

CHANGE IN ERNEST J. GAINES' CATHERINE CARMIER

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Many commentators have noted that the issues of change, whether individual, social, or economic, are clearly in the forefront of Gaines' fiction. Michel Fabre observes that despite the increasing threat to the old order which modernity poses, Gaines depicts a «universe [which] remains a stable one.»¹ Similarly, Charles H. Rowell views Gaines as an author recording «a static world fiercely resistant to change.»² However, John O'Brien is of the opinion that «unlike Faulkner, who was enamored of the past because its strict social order at least offered man stability, Gaines in his fiction labors to escape the immobile past and to view change as necessary in sustaining life.»³ Clearly, critical opinions differ significantly about Gaines' treatment of this theme. This paper discusses change in *Catherine Carmier*, Ernest Gaines' first novel published in 1964. Some of the questions it seeks to answer are: how does Gaines understand change? Is he for or against change?

Noting the recurring themes in Ernest J. Gaines' fiction, Hoyt Fuller remarked that Gaines is concerned with

the conflict of eras. The new world of mobility and expanded possibilities impinges on the old world of land love and solid, accepted social stratification. The realities of the plantation culture gradually surrender to the demands of industrial pace and technology. The once-rigid poles which separated whites from cajun, and cajun from mulatto, and mulatto from black, have been bent out of shape.⁴

The collision of eras Fuller mentions is one of the catalyses of change. The discussion is done through the examination of in-between attitudes and races, and

different strategies of survival which result when «the new world impinges on the old,» and «the once-rigid poles» separating races tend to bend.

Like all of Gaines' works, *Catherine Carmier* is set in the fictitious Bayonne area in Southern Louisiana. In this novel, Gaines provides the reader with a conflict between generations, played by a mosaic of characters, women and men, who fit an era of change made of doubts and conflicts. The change is brought on Grover plantation by technology and education. On the one hand, with their tractors, the Cajuns have virtually put the black farmers out of business. The young are leaving their birthplace to find work in the cities. On the other hand, education appears equally disruptive. Aunt Charlotte has paid for Jackson's education in the hope that he will return to teach in their community and make her proud. But education is a consciousness-changing process. It has taken Jackson from his initial acceptance of the constraints of racial prejudice into a state of mind imposed by frustrations, in which resistance to the existing scheme of things, his only clear direction, is complicated by his love for Aunt Charlotte. It is clear, however, that traditions and institutions, religion, share-cropping, folkways, unwritten laws handed down from generation to generation, no longer bind Jackson to his people. He adds to his Aunt's anguish and to his community's disappointment by pursuing Catherine, the Creole girl. He challenges prevailing conditions and causes the people to examine their values, and thereby acts as an agent of change. Gaines structures his novel around a pattern of doubleness and ambivalence. The doubleness and ambivalence are revealed through the

characters' attitudes and choices, Gaines' own position in presenting them, and in the narrative itself. *Catherine Carmier* introduces the themes that Gaines uses in all of his fiction: the opposition between past and present, old and young, and oral and written. It suggests the passing of an era and the coming of a new one with the people stubbornly resisting the wind of change.

At twenty-two, Jackson Bradley, after graduating from college in San Francisco, returns to the Grove plantation, his birthplace and childhood home. He brings back a new perspective and set of values, acquired through his life «up North» and the literacy that makes him reject his people's tradition. It is fitting that nobody else understands Jackson except Madame Bayonne, his former schoolteacher, the other literate person in the black community. Madame Bayonne, a perspicacious old woman, is not unlike Madame Toussaint in the story «A Long Day in November.»⁵ Nobody willingly associates with her. The children accuse her of being a witch, but the intelligence she has of everything going on comes from her deep knowledge of human nature and of her community, and, Gaines suggests, from her literacy. As Keith Byerman points out, Madame Bayonne «combines... the wisdom of the folk and the critical perception of the larger society.»⁶ She has achieved that critical perception through education, which she and Jackson are the only ones among the blacks to share. Madame Bayonne's position resonates with the words of a character in Richard Wright's novel, *The Outsider*:

Negroes are going to be gifted with a double vision, for, being Negroes, they are going to be both inside and outside of our culture at the same time... they will become psychological men [and women], centers of knowledge, so to speak.⁷

Because she is equally both inside and outside of black culture, Madame Bayonne can relate to the people and to Jackson, and tell him the history of the community and explain the reasons why things are the way they are. At bottom, Wright and Gaines refer to the ambivalent nature of black existence in America, which W.E.B. Dubois termed double-consciousness. Dubois' idea has become central in the description of the cultural ambivalence of the African-American. The term doubleness is also fitting in that it describes the notion of «in-betweenness» or borderland and also points to the way in which Madame Bayonne, a character in the novel, is caught in the structure whereby she tends to become a narrator when she is given the task of providing background information.

Ambivalence, revealed in the character of educated Madame Bayonne, so knowledgeable in customs and traditional laws, is a pattern that informs the whole novel. It can be found in almost all the values and characters that it presents: Jackson wants to cast the past aside, but he can't bring himself to do it; he rejects the church, but ironically it is that institution, through Reverend Armstrong's lecture that to love, not «to have, to possess,» is the Christian way, that convinces Aunt Charlotte to let Jackson follow his own path; Catherine vacillates between Jackson and Raoul; Raoul, the last male Creole on the plantation, is rejected by whites. Along with this, his unwillingness to ally himself with blacks is a dead end journey. The characters' ambivalence reveals Gaines' own refusal to provide an easy answer to the characters' dilemmas. Gaines understands how inadequate such an answer would be. The old ways are neither wholly laudable nor wholly without merit. The future is both open and dangerous.

Most of these characters, particularly Jackson, Catherine, and Raoul, find themselves in the position of Edward Said's critic. They stand between two poles that claim their whole beings. One is the culture to which they are filially bound. Indeed, for Said, this would be a clear case of filiation. Black culture is Madame Bayonne's and Jackson's filiation whereas Creole culture is Catherine and Raoul's. But if we postulate, as the larger society does, that Creole equals black, then, the concept of filiation becomes hard to define. And if one remembers that Creole is both black and white, a definition appears even more complicated. The question here is: can one have several filiations? The second pole that claims the characters is what Said calls «a method or a system acquired affiliatively,»¹ by social ties and/or education, such as Madame Bayonne's and Jackson's education or Jackson's relationship with Catherine. This system cuts across filiative difference, and has the potential to include Jackson and Catherine.

(Footnotes)

¹ Michel, Fabre, «Bayonne or the Yoknapatawpha of Ernest Gaines,» *Callaloo*, 1 (1978), Special Gaines Issue, p. 113.

² Charles, H. Rowell, «The Quarters: Ernest Gaines and the Sense of Place,» *The Southern Review*, 21 (1985), p. 735.

³ John, O'Brien, *Interviews with Black Writers*, New York: Liveright, 1973, p. 79.

⁴ Hoyt, Fuller, «Books Noted», *Negro Digest*, 16 (1967), p. 51

⁵ Ernest, J. Gaines, «A Long Day in November» in *Bloodline*, New York: The Dial Press, pp. 1-.

⁶ Keith Byerman, «Fingering the Jagged Grain: Tradition and Form», in *Recent Black Fiction*, Athens, The University of Georgia Press, 1985, p. 69.

⁷ Richard Wright, *The Outsider*, New York: Doubleday, 1965, p. 129.

Though education may create a bond, as between Madame Bayonne and Jackson, Gaines shows how in other instances it acts as a barrier. We recall Madame Bayonne's peculiar position in the community. Additionally, Gaines writes that after Jackson greets the people, they waited for him to make the first move. He had been educated, not they. They did not know how to meet and talk to educated people. They did not know what to talk about. So let him start the conversation, and if possible, they would follow².

Since Jackson too is at a loss for words, no real communication takes place, and the impression he conveys is that of a «stuckup,» somebody who feels superior to them, because he is educated. His leaving the house with Madame Bayonne further drives the people away from him. The welcome party, in some degree a celebration of cultural identity, turns out to be a disastrous event. It marks openly the beginning of the ever increasing gap between Jackson and his people. With Mary Louise, a childhood girlfriend, Jackson tries to minimize his achievement, when obviously impressed, she admiringly looks and smiles at him after he shows her the book he has been reading. The opposition between Jackson and his people is first the one between the intellectual whose education has cut him off from his people who are more attuned to folk culture. But that opposition is also the one between a tradition and any individual who takes a stance against it, or even a critical stance in favor of it.

The Grove plantation is a place where beliefs, dreams, values, and attitudes are grounded in the past and in tradition. Gaines reinforces the idea that the past and tradition are important in this culture when he writes that to talk to Mack Grover, the white landowner, Robert Carmier takes his hat off, not because he thought he should, «but because someone in the past had told him this was the proper thing to do when asking for a favor» (CC, p.9). Gaines also stresses some of the beliefs in the culture when he writes that after Robert's disappearance, it was believed that his house was haunted and that his «ghost had been seen several times by several different persons» (CC, p. 14). Tradition is also shown as static. When in the early part of the novel Jackson and Brother meet at the bus station, the latter exclaims, «Damn it, man, you done growed some there. I wouldn't 'a' knowed you.» To this Jackson answers: «you look the same,» and Brother acknowledges: «Me, I never grow» (CC, p. 18).

These remarks run deeper than they seem to. The sameness and lack of growth are emblematic of

the whole black community. Echoes of the demonstrations and freedom rides of the civil rights movements are heard, but do not seem to affect the place. The fact is the people and the place have undergone very few changes since Jackson left about a decade before. Very little social growth has occurred. Jackson, on the other hand, has grown, not just physically, but also intellectually. Actually, a few days on the plantation show he has outgrown his birthplace and his culture. This fact is made clear when he visits his school building and ponders: «How small was the yard... What had happened? Had he grown so big or had the place actually shrunk in those ten years?» (CC, p.192). Maybe both, for, the place has metaphorically shrunk in pursuing its practices and customs inherited from the past.

One such local custom, reminiscent of Dubois' theory of a «Talented Tenth,» is the idea that at least one of their youth must be educated in order to return and educate the others. Thus, everybody, and particularly Aunt Charlotte, the old woman who brought Jackson Bradley up until he left for California, and who was the main standard bearer of traditional culture among the blacks, expect him to come back, teach, and thereby redeem them, in fulfillment of a boyhood vow. Accordingly, Aunt Charlotte tells Jackson, in ever' family, they ought to be somebody to do something. We ain't had that somebody in this family yet... I don't mean to preach to you. I never had to, 'cause you always knowed right from wrong. But I just want you to know... you all they is left, Jackson. You all us can count on. If you fail, that's all for us (CC, p. 98).

Jackson, then, is the torch-bearer, the hope of the whole community. But Jackson has come for final goodbyes. He feels no interest in actions directed at group liberation. Having heard that the Cajuns suspect him of being a civil rights activist, he reflects: «What a joke. He a Freedom Rider? And what would he try to integrate, this stupid grocery store?» (CC, pp. 174-75). Jackson does not fit the image of the Freedom Rider who engages in sit-ins to reach his goal of desegregation, and in his own mind, he is not one, but in a sense, he is. He refuses to use the segregated sideroom in the local general store. He does not respect the color line in his wooing of Catherine. It should come as no surprise to him that he is regarded as a threat both by the Cajuns who want to maintain their domination over the blacks, and by the blacks who have adjusted themselves to that domination and who fear his action will further endanger them. However, Jackson's concern is to find a place where he can fit,

for, as the text makes clear, he feels at home neither in the South nor in San Francisco:

He [Jackson] was feeling empty. He did not like being empty—unable to recognize things, things unable to associate himself with things. He did not like being unable to recognize the graves. He did not like being unable to associate with the people. He did not like being unable to go to church with his aunt, or to drink in the sideroom with Brother. What then? Was it to be there? No, that was not it either. If neither there nor here, neither the living nor the dead, then what? (CC, p. 191).

The narrative, at this moment of inner crisis, uses free indirect discourse. It is impossible to distinguish a separate narrator's voice from Jackson's in this passage. The fundamental ambiguity and complexity of free indirect discourse reflects on the level of fictional technique Jackson's confusion.

Jackson, then, is a rootless individual confronting existential problems, «the experience of meaninglessness... the awareness of finitude which is anxiety... estrangement from oneself and one's world.»³ Jackson's feelings correspond to the emptiness and estrangement that Tillich talks about. Jack Hicks refers to *Catherine Carmier* as Gaines' «personal version of the white 'existential' novel.»⁴ This existential texture, moreover, has precedents in African-American literary history. Richard Wright's short story «The Man Who Lived Underground,» for example, shows the black as an individual with universal existential problems. Alienation, isolation, and crisis of identity can be found in many African-American writers' portrayal of black people. The depiction of black culture with its beliefs, customs and practices makes *Catherine Carmier* a «black» novel. On the other hand, the existential texture gives it a universal interest. These two aspects give Gaines' text a double-voiced accent which still echoes Dubois' coinage and my own «in-betweenness.»

In the description of Jackson's emptiness and estrangement from his people's culture, the «black» and the «universal,» aspects converge to stress the importance of black traditional culture. Jackson's inability to communicate with almost anybody and to recognize any grave in the cemetery as he once could when he was a child are the expressions of the agony of somebody alienated from his roots. The cause of the alienation, if we deduce from the marginal position of the two intellectuals in the community, Madame Bayonne and Jackson, lies in a large measure in their education that makes them critical of their culture. That culture nurtures the people immersed in it and help them bear

adversity and avoid the kind of psychological problems Jackson experiences. Norman Harris points to a feature found in black fiction when he writes that «the more immersed a character is in the folk culture the more likely he/she is to be able to resolve conflicts.»⁵ This feature, which is a stress on the importance of black culture, has sometimes been criticized as narrowing the scope and interest of works by blacks. I contend that instead, it appeals to a general audience's romantic nostalgia for filiation, for one's past, and for the sense of belonging. In *Catherine Carmier*, the party signals Jackson's open detachment from his community, but it also works as a means for the group members to relate to one another and to bring them in communion. Thus, the people discuss their dire condition brought about by the Cajun invasion, and despite the bleakness of their predicament, there is humor in their discussion. This is because the strong sense that they have of their culture sustains them. Similarly, Madame Bayonne, more integrated in that culture than Jackson, is also more able to resolve her psychological problems than the latter who lacks any vital connection with the community.

The traditional culture's ability to sustain the characters immersed in it does not mean that Gaines finds no faults with it. Describing the Carmier house, he writes:

the house looked no different from the way he left it ten years ago. Regardless of how bright the sun was shining, the big trees in the yard always kept the yard and the house in semidarkness... The Cajuns have taken over the land and some of the people have gone away, but the ones who are left are the same as they ever were. Just as that house and those trees were and will always be (CC, pp. 30-31).

Here, Gaines restates the stasis of the people and the region, mentioned earlier, and implies that the characters on the plantation refuse to change. With their tradition and values, they live in semidarkness, and those who do not wish to do so must leave. On the one hand, attachment to the culture inherited from the past sustains the people, on the other, it affects their lives in a negative way.

Jackson does not see the immersion in his culture as something with which to replace the emptiness within himself. For him, Catherine's love will give direction and meaning to his life. But, as Thadious Davis remarks, «attaining Catherine is a direct way of retrieving the past for him.»⁶ Thus, if Jackson rejects his birthplace and the ways of its people, he also accepts them. for.

Catherine represents them. Davis expresses this ambivalence when he goes on to say:

Catherine, with her complex ties to Louisiana, the place and the people, is Jackson's way of accepting the nostalgia and the substance of his Aunt Charlotte's for what was a strong relationship between two individuals in the past. Catherine is a means of accepting, while ostensibly rejecting, the Louisiana that was formerly personified by Charlotte.⁷

Indeed Catherine's love is for Jackson, a way of remaining attached to his traditional past. But this love is also for Jackson, a way of breaking through all the boundaries that family, region, convention, and color impose on him and on Catherine, his Creole girl friend.

Like the Cajuns, the Creoles are French descendants. But they also have a trace of black ancestry, and that places them below the Cajuns, but above the dark-skinned blacks, on the Southern social scale. Separation of the races is the rule. The store has a separate room for the blacks in the back, and no one has ever challenged this arrangement. Colored people and whites alike strive to carry on the inheritance of the past and resist change.

The rich white landowners, represented by the drunkard Bud Grover, at the top of the Southern social scale, take the land away from the blacks and give it to the Cajuns, as racial solidarity dictates. But the Cajuns work the land voraciously without love. Brother speaks of «destroying some land» (CC, p. 6) when he refers to the work they will do with their tractors, a sign of the inhuman and modern industrial world now invading the South. The landlord's alcoholism and the Cajuns' lack of organic relationship with the land suggest a deteriorating world whose hope of moral rejuvenation lies in the young like Jackson who dare confront and challenge its obsolete values and laws. But at the same time, there is another side at work in Gaines' portraits of the blacks and the Cajuns. Gaines implies that the

former have dwelt too long on the old ways not all of which are necessarily worth preserving or perpetuating. As for the latter, although they lack organic relationship with the land, they have moved with time. With their machines, they fare much better than the blacks and produce more for the rich landowner, which is one reason why he had rather they work the land.

Another reason why the planter's preference goes to the Cajuns, the most important, is that here, as in the stories in *Bloodline*, race is the final determinant of difference. The skin color, no matter how white it is if a character descends from slaves, determines who gets the land, just as it determines who patronizes which doctor in «The Sky is Gray,» and who uses the front door in «Bloodline.» As Henry Louis Gates, Jr. indicates,

race has become a trope of ultimate irreducible difference between cultures, linguistic groups, or adherents of specific belief systems which—more often than not—also have fundamentally opposed economic interests.¹

In *Catherine Carmier*, race stands as the «trope of ultimate irreducible difference.» As stated above, its politics do not oppose the landlord's and the Cajuns' economic interests. The last black to hold out against the Cajun take-over is Raoul, Catherine's father.

Raoul represents the Creole tradition, handed down from generation to generation, which Madame Bayonne explains:

Raoul has been Della's husband only by law. Other than that, it's been the land... Why the land? It happened long before Raoul was born. Probably his [Raoul's] greatgrandfather 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 (CC, p. 116).

The text gives ample proof that Madame Bayonne is right in her assessment. Raoul, the last of the Carmier males on Grover plantation, works in his field until it is pitch dark. The land constitutes his favorite conversation subject. In spite of the white man's proclaimed superiority, the male Carmiers, especially Raoul, are extremely proud and believe no man, white or black, is better than a Carmier, as shown in the conflict between Robert, Raoul's father, and a Cajun which leads to the disappearance of the former. Their contempt for dark-skinned people is also amply documented. Gaines

(Footnotes)

¹ Edward Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic*. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1983, p. 25.

² Ernest J. Gaines, *Catherine Carmier*. San Francisco, North Point Press, 1981, p. 67. All further references will be to this edition and will occur parenthetically within the text preceded by CC.

³ Quoted from Paul Tillich, in Chester Hedgepeth, Jr., *Theories of Social Action in Black Literature*. New York, Peter Lang, 1986, p. 37.

⁴ Jack Hicks. «To Make These Bones Live: History and Community in Ernest Gaines's Fiction.» *Black American Literature Forum*, 11 (1977), p. 9.

⁵ Norman Harris. «Introduction,» *Connecting Times: The Sixties in Afro-American Fiction*. Jackson, The University of Mississippi Press, 1988, p. 5.

⁶ Thadious M. Davis, «Headlands and Quarters: Louisianain *Catherine Carmier*,» *Callaloo*, 7 (1984), p. 8.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

writes they have little «use for dark-skin people,» and indeed, Raoul hires workers of his own color at harvest time. He also rejects his wife not because she has been unfaithful to him, but because she has gone with a black man. Lillian, the Carmier daughter who has been brought up by Raoul's relatives in New Orleans, voices the same prejudice: «I'm not black, Cathy. I hate black. I hate black worse than the whites hate it» (CC, p. 48). In short, the Creoles think they are unique, and they must assert and preserve their uniqueness.

This thought has a basis in Louisiana history. In colonial and ante-bellum Louisiana, Creoles, whom Thadious Davis calls «gens de couleur,» had privileges and opportunities that neither «other part-blacks, [nor even Creoles] outside the state»² were accorded. Some exclusively Creole communities still exist, but in general, Creoles have acknowledged their common racial bond with dark-skinned blacks, and today, most of them have integrated into black culture, and a few have passed into the white world as Raoul's daughter, Lillian, intends to.

Raoul is among those who refuse to relinquish the Creole identity. He refuses to ally himself to darker blacks even though, they, too, are being displaced by the Cajuns. However, as Davis notes, «the boundaries encircling the quarters—the physical and psychological boundaries—enclose all the people of color, and thus, his attempt to establish artificial internal boundaries and create the crime of trespassing is ineffectual, even ludicrous».³ The whites consider blacks and Creoles as the same, but the Creoles insist on a social and cultural difference from blacks.

The Creoles' insistence on a separate identity is an attempt to escape the trope of race. Since blacks have been defined as inferior, as the «other», to claim a different identity is to refuse the status of that «other.» But the whites' attitude shows the Creoles' and blacks' sameness as well as their difference: they are all segregated against; the former are about to lose their land, and the latter have already lost theirs. Raoul feels no sense of inclusion in white society and, resorting to the same prejudice, he rejects black society which could have been the source of a fruitful affiliation. This is not to say that there is no difference between Creoles and blacks. The difference is one of social class, but race being the trope of ultimate difference, Raoul should have been open to the possibility of affiliation. However, he chooses to stand single-handedly against the Cajuns and their machines, and refuses to ally himself to the darker blacks, even though they, too, have already been displaced by the same Cajuns. In so doing, Raoul helps perpetuate the system which alienates and marginalizes

him as it does the blacks, who have accepted the Creoles' demarcation.

In everybody's eyes, Jackson, then, crosses a forbidden line when he pursues Catherine Carmier the way he does. It is no wonder his family and hers are against the match. Jackson's action is another trope to counter the Creoles'. Raoul's attitude is a trope of difference, Jackson's is a trope of sameness. Consciously or not, Jackson signifies on the Creole's position. Moreover, his refusal to give Catherine up, like his refusal to conform to the role that Aunt Charlotte and his community have created for him, shows both his refusal to accommodate himself to the established rule and his desire to disrupt that rule.

Raoul's refusal to recognize that the uniqueness no longer exists leads him to self-isolation. His pride and stance, persevering when all the odds are against him, give him an heroic aura that not only his daughter Catherine, but also Jackson admires. As Aunt Charlotte relies on Jackson to redeem her remaining years, and refuses to share him with any other woman, so Raoul relies on Catherine's presence and love to sustain him in his fight against the Cajuns and their machines. This love is so deep that it has incestuous undertones, and makes Catherine hesitate to leave with Jackson.

The novel implies the disappearance of Aunt Charlotte's and Raoul's world. Jackson will depart from the South in his quest «to make something out of a senseless world» (CC, p. 81), leaving Aunt Charlotte to devote her remaining years to the church. In a similar vein, Raoul is irremediably alone in his pathetic and futile fight against The Cajuns. He has been so conditioned by the past to hate all blacks that he kills Mark, his illegitimate dark son, who could have carried on the fight. As Jackson has rejected black culture, so Lillian too rejects Creole culture, which she describes as the «middle of the road:»

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 (CC, p. 48).

Only Raoul chooses to remain in-between. Lillian chooses to be white. Presumably, this is her last visit to her family. She will go north to pass. But not all the Creoles will make the same choice. Given that choice, Della will prefer to be black. As Madame Bayonne explains to Jackson, «color is skin deep, and below that Della is as much Negro as you or I» (CC, p. 114). This is the idea that affiliation can be voluntary. These

internal differences which attest to the disparity in the Creoles' allegiance point to the disappearance not only of Creole culture, but of the Creole himself as a third caste. Raoul's defeat in the fist fight with Jackson, which shows him physically and spiritually crushed, underscores that idea.

The end of the novel leaves many elements on an uncertain note. In defeating Raoul, Jackson brings change in the major characters' lives. First, to my mind, this defeat compromises forever his and Catherine's life together. The last sentences read: «He watched her go into the house. He stood there, hoping that Catherine would come back outside. But she never did» (CC, p. 248). The tone here is noncommittal, leaving us the choice of a number of plausible readings. The word «never» gives the definitive impression Jackson will have to leave without Catherine. But one can look at things from the point of view of Della, for whom the change is for the better. Della sees a chance to work her way back into Raoul's affection. As Keith Byerman explains, Della is «in tune with the slow rhythms of the land and the folk»⁴. She has suffered for twenty years, never losing faith. There is no doubt in her mind that the fight has produced a new order. She tells Jackson: No, you right, you not a hero. But he's a proud man, and after what happened tonight, he won't even be able to raise his head in front of her like he done before. So that means she'll have to leave. He'll see to that. And then I get my chance—a chance I been waiting for twenty years (CC, p. 247).

By contrast, for Jackson who, in Byerman's words, «lives by the chronology of the modern, rational world,»⁵ such confidence and patience are difficult to possess. If he is to be reunited with Catherine, he must learn these qualities. Similarly, Catherine herself must undergo a change to be more aware of her own life as a separate individual instead of as a comforter to her father. The conditions for such changes are present in the novel even if Gaines does not make them clear.

Moreover, Gaines has said in an interview that Catherine is the kind of person who could not exist outside the South¹. Catherine is a strong woman who will not let her love for Jackson supersede her sense of obligation toward her father. These elements come in favor of an impossible future together for Catherine and Jackson. However, in her love for Jackson and in her decision to leave with him, she shows her capacity for affiliation. Given time and the new order brought about by Raoul's defeat, her filiation will leave enough room for affiliation. But where will Jackson take her? He wants to take her away, but he has nowhere to go, for, he feels at home nowhere. In contrast to Raoul's blindness to the choice of relationship with blacks, the lovers' choice to leave is not one, because it does not exist, and *Catherine Carmier* closes on an ambiguous note.

Catherine Carmier establishes the world that will be the setting of all of Gaines' fiction. In this world, the old order of separate races and ethnic group is being challenged, and the novel suggests it will eventually be replaced by a new one announced by the echoes of the civil rights demonstrations. But the time in *Catherine Carmier* is that of a border area, comprising at the same time elements of the change that some characters are pushing for and elements of the tradition that others want to preserve. Thus, Grove Plantation is an in-between world, with a mixture of races, cultures, and attitudes. Hence, the novel suggests that for Gaines, change is not the mere replacement of the old with the new, the past with the modern, but a blending of the positive aspects from both.

(Footnotes)

¹ Henry Louis Gates, Jr., «Editor's Introduction: Writing 'Race' and the Difference it Makes.» *Critical Inquiry*, 12 (1985), p. 5.

² Thadious M. Davis, *Headlands and Quarters*, p. 7.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Keith Byerman, *Fingering the Jagged Grain*, p. 70.

⁵ Ibid.

(Footnotes)

¹ Charles H. Rowell, «This Louisiana Thing That Drives Me,» *Callaloo*, 1 (1978). Special Gaines Issue, pp. 42-43.

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