

The present volume, part of the *Critical Insights* series, examines the nature and significance of exile for a number of well-known American writers over the last two centuries. Exile, as we have attempted to illustrate in the introduction, “On Exile,” is not a condition or state that can be simply or airily defined, nor can its influence on any particular author be easily understood or casually dismissed. Rather, it is often a transitional state, even if it appears more or less permanent to the impartial outside observer. Even the writer him or herself may misjudge the nature and extent of its impact. Many exiled writers—including a number of whom are discussed in this volume—leave their home country only to spend the balance of their professional lives remembering and recording impressionistic sketches of the nation and culture they have “left behind.” The condition of exile—seemingly so easy to achieve in this age of supersonic international flight—turns out to be a somewhat nebulous state of being. Indeed, it may be a matter of *becoming*, in a certain sense, a matter of existing in a nearly permanent liminality, rather than the achievement of some finite, definitive end state. Many of our contributors’ essays offered in this volume suggest this may have been the case for our exiled authors and at least some major portion of their writing.

In the first essay, and the first of four of our more broad-based “Critical Contexts” essays, Sirpa Salenius describes the influence of “[A] Paradise for Exiles in Pursuit of Artistic Ease and Literary Quiet” on nineteenth-century American writers. The author of the quote, James Jackson Jarves, mentions the attraction Italy had for American artists and writers who chose such a serene place as the destination of their exile. There, American writers could look back at their own country and culture and reflect on its nature and do so from a vantage point that reflected the differences apparent when displayed against a European background. As Salenius describes,

the Old Word/New World comparison was a fruitful vein of thematic development that a number of nineteenth-century American writers pursued to notable effect.

Jeff Birkenstein, in his essay on the Paris literary scene between the two world wars, explores the changes to the world that World War I brought on through two influential writers who spent time in Paris in various forms of self-imposed exile: Gertrude Stein and Ernest Hemingway. From the assassination in Sarajevo to the Armistice in November 1918, just about everything changed, including the English language. Birkenstein focuses on the concept of hunger and how this many-layered desire can help us understand the enormous changes of the era.

Kelly C. MacPhail, writing about the early twentieth-century modernist poets T.S. Eliot, W.H. Auden, and Ezra Pound, notes that each author challenges our conceptualization of national identity. MacPhail locates the three poets among a broader generation of early twentieth-century writers who saw exile as a rich setting for literary cross-pollination and accretion. MacPhail argues that this period's American and European literature, especially, became an international phenomenon, more than a national one, and its literary productions drew from many sources. The poetry of Eliot and Auden clearly demonstrates this movement, and their lives and works illustrate the problem of adopting arbitrary designations of nationality by relying on origin. Both can certainly be defined as either American or as British; whichever they may be, each is often claimed by the literature of both nations. Pound, a complex figure in a different way, represents a writer whose exile became the ground for a nearly complete dissociation from any allegiance to his birth country and disaffiliation from the cultural affection he might once have held for America. Few exiles encompass a transition so extreme, especially one followed by a return to the homeland.

Joseph J. Cheadle examines the lives at home and abroad for James Baldwin and Richard Wright and encounters a radically different narrative for their respective exiles, even though their careers are otherwise aligned in one or more ways. Two of the most influential and well-known twentieth-century African American

writers, Wright and Baldwin both chose to leave the United States—and its racism—for what they viewed as, hopefully, a better life in Europe. Both wanted to escape racial prejudice and be free of an identity based primarily on how others viewed their race. While both perhaps sought a “literary quiet,” their exile was driven primarily by reaction against the prevailing social conditions for African Americans during their lives. Their “exile” marked an attempt to break free from America; however, neither could, in the end, escape the specter of race that formed a central component of their literary and personal identities. In this regard, their states of being were always tightly enmeshed with social conditions in the United States that spawned their desire to escape those conditions—one variant of the exile who cannot ever truly leave one’s country and culture behind.

Myrto Drizou, in the first of our more targeted “Critical Readings” section of the book, traces Edith Wharton’s *émigré* journey from the stifling, rigid social roles of class and gender in “Old New York” through her discovery of a place for her exile—the world of literature. Wharton, expressing at one point the feeling of homelessness she experienced throughout much of her life, began her exile by fleeing her aristocratic circle in New York society, from which she felt distant and estranged even as she was a part of it. As Drizou illustrates, Wharton’s literary oeuvre provides the intellectual space that Wharton sought: her themes and characters exhibit Wharton’s continuing concern with social worlds that deny men—and especially women—the possibility of moral, intellectual, emotional, and human growth.

Henry James, the subject of Charlotte Anne Fiehn’s essay, was a true expatriate, spending more than forty years living in Europe (primarily England) both as a child and as an adult. Fiehn explains that James was one of the early “trans-Atlantic” cosmopolitan American authors, among those whom Salenius described as seeking a new homeland, which could offer a kind of support for the production of arts and letters that the United States arguably did not. Through a close reading of some of James’ work, Fiehn explores his vision of the contrasting attitudes of Americans and Europeans in the late

nineteenth century, as well as offers us a note on the responses of American audiences to these portrayals. James, an early “voluntary exile” in Europe, arguably established a certain precedent for later American writers, and Fiehn’s portrait permits us to examine the outlines of the pattern his exile helped to create.

By way of significant contrast, Matthew Teutsch offers us a study in domestic exile with his meditation on the life and works of Ernest Gaines. Gaines, a native, fifth-generation Louisianan, left his southern home when he was fifteen to join his mother and stepfather in California. He completed undergraduate studies at San Francisco State University and, except for two years in the army, spent the next twenty-five years (until 1983) living in domestic exile in California. Beginning in 1963, Gaines returned home each year to gather material for his writing. All of Gaines’ major works—each of which harkened back to the Louisiana farm life of his youth—were written there. In this regard, Gaines—like Wharton, Hemingway, and Fitzgerald—offers us an example of the American writer who leaves home, but cannot leave home behind. Indeed, after 1984, Gaines began spending half of each year in Louisiana and eventually built a home there on the farm on which he was raised, an example of the uncommon experience where an exiled American writer returns successfully to his native home.

Rebecca Young offers us still another variation on exile for an American writer: Jamaica Kincaid’s journey from Elaine Potter Richardson of Antigua to the internationally renowned American author we know today. As Young persuasively argues, Kincaid’s work may be best understood as an author seeking exile from her family and her homeland as a means of finding her individual voice and identity. Young details Kincaid’s journey by explaining that the author finds her voice by at first physically, and then symbolically, crossing boundaries. She uses her exile to re-make her identity through the trials and tribulations of her characters, whose own experiences of escaping oppression imposed by the politics of power mirrors her own journey.

As Angus Cleghorn shows, Elizabeth Bishop considers herself three-quarters Canadian and only one-quarter American, but her

early ties to the United States are nevertheless strong. Growing up shuttling back and forth between Nova Scotia and Massachusetts, Bishop attended Vassar College, where her literary apprenticeship began, and later lived in Key West, Florida, for more than ten years. In the early 1950s, Bishop moved to Brazil, where she lived primarily until her death in 1979. One of several openly gay writers examined in our volume, Bishop's exile substantively began as a child when, in relatively quick succession, her father died and then her mother was institutionalized in an asylum. She grew up with her grandparents at their home in Great Village, Nova Scotia, until she was moved to Worcester, Massachusetts, with her father's family, though she knew no one in Worcester and was irredeemably lonely. In Brazil, too, she led an isolated—but literarily productive—existence (on a mountaintop). Indeed, Bishop's exile was, in some ways, from life itself; she led an alienated existence, punctuated by brief interregnums of engagement. In one of her most moving poems, “In the Village,” she writes—from Brazil—of her grandparents' house decades before, an exile's eloquent poem of home from a displaced present.

Jericho Williams takes up the theme of an exile's return in his portrait of Washington Irving, one of America's earliest writer exiles. Away from the United States for seventeen years, Irving wrote his most celebrated works from Europe. In 1832, he returned to the United States and joined an expedition to the West in order to grapple with, and reconnect to, a rapidly changing country. He was undergoing, according to Williams, an exile within an exile, since he had been away so long. His account of that trip in *A Tour on the Prairies* could have been received as a poor companion to “Rip Van Winkle” and other popular stories, but instead the public accepted a “new” literature from Irving, helping to create for him a successful exile's return.

Leïla Moulfi explores the life and work of Paul Bowles, who lived for forty years in Tangier, Morocco. Moulfi argues that Bowles' writing in exile developed authentic American themes with an unmistakable Moroccan influence. Bowles, who influenced writers as diverse as Allen Ginsberg and Ken Kesey, steeped himself

in the Moroccan oral tradition as well, translating works that would then add further North African influences to his writing. As Moulfi depicts him, Bowles became a storyteller in exile, living amongst a culture of storytellers.

For Ashley E. Reis, Edward Abbey epitomizes the outcast who has not been cast out, but has established an identity so at war with many of the prevailing tenets of his own country and culture that he has become, essentially, an internal exile in his own homeland. Perhaps most famous as the author of *The Monkey Wrench Gang* (1975)—a diatribe in the guise of a novel, which condemns the destruction of the West by development forces—Abbey was a lifelong critic of environmental degradation whose often extreme views alienated him from contemporary life in the United States. The characters he created wreaked destruction on the mad men and forces intent on despoiling the land where Abbey and his characters sought sanctuary from an all-consuming culture. Abbey is now widely considered to be one of the forerunners and earliest exponents of so-called “eco-lit,” a genre that itself may have once constituted a form of literary exile, even as it gains mainstream acceptance.

Robert C. Hauhart discusses Hart Crane as both a romantic modernist American poet and a doomed, reckless exile. As Hauhart deftly summarizes, Crane’s complicated life was a peripatetic search for poetic excellence, someone he could love and be loved by in return, and a haven in which he could live and write. While he found all three for brief periods, Crane seldom found even two of the three in temporal juxtaposition. His marginal financial existence, combined with his permanent attraction to a lifestyle dependent on sexually satisfying, but emotionally empty, liaisons, made it enormously difficult for Crane to sustain his writing. Hauhart argues that Crane sought foreign exile as an antidote to what he believed was his loss of poetic voice. Suffering from disappointments in every realm in 1931–32, Crane tried to flee from his experience of physical, emotional, and expressive decline. Crane’s poetic mission, entangled with a romanticized American myth (suffering its own decline as a result of the Great Depression) only added to his despair.

As with many writers who leave America, exile alone could not restore Crane to his embattled sanity, his poesy, or his will to live.

Rossitsa Terzieva-Artemis considers three works by Henry Miller, all written during his Paris years—*Tropic of Cancer* (1934), *Black Spring* (1936), and *Tropic of Capricorn* (1938)—in light of efforts to censor his work. Miller’s language—highly provocative when combined with content that was often overtly pornographic—arguably shows the influence of Miller’s exile by melding European modernism, surrealism, and Dadaism into a text that is uniquely located in a cultural space between the world wars. Terzieva-Artemis carefully explores the works of the many cultural commentators and critics who have written on this era in Paris and concludes that it was this cultural surrounding that permitted Miller to achieve a fusion of language that reflected a unification of sexuality and freedom of thought in uniquely new artistic terms.

In our final contribution, Jamie Olson addresses the life and work of Joseph Brodsky, whom he considers an American poet, yet one whose work exists simultaneously in two literary traditions: both a Russian and an Anglo-American one, with much cross-fertilization between the two. Olson suggests that Brodsky self-consciously presents himself to his readers, shaping and reshaping poems and translations for an audience in the West, even as he questions his new American identity. Through close readings, Olson traces Brodsky’s ambivalent, burgeoning American-ness through a series of poems that depict the American landscape as one of estrangement. Brodsky’s American poems, although often written in Russian (thereby adding another element of interpretation, that of the translator), seem to stamp his exile as one of being grateful for democracy but despairing of American culture. Brodsky, a transnational hybrid, eloquently embodies the central conundrum of this volume—when does a writer exiled from his homeland become a native writer, if ever? Can a mature Russian writer displace himself to America and become an American writer who writes in Russian? Ultimately, who can say with certainty?

We hope this volume’s selections offer readers a stimulating introduction to the experience of being an American writer in exile.

Like writers in general—and keeping in mind that no two exiled writers are alike—all must share, to some degree, common themes. We believe our contributors have effectively sketched the dimensions of exile for their subjects in ways that reveal both the universality and the quintessential American-ness of the exile experience.

Ernest Gaines: A Study in Domestic Exile_____

Matthew Teutsch

Dear Jim and Carol, I am sorry but I will not be joining you. I must go back home to write my book. My best wishes, Ernie. (“Mozart” 25)

Ernest J. Gaines wrote the above letter in the fall of 1962. He wrote to inform his friends, who left California and moved to Mexico earlier that year in order to both escape the materialism of America and to find a place to work in peace, that he would be unable to join them. He could not join them because of an event that occurred on the campus of the University of Mississippi in September of that year. With those words to “Jim and Carol,” Gaines made it known that in order to complete his first novel and—as he later noted—to fight racism and oppression in the United States, he could not leave the country as others had done before him and were continuing to do.

The event and Gaines’s response to it was a watershed moment in the life of the United States and a defining moment for Gaines. During a speech at the University of North Carolina in the late 1960s, Gaines talked about leaving the Jim Crow South at the age of fourteen in 1948 and his decision to return to his home state of Louisiana after spending fourteen years in California. He spoke of these events—his departure and his return—as among the most important in his life. Gaines went on to mention the milieu of the early sixties and commented that many young people “were leaving America to go to Europe, Africa, and South America—especially Mexico” (16).¹ In 1962, his friends Jim and Carol left San Francisco for Mexico to discover for themselves a different culture and thereby escape the avarice that surrounded them in the United States. Gaines only had to save up enough money for the trip by working at the post office. Throughout the summer, Gaines prepared himself for a move to Mexico; however, one episode caused him to stay in the United States and to ultimately return home to Louisiana for extended

periods of time. That event was James Meredith's integration of the University of Mississippi in September 1962. When Gaines saw Meredith attending Ole Miss, he changed his mind: "I told myself if James Meredith can go through all that, I should be able to go to Louisiana and take whatever waits me there" (16).

After deciding to go back, Gaines packed his bags and returned to Louisiana for six months. Even though Gaines came back, he still had to endure racial oppression. He states, "Many things I put up with that I hated. Many times I was questioned by the police. Many places I could not eat where I can eat in today. There were some places still where they didn't want you to try on clothes before buying them" (16). In spite of these occurrences and others, Gaines's return trip to segregated Louisiana "saved [his] writing and quite possibly saved [his] life" (16). Almost ten years later, in 1973, and after numerous trips home, Ruth Laney asked Gaines if he could ever think about coming home to Louisiana to live for good. Gaines replied, "If I did, it could not be before, say, ten years from now, simply because I do not know how I would react to a given situation. I don't know whether I would explode and hurt someone, or get hurt myself" (Laney 67). What do Gaines's thoughts about returning to Louisiana say about him as a writer in exile? Is he an American writer in exile in the same way that say Richard Wright, James Baldwin, and Chester Himes, all of whom spent time in France, were? Through an examination of Gaines's first novel, *Catherine Carmier* (1964), and his last, *A Lesson Before Dying* (1993), this essay will explore how Gaines's self-imposed exile from Louisiana and eventual complete return in 1997 is mirrored in the characters of Jackson Bradley and Grant Wiggins, respectively.

Should we even consider Gaines an exile? Edward Said argues that exile ultimately is "the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home" (137). In this way, Gaines can be viewed as an exile, removed from his "native place," creating a divide that becomes difficult to mend, both psychologically and physically. However, Gaines's migration to California does not completely fit the term exile as most envision it. Said's definition of exile implies banishment with the inability to

come back. In contrast, we might think of Gaines, and the characters discussed below, as an expatriate, a term that provides a person a certain amount of agency when deciding where to live. Said states, “Expatriates voluntarily live in an alien country, usually for personal or social reasons” (144). In this manner, Gaines resembles Wright, Baldwin, and Himes. Even though he moved to be with his parents and for a better education, his family ultimately left Louisiana not only for better jobs but to escape the social conditions of racism that affected them in the Jim Crow South. Expatriates “share in the solitude and estrangement of exile,” while not having to adhere to certain strictures of their removal (Said 144). Expatriates—as can be seen with Baldwin, Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and others—can move between different spaces, unlike banished exiles. Similarly, Gaines freely left California to return to Louisiana periodically to converse with the people, walk the land where he grew up, and experience the countryside about which he continued to write. Yet he remained in voluntary domestic exile for nearly fifty years.

***Catherine Carmier* and the Dilemma of Return**

Jackson Bradley, the protagonist in *Catherine Carmier*, can be seen, like Gaines, as an expatriate within his own country. Jackson returns to the South to clear his head, and his Aunt Charlotte knows for sure that he will stay in the quarters and become a teacher within the community. However, Jackson has plans to return to California; as such, he struggles to find the right way to tell his aunt that he does not intend to remain. Sitting on the gallery and speaking with his childhood friend and admirer, Mary Louise, Jackson reflects upon his removal from Louisiana and his return. The move to California freed Jackson in some ways, but even with that liberty, he feels a strong connection to his former home. Looking out on the yard, Jackson “feel[s] like going out there and rubbing his hand over the grass. . . . to feel the wetness of it” (Gaines, *Catherine* 91). California provided Jackson with a space to realize his potential and his humanity. Like other African Americans, Jackson new that California and the North, even “with all of her faults, [provided] a

Negro from the South, an Indian from New Mexico, or a Chinese from Hong Kong” with improved conditions “than the ones [they] had left” (93). Things may have been better, but Jackson still encountered racism and oppression there, albeit subtly. His family lived in a “slum neighborhood,” his stepfather had to work labor jobs, and restaurants would not serve him promptly when he went to eat. Eventually, Jackson had to get away from this struggle, so he decided to return to Louisiana to clear his head:

He was not coming home. No, the South was not home, it had not been home for a long time now. But he had chosen the South because he knew people there, and because he had to go somewhere to think for a while. He had finished college now, and he had to leave San Francisco to think about what he was going to do from then on. (Gaines, *Catherine* 94–95)

Louisiana, as it did for Gaines, serves as a refuge and reservoir for Jackson; however, it does not provide him with a permanent place to reside. Thadious Davis argues that Jackson’s period in California taught him “that the carceral space is not merely the southern Louisiana plantation [or the South] but anywhere where race and class restrict individuals,” including the supposed beckoning promised land of the North (*Southscapes* 280). His time there though opened him up to experiences that he would not encounter in rural Louisiana, which makes his return to Grover Plantation even more difficult. Back home, he still feels like an outsider. The community and his childhood friends remain at a distance from him, neither knowing how to bridge the breach.

Upon first encountering his childhood friend, Brother, after his return to Louisiana, Jackson and his comrade share an awkward moment, feeling that something has changed between them: “A moment of silence followed. Neither one of them could think of anything more to say. Brother smiled uncomfortably and lowered his eyes” (Gaines, *Catherine* 18). Later, it becomes evident that a gap exists between Jackson and the rest of the community because of his removal from Louisiana to a more integrated space, where he was able to obtain a higher education and interact with various groups

of people. The disconnection becomes even more pronounced at the party Aunt Charlotte throws to celebrate Jackson's homecoming. The people gathered at Aunt Charlotte's house "did not know what to do around [Jackson]," so they only offered him the polite courtesies of a smile and a handshake, but nothing more (66). Out in the yard, Jackson encounters a group of men having an argument. Seeing Jackson, the men stop and shake his hand; however, just like the rest of the people at the party, they find it difficult to speak with him:

The men shook Jackson's hand and spoke to him, but they did just as the others had done. 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 follow. (Gaines, *Catherine* 67)

Awkwardly starting and stopping the conversation, Jackson and the group of men never move far past a simple greeting. When he leaves the yard, the group of men resume their boisterous conversation. Jackson cannot, no matter how hard he tries, (re-)connect with those who remained in Louisiana. The gap between Jackson and those in the quarters appears, at least in *Catherine Carmier*, as insurmountable, and Jackson struggles with this throughout the novel.

Jackson's separation from those in Louisiana carries over, as mentioned earlier, to the interactions with his aunt and Mary Louise. After telling his aunt that he does not believe the "bourgeois farce" of religion, Jackson struggles with how to tell her that he does not want to stay in the quarters and teach. He tries to speak with her in the evening on the porch and at breakfast when she mentions his teaching, yet he fails to make the words come out because "he did not want to hurt her any more than he had done already" (Gaines, *Catherine* 105). When he eventually tells her that he plans to return to California, Aunt Charlotte staggers and falls on the porch, telling Jackson to get away from her. Mary Louise tries to get Jackson to leave so Charlotte can rest, and he utters, "I don't know why the hell I came back here in the first damn place. . . I swear to God I

don't" (165). While Louisiana pulls him, Jackson does not want to remain, even questioning why he originally decided to return for a visit. The next day, Mary Louise returns to the house after work to check on Charlotte and speak with Jackson. Initially, she ponders that "she understood him quite well now and wondered why the others did not," but her assumptions prove false (168). She sees a book of Greek poetry that Jackson has been reading in the swing and starts to look at it: "She looked at the book a long time, as though she were trying to figure out the words. She had no idea what any word meant, and she looked at him and smiled" (168–169). Just like the men at the party, Mary Louise does not know what to say to Jackson, so she just smiles politely and returns home.

Once Mary Louise returns to the house, Jackson goes for a walk and meditates about his future and where it will take him. For Jackson, Louisiana remains absent from his future; "I have to get the hell off of this place," he thinks to himself (Gaines, *Catherine* 173). Just as Louisiana does not offer a home for Jackson, neither does San Francisco. Jackson continues his contemplation: "But where to? Back to San Francisco? Then what? What then? I came here because I had to get away from there for a while. Am I going back to the same thing? But if not San Francisco, then where to?" (173). Jackson's thoughts here place him in a liminal space, somewhere inside yet outside of the community, in much the same way that Raoul Carmier exists throughout the novel. Through his exposure to a less racist society in California, Jackson has learned to fight, in his own way, the abuses that he must endure when returning to Louisiana. However, the mistreatment he experiences in California still constitutes racism, although subtler than what he experiences back home.

Eventually, Jackson ends up at the store and sees Brother standing outside speaking with some other people. As he approaches, Jackson looks at the crowd but does not say a word, and "[n]o one spoke to him, either" (Gaines, *Catherine* 173). Like the scene at the party, the disconnect between Jackson and the community is evident. Neither the people nor Jackson know what to say to one another, so instead of talking, they just go about their business. Jackson goes into the

store for a Coke because he refuses to go in the “sideroom” where “Negroes could buy and drink their [beers]” (174). To Jackson, the room serves as a degrading reminder of conditions in Louisiana, and he chooses to stand against those conditions by refusing to buy a couple of beers in there for Brother and himself. Davis points out that Jackson’s exposure to ideas outside of the rural Louisiana community from which he comes serves as a wedge that begins to separate him from that community. Jackson “has learned to analyze the various positions both of self and others” psychologically and to analyze those positions within the space that they occupy, thus causing him to refuse to enter the “sideroom” (Davis, “Headlands” 3). Jackson, leaving the store, sees a group of Cajuns looking at him and thinks about the stories they have told about him: they wonder whether or not he is a Freedom Rider and what he would try to integrate. He just thinks about laughing then turns to the “Negroes” who look at him as well. To Jackson, they are just as bad as the Cajuns in their view of him because they talk behind his back, too, calling him “Mr. Stuck-up” (Gaines, *Catherine* 175). Unlike Catherine’s father Raoul, Jackson did not choose separation from his community; his aunt sent him to California for an education and with the expectation he would return, but he cried and pleaded with her not to make him board the train that pointed west. Raoul, on the other hand, consciously chooses to isolate himself and his family from the African American community, even when the white community will not accept him. He resides, like Jackson, in a liminal space, although it exists in part because of his own volition.

For Jackson, the trip back to Louisiana highlights and magnifies the changes taking place both in the South and elsewhere. Reverend Armstrong tells Charlotte that people “ain’t staying; they leaving” for something better, something more (Gaines, *Catherine* 183). Jackson represents the people leaving, and upon his return, he feels so far removed from his family, friends, and the community that he cannot speak with them. Further, he sees physical evidence of the changing times as he walks through the quarters and notices crops where houses used to be and other houses so dilapidated that they are about to fall down. Observing these things, Jackson recalls how

important Louisiana is to him and how much it has shaped his life to this point. He wants to go out in the yard while speaking with Mary Louise and run his hand over the damp Louisiana grass. He wanders through the quarters, while reminiscing about the times he spent there and ponders the changes occurring. Still, Jackson cannot contemplate a permanent return as the solution for his wandering soul. Looking at the overgrown cemetery, Jackson does not like the way he feels because he cannot recognize the graves anymore. More importantly, he feels bad because he is “unable to associate with the people,” including accompanying his aunt to church and drinking with Brother in the “sideroom” of the grocery store (191). “Schooling has given him a sense of dignity that will not allow him to cooperate with the indignities nor accept the limits that white society imposes,” according to Mary Ellen Doyle, “[b]ut he has no zeal” either to demonstrate or change the status quo (88). Jackson wants to connect, but the fissure that expanded once he went to California cannot be sutured together so easily. He walks to the church that doubled as his schoolhouse, remembers learning from Madame Bayonne, and looks at the sugar cane field and pecan tree, then walks away. As he leaves, he spies something in the yard, “a small piece of a broken key chain,” and, instead of throwing it away, he places the broken item in his pocket, taking a symbolic broken piece of Louisiana with him (Gaines, *Catherine* 193).

Jackson mirrors Gaines’s experiences and his own returns to Louisiana. I do not want to draw direct parallels between the author and the character, but I do want to note that Gaines’s journey can be seen, to a certain extent, through his first novel’s protagonist. Jackson, while not wanting to stay in Louisiana, still feels a very powerful pull to the place where he grew up and spent the first years of his life. When Gaines returned in 1963, he talked about staying in the city—Baton Rouge—with his uncle and aunt and going to the country on Sundays. While there, Gaines would visit the people, eat with them, and listen to them talk. He would walk the fields and find a stalk of sugarcane, cut it, peel it, and chew on it slowly, enjoying the sweet flavor. Just as Jackson looks over the land, Gaines would gaze at the acres his parents tilled, and he would travel to

the cemetery looking for pecans. This place, his native land, stirred inside of him and calmed him: “I would feel very comfortable and safe there because that is where Auntie, who had raised me, was buried. I did not know the exact place because the grave had never been marked, but I would feel more peace at that moment than I ever did in California” (“Mozart” 26). While being able to express reverence for the Louisiana countryside, Gaines, as stated earlier, could not foresee moving back to the state he thought he had left permanently. He would not return permanently until later in his life when he built a house for him and his wife on the land that his ancestors and parents once worked.

***A Lesson Before Dying* and the Experience of a Successful Return**

Gaines’s permanent return to Louisiana in 1997 becomes partly mirrored in Grant Wiggin’s work in the quarters in *A Lesson Before Dying*. The novel centers around the story of Jefferson, a man falsely accused of murder and sentenced to execution. Grant must educate Jefferson so that he will walk to his death as a man, not as a “hog,” the term his defense attorney uses to describe him at his trial. Similar to Jackson, Grant struggles with his return to the quarters. Published almost thirty years after *Catherine Carmier*, *A Lesson before Dying* serves as an extension of Gaines’s first novel since Gaines set the story in 1948. As Doyle notes, the characters in the latter novel can be seen as continuations of those in the first. Likewise, “[t]he action seems to begin where that of the first novel left off: Grant has repeated Jackson’s cycle of Louisiana-California-Louisiana but has settled, at least for the time, in his aunt’s house and is teaching school” (Doyle 204). Jackson wants to run away with Catherine, but for all of his resistance to teaching the children in the quarters, Grant plans to stay with Vivian in Louisiana instead of leaving and to make things better for the community.

Early in the novel, however, Grant does not want to stay in South Louisiana and teach the children. Valerie Babb notes that “[t]hough he has a genuine affection for his students, Tante Lou, and the elders of his community, he clearly feels apart from them and in

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