during Jackson's absence of five years, Raoul has made his elder daughter, Catherine, into a surrogate for his wife. Her father's overprotectiveness makes it impossible for Catherine to live her own life and have a relationship with Jackson. Catherine is placed in a quandry because of her love for her father and her love for Jackson. Both are strangling her life. Raoul learns of their affair and, like a jealous man, fights with Jackson. He loses to Jackson. Jackson believes he has won Catherine; however, at the end of the novel the question of their union is unanswered.

Although the story takes place in the 1940's or 1950's, the setting is similar to that of Mary Louise; time has not changed the rural community around Bayonne Parish. Time has allowed changes to occur outside this small Bayonne community, but it has had no effect upon the attitudes

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1 Ernest J. Gaines, Catherine Carmier (New Jersey: The Chatam Book-seller, 1964). All quotations are taken from this publication.
or beliefs of the people. This is most visible in Gaines's Creole family characterization.

The history of the Creole's position is the skeleton for the male Creole character.

They [Creoles] possessed many of the civil and legal rights commonly enjoyed by whites, but they were disqualified from political rights and social equality. However, in their contact with white people, they did not assume that creeping posture of debasement which has frequently characterized them in fiction. While the white were superior to them, they in turn were superior to the blacks and objected just as the whites objected to mingle with free negroes.¹

The Creole pride is viewed through Raoul's father, Robert Carmier. This pride forms the basis for social nobility for his father in the community by purchasing the Grover house and land. The land and house represent higher social status since they have only been owned by whites. In purchasing the Grover house and land, Robert Carmier says, "I'm a colored man. . . . I can farm as well as the next one." (p. 8) Describing the encounter between himself and Mac Grover, Robert shows the distinction of the Creole manhood.

Hat in hand, yes, but not fidgeting with it one bit— as any other Negro would have done, and many whites, too, who stood, before Mac Grover—but holding it as steady as a professional beggar would hold his. Only Robert Carmier was not begging. (p. 9)

Robert's attitude towards the purchase of the Grover house and the accompanying land is reflected in his refusal of the assistance offered him by the quarter Negroes and of defeat in competitive farming by the Cajuns,

often considered beneath Creoles since Cajuns were poor white trash. Unlike other areas of the South, there existed in Bayonne Parish, a double social standard between not only the whites and blacks, but also between the Negroes and Creoles. Through the character portrayal of Robert Carmier and his family, the Carmiers dramatize the effects, especially the alienation, caused by social standards within such communities.

It was soon learned in the quarters that the Carmiers had little use for dark-skinned people. They went by without speaking, and when you spoke to them they hardly nodded their heads. When they needed help to get in their crops, they hired people their color. Once the work was done, the people left and no one saw them until crops were ready to be harvested again.

Robert Carmier and his family made as much crop for Mac Grover as any family that size could make. Morning until night, six days a week, they were in the field. Then every Sunday morning, they got into the buggy and went to the Catholic Church in Bayonne. Around five in the afternoon they would return, change into everyday clothes, and sit out on the porch. They visited no one, and no one in the quarters would dare visit them. Every so often one of the daughters would come in from Bayonne or New Orleans, but the rest of the time, Robert and his family, the four of them, would be seen on the porch alone. (pp. 12-13)

Raoul Carmier inherited his father's pride as a Creole and his alienated position. He became locked in a no man's land created by historical and social developments of Southern Louisiana. In Raoul's characterization, the land determines his manhood in the South. Land intercedes his male-female relationship with his wife, Della. As a man who needs a woman understanding this conflict, Catherine—his first daughter—becomes this woman and replaces his wife. Bayonne, an elderly school teacher in the community, spoke in these terms about Raoul and his family.

Raoul has been Della's husband only by law. Other than that, it's been the land. Not Della he loved when he married
her--the land. Della was brought there to cook his food, to bear his children, to see that his clothes were kept half clean. . . . Why the land, you ask? What the land? It happened long before Raoul was born. Probably his great-grandfather was the first one to find out that though he was as white as any white man, he still had a drop of Negro blood in him, and because of that single drop of blood, it would be impossible to ever compete side by side with the white man. So he went to the land--away from the white man, away from the black man as well. The white man refused to let him compete with him, and he in turn refused to lower himself to the black man's level. So it was to the land where he would not have to compete—at least side by side—with either. He was taught to get everything from the land, which he did, and which he, through necessity, was taught to love and to depend upon. His love for his land, his hatred for the white man, the contempt with which he looks upon the black man has passed from one generation to the other. Robert brought it here, and you see it in Raoul.

Raoul did not choose his position. He did not choose that house up there behind those oak and pecan trees. He is only carrying out something that was cut out for him in the beginning. He has no control over it. He was not put there by the white and the black man alike. The white man will not let Raoul compete with him because of that drop of Negro blood, and at the same time he has put the Negro in such a position that Raoul would rather die than compete with him. So it is Raoul alone—Raoul and his land, his field. . . .

(Cp. 116-117)

Catherine, the elder child, becomes even more greatly locked in the family marital conflict by the Creole history. She has an understanding of her father's position and the importance of land in his life. She loves her mother; however, as a surrogate, she must operate as Raoul's wife. Madame Bayonne reveals this to Jackson.

So he went to Catherine. She was to be victim now, cross-carrier now, as long as he was alive. If she goes for a visit, she must hurry back or he goes after her. When he's sick, it must be her hand which puts the medicine in his mouth. You know this already, because he was sick once when you were here. He stayed on his back a month, and he kept her from school every day until he was up again. Sure, Della could have brought him the cough syrup or made the tea or broth—whenever was necessary. But, no, the boy was black. If he were white, it would have been the same. They have put her in this position—behind those trees—-and
nothing, hear me clearly, Jackson, nothing outside those
trees is allowed in that yard. (p. 119)

Raoul's overprotectiveness prevents Catherine's joining Jackson, as it
prevented her joining the father of her child, Nelson.

Catherine, also, operates as a medium between her mother, Della,
and her sister, Lillian. She understands her sister's bitterness and
hatred towards the family's Creole history and what Creole indoctri-
nation has done to their family. Lillian is sent away shortly after
Della's affair and the death of her brother, Mark. As her under-
standing of the Creole's social position increases, she feels more
awkward in her relationship with her parents. Lillian confides in
Catherine her frustrations of the double standards created by the social
traditions of the Louisiana Creoles.

"Because they never told you to hate Mama. I'm sure
they didn't." Catherine

"Not directly--no. Because then I'd want to know why.
But indirectly they told me a million times to hate her.
There're so many little ways to make you hate, and they
used every one of them."

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

"Those in the city, Mama and Daddy, they're all
strangers to me. There's a fence between us. I can see
them, I can hear them. I can feel you. You're the only
person I can feel. . . .

"That other way--I've thought about it. I've thought
about it over and over. I'm not in love with it. I can't
ever be. But I have no other choice. I'm not black,
Cathy. I hate black. I hate black worse than the whites
hate it. I have black friends, but only at a distance. I
feel for my mother, but only at a distance. I don't let
my black friends come close to me. I don't let her come
close to me. I don't say get away. I've never said that.
I just can't open my heart out to them.

"I haven't opened my heart out to that white world
either. But I'm going there because I must go somewhere.
I can't stand in the middle of the road any longer.
Neither can you, and neither can you let Nelson. Daddy
and his sisters can't understand this. They want us to be
Creoles. Creoles. What a joke. Today you're one way or
the other; you're white or you're black. There is no in-between." (p. 48)

Lillian informs Catherine that this is the last visit home and she will never return. She attempts to persuade Catherine to leave, but Catherine stays. Lillian's characterization reemphasizes the alienation created by the double standard between white and black, and between Creoles and Negroes. Her ending statement verifies that time has changed this. Her exposure to urban life away from the rural community of Bayonne Parish dramatizes that time has had no effect upon the Creole's attitudes and beliefs in Bayonne Parish. Regionalism is retained in the characterizations of the Creoles and their sustaining past social tradition. The fight between Raoul and Jackson over Catherine will not release her from her Creole past, not to join Jackson, nor to exist outside of the Bayonne Parish; nor for Della to resume her marital position as Raoul's wife.

"My Grandpa and the Haint"1 is a short story about Grandpa's visits with another woman seen through the eyes of the grandson. The Grandfather has been frequently visiting a woman whose home, again, is set apart from the major surrounding community of the Bayonne Parish. Through the grandson, who thinks something is wrong in these unusual visits, presents it as such to Grandma. Grandma, who now is made aware of the situation, immediately seeks the aid of a vodun to terminate the relationship. It is because of what happens in Grandpa's next visit to the lady's home that one is led to believe that voodooism works and has

1 Ernest J. Gaines, "My Grandpa and the Haint," New Mexico Quarterly 36 (Summer 1966), pp. 149-160.
effectively stopped Grandpa's activities. Grandpa meets a snake, whom he believes is the "Haint," the symbol of the vodun king spirit. He is chased by this snake into barbed-wire. The fear of this snake re-emphasizes his belief in vodun and strengthens his wife's belief as well. Regionalism is seen in the importance of vodun in the rural community and that community's belief that it works.

The belief in voodooism becomes a theme in "A Long Day in November," "The Boy in the Double-vested Suit," and The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman, where the assistance of a voodoo appears to provide solutions to various problems or an alternative to religion. In "A Long Day in November," Eddie Howard's belief in voodooism accentuates its importance in the rural community. As recalled, Eddie goes to Madame Touissant for advice. Even though her advice is to demolish the car, Eddie is a more confirmed believer because he has regained his family and a happier relationship with his wife. Vodun opposes the position of the preacher in the rural community, as in "Boy in the Double-vested Suit," where the church and the pastor might provide the solution to the child's desires for a mother. Throughout Gaines's fiction, vodun and religion conflict as the people's beliefs are firmly planted in one or the other. In The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman, both are presented; however, vodun proves to be ineffective whereas the church, parallelizing with the Civil Rights movements, does support the development of the new black manhood.

The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman consolidates Gaines's Louisiana rural people in characterizations and themes; Creoles, Cajuns, whites, blacks, beliefs of voodooism and church, and manhood. The plot
focuses on the life history of Miss Jane Pittman, her one-hundred and ten years of life extending from slavery to the early Civil Rights Movement of the sixties. Gaines continues the Creole history and attitude in the characterization of Mary LeFabre; the wealthy white characterization in Tee Bob Samson; vodun in the relationship of Miss Jane and Joe Pittman; educational influence in Ned Douglas; religious belief in Jimmy Arron; and the theme of manhood in the major male characters of Joe Pittman, Ned Douglas, Jimmy Arron.

Mary LeFabre's character reiterates the alienated world of the Southern Louisiana Creoles, as the Carmier family. She is a descendant of a Creole society similar to the Carbon Bleus. Her family history reveals the history of Creole women before the Civil War. They were often mistresses of wealthy white men who supported these women and allowed them to carry their names.

Mary Agnes LeFabre come from a long line of Creoles back there in New Orleans. Her grandmother was one drop from being white herself. Her grandmother has been one of those ladies for white men. They used to give these great balls before the war, and the white man used to go to them to choose their colored woman. They didn't marry these women, but sometime they kept them the rest of their life. The one who took the girl's grandmother was called LeFabre. (p. 158)

Therefore, Mary Agnes could have easily passed for white. Her description illustrates the beauty of the Creole women.

'Specially somebody pretty like she was. She was medium height, but a little thin. She reminded you of some of these dagoes round her who call themself Sicilians. But she wasn't fat like most of them get. She had long black hair, black as any hair I have ever seen, and it used to come way down her back. (p. 158)

However, her beauty and her background contributes to her victimization
by the social strata system of the Southern Louisiana code.

As a teacher on the Samson Plantation, Mary Agnes attempts to erase the injustices frequently administered by wealthy Creoles to Black slaves. "Mary Agnes was trying to make up for this [slavery of blacks]; for what her own people had done. Trying to make up for the Past—and that you cannot do." (p. 158) The engrained Creole attitude of superiority, as seen in the Carmiers, is illustrated again in the Sappho and Claudee incident.

"Both Sappho and Claudee's daddy was white, but not Creole white. Poor white—no quality." (p. 159) The distinction of French "original" as opposed to poor whites almost causes the deaths of Sappho and Claudee. Sappho finds out about a party to be given at the Creole Place. They decide to go. At the party, the Creoles discover their presences and weed them out. Unable to explain their presence or an invitation, they are placed in a precarious situation, which meant either punishment or escape. Punishment would be lynching. The incident exemplifies the regional attitudes of the Creoles and mulattoes towards each other in the thirties and forties. Because this sort of situation occurred frequently, Mary Agnes's father had cause to plead for Mary Agnes to return to New Orleans. Mary Agnes refuses and remains to teach on the Samson plantation. She is seen by Tee Bob Samson, who falls in love with her. Tee Bob, committing suicide, dies before he ever has an opportunity to express his love to Mary Agnes. The tragedy of their relationship is that it can never be acceptable because of the racial barriers dictated by the social code.

Miss Jane narrates the situation between Mary Agnes and Tee Bob
Samson. Introduced earlier in the novel as the rich white child with a mulatto brother, Tee Bob grows up and attends college. He returns for the funeral of his Uncle. He immediately falls in love with Mary Agnes on sight. However, Tee Bob lacks the ruthlessness of Marshall Rebert and the manliness of Marcus Payne and Sidney Bonbon and cannot take or approach Mary Agnes. His character is too weak to cross the racial line of separation in defiance of tradition. His description supports his lack of manliness.

Tee Bob was not a man. His mouth was too red and soft, his eyes was too big and sorrowful. His skin wasn't tough enough. He didn't have a mustache. He had never shaved in his life, and he never would shave. (p. 166)

His appearance portrays effeminacy and weakness, even though he is engaged to be married to Miss Majors.

Jim Caya, his best friend, learns of Tee Bob's attraction to Mary Agnes when Tee Bob confesses his love for her. He believed that Tee Bob is just sowing his wild oats before his marriage. When he realizes the seriousness of his words, Jim tries to redirect Tee Bob back to the structure of the system. "That woman is a nigger, Robert. A Nigger. She just look white. But Africa is in her veins, and that make her nigger, Robert." (p. 173) Tee Bob realizes that Jim is right. In an attempt to do what is expected, to seize Mary Agnes and sexually take her, he ends up crying and confused. It is in this turmoil that he takes his life. Miss Jane comments: "He had to find peace. He couldn't find it here." (p. 186) Jim Caya tries to have the blame placed on Mary Agnes. However, Tee Bob left a letter acquitting her from his death. Miss Jane and Jule Raynard, his god-father, summarize how Tee
Bob and Mary Agnes are victims of the system through Mary Agnes's futile desires to change the Past and Tee Bob's belief that love can conquer the Past.

She was nigger, he was white, and they couldn't have nothing together. He couldn't understand that, he thought love was much stronger than one drop of African blood. But she knew better. She knew the rules. She was just a few years older than him in age, but hundreds of years wiser. (p. 194)

Mary Agnes is forced to leave. The relationship between the Creoles and the whites remains the same. Mary Agnes and Tee Bob are victims of the social restrictions of the South; just as Bonbon, a Cajun, defeated by alienation of the system and just as Marcus Payne, a black, defeated by racial hatred. Each character protests against the past for he possesses human feelings as opposed to the inhumanity of the structured racial system. However, the characters are condemned because they could not remain in their social boundaries as dictated by the codes of social tradition of the Louisiana past.

In The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman, the theme of manhood reaches its epitome in the black male characters of Joe Pittman, Ned Douglass and Jimmy Arron. Each restates the struggle of black manhood in the Louisiana area. Within the novel's beginning, Gaines utilizes black stereotyping of the male character in the slave stud, Brown. Yet, Gaines elevates his characterization by explaining his birth within the conditions of slavery. Moving from the black stereotype image of studs, Gaines creates a new black male and a portrayal of black folk heroism which he claims is not presented in Southern Literature. Joe Pittman, Ned Douglass and Jimmy Arron exemplify this black folk heroism and black
manhood, demonstrated in each's attempt to survive the indoctrination of the plantation structure and to correct the system's wrongs with a direct attack at the white man.

The literary image of the stereotype of the dumb black is found in the character of Brown. Brown is a simpleton and a stud slave of the pre-Civil War years. Through him, one can imagine the complete control the white plantation owners had in slavery; the dehumanizing treatment in order to gain more profit by increasing stock. Brown's attack on Jane, when she is only twelve, displayed the type of conditioning during slavery. They are having a disagreement on names, when he proceeds toward her.

And I tried to crack his head open with that stick. But I didn't bit more hurt that loon I would a hurt that post at the end of my gallery. He came on me and I swung the stick and backed from him. He kept coming on me, and I kept hitting and backing back. Hitting and backing back. Then he jecked the stick out my hand and swung it away. I tried to get the stick, but I fell, and when I looked up, there he was right over me. He didn't look like a man now, he didn't even look like a loon, he looked more like a wild animal. Animal-like greed in his face. He grabbed me and started with me in the bushes. But we hadn't gone more than three, four steps when I started hearing this noise. Whup, Whup, Whup.

"Drop her, you stud-dog," she said. "Drop her or I'll break your neck."

Big Laura hit him in the side with the stick. She hit him twice in the side, but all he did was covered his head and cried. He was a slow-wit and couldn't look after himself. All he could do was do what you told him to do. (pp. 18-19)

Forced to put Jane down, Brown controls his behavior to remain with the slaves moving towards the North. The group is massacred by patrollers, poor white trash who made a living by finding and returning runaway slaves. The brute's death accents the sadness of the slave stud created
during slavery and the bestial tactics applied by whites for control.

They came in on horses and mules, and soon they saw the slow-wit, they surrounded him and started beating him with sticks of wood. Some of them had guns, but they would not waste a bullet. More satisfaction beating him with sticks. They beat him, he covered up, but they beat him till he was down. Then one of the patrollers slid off the mule, right across his tail, and cracked the slow-wit in the head. I could hear his head crack like you hear dry wood break. (p. 21)

The brute’s existence parallels the tragic black male image created by Southern literary stereotyping.

However, Gaines emerges with a rural black male image which strengthens black folk heroism. The characterization of Joe Pittman, Ned Douglass, and Jimmy Arron establishes the new breed of black manhood in the South, developing after the Civil War years. Each brings dignity and pride to black manhood. Joe Pittman lives a life of a freed man. He knows his strength and potential during his life. He is a horse-breaker who wants better than what plantation life has to offer.

Joe Pittman found a place near the Luzaza [Louisiana] Texas borderline where he could break horses. He knew all about breaking horses and branding cattles—he had learned that on Colonel Dye’s place—but now he wanted to go where he could make a better living. (p. 80)

It is because of this skill that Colonel Dye does not wish Joe Pittman to leave. He creates a debt of one-hundred and fifty dollars, plus an interest of thirty dollars. Colonel Dye claims this was bond money rendered in Joe’s entanglement with the Ku Klux Klan. Joe pays the debt and moves to the Clyde’s farm with his family.

On Mr. Clyde’s place, recognition of Joe’s skill as a horsebreaker is acknowledged.
Joe was called Chief Breaker. Everybody called him chief--Chief Pittman. He broke horses nobody else could ride. People used to come from all over just to see him. Bet on him like you bet on rodeo riders. (p. 88)

Joe's job as breaker was dangerous and his wife, Jane, worried and feared for his death by one of the wild horses. Her fears force her to confront him. In response to her fears, Joe comments about manhood:

Now, little mama, man come here to die, didn't he?
That's the contract he signed when he was born--'I hereby agree that one of these days I'm go'n lay down these old bones.' Now, all he can do while he's here is do something and do that thing good. The best thing I can do in this world is ride horses. Maybe I can be a better farmer, but the way things is a colored man just can't get out there and start farming any time he want. He's go'n have to take orders from some white man. Breaking horses, I don't take orders from a soul on earth. That's why they calls me Chief. Maybe one day one of them'll come along and get me. Maybe I'll get too old and just have to step down. Maybe some little young buck'll come along and take over Chief from me and I won't have to ride the terrible ones no more. But till that day get here I got to keep going. That's what life's about, doing it good as you can.
When the time come for them to lay down in that long black hole, they can say one thing: 'He did it good as he could.' That's the best thing you can say for a man. Horse breaker or yard sweeper, let them say the poor boy did it good as he could. (pp. 89-90)

This does not calm Miss Jane, who then seeks the aid of the town voodooist. Miss Jane believes, as previous characters, that voodoo remedies action against evils. Evil is symbolized by the black stallion. The voodooist assures Miss Jane there is no reason to fear, gives her some special powder, and sends her home. However, the voodooist does not prevent the death of Joe Pittman by the horse. Regionalism is shown again in Miss Jane's seeking aid from vodun.

Joe's contract with life expires with the arrival of a stallion, "tall, slick and black." (p. 91) Jane releases the stallion to prevent
her husband's death, but death still comes.

Early the next morning they came back with the stallion and with Joe tied to his own horse. They said Joe had corned and roped the stallion, but with no saddle to tie the rope on, the stallion had jecked him off his horse and dragged him through the swamps. When they found him he was tangled in the rope, already dead. The horse still had the rope around his neck eating leaves off a bush to the side. (pp. 97-98)

The black horse symbolized Joe's own black manhood, his black youth, and Black strength—all of which he was trying as best he could to maintain. It is important for us to see that Joe Pittman died while in pursuit of a black horse and for us to understand that this represented the essence of his life—seeking, struggling to maintain a grip on black manhood.1

Joe's death verifies his comment that he died doing the best he knew how. And he is honored for his success. During Mr. Clyde's rodeo, several minutes were dedicated as a memorial to honor Joe, who had held the title of "Chief Breaker." Miss Jane, herself, realizes the depth of Joe's manhood and knows that "no man would ever take his place." (p. 98)

In this episode, Gaines shows us that death lies constantly across life, and that the confrontation between the two frequently gives life meaning. Joe's struggle with the stallion is analogous to the fire lighted by Big Laura in swamp. Both are assertive of the black presence against a world that would extinguish that presence. Both contain death because that assertion makes them vulnerable. Even so, the assertion is supremely valuable. All this sounds like Hemingway. But Hemingway stops with the value of the individual assertion. Gaines goes further and suggests that the individual assertion is the value-giving booster to the longevity carried by Jane, the black woman. From

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that assertion, the black race absorbs intensified life.\footnote{Jerry Bryant, "From Death to Life: The Fiction of Ernest J. Gaines," \textit{Iowa Review}, 3 (Winter, 1972), p. 117.}

Joe's viewpoint of life supports folk heroism in a racist society. He begins the emergence of the new black man, which is continued in the characterization of Ned Douglass, fighting the racist system through education. He accepts death in his struggle and faces death with dignity.

Ned, son of Big Laura who is killed by patrollers, is adopted by Miss Jane as a foster child. Through the strength of Ned's character, the new black image of manhood is seen during the Reconstruction Era. Ned's political activities, which were registering voters, forces him to leave for his safety for the North. He goes to Kansas, receives an education, but returns to the South to build a school where he can educate his people. His early life is a saga similar to that of Frederick Douglass, whom Ned names himself after. Ned meets opposition in regards to his school. The blacks do not support him. The whites do not want his northern education interfering and upsetting the rural Southern community. Jane is informed by Albert, a Cajun, who is hired to kill Ned:

\begin{quote}
They talk 'bout your boy there, Jane. They don't want him build that school there, no. They say he just good to stir trouble wunks niggers. They want him go back. Back where he come from. (p. 105)
\end{quote}

With this knowledge, Jane tries to persuade Ned to leave before he is killed. Ned replies, "I will build my school. I will teach till they kill me." (p. 106)
Ned stays to educate and to unite the people in the struggle towards their freedom which he explained in his speech on the river. He is aware of the danger surrounding his life, but he spoke to the consciousness of black manhood in the United States.

"Your people's bones and their dust make this place yours more than anything else. I'm not telling ya'll own the earth," he said. "Man is just a little bitty part of this earth. When he dies he go back in the earth just like a tree go back in the earth when it fall, just like iron go back in the earth when it rust. You don't own this earth, you're just here for a little while, but while you're here don't let no man tell you the best is for him and you take the scrap. No, your people plowed this earth, your people chopped down the trees, your people built the roads and built the levees. These same people is now buried in this earth, and their bones fertilizing this earth." (pp. 107-108)

These words echoed Joe Pittman's philosophy of life's contract with death. Ned continued to distinguish between the attitude towards life of a nigger and a black man.

But there's a big difference between a nigger and a black American. A black American cares, and will always struggle. Every day that he get up he hopes that this day will be better. (p. 110)

To be a successful black American, the black man must stand tall, even if Death is the reply. "But if you must die, let me ask you this: Wouldn't you rather die saying I'm a man than to die saying I'm a contented slave?" (p. 111) Ned accepts death for death was inevitable in his struggle for manhood. He dies without fear of death. "His eyes said, "I'm go'n to die, Mama." But I knewed he had no fear of death." (p. 112) Ned is assassinated. Ned's life displays the meaning of the action tactics which were spoken by the college youth during his verbal battle with the pastor in "The Sky is Gray;" that action changes things.
It must be direct action through education, as Ned's life militated against the white man's system of economical, social, and mental control of the black mind.

Jimmy Aaron, labeled "The One," continues the struggle of black manhood in the South during the Civil Rights Movement in the sixties. Following Martin Luther King's philosophy of non-violence, Jimmy and his followers attempt to destroy the "Jim Crow" laws governing the rural blacks. He is selected by the rural blacks in Samson's Negro quarters to become a preacher and to be a leader. Jimmy leaves for college and returns, but with talk of changing their simple rural life. The first objective is to drink water from a fountain located in the front of a white courthouse. Jimmy assumes leadership in this activity; however, when he presents the project to the church congregation of the quarters, the people reject it. It is too much of an abrupt change from the old tradition of things to the new equalizing present. Just as death occurred for Joe and Ned, Miss Jane explains and realizes again that death for Jimmy is inevitable. Throughout her life, she had seen the struggle for black manhood in Joe and Ned, and death was always the victor for defiance of the white racist system.

Jimmy. It's not that they don't love you, Jimmy; it's not that they don't want believe in you; but they don't know what you talking about. You talk of freedom, Jimmy. Freedom here is able to make a little living and have the white folks say you good. Black curtains hang at their window, Jimmy; black quilts cover their body at night; a black veil cover their eyes, Jimmy. . . .

You see, Jimmy, they been told from the cradle they wasn't—that they wasn't much better than the mule. You keep telling them this over and over, for hundreds and hundreds of years, they start thinking that way. The curtain, Jimmy, the quilt, the veil, the buzzing, bussing, buzzing—two days, a few hours, to clear all this away,
Jimmy, is not enough time. . . . (pp. 236-37)

At this point, the people seem not to support Jimmy and create more opposition to Jimmy's peaceful tactics for desegregation. Jimmy is killed in Bayonne. Yet, the spirit of the new black man lives on as Miss Jane comments about Jimmy's death: "Just a little piece of him is dead, . . . . The rest of him is waiting for us in Bayonne." (p. 245) Regionalism is presented in each male characterization who represents the struggle of black manhood in the South and in the characterizations of the Louisiana people, Cajuns, Creoles and whites in the rural community of Bayonne Parish.

Bayonne Parish defines regionalism in Gaines's fiction. The fictional region gives birth to his characterizations and themes. The history is the womb feeding life into the rural portrayals of the Louisiana people; the Cajuns, the Creoles, the whites and the blacks. Gaines's intimacy with this region supplies the colorful setting for their portraits in the rural community. He comments:

I think one of the greatest things that has happened to me, as a writer and as a human being, is that I was born in the South, that I was born in Louisiana. Because when I grew up on a plantation in the late thirties and the forties, I'm pretty sure it was not too much different from the way things could have been when my ancestors were in slavery. Oh, we could do a few things more. But what I went through that kind of experience--there's a direct connection between the past and what is happening today. I'm very fortunate to have had that kind of background.1

Gaines's writing abilities move his characterizations into real entities of rural life. His personal consciousness of this area forms Gaines as

1 Laney, loc. cit.
a regionalist writer because he has captured the Louisiana people well.

His (Gaines) world is the Louisiana bayou country, and his people are the black workers who have remained on the post-bellum plantations; the black sharecroppers, the clannish Cajuns, the rich whites who own the land and administer the southern code.¹

Plots focus on the struggle to survive the Louisiana "code" of life which either supports or destroys Gaines's characterizations throughout his fiction. Bayonne Parish nurtures the rural peoples' beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors; as seen in vodun, religion, and education. Value systems, based on religion and vodun, are revealed in the male-female and father-son relationships found in "A Long Day in November," "Turtles," "Boy in the Double-Vested Suit," and "Grandpa and the Haint." Educational attitudes are most visible in the character of the college youth in "Sky is Gray:" that education would be unacceptable if change of the system was indicated by radical action like Copper Laurent's complete revolution or northern interference in rural education represented by Ned Douglass and Jimmy Aaron. Even more important is the black manhood theme developed in various male characterizations and their testing of manhood through obedience as found in "Turtles," or by suffering as in "Sky is Gray," "Bloodline," and "Three Men," or by death as in Of Love and Dust and The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman.

CHAPTER III

REGIONALISM IN GAINES'S IMAGES

This chapter will briefly attempt to analyze the symbols of Gaines's fiction. Gaines's employment of various images as motifs supports the regionalism found in his characterizations and themes. The images of trees, water, dust and heat, and land appear crucial in Gaines's Louisiana setting and accentuate characterizations of the rural community. These motifs, referred to above, will gain in importance as critics more deeply evaluate Gaines's literary works.

As mentioned before, Gaines has great pride of his birthplace in the Louisianaian territory.

I think that Louisiana's probably the most romantic and interesting of all southern states--the land, the language, the colors, the bayous, the fields--all of these things together, the combination of all these things I think make it an extremely interesting place. If I were to come from any other southern state, I think Louisiana is the one that I would choose. And I'm glad I came from here. I'm glad I came from here.¹

Within this quotation are several images which flow throughout Gaines's fiction, sometimes unnoticed and inconspicuous. The rural Louisiana areas have influenced Gaines's images in his regional setting and characterizations. With respect to Louisiana's terrain, Gaines's attachment to this region has added deeper dimensions to rural images as statements on the circumstances surrounding his rural characterizations, especially

those characterizations caught in the racial struggle. According to one critic, Jerry Bryant,

He (Gaines) views the racial struggle not as a clash between black people and a satanic white oppressor, but between black and black, as well as white and black, between young and old, the forces of conservation and the forces of change. It is a struggle that brings pain to basically worthy antagonists. And while he does express his own attitudes toward the proper resolution of the conflict, his main interest as an artist is the archetypal human experience reenacted in it.¹

Gaines's images become aphoristic towards the rural characterizations and supportive of regionalism in Gaines's fiction.

Many aspects of Gaines's background and memories of the Louisiana territory are interwoven into his literary creations, like the bullfight theme in some of Picasso's art. Gaines compares himself to Picasso in his attempt to portray an accurate picture of Louisiana. In his comparison, the tree image proves to be very important in the analysis of his regionalism.

I grew up around trees and of course, everything around us was made of wood. The houses were made of wood. We burned wood as small children very early in life. So we grew up around wood. We used wood as our food. We picked up pecans under trees, fig trees, plum trees, whatever kind of tree, cypress trees for moss. Willow trees around the bayou for fishing, in the summer under trees because of extreme heat. The trees for fuel. I know a lot of people say that's all I talk about is trees, but look at what Picasso did with the guitar and the bull. He made, I don't know hundreds of sketches and paintings. . . . so, if Picasso can do that, express pain through the bullfight, the bullfighter, and the bull and the guitar, I think I can in my few years say a little something about Louisiana

through the trees, and the rivers, and roads.¹

Here, again, Gaines's statement advocates analysis of trees, rivers, and roads images which are often anthropomorphic expressions of regionalism in characterizations and settings. The images emphasize historical conditions surrounding the rural Louisiana peoples' social strata created by the tradition. The trees echo the sacredness of the forbidden ground operation between racial barriers and the nobility of Black heroism in the South. The river is the road to freedom for Black Americans and natural power against man's greed for control. The road is the never ending struggle of the Southern Black manhood. Dust is the symbolic death of change, frequently conquered by the traditional social code of Louisiana. Each verifying regionalism in Gaines's images.

The tree is employed as a distinctive motif in Catherine Carmier, Of Love and Dust, "Just Like a Tree," and The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman. The trees in Catherine Carmier² operate as walls of separation created by past Southern tradition: they predict the demise of Catherine's and Jackson's relationship and Raoul's and Della's marriage. Throughout the novel, trees and the houses seem to foretell the doom of the relationship between the major characters by anthropomorphizing the past beliefs and attitudes of the rural Louisiana. Various characterizations, such as the Creoles and Cajuns, appear already doomed according to their

¹ Sharon Spence, Interview with Ernest J. Gaines during the meeting of the Clark College Seventh Annual Workshop, Atlanta, Georgia, April 1976.

² Ernest J. Gaines, Catherine Carmier (New Jersey: The Chatham Booksellers, 1964). All quotations are from this edition.
social stratum. Catherine, Raoul and Della represent the past Creole history and tradition. Jackson is representative of change and growth in the present. Catherine slowly moves into a position of transition between her father and her lover, Jackson. The trees are supportive of this traditional division created by the Creole heritage and are operating as guardians of this Creole tradition.

In the beginning of the novel, from the moment Catherine is introduced, the trees and their dark coloration indicate the death of the relationship between Catherine and Jackson. While waiting for Jackson’s arrival, Brother, a childhood friend of Jackson, views the setting. The trees, river and road operate as personas, supporting the traditional aspects of the passive rural Louisiana people.

... Brother drank his cold drink and looked at the river on the other side of the road. The river was very calm and blue. The trees on the other side of the river looked black, and Brother noticed a car, quite small from this distance, passing through the trees. (p. 5)

Catherine was driving slowly, but the car still spread dust on either side of the road. (p. 7)

Catherine is on her way to pick up her sister, Lillian, who is arriving on the same bus as Jackson, who is returning to visit Aunt Charlotte. When the bus reaches the stop, Catherine and Jackson meet once again after several years have passed and their old love for each other is rekindled. Their relationship is forbidden by the Creole history of superiority over black Americans which is exemplified in the Carmier family; especially Raoul’s characterization. The end of Catherine’s and Jackson’s relationship is already announced by the darkness of the trees which makes Catherine’s arrival appear as a messenger of Death
from a dark tomb. The rising dust is a symbolic image of death used frequently through Gaines's fiction and will be discussed later in this chapter. The calmness of the river parallels to the acceptance of tradition by the rural people; however, the darkness of the trees verifies the doom of Catherine's relationship with Jackson because he is not Creole.

Towards the novel's closing, an old school teacher, Madame Bayonne, who understands Catherine's and Jackson's relationship, knows that Jackson cannot remain in the rural community because of his exposure to the other urban world. Jackson, likewise, is conscious of his dilemma since he must inform his Aunt Charlotte of his decision. Jackson likens himself to a leaf seeking a place to land amid the confusion of his life. His experience in the urban life still continues the void in his search for manhood. The characterizations of Madame Bayonne and Jackson verify the conflict of the old rural past as opposed to the present urban influence in the rural South. The trees once again become an aphorism towards the discontinuity of the past and the transitions of the future world.

They had stopped in front of her house now—a small three-room cottage that looked no better or worse than any of the others on that side of the road. There were several little trees in the yard—flowers, too, that almost hid the house from a passerby. Madame Bayonne leaned on her walking cane and tilted her head back to look up at Jackson.

"Something is bothering you, isn't there?"

He was not looking at her; he was looking far away. He frowned and made a sound in his throat as though to say, "Do you have to even ask that?"

"There is, isn't there?" she said.

"I'm like a leaf, Madame Bayonne, that's broken away from the tree. Drifting."

"You are searching for something?" (p. 79)
Jackson represents the past. He is confused since he has not found the answer to his quest for self or his manhood; especially in his quest to make "sense in a senseless world." (p. 81) Realizing the rural past had held nothing supportive of equal human rights for the Black man, he finds the urban future of black manhood uncertain. Madame Bayonne is aware of Jackson's quest; but she remains locked in the past. The trees designate the separation of their worlds.

She walked into the yard, and the tall flower bushes and the trees in the yard seemed to envelope her, hiding her from him in the road. Or did these things hide the road, the outside from her? He walked away. (p. 82)

The trees are boundaries between the small rural community and the large urban world portrayed in Madame Bayonne's and Jackson's attitudes. The trees surrounding Madame Bayonne are protection against intrusion by urban modernization. Protecting Madame Bayonne, the trees insure her against worldly influences represented in Jackson, who does not understand or seeks to understand the past tradition separating him from Catherine. Jackson's actions reiterate that the present cannot change from the established rural southern past in which Madame Bayonne has lived her life.

Understanding the social structure of her rural life, Madame Bayonne is not only conscious of the differences between herself and Jackson, but also, the complex liaison between Jackson, Catherine and Raoul. In her perception of tradition, she admonishes Jackson not to pursue a reunion with Catherine because of the fruitlessness of their situation created by time and the racial history between Creoles and Blacks. "A word to the wise--" she started, then stopped. "Don't go behind those trees, Jackson. It won't come to any good." (p. 122) The trees are the
visible boundary line of acceptance towards the Southern racial code originated by the past. Jackson feels doomed to fate as he looks at the Carmier's home. "He stopped to look at the Carmier's home when he came up even with the gate. The house was dark and quiet. The big oak and pecan trees surrounded the house like sentinels." (p. 190) The trees truly symbolize the unbroken laws written and accepted by tradition in the rural peoples' minds in the Louisiana region. The trees definitely strengthen an analysis of regionalism in Gaines's images. The tree image accentuates the forces of the tradition creating Gaines's characterizations of Southern Louisiana people--the Blacks, the Cajuns and the whites and the Creoles.

In *Catherine Carmier*, the Creole distinction is especially visible in the marriage of Raoul and Della Carmier. In Della's and Raoul's marital relationship, the trees and wooden apparatuses are symbolic destroyers which support Gaines's regionalism in characterization of the Southern rural Creole and his social attitudes and beliefs. Della turns to an extramarital relationship with an extremely dark-skinned Negro, by the name of Bayou Water. Madame Bayonne explains to Jackson the void created in Della's marriage and why Della sought Bayou Water. In this explanation, the wooden gate symbolizes Della's separation between herself and Raoul's Creole world. The house is the forbidden law of social code that Della trespassed in her marriage to a Creole, Raoul. Her marriage is more of a social crime than her sexual relation with Bayou Water.

"I know what you're thinking. She was wrong. Yes, she was wrong. But it was not then that she was wrong. She was wrong when she came to that house. It was wrong when
she said 'I do,' when all the time she should have been saying 'I don't.'

Della did not want Bayou Water. She did not love Bayou Water. But she needed Bayou Water. Not necessarily Bayou Water, but someone. Though Raoul made her stop leaning on that gate, he did not think one moment about staying there and being with her himself. (p. 115)

Raoul's separate Creole world forces Della to look elsewhere for love. Her lack of understanding the Creole's history and Creole manhood estranges Della from her husband. In her reaching for love, Bayou Water is temporarily an answer to her desires since Raoul's behavior is not affectionate. Bayou Water represents the lively world of people she had been forced to leave on the other side of the gate. Although their relationship is short-lived, the degradation of Della's marriage is initiated through the birth of a male child.

In their liaison, Mark is conceived and inherits the dark-skinned complexion of his father, Bayou Water. Raoul partially accepts the child because of his personal desires for a son. However, the father-son relationship is ended; not only figuratively by the Creole racial barrier, but also, literally by a tree which crushes the boy. The tree suppresses the hope of any successful marital relationship between Della and Raoul.

One day while Raoul and the boy were sawing down a tree in the woods, the tree suddenly made a false turn, crushing the boy into the ground. The people in the quarters called it murder, but the sheriff, as well as Mack Grover, agreed with Raoul that it was an accident. After this happened, Della was seldom seen any more. (p. 16)

Mark's death turns their marriage into one of complete isolation. Della's withdrawal is her submission to the Creole social pressures. The house becomes a coffin; the trees--a veil of death.
A fight between Raoul and Jackson sparks a fleeting hope for Della since Raoul is defeated. All the action occurs behind the trees before the house on a dark evening. Raoul discovered Catherine's affair with Jackson; and like a jealous lover, he fights for her. Della believes that Jackson is Mark coming back to fight for his life which was ended so soon. "... You Jackson. Marky. You been Marky ever since he--since he died. He died by an accident, you understand what I'm saying? ... Out there tonight, my husband and Marky was fighting." (p. 248) Her son's revenge is answered according to Della. Della concludes from Raoul's defeat that she can now regain a semi-normal marriage behind the protection of the trees, just as Madame Bayonne continued to live protected from worldly experiences. The trees and the wooden house will continue acting as "sentinels" guarding the past tradition; therefore, regionalism is supported in the rural setting and characterizations.

In *Of Love and Dust*, the trees take on a fatal aspect. The trees surround and protect Sidney and Louise Bonbon's house as they did the forbidden ground in *Carmier*. This house which had a deadly atmosphere for the Carmier family, is the same for Louise Bonbon and Marcus Payne. The Carmier house illustrates regionalism in the conflicts between Southern Louisiana Blacks and Creoles. The Bonbon house suggests the social conflict between Cajuns and black Americans. The house suffocates the characters who live within and who have broken the Southern Louisiana code of social order. In every offense against the social code, death is inevitable for the characters. Gaines acknowledges that the wooden house accentuates the regionalism in setting and characterizations of the Louisiana people and terrain.
Well, the trees, I knew places like that where Catherine lived. You had these kind of houses that set back beyond these trees. This used to be the old Oleagle house, and all kinds of things had gone through that house. This is the same house as a matter of fact, as I used in Catherine Carmier. I also used in Of Love and Dust. Sidney Bonbon lived in the same house that Catherine and her family lived in. The house had been down years and years ago, but I keep building it up when ever I needed it. I put it back there and put those characters in it and definitely hid the house, separated it from the road, separated from the people around.¹

In the relationship between Marcus Payne and Louise Bonbon, the trees provide a solution to their desires and function as for their meeting together on Bonbon's property. Marcus and Louise want to see each other. She questions how to get Marcus closer to her beyond the gate and the road which are separating them. The answer becomes the leaves and the trees.

How? How? How? She probably thought. How? How? How? And probably while walking across the yard, she had looked down and seen the leaves—leaves that had been laying there ten, maybe twenty years; leaves on top of leaves on top of leaves, that weren't leaves anymore, but had turned to dust, even if Marcus used a shovel and even if he dug six feet in the ground he would never reach the bottom of all those leaves. (p. 133)

The leaves continue the theme of death, not change; they are the unbroken bond of unwritten laws governing the lives of the Southern rural Louisiana people. The Creole social law that declared Catherine's and Jackson's relationship could never exist because one is Creole, the other black. A parallel is found in the relationship between Louise and Marcus, which also can never exist because the Cajun social code prohibits a relationship to occur between a Cajun woman, Louise, and a Black male,

¹Spence, op. cit.
Marcus Payne. Both women, Catherine and Louise, are bound to their historical past whereas the men, Jackson Bradley and Marcus Payne, are different because of their urban influences. Jackson's exposure on the West Coast and Marcus's upbringing in the city remove them from the rural setting, the rural history and laws. Regionalism is shown in each character's struggle to exceed beyond the gate, the road and the trees representing the depth of the traditional social stratum which prohibits their various relationships.

In the short story, "Just Like a Tree," and the novel, The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman, trees symbolize past nobility and stability of the black race, and wisdom gained through time. In "Just Like a Tree," the main character, Aunt Fe, is likened to a chinaberry tree. She is being removed from her Southern home and carried to the North for safety since a bomb was occurred near her house. The removal and situation of Aunt Fe are compared to an uprooted tree which has been growing for centuries. Through the technique of multi-narration, the tragedy and the grace of both Aunt Fe and the chinaberry tree can be viewed as a statement toward regionalism in characterization and setting.

Preceding the short story is the old Negro Spiritual "I Shall not be Moved." The mood is set with the spiritual's words denoting the black's history embedded in the South. Aunt Fe cannot be moved. Like the chinaberry tree in the front yard, her life is deeply rooted in the Louisiana soil. Leola tells Aunt Fe's daughter, Louise, who is taking her mother away: "Louise, moving her from here's like moving a tree you been used to in your front yard all your life." (p. 227) Louise does not respond, remaining aloof to her relatives' outcries. Louise's exposure to urban
life causes indifference towards the rural relatives whose concern for Aunt Fe carries greater warmth on the cold, rainy, stormy day. The weather accentuates the forces operating against the tree, outside, and opposition to Aunt Fe's removal.

James, Louise's citified husband, is mystified and amused about the situation of moving Aunt Fe and the reaction of her country relatives. Detached from the simple rural life, he sees Aunt Fe as a bag of bones.

She's still sitting in that funny-looking little old rocking chair and not saying a word to anybody. Just sitting there looking into the fireplace at them two pieces of wood that aren't giving enough heat to warm a baby, let alone ninety-nine grown people. (p. 231)

The rocking chair and Aunt Fe support regionalism in Gaines's tree imagery because the chair and Aunt Fe show the depth of their lives in Louisiana through the years. Simultaneously, Chris, a relative, views Aunt Fe and sees the unity in her life. "Look at her there in that little old chair. How long she had it? Fifty years, a hundred? It ain't a chair no mo', it's little bit o' her just like her leg." (p. 238)

Aunt Fe and her rocking chair become the spirit of the rural black Americans in the South. Between the characterizations of James and Chris, the distinction between rural and urban life is visible. James's removal from the deep Southern roots is severed from a reasonable understanding of the rural people's habits, values and beliefs. He no longer understands the simplicity of rural lifestyles.

Aunt Cleo, however, knows that Aunt Fe's removal upsets the stability of family ties. Her voice speaks of Aunt Fe's nobility and of the tree's strength with respect and wisdom. Aunt Cleo interprets the history of rural people reflected in Aunt Fe; that no action will ever destroy the
past and its products, whether it is protest activities which caused the
bombing or an axe at the root of a tree.

...Be just like wrapping a chain round a tree and jecking
and jecking, and then shifting the chain little bit and
jecking and jecking some in that direction, and then shift-
ing it some mo' and jecking and jecking in that direction.
Jecking and jecking till you get it loose, and then pulling
with all your might. Still it might not be loose enough
and you have to back the tractor up some and fix the chain
round the tree again and start jecking all over. Jeck, jeck,
jeck. Then you hear the roots crying, and then you keep on
jecking, and then it give, and you jeck some mo', and then
you see the big hole in the ground and piece of the taproot
still way down in it--a piece you won't never get out no
matter if you got the tree-least you got it down on the
ground, but did you get the taproot? No. No, sir, you
didn't get the taproot. You stand there and look down in
this hole at it and you grab ho' axe and jump down in it and
start choppin at the taproot, sir. You never get the tap-
root, but do you get the taproot. No. You don't get the
taproot, sir. You never get the taproot. But, sir, I tell
you what you do get. You get a big hole in the ground, sir,
and you get another big hole in the air where the lovely
branches been all these years. Yes, sir that's what you get.
The holes, sir the holes. Two holes, sir, you can't never
fill no matter how hard you try.

So you wrap yo' chain round yo' tree again, sir and you
start dragging it. . . .
if you look over yo' shoulder one second you see her leaving
a trail--a trail, sir, that can be seen from miles and miles
away. You see her trying to hook her little fine branches
in different little cracks, in between pickets, round hills
o' grass, round anything they might brush 'gainst. . . .
But what you don't notice, sir, is just 'fore she get on the
pave road she leave couple her little branches to remind the
people that it ain't her that want leave, but you sir, that
think she ought to. (pp. 235-37)

Unconsciously, Louise and James represent Aunt Fe's destruction. However,
"loved by all on the plantation, Aunt Fe has earned her own selfhood, her
estate of happiness, and she would rather die than be separated from it.
Though merely a plantation, this place is her home. Here she lived, and
here she determines to die, like Grandpa Joad in The Grapes of Wrath."1

1Walter R. McDonald, "You not a Bum, You a Man: Ernest J. Gaines'
The same nobility and respect applied to the chinaberry tree and Aunt Fe is also given in The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman. Miss Jane's description of trees reaches the tree's stability and the tree's basic wisdom of life.

There's an old tree up the quarters where Aunt Lou Bolin and them used to stay. That tree has been here, I'm sure, since this place here, and it has seen much much, and it knows much, much. And I'm not ashamed to say I have talked to it, and I'm not crazy either. It's not necessary craziness, when you talk to trees and rivers. But a different thing when you talk to ditches and bayous. A ditch ain't nothing, and a bayou ain't too much either. But rivers and trees—less, of course, it's a chinaball tree. Anybody caught talking to a chinaball tree or a thorn tree got to be crazy. But when you talk to an oak tree that's been here all these years, and knows more than you'll ever know, it's not craziness; it's nobility you respect. (pp. 147-48)

Between these descriptions here and in "Just Like a Tree," the chinaberry tree symbolizes the established past instilled into the rural people. The chinaberry tree clearly suggests the spiritual strength of the rural blacks and their struggle. Acceptance of this long journey towards respectability is seen in the people's behaviors to Miss Jane and the tree.

On days when I'm feeling real good, I can go all the way to the road and look at the river. But generally I just go up the quarters a piece and sit under my old tree. The people done fixed me a clean little spot there, and I can go up there and sit and talk to my tree, talk to myself, talk to my God till I get tired. Sometimes I stay there an hour thanking Him for His blessings, then I come on back home. (p. 211)

In the introduction of the story, a reporter comes to Miss Jane out of respect to the old and the wise, as Miss Jane respects the tree for being old and wise. The tree's life is history. Each perennial ring of the tree's trunk symbolizes knowledge gained through trials of natural
surroundings; Miss Jane's wrinkles of old age symbolize the trials of black life through the years of slavery to the present. The trees cannot talk of what they have seen and of what they have learned; but, Miss Jane can. Her history is the tree's voice explaining the lives of the rural Louisiana people planted in traditionalism.

Water, another image, carries a message similar to that of trees throughout Gaines's fiction. In his earlier works, the water imagery just happens to occur. Gaines does not use it to suggest the quality of human life surrounding the water in the same way he has used trees to reflect the accepted values of the old social system and tradition of the past. In later works he uses water imagery more symbolically. In several instances, the water reflects the Southern social stratification. In both Catherine Carmier and Of Love and Dust, the river on the bayou is simply for the pleasure of the white elite. Again, as Catherine arrives as the novel begins, the "river was very calm and blue," just mirroring the calmness of the day and yet, the unexpected. Brother, Jackson's friend, "watched the boats until they were out of sight. . ." (pp. 5-6) Even later, Gaines has the confused Jackson Bradley looking at the river.

Jackson drank from his Coca-Cola bottle and looked at the river. A sailboat halfway out was drifting leisurely toward Bayonne. Jackson could see that the people on the boat were white. They were diving off the boat, swimming away from it, then back to the boat again. Jackson watched them awhile, and looked away. What a place to be in. Nothing to do, nowhere to go--unless you wanted to go to a sideroom for a bottle of beer. (p. 174)

Here, Jackson's characterization illustrates the frustration of living in a small rural society. The life is limited and boxes Jackson in,
although the rural people have accepted their confined lives there.

Jackson realizes at this moment that he cannot stay in the rural community and desires to leave as soon as he informs his Aunt Charlotte of his decision.

In Of Love and Dust, the river is used in a similar way.

The pecan tree was no more than three or four feet from the highway. On the other side of the highway was the river. You had to climb through a barbwire fence and feel your way down a steep, grassy bank before you came to the water. Right now the river was clear and blue. Later this evening when it got cool, the white people would be out in their boats. (p. 8)

Here, the barbwire serves as protection against intruders and makes access to the river difficult for the common people. In both references, the water is for white use only.

In The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman, Gaines implements through the water image various connotations of the Afro-American heritage. During slavery, black Americans traveled across the water to freedom, and frequently, the freedom seeker's death in this struggle. Throughout the novel, telling her story, Miss Jane "has the superstitious wisdom of the folk, finding extra strength in rivers and trees, and facing nature's retaliation when we go a little too far in attempting to curb it."¹

During the Civil War years, the Mississippi River was the road to freedom in the North for many freed slaves. After the patroller's massacre of Big Laura, Ned's mother, and other freed slaves, Jane Pittman and Ned Douglass, small children, continue the river's route to the North, hoping to reach Ohio. At various large sections of the Mississippi, the river's

¹ Bryant, "Change, Growth, and History," loc. cit., p. 361.
vastness epitomizes the initial struggle for freedom. Returning to the swamp area until Jane and Ned learn how to cross the river, by their actions they parallel the numerous strategies black Americans employed to obtain their freedom.

... When the sun went down and the stars came out, we travelled by the North Star. We didn't stop that night till we came up to a river. But I could see it was too wide and too deep for us to cross, so we moved back in the swamps for the night. (p. 24)

Ironically, after the Civil War years and during the Reconstruction Era, the water becomes a deathbed for many black Americans still willing to die for freedom.

... We had a bayou some five miles from where I lived that they call Dirty Bayou. The people used to run in the Bayou to throw the dogs off their scent, and that's how the patrollers used to catch them. The bayou was too wide and boggy and the slaves couldn't swim--they had to wade over--and that's how the patrollers would catch them. That Bayou got more people in it than a graveyard. (p. 71)

The bayou is a coffin for those who strive for freedom.

Water represents death for other characters in The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman; especially the deaths of two important men in Jane Pittman's life. The first man is Ned Douglass, who had followed Jane in their beginning struggle for freedom. Educated, Ned returns to build a school and to instruct the rural black people in Frederick Douglass's philosophy to unite and fight for human rights. On the day of his speech delivery to the people on the river bank of St. Charles, the whites send Cajun observers to watch from the water and report their observations. The men are seen by the people on the river bank. Ned's daughter points them out.
She pointed at the two men fishing in a boat now. They were close enough for me to see who they was--two of the Le Clex brothers from Bayonne. They made their living on seine boat running up and down St. Charles River. (p. 107)

The men are identified as Le Clex brothers, Cajuns who are known as hired killers. Their presence verifies the fears of Ned's death since he speaks so strongly for equal human rights which was greatly opposed by wealthy southern whites. Ned realizes this and accepts his fate. Death is inevitable in the struggle. The river appears to calmly support death for Ned while harboring his killers. The boat and killers demonstrate the continuous oppression of the Black Americans.

Ned got quiet and looked at us a long time. His eyes was sad again now. Behind him the river was blue and calm; nothing to disturb the water--but that boat over to the right there. (p. 112)

Before Ned's death, Jane is afraid of the water for it carries death. After Ned's speech, Jane believes Ned is going to drown.

I was so scared for Ned's life, I was scared the white people might pay some of them bigger children to drown him. He would always come out, the water when he saw me sitting there on Pigeon. (p. 114)

When she comes to visit Ned, Ned meets her on the land. She feels that she is calling him to safety.

Jane dreams about his death in the swamp a few nights before he is killed by Albert Cluveau. She says, "Two nights before he was killed I had a dream where a bunch of Cajuns had lynched him in the swamps." (p. 114) Ned accuses her of being foolish and tells her not to frighten his wife. However, Ned is murdered by Albert Cluveau. He is killed on the road to Bayonne as he is going to pick up lumber for the school.
Without fear, Ned meets death when Albert Cluveau guns him down on the road.

Bam and Alcee didn't go after Cluveau, they picked up Ned and laid him on top the lumber. The lumber was red when they go home. Blood dripped through the lumber on the ground. A trail of blood all the way from where Ned was shot clear up to his house. Even the rain couldn't wash the blood away. For years and years, even after they had graveled the road, you could still see little black spots where the blood had dripped. (p. 116)

The struggle of black education in the South was emphasized with his burial.

He is buried side the place where he was building his school. The people finished the school after his death, but it was destroyed during the second high water. That was back in '27 when we had a very bad high water. We had one in '12, but the one in '27 was much worse. Ned used to live on the field side of the road; his school was on the river bank side of the road. (p. 113)

Gaines uses water as a symbol of death with Jimmy Aaron and as a symbol of the continual struggle for freedom and equal rights in the sixties. When Jimmy, called "The One," is born on the Simpson plantation, he is to continue the struggle for black manhood. His death occurs in changing segregation laws in the South beginning with Jim Crow laws about the usage of the white water fountain in Bayonne. While Jimmy tries to desegregate the use of the water fountain, he is killed.

In the previous examples, the water compromises the white man's control of black Americans. However, within the novel, water is a respected powerful force which cannot be controlled by man, whether he is white or black. The white can conquer and enslave the Indians and Negroes, but not the God-given spirit of the river. Jane verifies the spirit to be the spirit of the black man's struggle with high respect and nobility.
she holds for water, as well as for trees. The river retaliates for the
white man's unnatural ways to control a natural force.

The damage from that high water was caused by man, be-
cause man wanted to control the rivers, and you cannot con-
trol water. The old people, the Indians, used to worship
the rivers till the white people came here and conquered
them and tried to conquer the rivers, too. Now, when I say
they used to worship the rivers I don't mean they used to
call the river God... But they thought the river had
extra strength, and I find no fault in that. (p. 147)

Gaines allows Miss Jane to explain the power of water as a force that
cannot be controlled in highly imagistic language.

Coming like a whirlwind, coming like a train, like
thunder, like guns roaring. Taking everything up in its
way-showing that little Frenchman who had lived long before
who was still boss. Taking up big trees by the roots,
taking houses with the people still in them. Nothing to
see mules, cows, dogs, pigs floating on the water. Nothing
to see people in trees, people on top of houses waiting for
boats to pick them up. Days and days, I don't know quite
how long, before it stopped. But it hadn't really stopped.
The force had just gone out of the water. The water was
still there. It was just flowing now smooth and quiet.
Like a snake in the grass, like a cloud. The sun was out,
the sky was blue, and you said to yourself: "Thank the Lord;
over at least." But that was before you looked over your
creeping up on you.

Now he's built his concrete spillways to control the
water. But one day the water will break down his spillways
just like it broke through the levee. That little French-
man was long dead when the water broke his levee in '27,
and these that built the spillways will be long dead too,
but the water will never die. That same water the Indians
used to believe in will run free again. You just wait and
see.

The water, just like the trees, operates continuously throughout Gaines's
literature supporting regionalism. These two motifs constantly emphasize
the evil system in which Gaines's characters are trapped by the Southern
historical past; and if characters did not conform to the land's laws,
death is the punishment, spiritually or physically.
Dust is symbolic of death and change within the rural community. When dust is present, it is associated with heat, accentuating the suffering of various characters who are deeply involved in overcoming the southern social code. The fictional work that uses dust as symbolic of death is Of Love and Dust. Dust is the image that announces the demise of Marcus Payne's and Louise Bonbon's relationship since they fall in love and this is not acceptable if one is a black man and the other is a Cajun woman. Gaines himself acknowledges the use of this image in the novel's characterizations.

You're absolutely right that dust is the opposite of love. I think that the dust is death. When a man dies he returns to dust. If you lived on a plantation you would find that there's no value to dust at all; it's just there. Dust is the first thing Jim sees when he's sitting out on the porch at the beginning of the novel. When the dust finally settles, Marcus is walking toward the house. So the dust brings Marcus to the plantation. The dust is always there. Whenever Marcus goes by Louise's place the dust rises, or whenever Marshall Habert moves around in his car, the dust starts flying. Louise realizes at the end that it is the opposite of love. It is the symbol of death.1

Jim Kelly, as the novel's narrator, frequently takes note of the effects of dust.

From the gallery I could see that dust coming down the quarter, coming fast, and I thought to myself "who in the world be driving like that?" I got up to go inside until the dust settled. . . . The dust was still flying across the yard, but it wasn't nearly as thick now. I looked toward the road and I saw somebody coming in the gate. It was too dark to tell if he was white or colored. (p. 3)

When the novel begins, the three male characters, Sidney Bonbon, Marcus Payne, and Jim Kelly are present. Before the end of the novel, each

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dies or a portion of his life is ended. Marcus dies violently. He is killed by Bonbon.

The importance of dust is most visible in Marcus' arrival at Bonbon's house to pick up Louise. Sun, a field hand on the plantation, narrates his view of Marcus' arrival and the flying dust verifies Marcus' death.

Sun felt more scared now and walked faster. Then he saw a car coming toward him--no, he saw dust. The dust was flying all over the quarter. In front of the car, coming up the quarter with no lights on. The car stopped in front of Bonbon's house, and somebody got out and ran in the yard. Sun had come up to the car by the time the other person came with a package in his arms, and now he saw the other person was Marcus. (p. 274)

Here, the love and dust theme of the two lovers, Louise and Marcus, is analyzed by a critic, Jerry Bryant.

A love had developed between Marcus and Louise, which neither romantic or sentimental, is much more real than the estranged relationship between the white man and his white wife. But the old code prohibits any of these principals from following their natural inclinations--Marcus and Louise to marry, Bonbon to settle down with the black woman he loves. Bonbon must protect his honor. In both novels (Of Love and Dust and Catherine Carmier), the vital, the reproductive lose out. The old try to extend themselves beyond time.  

Repeating the division of the old and the new conflict, the dust image supports regionalism in Louise and Bonbon's characterizations.

For Bonbon, death comes when he is forced to leave the plantation since Louise's relatives will expect him to go or die by their hands. Jim Kelly's reaction to the dust or death is one of avoidance. Just as he moves himself into the house to get away from the dust, he moves

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Jerry Bryant, "Change, Growth and History," loc. cit., p. 854.
uninvolved and passively through the many crises of the novel. Jim's most obvious involvement is his leaving the plantation following Marcus's death and Bonbon's release from his position; however, this is also weak in action since he is avoiding possible death for Marcus's behavior.

In The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman, dust appears frequently symbolizing death and change. Dust enters in the movement of the Confederate and Yankee troops during the War. Jane Pittman begins her narration of the Civil War Years: "It was a day something like right now, dry, hot, and dusty, dusty. It migh'a' been July, I'm not too sure, but it was July or August." (p. 3) Here again, dust is accompanied by heat to accentuate the suffering of those involved; especially the combating armies which passed the plantation where Jane is a slave. The Confederate troops, resting for only a moment, reveal the hardships of the War while the Yankee soldiers pursue them close behind.

It is when the Yankees arrive at the Plantation that dust indicates the death of slavery and hopeful change for slaves, freedom. Jane's acceptance of the name a Yankee soldier gives her supports hope for freedom. The Yankees leave in pursuit of the Confederate troops and Jane watches: "after they had made the bend, I stood there and watched the dust high over the fields." (p. 9) At the end of the novel, dust on the road symbolizes change as people follow Jane Pittman to Bayonne to continue the civil rights activities initiated by Jimmy.

The person was too far for me to make out who it was; all I could see was a dark form in the white dust. We hadn't gone too much farther when Etineen, a worker, said it looked like two or three more people was coming that way. (p. 243)

Here, the dust has a double, but transitional, meaning of progress,
as well as death. The progress comes in the uniting of the people to continue Jimmy's purpose of desegregation.

The last reference to dust combines death and the repeated struggle of the black man towards freedom in the characters of Ned and Jimmy. Jane takes the saying of a white woman and changes it to apply to Ned's death. "The precious blood of the south, the precious blood of the south. Well, there on that river bank is the precious dust of the south. And he is there for all to see." (pp. 113-14) With Jimmy, she states: "He kissed me good night and left. The dust followed the car down the quarters. You could feel the dust in your skin when it drifted from the road and settled on the gallery." (p. 233) In both, the eminent message is that the black man's struggle for equal rights is often answered by death; but a victory still occurs if death is with dignity.

These images, the tree, river, water and dust, support regionalism in Gaines's characterizations and setting. As seen in the trees, Gaines implies various meaning to their existence in the Southern Louisiana terrain. The terrain that Gaines speaks about proves significant in viewing him as a regionalist writer. Each image makes a statement about the South that he knew, praised, and enlightened upon the printed page.
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