

□ Contemporary
Literary Criticism

CLC

181

Volume 181

Contemporary Literary Criticism

Criticism of the Works
of Today's Novelists, Poets, Playwrights,
Short Story Writers, Scriptwriters, and
Other Creative Writers



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Contemporary Literary Criticism, Vol. 181

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LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOG CARD NUMBER 76-46132

ISBN 0-7876-6754-4
ISSN 0091-3421

Printed in the United States of America
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Preface

Named “one of the twenty-five most distinguished reference titles published during the past twenty-five years” by *Reference Quarterly*, the *Contemporary Literary Criticism (CLC)* series provides readers with critical commentary and general information on more than 2,000 authors now living or who died after December 31, 1999. Volumes published from 1973 through 1999 include authors who died after December 31, 1959. Previous to the publication of the first volume of *CLC* in 1973, there was no ongoing digest monitoring scholarly and popular sources of critical opinion and explication of modern literature. *CLC*, therefore, has fulfilled an essential need, particularly since the complexity and variety of contemporary literature makes the function of criticism especially important to today’s reader.

Scope of the Series

CLC provides significant passages from published criticism of works by creative writers. Since many of the authors covered in *CLC* inspire continual critical commentary, writers are often represented in more than one volume. There is, of course, no duplication of reprinted criticism.

Authors are selected for inclusion for a variety of reasons, among them the publication or dramatic production of a critically acclaimed new work, the reception of a major literary award, revival of interest in past writings, or the adaptation of a literary work to film or television.

Attention is also given to several other groups of writers—authors of considerable public interest—about whose work criticism is often difficult to locate. These include mystery and science fiction writers, literary and social critics, foreign authors, and authors who represent particular ethnic groups.

Each *CLC* volume contains individual essays and reviews taken from hundreds of book review periodicals, general magazines, scholarly journals, monographs, and books. Entries include critical evaluations spanning from the beginning of an author’s career to the most current commentary. Interviews, feature articles, and other published writings that offer insight into the author’s works are also presented. Students, teachers, librarians, and researchers will find that the general critical and biographical material in *CLC* provides them with vital information required to write a term paper, analyze a poem, or lead a book discussion group. In addition, complete biographical citations note the original source and all of the information necessary for a term paper footnote or bibliography.

Organization of the Book

A *CLC* entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** cites the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the author heading and the author’s actual name given in parenthesis on the first line of the biographical and critical information. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Single-work entries are preceded by a heading that consists of the most common form of the title in English translation (if applicable) and the original date of composition.
- A **Portrait of the Author** is included when available.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.

- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose works have been translated into English, the English-language version of the title follows in brackets. Unless otherwise indicated, dramas are dated by first performance, not first publication.
- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it appeared. All titles by the author featured in the text are printed in boldface type. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included.
- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism. Source citations in the Literary Criticism Series follow University of Chicago Press style, as outlined in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 14th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993).
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.
- Whenever possible, a recent **Author Interview** accompanies each entry.
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Gale.

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An alphabetical **Title Index** accompanies each volume of *CLC*. Listings of titles by authors covered in the given volume are followed by the author's name and the corresponding page numbers where the titles are discussed. English translations of foreign titles and variations of titles are cross-referenced to the title under which a work was originally published. Titles of novels, dramas, nonfiction books, and poetry, short story, or essay collections are printed in italics, while individual poems, short stories, and essays are printed in roman type within quotation marks.

In response to numerous suggestions from librarians, Gale also produces an annual cumulative title index that alphabetically lists all titles reviewed in *CLC* and is available to all customers. Additional copies of this index are available upon request. Librarians and patrons will welcome this separate index; it saves shelf space, is easy to use, and is recyclable upon receipt of the next edition.

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Ernest J. Gaines

1933-

(Full name Ernest James Gaines) American novelist and short story writer.

The following entry presents an overview of Gaines's career through 2002. For further information on his life and works, see *CLC*, Volumes 3, 11, 18, and 86.

INTRODUCTION

Counted among the most significant Southern writers of the past half-century, Gaines has consistently based his fictional work on the African American cultural and storytelling traditions of rural southern Louisiana despite living most of his adulthood elsewhere. Best known as the author of the critically acclaimed novels *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* (1971) and *A Lesson before Dying* (1993), Gaines has brought a new awareness of African American contributions to the history and culture of the American South. With authentic dialects and convincing characterization, Gaines has typically written first-person narratives that chronicle the struggles and sufferings of humble black protagonists who possess a strong attachment to the land. Many critics have observed the originality of Gaines's prose, noting the distance of his aesthetic philosophies from such contemporary literary trends as the Beat and the Black Arts movements. In addition, commentators have often compared Gaines's fictional treatment of his native Louisiana parish to that of William Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County and James Joyce's Dublin.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Born on January 15, 1933, in the bayous of Pointe Coupee Parish near Oscar, Louisiana, Gaines is the son of Manuel and Adrienne J. Gaines, who sharecropped at local plantation. As a youth, Gaines also worked the fields, digging potatoes for fifty cents a day from the time he was nine years old until he was fifteen. Augusteen Jefferson, a paraplegic aunt who served as the model for the recurrent aunt figure in Gaines's writings, effectively raised him and his twelve younger siblings while his parents worked. Jefferson continued to act as Gaines's guardian after his parents separated in 1941. Subsequently, Gaines lost touch with his father, who served in World War II before returning to New Orleans. In 1948 Gaines joined his mother and merchant marine



stepfather in Vallejo, California, where the couple had moved several years earlier. There, Gaines attended high school for the first time and developed a passion for reading, especially the novels of such Russian masters as Leo Tolstoy, Nikolay Gogol, and Ivan Turgenev. Gaines later attended Vallejo Junior College before he enlisted with the U.S. Army in 1953 to serve during the Korean War. After his tour of duty ended in 1955, Gaines enrolled at San Francisco State College. In 1956 he published his first short story about the rural South in the San Francisco magazine *Transfer*, and one year later, earned his bachelor's degree in 1957. In 1958 he received a Wallace Stegner fellowship and entered the graduate creative writing program at Stanford University. However, Gaines withdrew the following year after winning the Joseph Henry Jackson award for his short story "Comeback" and dedicated himself to writing full-time. He published his first major novel, *Catherine Carmier*, in 1964, followed by a collection of five short stories, *Bloodline*, in 1968 and the novel *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* in 1971. *The*

Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman was adapted as a critically acclaimed and highly popular television movie in 1974, which starred Cicely Tyson and won nine Emmy awards from the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences. Following the publication of *In My Father's House* (1978), which many critics have viewed as his most pessimistic work, Gaines's literary reputation continued to grow. "The Sky Is Gray," a short story appearing in *Bloodline*, was adapted for television in 1980, and Gaines's novel *A Gathering of Old Men* (1983) was also adapted for television in 1987. Gaines joined the faculty of the English department at the University of Southwestern Louisiana as a writer-in-residence in 1983 and has since taught part of each year at the university. In 1993 Gaines published *A Lesson before Dying*, which earned him a National Book Critics Circle Award and the endorsement of American talk show host Oprah Winfrey's popular book club. Like many of Gaines's previous works, *A Lesson before Dying* was adapted as a television movie in 1999. In addition to several other honors and awards, Gaines received a MacArthur Foundation grant in recognition of his literary accomplishments in 1994.

MAJOR WORKS

Gaines's major works offer an uncommon African American perspective on the rural Deep South, recalling and recreating the places and people who inhabit the region. Primarily set in the imaginary locale of Bayonne, Louisiana, Gaines's fiction depicts the complexities of a culturally diverse community that includes blacks, whites, Creoles, and Cajuns. Set during the onset of the American civil rights movement, *Catherine Carmier* chronicles the love affair between Jackson Bradley, a young African American man recently returned to Bayonne after completing his education, and the title character, a daughter of a bigoted Creole sharecropper who forbids his family members from associating with anyone with darker skin than their own. In the novel, the characters face struggles that test not only their loyalty to family and community but also their personal convictions about the status quo and morality. A story of adultery and miscegenation narrated from the perspective of a respected, middle-aged black man named Jim Kelly, *Of Love and Dust* (1967) centers on the taboo relationship between Marcus Payne, a hostile young African American man bonded out of prison by a sympathetic white landowner, and a white woman named Louise Bonbon. Louise is the vengeful wife of Sidney Bonbon, the arrogant Cajun manager of the plantation where Marcus now works. Sidney is having an affair with a black mistress named Pauline. As Marcus and Louise fall in love, they plot to run away together, but by the novel's violent end, Sidney kills

Marcus. Subsequently, Louise goes mad, and Sidney flees the plantation with Pauline, claiming that if he spared Marcus, he would have died at the hands of other Cajuns.

The stories of *Bloodline* exhibit what some critics have considered Gaines's most effective use of folk material. Three of the five stories in the collection—"A Long Day in November" (1958), "Just Like a Tree" (1962), and "The Sky Is Gray" (1963)—originally appeared as individual pieces. The collection is unified on a number of levels: its sequence is partly determined by the age of each story's respective narrator or protagonist, which ranges from childhood to old age, and the action of each story occurs during a single day in and around Bayonne at the beginning of the civil rights movement. In addition, the stories share a thematic focus on inter-generational relationships, mostly concerning a father's legacy to his son, and they all are narrated in the idiom and dialect of rural Southern African Americans, the hallmark of Gaines's literary style. In "A Long Day in November," the first and longest story in the volume, six-year-old Sonny relates a conflict between his parents about his father's obsession with the family car. After Sonny's mother runs off, his father consults a local conjure woman, who advises him to burn the car in order to resume his place as the head of the household. Following the fiery ritual, the mother returns and insists that the father beat her for disrespecting his authority. The story concludes with Sonny innocently overhearing his parents making love that same evening. In "The Sky Is Gray," the second and most anthologized story of the collection, eight-year-old James learns a series of lessons about survival, racial etiquette, and personal integrity in the Deep South as he and his mother venture into town to run errands. Nineteen-year-old Proctor Lewis confronts his destiny as a black man in a white world in "Three Men," which consigns him to a cycle of poverty, violence, and imprisonment. Jailed and accused of stabbing another black man, Proctor ponders the advice of fellow inmate Mumford Brazille, who explains to him the nature and meaning of the cycle and implicates African American men for its perpetuation. By the story's end, as he cares for a badly beaten boy who joins them in the cell, Proctor tenuously decides to break the cycle. In "Bloodline," seventy-year-old Felix narrates the story of Copper Laurent, an African American veteran who returns to Bayonne to claim his birthright as the only direct heir of a deceased white plantation owner. Conflict arises from his dying white uncle, who currently inhabits the plantation and refuses to recognize Copper's demands or to violate societal values that nullify his nephew's claims. In "Just Like a Tree," the elderly Aunt Fe seems to will her own death as her fearful family and friends gather at her home on the night she is to leave the plantation for the city following a series of recent bombings perpetrated by whites against blacks. Narrated by the evening's

visitors, this story demonstrates that Aunt Fe “will not be moved,” an allusion to a verse in the Negro spiritual from which its title derives.

Widely recognized as Gaines’s masterpiece, *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* chronicles a folk history of African American experience in the United States from the Civil War and Reconstruction through the segregation and civil rights eras as narrated from the perspective of the one-hundred-eight-year-old title character. Her account of personal struggles, losses, and triumphs from childhood through old age voices the stories of many African Americans. This fictional autobiography is framed as an edited, tape-recorded interview between Miss Jane and a black history teacher, who introduces the circumstances that brought the story to light before Miss Jane takes over narration. Suffused with the wit and idiom of her native Bayonne, Miss Jane begins with her futile escape from Louisiana to Ohio after the Civil War, only to find herself eventually returned to her plantation home. She spends the rest of her life refusing to accept the social dictates of white society and waiting for “the One,” who will lead blacks to freedom. Throughout the course of the novel, Miss Jane meets a series of civil rights leaders until she finally realizes, as she leads a protest against Bayonne’s segregated courthouse, that being free comes not from individuals but the community itself. Principally set in urban Baton Rouge, *In My Father’s House* concerns the relationship between Philip Martin, a prominent civil rights leader at the height of his career, and Robert X, a troubled young man, who is one of Martin’s three illegitimate children from an affair decades earlier. Because he has not seen nor tried to locate his first family for more than twenty years, Martin does not initially recognize Robert as his son. Although Robert originally intends to kill his father, whom he blames for his family’s misfortune, their confrontation ends without bloodshed. However, their meeting forces Martin to embark on a search that teaches him the destructive consequences of abandoning his family. Styled as a detective story, *A Gathering of Old Men* depicts a group of seventeen elderly black men, who collectively make a defiant stand against past injustices by separately claiming responsibility for the murder of a hostile member of a violent Cajun clan. After one of the “gathered” has been decided guilty by the sheriff and the victim’s vengeful family, the others step forward one by one to admit responsibility. Narrated by each suspect, the “confessions” collectively exhibit the accumulated rage and self-hatred that resulted from a lifetime of exploitation and humiliation by dominant whites. Set both in a jail and on a plantation in Bayonne during a six-month span in 1948, *A Lesson before Dying* focuses on the friendship between Jefferson, a scarcely literate young man sentenced to death, and Grant Wiggins, a rural school teacher disillusioned and displaced by his work. At Jefferson’s trial, the defense

attorney compares him to a “hog,” which riles the community, particularly Jefferson’s godmother. She insists that Wiggins can restore Jefferson’s sense of self-worth, and the subsequent interaction between both men eventually transforms the pair as they recognize the meaning of human dignity.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

Critics have long recognized Gaines as an integral interpreter of Southern history and culture. He has been noted for voicing the stories of contemporary Southern African American men—a perspective many scholars feel has seldom been represented in the past half-century as prominently as in Gaines’s fiction. While reviewers have charted a shift in his use of black folk materials and storytelling traditions that has accompanied the evolution of his literary vision, other commentators have focused on his thematic recurrence of the African American male’s rite of passage to manhood, the cultural definition of black masculinity, and the relationships between fathers and sons. A number of linguists have studied the means by which some of Gaines’s characters appropriate and subvert the dominant discourse of a white American South in order to realize the position of a male subject. Others have illustrated how Gaines has manipulated his characterizations in order to re-inscribe prevailing cultural notions of black masculinity, investigating the literary implications of black male agency and subjectivity with respect to conventional protest fiction and oral storytelling traditions. Although racial issues often inform the principal themes of his writing, Gaines has also attracted attention for his skill at figuring universal human ideals through particular characters that inhabit a particular place. Often mentioning Gaines’s insistence on the inherent dignity of characters that range from pitiable to contemptible, many reviewers have also commended Gaines’s fiction for realizing typical human motivations and emotions concerning such topics as American racial relations, human rights, and personal responsibility. In addition, most commentators have marked a technical and stylistic departure from prevailing contemporary literary trends in Gaines’s work. Similarly, some critics have analyzed the thematic significance of economic and social changes of the New South that inform Gaines’s fiction. Scholars have also distinguished Gaines for his consistent use of the Southern bayou as the primary setting of most of his fiction, contrasting the geographical, historical, and cultural implications of Bayonne, Louisiana, with the conventions of traditional Southern literature. Much of the critical scholarship on Gaines’s works has produced examinations of the symbolic geography of Bayonne and its surrounding parish, highlighting the physical, social, and political significance of the black “quarters” in Southern culture.

PRINCIPAL WORKS

- Catherine Carmier* (novel) 1964
Of Love and Dust (novel) 1967
Bloodline (short stories) 1968
The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman (novel) 1971
A Long Day in November [illustrations by Don Bo-lognese] (novella) 1971
In My Father's House (novel) 1978
A Gathering of Old Men (novel) 1983
Porch Talk with Ernest Gaines: Conversations on the Writer's Craft [with Marcia Gaudet and Carl Wooton] (interviews) 1990
A Lesson before Dying (novel) 1993

CRITICISM

Frank W. Shelton (essay date 1975)

SOURCE: Shelton, Frank W. "Ambiguous Manhood in Ernest J. Gaines's *Bloodline*." *CLA Journal* 19, no. 2 (1975): 200-09.

[In the following essay, Shelton examines the aesthetics and themes of *Bloodline*, focusing on the thematic recurrence of how the African American male attains manhood, what constitutes manhood, and its implications for the individual.]

With the recent highly regarded television version of the novel, *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, Ernest J. Gaines's reputation and popularity have been enhanced substantially. His earlier works are consequently being reconsidered, but one of the curious facts of Gaines criticism is that his one volume of short stories, *Bloodline*, has been relatively neglected.¹ Certainly "**The Sky Is Gray**" is an extremely popular story—Gaines himself has noted that it "has been anthologized twelve to fifteen times."² Considering his own opinion of his stories, about which he said, "I always knew my stories were better than anything else I had written,"³ the critical neglect of them is surprising, especially in light of the fact that the stories deal with situations and characters similar to those in the novels. With the growing popularity of his latest novel, it is useful to examine the stories more closely, not simply to notice their many aesthetic virtues, but to trace themes which are important both in his own writing and in much recent black American literature.

The one concern which seems predominant in at least the first four stories of the volume is the black man's (or boy's) search for manhood. Surely one of the aims

of the contemporary black artist is to define and portray black manhood. Familiar forces in American culture have combined to deprive the black man of his manhood, and Gaines is one of many writers who have attempted to counteract these forces. He has said in an interview,

You must understand that in this country the black man has been pushed into the position where he is not supposed to be a man. This is one of the things that the white man has tried to deny the black ever since he brought him here in chains. . . . My heroes just try to be men; but because the white man has tried everything from the time of slavery to deny the black this chance, his attempts to be a man will lead toward danger.⁴

Further, when asked if he has any code he lives by, Gaines has answered, "I want to be a man toward my family, toward my woman, toward my friends."⁵ His stories present subtle variations on the theme of how the black male can achieve manhood, what that manhood consists of, and finally its implications for the individual. It is no coincidence in this regard that the first four stories, all employing a limited narrative point of view, are told by males; the first two are children, another is nearing the prime of manhood, and one is seventy years old. While each story presents an instance of a black male who in some sense gains dignity and manhood, and while the stories are arranged so that in their progression, a growth in awareness and experience as well as age is evident, Gaines's portrayal of black manhood is frequently ambiguous, and he implies the danger of something important being lost through a single-minded concern with achieving it. Though Jerry H. Bryant may be in general correct that "Pessimism does indeed seem to be foreign to Gaines's interpretation of his world,"⁶ Gaines acknowledges, more than has been recognized, the human costs of the black man's obsessive concern with manhood.

One of the distinctions of the first story in the volume, "**A Long Day in November**," is that it is the only story in which the young male character actually has a father present to whom he can relate. Certainly the family, as insecure as it may seem to an outside observer, is very important to Sonny, the young narrator; on occasion he even pities pigs or birds for their lack of a parent. Employing the comic mode, the story concerns the attempt of Amy, Sonny's mother, to demonstrate to Eddie, his father, the basis of true manhood. Though in many ways weak and foolish, Eddie shows a great need for the support of his family. His education begins when Amy leaves him, thus withdrawing that support from him, because he has neglected his responsibilities in favor of his motor car.

Particularly in American culture, the automobile has traditionally been a symbol of freedom and, to the male, masculinity. Spending long hours of hard labor to sup-

port his family, Eddie regards his evening activities in his car as the only glamorous, exciting aspect of his life. The case of Eddie and his car is also symptomatic of a wider social condition. Through the comments of the fortune teller, Madame Toussaint, Gaines suggests that something is wrong with the relationship of black men and women as a whole. Many men have come to see her recently, all seeking some way to placate their dissatisfied wives. She explains that, men having messed up the outside world, a woman's house is the only place which is her own. By taking his wife for granted, however, the black man even destroys the comfort she derives there. Ultimately the black man has neglected his woman, perhaps because he feels that life's meaning and his own manhood are to be found outside of and independent of the home. Certainly Eddie has sought his manhood through his car and not within the familial context. His whining and crying, and his inability to handle Amy's desertion, indicate that indeed he possesses very little personal strength to rely on.

Through her direct action Amy is able to affect her family's situation. In essence she forces Eddie to choose between his car and her. The basic nature of that choice becomes clear when Gran'mon, who has heretofore had absolutely nothing good to say about Eddie, acknowledges the consequences of his burning the car: "He's a man after all." Yet Gaines works one further ironic variation upon his theme. After being led to this act and after the family is once again safe in its warm home, Eddie is then forced to beat his wife—and it is Amy who requires the beating so that no one will be able to laugh at him. She thus remains committed to a simplistic idea of manhood—that the man must dominate the woman, and in a physical, even brutal way. To his credit Eddie does not enjoy, or even understand why he must give, the beating. His manhood does not depend on such things, nor on the attitude of the community. Finally though, Amy has accomplished her goal, to reunite the family on a different and more stable basis, and Sonny's feeling of warmth and security at this reunion is surely the dominant impression the story conveys.

Unlike Sonny, the eight year old narrator of "**The Sky Is Gray**" has no father present to look up to. His father has been taken into the Army, and no one knows when he will be allowed to return home. Consequently his mother is forced to assume the male role of provider for the family. Though the family is unhappy, the pride, dignity, and courage the mother shows in coping with her painfully difficult situation is admirable. One of her aims is to make her son a man who can, if anything happens to her, care for the family.

Yet Gaines asks if, because of her determination to teach her son to be a man, the boy loses anything vital. He feels an almost overpowering love for his mother

but is afraid to show it because to her any direct expression of love is weakness and "crybaby stuff" (p. 84). Further she is one of the most taciturn characters in modern fiction, wasting not a single word. A child needs to show and be shown love, to talk and be talked to, but this boy is denied these things. When she forced him to kill his pet birds so that the family would have something to eat, surely a hard thing to ask a child to do, but necessary given their dire economic circumstances, she never attempted to explain why she required this act of him; she simply beat him until he acquiesced. At the time of the action in the story, he understands why he had to do it, but only because Auntie and Monsieur Bayonne explained it to him, not because his mother ever tried to make him understand. In fact, throughout the story, he feels a strong element of fear of his mother along with love. She treats him as she does for his own good—certainly she is very proud of him, and her love for him is strongly implied throughout the story—but her identifying the direct expression of human feeling and affection with weakness suggests a denial of one aspect of herself and of her son.

The confrontation in the dentist's office between the "preacher" and the "teacher" perhaps helps to clarify her motivation. These two characters are "head" and "heart" characters in a sense reminiscent of some of Hawthorne's characters. Complacently accepting all the white man tells him, the preacher appeals to the heart.

"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)

The teacher is "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" (p. 97). He sees hope for progress in those who are logical and not emotional but must also acknowledge the personal consequences of his total allegiance to the head. Without belief in God, he has nothing with which to replace it. His agnosticism, a result of complete reliance on logic, is finally as empty as the preacher's heartfelt faith.

Not that the mother subscribes to what the young man says. Both he and the preacher seem to address inadequately the concrete realities of her situation. Certainly she is filled with emotion, predominately a rage she struggles to keep under control but which at

times erupts from her seemingly calm surface. In fact, the narrator, who listens fascinatedly to the young man, may be a representative of those who will come after and will have something to believe in. The crucial point, however, is that his mother, in denying him an outlet for his feelings, is perhaps encouraging them to wither away. In the world of the story, feelings can be manipulated by the white man, and to live by them leaves the black man vulnerable. Concerned for her son's manhood, the mother wants to teach him the strength to endure and function constructively in such a situation. What a reader, who hopefully combines in some kind of balance the faculties of both head and heart, must consider is the consequences for this boy of being forced, by his mother and in response to the necessities of his life, to be a man at age eight. While he very likely will have a strong sense of pride and dignity, as his mother intends, he may also lose a quality he still retains, his sensitivity to the affairs of the heart. Certainly in any situation which encourages full humanity, manhood should not require a rejection of the heart. The position of a black in a white-dominated society seems to call for extreme measures, measures which ultimately risk denying the complete humanity of every individual.

In the next story, "Three Men," Gaines presents very directly the way a white-dominated society pressures all men, both black and white, to play roles. The white deputy, Paul, feels instinctive sympathy for Proctor, the young black, but as long as he is near the sheriff, he must hide that feeling and show his manhood by acting the tough, nigger-hating white man. Proctor, when he surrenders himself to the law, knows that he must cringe and grovel in the expected manner. At the beginning of the story, however, he feels that his drinking, brawling, and woman-chasing are enough to affirm to himself that he is still a man.

The movement of the story is toward a transformation of his view of what manhood is. The primary instrument of his education is Munford, a filthy old man who, like the old Lazarus in Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice*, manifests in his own corruption the ultimate effects of the kind of life Proctor himself is living. Though incapable of changing his own life, Munford is conscious of how his personal degradation has been accomplished so that whites can assert their manhood. He tells Proctor that they need to have blacks in jail so that they can see what they themselves are not. By forcing the black man to play a predetermined subservient role and by then being able to look down upon him, the white man can affirm his own manhood. Munford knows, though, that all, degraded and those who degrade alike, lack true manhood. In depriving the black man of dignity, the white man forfeits his own humanity. Thus Gaines suggests that a manhood based on the denial of that quality in others is indeed false and illusory.

Proctor has felt that his violent hell-raising has been an assertion of his own manhood, but gradually he realizes that if he continues his present way of life, he will be constantly in and out of jail, like Munford, and subject to every whim of the white man. Further, what he has prized as manhood he discovers to be nothing but animality and finally a denial of love and human fellow feeling. He admits that he has loved nobody since his mother died and that a man's humanity, his manhood, is expressed not at all by violence or self-assertion but by human feeling and love. Proctor's decision to go to the penitentiary rather than continue his present way of life is signalled, very importantly, by his breaking down and crying uncontrollably which purges and purifies him. When he first came into the jail, he felt that such an expression of emotion was a sign of weakness and vulnerability, but he realizes that crying is not necessarily a sign of weakness, as it was with the father in "A Long Day in November" or as the mother in "The Sky Is Gray" felt it to be. In this case it is a prelude to Proctor's assumption of his humanity and a truer kind of manhood.

His change is further indicated by his attitude to the boy who is thrown into the cell with him. At first ignoring him, Proctor eventually treats him gently and solicitously, even coming to feel love for him and trying to prevent the boy from following in his footsteps. Thus his awakened feelings for others and his determination to assert his manhood by enduring whatever punishment the white man can inflict are closely related.

Even at the end of the story, his newly assumed manhood shows a curious blind spot with regard to the third occupant of the cell, the homosexual called Hattie Brown. Neither Proctor nor Munford feels anything but contempt for Hattie, whom they call a "freak" or a "sad woman." Perhaps Hattie represents to them, as the homosexual does for Eldridge Cleaver, the ultimate sign of lost black manhood. In effect, however, Proctor comes to adopt Hattie's sympathetic attitude without being aware of it. Since Gaines so highly values this kind of humanity, it would be erroneous to identify his feelings with those of Proctor or Munford. Though the title of the story may seem ambiguous,⁸ Hattie in his own way possesses manhood; he simply manifests the softer rather than the hard virile qualities. Proctor feels only disgust for him, suggesting that, like the whites, he must still gauge his manhood by contrasting himself with someone whom he feels lacks that quality. Not yet able to accept every man on his own terms, he is still trapped in a myopic view of what manhood truly is.

This shortsighted view of black manhood is most evident in the title story of the collection, "Bloodline." The characterization of Cooper Laurent, one of the most overt political and social revolutionaries in the entire