PERFECTING PEASANT PERSPECTIVES: IVAN TURGENEV AND ERNEST GAINES

by

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(Under the Direction of John Lowe)

ABSTRACT

Ernest Gaines has repeatedly claimed that he was heavily influenced by Ivan Turgenev's work on peasants and peasant culture in nineteenth-century Russia. This exploration examines the ways in which *Fathers and Sons* had a direct impact on the creation and development of *Catherine Carmier*. Additionally, this text also deals with the ways in which these two authors attempted to capture the unique mystical and superstitious components of peasant culture in their distinct geographical and historical settings.

INDEX WORDS: peasant; serf; slave; literacy; Turgenev; Gaines; influence; *Catherine Carmier*; *Fathers and Sons*; "Bezhin Lea," *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*; *Sketches from a Hunter's Album*; "A Long Day in November;" folklore; superstition; mythology; religion

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For Evelyn and Gordon Herndon

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INTRODUCTION

HISTORICAL CONVERGENCE

The important Louisiana African American author Ernest Gaines has said numerous times that the most vital literary influences on him were not other African American authors, famously claiming, "No black author had influence on me" (Gaudet and Wooton 33). Furthermore, Gaines has asserted that no American authors have influenced him as much as the great nineteenth-century Russian authors, including Chekhov, Dostoevsky, Pushkin, and Tolstoy. However, the man to whom Gaines elevated as the most significant influence on his writing was Ivan Turgenev. Gaines even went so far as to refer to Turgenev as his "first great influence" (Gaudet and Bourque 157). With these admissions in mind, the ultimate goal of this thesis is to show the influence that the literature of Ivan Turgenev has had on Ernest Gaines, through an exhaustive and formal explication. Turgenev was one of the first authors who focused on peasant culture and Gaines continued this legacy while also expanding the possibilities of the artform. Where Turgenev confronts social injustice and retains peasant culture in a primarily Caucasian people group, Gaines furthers the scope of peasant culture through a regional lens, incorporating issues of race, affluence, miscegenation, and dialect. Both men seek to preserve culture, in effect creating literary time capsules, while also attempting to enact socio-political change and the reconciliation of various ethnic groups.

To this point, there has been no formal analysis of these two men's work in context with one another and the explorations set forward in the following chapters may offer a useful gateway for interpreting the influence and methods used to emphasize the seemingly cyclical nature of peasant culture in Turgenev's and Gaines's texts.

The historical similarities foregrounding this study developed in nineteenth century, which was an era witnessed some of the world's most sweeping socio-political changes that still affect communities worldwide. Perhaps the most significant of these historical alterations was the considerable reduction in legalized slavery around the globe. The Abolition Act of 1807 effectively ended the British slave trade and by 1833, the Emancipation Act had abolished slavery in all British colonies ("A World of Slavery: Britain"). While the British Empire was one of the first major powers to change their approach to slavery, other countries lagged behind and refused to adopt more progressive humanitarian laws in favor of economic pursuits. America found itself in the latter of these two distinctions and by 1861 it was ripped apart by a war that pitted ideological and geographical communities against one another. While several other causes such as states' rights, the Fugitive Slave act, and the Missouri Compromise are often cited as important reasons behind the Civil War, slavery certainly should be seen as one of the foremost causes of dissent ("Causes of the Civil War"). However, due to Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, the conclusion of the Civil War, and the ratification of the 13th Amendment on December 6, 1865, slavery was legally abolished in the United States of America ("The Emancipation Proclamation;" "13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution").

While America was being torn apart due to the Civil War, another labor force was being introduced to freedom for the first time in Russia. The longstanding system of serfdom, which

was established in Russia in 1649 and "was not technically slavery" even though these two systems had many similarities as the participants were indentured to a certain degree (Lynch). In serfdom, the "landowner did not own the serf" and "the serf was bound to the lord" because of the land on which the serf lived (Lynch). 1861's Emancipation statute issued by Tsar Alexander II changed this system definitively as serfs were "made legally free from their landlords (Lynch). Tsar Alexander II's mandate resulted in serfs being allowed to buy land from the estates of their former owners, vote, marry a person of their own choice, and even possess legal rights to sue in court (Lynch). However, the newfound freedom that serfs had begun to experience led to new problems, specifically corruption in land divisions and debt entrapment, brought about by landowners seeking a continued hold on their former power. In a dramatically analogous manner, the conclusion of Russian serfdom and American slavery resulted in a very similar system known as sharecropping, which was a system of agricultural production through the use of tenant farming. Though emancipated, sharecroppers were often given some of the worst offerings of land available from landowners; these tracts not only difficult to maintain but also produced little food or profit (Lynch). Furthermore, to ensure the continued commitment of tenant farmers for future generations, many landowners took considerable advantage of the lack of savings of many of their former slaves and granted them loans, which were given at exorbitant interest rates (Lynch). For many sharecropping families, the first generation got into a considerable amount of debt, which tied the next generation to the land, offering a system of cyclical redemption payments that had to be made before a family was free to leave (Lynch). In both Russia and America, this system of sharecropping continued to be mired in corruption and frustrating loan schemes for decades, until the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the mobilization of the U.S.

South for World War II respectively brought on sweeping economic and agricultural changes (Lynch; Giesen).

The convergence in the history of slavery in these two countries, particularly through exceptionally similar transitions in agricultural production, is fascinating, but the legacies left behind by these systems also present intriguing scenarios. In particular, artistic impressions of the emancipated slaves and serfs who eventually became sharecroppers are of vital importance, because they permit future generations to both experience and understand the problems affecting these individuals firsthand, through music, paintings, and literature, an especially critical pursuit due to the extremely low rate of literacy by families growing out of traditions of slavery and serfdom. In the introduction for his *Four Russian Serf Narratives*, John Mackay makes it clear that literacy in the serf population was quite rare: "although there exists no adequate estimate of the percentage of serfs able to read and/or write, we can safely assume that the numbers were not large" (Mackay 3). Mackay clarifies this discussion of serf illiteracy and comments that "scholars have identified only a few serf autobiographies in total - around twenty - although surely other autobiographical texts and fragments repose in police estate archives awaiting discovery" (Mackay 4). Equally substandard levels of literacy were typical of American slaves: as with serfs, it is challenging to define the level of literacy in the slave population (Lynch). In many cases, "we are often compelled to rely on evidence left by their owners. Though it is fragmentary and frequently unreliable, when it survives, it can be revealing" (Lynch). The most accurate estimation for illiteracy in the slave population is found in the 1870 census, where 11.5 percent of the white population and 79.9 percent of the black or other population were counted as illiterate ("120 Years of Literacy"). This made the recording of the lives, history, and especially culture of these mostly illiterate serfs and slaves of vital importance because without historical

and artistic expressions of these groups, the identity of an entire segment of a population would be discarded as a group viewed as inferior.

One of the first individuals to gain prominence for his depictions of serf culture was Ivan Sergeyevich Turgenev. His family was aristocratic and their estate Spasskoye utilized many serf workers. When he was a child, Turgenev "played with the serf children on the estate," but was fully aware that "he was the master" (Troyat 4). Turgenev grew to adulthood in close proximity to serfs, but was horrified of his mother's gruesome treatment of them as she "ruled over her serfs with a rod of iron, treating them exactly as the Czar treated his own subjects" (Magarshack 14). By the time he enrolled at Moscow University in 1833, he was all too ready to join in with his fellow students who detested serfdom. He was determined to "condemn slavery even more vehemently than his comrades" while also "chipping away at his own maternal colossus," for whom he reserved a great amount of disdain (Troyat 8). By 1847, an opportunity to publish a collection of his naturalistic writings that featured an attempted objective depiction of serfs arose and his *Sketches from a Hunter's Album* was published serially in *The Contemporary* literary journal between 1847 and 1851 before being formally published in 1852 (Freeborn 1; Freeborn x). With these short stories he effectively created "an album of pictures drawn from Russian country life in the period prior to the Emancipation of the serfs in 1861" and "began to devote himself to realistic depiction of the inadequacies in Russian society" (Freeborn 1, 2). These *Sketches* also cast ripples through Turgenev's life and the social waters around him, and after their publication he "suffered official government disapproval and exile to his estate" (Freeborn x). Though he received political punishments, these tracts made a significant contribution to the movement for the emancipation of the serfs after the Crimean War and were also aesthetically appreciated due to their strength at "depicting the peasants as endowed with a culture of their

own" (Freeborn 10). Through "his novels, especially *Fathers and Sons*, he was no doubt to achieve greater things, but his *Sketches* were his first major achievement" and aided in a reevaluation of peasant value (Freeborn 13).

Turgenev's work was significant because it offered a rethinking of the serf system in Russian and forced a recognition of the humanity of a devalued culture. His work also forms a figurative bridge to America, especially with the progression from serfdom and slavery to sharecropping. In the twentieth century, Ivan Turgenev became one of, if not, the most vital influences on the work of Ernest James Gaines, an African American author born in 1933 in Pointe Coupee Parish, Louisiana (Carmean 1). Gaines, like Turgenev, was first influenced most significantly by a powerful female figure in his life. Unlike Turgenev, Gaines was fortunate to be raised by a strong willed and graceful woman, his aunt Miss Augusteen Jefferson. In an essay he wrote about the background for *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, he writes, "Until I was fifteen years old, I had been raised by an aunt, a lady who had never walked a day in her life, but who crawled over the floor as a six-month-old child might" (Gaines 4). The influence this woman would have on him is apparent in the numerous dedicated women throughout his texts. His experiences in childhood, like Turgenev's, also had a profound impact on his writing. At the "age of eight he was in the fields, picking cotton and gathering Irish potatoes for fifty cents a day" and he would "often be sent to cut wood in the swamps" as well (Carmean 2). At the age of fifteen, Gaines moved to Vallejo, California. His mother had earlier moved there with her second husband. There Ernest's loneliness and feelings of displacement led him to the Vallejo Public Library (Carmean 3, 4). Gaines began to sift through books at random at first before eventually selecting works by Willa Cather and John Steinbeck. While he found these texts somewhat

intriguing, the characters in these books were not those that he knew or with whom he could truly relate (Carmean 4).

Gaines finally found authors worthy of his attention when he discovered "the great European writers," which eventually led him from Guy de Maupassant to Anton Chekhov (Carmean 8). Once Gaines was introduced to Russian authors, he decided to stay in that canon and went from "Chekhov to Tolstoy, then to the rest of the Russians - among them Pushkin, Gogol and Turgenev," enjoying "especially Turgenev's *A Sportsman's Sketches* and his *Fathers and Sons*" (Gaines 8). The "nineteenth-century Russian writers" quickly became his "favorites, and to this day as a group of writers of any one country, they still are" because Gaines "felt that they wrote about peasantry or, put another way, truer than any other group of writers of any country" [1](Gaines 8-9). Unlike the peasant figures put for by other authors who he had read, the nineteenth-century Russians, Turgenev in particular, created realistic depictions of peasant culture. As Gaines stated:

> Their peasants were not caricatures or clowns. They did not make fun of them. They were people - they were good, they were bad. They could be as brutal as any man, they could be as kind. The American writers in general, the Southern writer in particular, never saw peasantry, especially black peasantry in this way; blacks were either caricatures of human beings or they were problems. They needed to be saved or they were saviors. They were

[1] It should be noted here that two of Gaines's other most prominent influences, Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner, were also heavily inspired by nineteenth-century Russian authors. Faulkner, who Gaines credits "with influencing the structure of his language and dialogue," frequently "singled out Dostoevsky, placing him among the great writers who inspired him not only to 'match' their achievements but outdo them" (Babb 12; Bloshteyn 69). Gaines also "claims Hemingway as an ancestor" and in an interview with Marcia Gaudet and Carl Wooton, he claimed, "I think Hemingway's importance to me is a combination of the language and that particular theme of grace under pressure. Of course, there are also his drinking well and eating well. I like to do that, too" (Beavers 31; Gaudet and Wooton 23). Hemingway was also significantly influenced by the nineteenth-century Russian authors and he elevated Turgenev in particular, referring to him as "'the greatest writer there ever was'" (Cirino 46). The influence of nineteenth-century Russian authors on men who would help mold Gaines's writing is of importance here as even Gaines's geographically and historically approximate influences were essentially molded by the same Russian literary heritage that Gaines extols.

> either children or they were seers. But they were very seldom what the average being was. There were exceptions, of course, but I'm talking about a total body of writers, the conscience of a people. (Gaines 9)

These authors provoked genuine interest within him, and for the first time in his life, Gaines was able to relate to authors because of depictions of a segment of society with which he was familiar. These portrayals, however were incomplete for the young man from Louisiana; while he "found the nineteenth-century Russian writers superior for their interest in the peasants, they, too, could not give [him] the satisfaction that [he] was longing for. Their four- and five-syllable names were foreign to [him]" (Gaines 9). Gaines meditated on his distanced feeling from these authors and claimed, "even those who I thought were nearest to the way I felt were not close enough" (Gaines 9). So, in the vein of the authors he respected and enjoyed the most, he began to write stories reflective of his own peasant culture, more commonly referred to as sharecroppers in the American South. In doing so, he modeled his writing style after the man who was his "first great influence," Ivan Turgenev (Gaines 157).

Ernest Gaines sought to carry on the legacy of "depicting the peasants endowed with a culture of their own" while also adapting, or evolving the narrative form used to observe the sharecropping characters who embody his texts (Freeborn 10). Much of Turgenev's work, especially his *Sketches from a Hunter's Album*, illustrates an outsider's perspective on peasant culture, which is reasonable due to Turgenev's own aristocratic past, but the narrative removal results in a lack of conversation with peasant characters where the "framework of the peasant encounters, then, tends to objectivize and to distance" (Freeborn 5). Though Gaines found considerable enjoyment in Turgenev's work, this quality is not one that he would seek in emulating the Russian's style. Where Turgenev wrote from an outsider's perspective seeking for

societal reform and the retainment of culture, Gaines wrote from an insider's perspective and simply continued writing for the sharecroppers he had known all his life. In a sense, he had been doing this type of writing for the sharecroppers around him for the majority of his life, but he had been doing in a different form. When he was younger, the "older, mostly illiterate residents of the plantation" would "ask Ernest to write letters to friends and relatives" simply recounting their experiences and health on the plantation for them (Carmean 2, 3). For Gaines, these moments had a profound impact, and he chose to memorialize his own history of writing for illiterate figures through the character of Jimmy in *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* (215).

For convenience and ease of reading, I have chosen to break this work into chapters. My first chapter investigates the distinct influence that Ivan Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons* had on Ernest Gaines when he was composing *Catherine Carmier*. Gaines used Turgenev's most critically acclaimed and famous novel as a template for his own text, while also making distinct modifications to the form of the peasant novel, including explicit structural divisions, racial elements, and a strong reliance on the influence of religion in the American South amongst others. My second chapter offers an analysis of the use of folk tales, mythical figures, and the supernatural capabilities in the fiction of Turgenev and Gaines, illustrating the vital importance myths play in preserving peasant and sharecropping cultures.

CHAPTER 1

STRUCTURAL INFLUENCE AND CONTINUED LEGACIES

"*Fathers and Children* was a bible to me when I was writing *Catherine Carmier*. I read that book every day" (Parrill 192)

Ernest J. Gaines's first attempt at writing a novel was 1964's *Catherine Carmier*. His inaugural foray into the form was met with modest commercial and critical success, selling less "than fifteen hundred copies" of its first edition of publication and garnering little academic praise (Gaines 28). However, within coming decades, Gaines would hone his craft, perfecting the physical characterizations, speech, and actions of Louisiana agricultural communities, sharecroppers in particular. These evolutions in form and craft may not have ever existed without the template set forth by Ivan Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*.

For the last few decades, Ernest Gaines has been nothing less than effusive for the texts of Ivan Turgenev, citing him as his "first great influence" (Gaudet and Bourque 157). While Gaines admits in several interviews to being influenced by the stream of consciousness technique pioneered by Joyce, regionalism from Faulkner, and father-daughter alignments from Shakespeare, Gaines holds a special and reserved air for Turgenev, referring to his *Fathers and Sons* in sacred terms (Gaudet and Bourque 156-157). Always a spiritual man, if not specifically religious in a traditional manner, Gaines saw Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons* as his own holy book during the composition of his first novel. In a 1976 interview with Charles Rowell, Gaines

claims, "His *Fathers and Sons* was a great influence on my first novel *Catherine Carmier*; I used his novel as a Bible when I was writing *Catherine Carmier*" (Rowell 92). Replicating this language and praise for Turgenev in a 1978 interview with Patricia Rickels in 1978, Gaines again claims, "Ivan Turgenev is *definitely* an influence. I read *Fathers and Sons* as a *bible* when I was writing my first novel *Catherine Carmier*. I've read him ever since. Definitely an influence" (Rickels 134). When questioned again nearly a decade later in 1986 by William Parrill, Gaines claims "*Fathers and Children* was a bible to me when I was writing *Catherine Carmier*. I read that book every day" (Parrill 1986). Most recently, in a 2004 interview with John Lowe, Gaines continued with this comparison, recalling, "Oh yes, that book was my bible when I was writing my first novel, *Catherine Carmier*" (Lowe 299). At certain moments in these interviews, Gaines even discusses the specific ways in which *Fathers and Sons* helped to shape his own novel, but these glances are cursory at most and to this point, there has been no formal textual analysis linking these two important novels. What I hope to accomplish in this chapter is a formal evaluation of the ways in which Gaines not only appropriated elements of Turgenev's text into his novel but also improved the legacy of peasant artwork.

Gaines's most common comment when discussing the use of *Fathers and Sons* as a template for *Catherine Carmier* is related to the overall structure of these novels. Quite literally, the plots of each text are extremely similar as both tales involve the return of an educated young man to the estate and plantation to which he is respectively from. In his own words, Gaines claimed that the story "is based around Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*" and, like that text, is simply about a man "coming from the North, coming back to the South, and meeting a beautiful lady, coming back to the old place, to the old people and just as Bazarov does, the doctoral

student coming back home for a while to be with his mother and father," so too does "Jackson [comes] back to be with his Aunt Charlotte" (Sartisky 265).

While Gaines is quite modest about the level to which he delved into replicating the plot structure between these two texts, it is apparent that the driving force behind each of these novels is the issue of generational disagreement. In *Fathers and Sons*, generational differences are philosophical and political in nature, and Arkady and Bazarov constantly seek out change that differentiates them from the older, romantically characterized Petrovich men. At one point after returning home and having the chance to talk to his father about the estate and their financial distress, Arkady reflects, "this isn't a rich region, it doesn't strike one as either prosperous or industrious. It can't. Just can't stay like this. Reforms are essential" (Turgenev 12). Though his comment is made about the estate, his thoughts ring true for societal reform and even his father's hierarchy of pursuits. Nikolai Petrovich also experiences a newfound understanding of the change his son and Bazarov have undergone during breakfast on the first day after his arrival home. Arkady claims that Bazarov is a nihilist, which he defines as "'a man who doesn't acknowledge any authorities, who doesn't accept a single principle on faith, no matter how much that principle may be surrounded by respect'" (23). Still attempting to be conciliatory and supportive, Nikolai Petrovich simply claims "'We, then of another age,'" will "admire you from afar'" (23). Gradually, the congenial nature of their philosophical and socio-political differences dissolves and Nikolai Petrovich's growing wariness about the younger generation is made more tangible as Pavel Petrovich's frustration boils over into a full blown argument about the long term goals for the philosophy set forth by Arkady and Bazarov (45). Arkady makes it clear that they "'don't recognize any authorities'" at all and Nikolai Petrovich exclaims, "'You're condemning everything or, to be more precise, you're pulling everything down, but surely

you've got to build something as well'" (50). Arkady illustrates the philosophical purge of he and his friend when he retorts, "'That's not for us to do. First, we've got to clear the ground'" (50).

Comments like this occur throughout the text, but the key for understanding their transmission into Gaines's text is the tension of philosophical identities between two very different generations. In *Catherine Carmier*, the conflict between generations is also due to disparate philosophies about what is to be valued, but this conflict also resides in the literal separation of the young individuals, who have now moved away, from the older generation that still inhabits the plantation. When Jackson returns to Louisiana after having been away for a decade receiving his education, he is reminded of his childhood on the land and is confronted with his Christian past when Mrs. Viney recounts, "'I 'member when you got baptized. You sure was a great little Christian. I hope you still keeping up the good work'" (65, 66). Jackson hears her words, but "does not answer her," simply reflecting that "He could not remember the last time he went into a church" (66). Jackson's level of education operates as another divide between him and those on the plantation. During his homecoming party, he realizes that the older individuals "did not know what to do around him" and as soon as Jackson enters into certain circles of conversation, "the conversation came to an abrupt end" (66, 67). The men "waited for him to make the first move" because "He had been educated, not they. They did not know how to meet and talk to educated people" (67). It is only after Jackson exits the circle and reenters the party that the men's conversation can resume. Gaines's protagonist is thus portrayed as an outsider, like Bazarov, due to his education and dismissal of religion, or all structures of authority for that matter.

The philosophical differences in generations displayed between the main characters in each of these texts also are reflected in the way that the agricultural community and land is depicted. In Turgenev's text, Nikolai Petrovich confesses to his son that the peasants are "'not paying their rent'" anymore and that the hired laborers are "'being stirred up'" while putting "'no real effort into their work'" and treating the equipment poorly (10). Arkady's father even discusses the concept of land division when he discusses selling part of his land, which is eventually "'going to the peasants'" (12). Arkady's opinion of his father's estate is bleak and he reflects, "this isn't a rich region, it doesn't strike one as either prosperous or industrious. It can't just can't stay like this. Reforms are essential. But how to go about them, how to start?" (12). When told by his father that his philosophy condemns everything without building anything else, Arkady replies by claiming that that job is "'not for us to do'" (50). For Arkady and Bazarov, their job is to "'clear the ground'" because the "'contemporary state of the peasantry demands this'" (50). Turgenev's text, although ostensibly focused on the unique relationships between autocratic generations of men, ultimately engages with the relation of the peasant to the land, as well as what may happen if reforms are not made.

These issues of estates, property, and rebuilding also offer a fascinating avenue of analysis into the intrinsic value of place and land in these two texts. While rural Russia and Louisiana are two considerably disparate locations, covered with significantly different vegetation, wildlife, and climates, the ways that characters interact with nature in each text appears restorative. For Bazarov, the land offers an area for consistent exploration where he can process his surroundings, procure creatures for dissection, and experience unbridled freedom. Upon arrival at Nikolai Petrovich's estate, Bazarov wakes up earlier than everyone else and goes for a walk (17). When he is next seen, he emerges from the garden with his nice clothing

"spattered with mud and a clinging marsh plant" wound about "the crown of his old round hat" (24). Bazarov also possesses a bag that is full of frogs and he quickly tells those around him that he intends to carry out dissections on these creatures (24). For the young nihilist, nature presents a place where solace can be attained in solitude while also presenting a need for order. Bazarov's pragmatism allows him to submerge himself into nature during his walks and emerge with samples that will allow him to more deeply understand his surroundings, provoking joy and deeper knowledge. Essentially, nature allows Bazarov a place where he can both belong as an individual while also exerting authority and ordering all that is around him through scientific experimentation. Similarly, Raoul also is consumed by his relationship with nature as his farming pursuits offer him a sense of belonging that he cannot achieve elsewhere. Herman Beavers has described the physical environment of Catherine Carmier as offering a "deadly fusion of desolation and fertility" (134). This dichotomy becomes the most apparent in the life of Catherine's father as the "land becomes a text on which Raoul can inscribe the illusion of racelessness" because farming is the ultimate opportunity for equality for him (Beavers 138). For Bazarov and Raoul, nature appears restorative and can also be labeled a meritocratic local where these men toil to discover order and achieve their goals.

Catherine Carmier consistently engages the same issues of property division, maligned land, and a conflict of purpose between two generations and, in a way, acts as a continuation of the struggle occurring on the Nikolai Petrovich estate. Gaines's text features numerous individuals discussing the effects of unfair sharecropping practices, agricultural bullying, and the loss of a generation due to the absence of reform. Francois expresses serious doubt over Jackson's long-term possibility of staying on the plantation because "'People leaving here; not coming back'" (5). Francois even questions the economic value of remaining on the plantation

and questions, "'what he do here?...Farming? It's all gone'" (5). Francois' doubts are well founded because in Gaines's novel, agricultural pursuits have not ended simply because people have lost their farming skills, but because white Cajuns have acquired the best land on the plantation through unsavory means and slowly forced the black community to retreat from farming. In fact, Aunt Charlotte confirms this, and tells Jackson that most "'of the houses done been tored down'" and "'All where they was, now you got crop. Cajuns cropping all the land now'" (29). Expressing disbelief at how the black community has been nearly eliminated from farming system on this plantation, Jackson asks Aunt Charlotte how the Cajuns "'take the land when it's not theirs'" and she promptly responds, "'They've got they way...A white man'll find a way to take something, that's for sure'" (29). Catherine even reflects upon the hopelessness of the agricultural situation and talks to her sister, Lillian, about the plight of their father, who is the last black sharecropper on the plantation. She claims, "'Daddy's world is over with,'" an idea professed by nearly all of the black characters in the text (40). For the black farmers, "The only thing you can do is get away'" from the lack of opportunities and attempt to create a new life elsewhere through another pursuit (61).

While the issues of conflict between the Cajuns and the black figures in *Catherine Carmier* are explored in this text, there is very little interaction between these two groups. Herman Beavers discusses this separation and locates Jackson as the figure "positioned exactly between the hostile whites and the increasingly hostile blacks," yet the reader must learn of the Cajuns almost entirely "through the stories the peasants tell" (140, 136). While Jackson can understand both sides due to his heritage, linking him with the peasant culture, and his education, linking him with the white community, Turgenev's Bazarov is not granted the same type of dual understanding. For the young nihilist, he has a "special flair for eliciting the trust of the lower

orders," but he "never indulged them and treated them rudely" whenever he interacted with the peasants (19). Later in the novel, Bazarov insults the peasant class when he claims, "'Who can understand him? He can't understand himself" (156). Fittingly, Bazarov's comments are self-condemnatory as he is the one who is incapable of understanding this segment of society, choosing to frequently humiliate and deride them. Though both Bazarov and Jackson are placed in the middle of a socio-economic disparity, Jackson, though racially divided entirely from one group, is really the only one capable of understanding each side. Turgenev's binary finds its bridge in Gaines's novel as the perspective changes and peasant culture is shown through the eyes of a man from within the system itself who is able to negotiate the gap.

These generational and racial differences in philosophy and opportunity spur the plots on in each text and eventually lead to the some of the most captivating, and confrontational, passages in both novels. In Turgenev's novel, the verbal sparring between Pavel Petrovich and Bazarov offers not only a quick escalation in disparate philosophical approaches but also provides some impressively crafted verbal sparring. Pavel Petrovich is initially upset by "Bazarov's completely free-and-easy manner" and becomes even more so when Bazarov claims, "'A good chemist's twenty times more useful than a poet'" (25, 26). These comments are particularly upsetting to Pavel Petrovich, the character in the text who can best be identified with the ideal romantic man who pursues poetry and art for the sake of beauty. Bazarov, then, is identifiable as cold, logical pragmatism, valuing function over aesthetics. Thus, these two men are at odds in what they appreciate and pursue, effectively creating a collision of generational and philosophical ideals. Pavel Petrovich begins to loath Bazarov "with all the strength of his spirit" and considers "him arrogant, brazen, cynical and common" (45). Furthermore, he refers to him as a "'charlatan'" and in reference to his philosophical sensibilities he claims, "'The fact is

that previously they were simply dunces and now they've suddenly become nihilists'" (46, 54). These moments of outrage and disparagement eventually reach their boiling point and Pavel Petrovich, on the cusp of an altercation, calmly declares, "'I have decided to fight a duel with you'" (149). Despite his lack of familiarity with pistols, Bazarov hears a shot whiz by his ear and "without aiming," he returns fire as "Pavel Petrovich staggered slightly and grabbed at his thigh" while a "trickle of blood appeared through his white trousers" (154). Bazarov's success in the duel, an activity foreign to him, he defeats the older generation on a field which Pavel Petrovich is much more familiar due to his past as a captain in the military (29).

While Gaines's novel does not feature a weaponized duel like the one in *Fathers and Sons*, Gaines still manages to incorporate two confrontations, one figurative and one literal. The first duel takes place between Jackson and his Aunt Charlotte when he tells her that he did not go to church in California because he "'had to study on Sundays just like any other day'" (99). During this argument, Jackson notices a "calendar with the picture of Christ hung above the mantelpiece" and this "picture was supposed to represent Christ kneeling in the garden of Gethsemane" (99). In a physical reflection of Jackson's interior dismissal of Christianity, he "thought both the idea and the portrait were disgusting, and he looked away" from the illustration (99). His action and rejection of Christianity is reflected when he claims, "'I haven't forgotten God. But Christ, the church, I don't believe in the bourgeois farce-'" (100). Before Jackson can even finish the sentence, Aunt Charlotte "slapped him across the mouth" and, furiously, "His eyes told her if she were anyone else, he would not have taken that insult" (100). This altercation includes the physical element of Aunt Charlotte hitting him, but Jackson does not retaliate. In fact, he does not have to enter into a physical altercation with Aunt Charlotte because his words

are enough to gain victory in the encounter and his choice to elevate knowledge over religion represents a clear deviation from Aunt Charlotte's beliefs.

Jackson also takes part in a physical altercation with Catherine's father, Raoul, at the conclusion of the text. This duel also takes place due to ideological reasons, specifically skin color, but the fight between these two men is also the most violent passage in Gaines's novel. Raoul, hearing of his daughter's involvement with a Jackson, a black man, retrieves his pistol and returns home as fast as he can, hoping to catch Catherine before she leaves town with Jackson. Raoul succeeds in catching them before they leave and he stares at Catherine in "disbelief," barely able to comprehend that she may be about to leave him (236). When Jackson places his arm on her, Raoul grows irate and as the "gun was shaking in his hand" Raoul screams for Jackson to unhand her, believing that she is being abducted in a sense (237). Jackson attacks Raoul, knocking the gun away, and they proceed with an extended fistfight. At the end of the altercation, Catherine goes to her father, helps him to his feet, and "passe[s] her hand over his face" (241). Jackson can only watch as Catherine assists her father; after these two enter the house, Della approaches Jackson and tells him to "'wait for [Catherine]'" even "'If it takes twenty years'" (248). The text concludes with Jackson outside of the Carmier house as "He stood there, hoping Catherine would come back outside. But she never did" (248).

Raoul's identification of himself as a Creole and his rejection of Jackson's color are of significance leading up to this confrontation, but the Electra complex at work in this scene, as well as the sequences between Catherine and Raoul leading up to it, are also of vital importance. Herman Beavers asserts that "the roles of lover and daughter become tangled, suggesting that the two narrative impulses, as they regard African American identity, have what amounts to an incestuous, and thus self-destructive, relationship" (Beavers 138). Mary Ellen Doyle furthers this

discussion of incestuous impulses and refers to the "discussions of the novel" that "speak of its plot, and especially its heroine, as tragic," further reinforcing these approaches by acknowledging that "Gaines had read widely in Greek tragedy and felt he had approximated elements of it in this novel" (Doyle 80). The seemingly romantic affection between Raoul and Catherine certainly appears to adhere to certain Greek antecedents and Beavers describes this relationship as an "Oedipal conflict" that demands closure (142). Beavers's analysis seems appropriate and the psychosexual Electra complex between Catherine and Raoul appears to act as yet another way for Gaines to pull the thread on another literary antecedent, linking the issue of color prejudice within one's own race to one of the earliest tales of incestuousness. Freud's own psychosexual explanations for these arrangements have lost respect in academia, but the familial loyalty on display is of note, even if not specifically sexual. Jackson is able to destroy this strangely romantic configuration between Raoul and Catherine as the altercation between the two men in Catherine's life "restores domestic convention to the Carmier household," which, as Herman Beavers argues, ultimately frees Catherine "from the dual roles of wife and daughter" and allows Della to reestablish her relationship with Raoul (143).

In each of these novels, the younger generation defeats the older generation in altercations brought about by philosophical conflict. Gaines's text extends the philosophical conflicts present to include matters of ethnicity and religion, significantly evolving Bazarov's conflict with Pavel Petrovich. Curiously, the protagonists defeat Pavel Petrovich, Aunt Charlotte, and Raoul, but the outcomes they earn through these duels are not necessarily pleasant. These men gain nothing through their victories, which seems to suggest a need for reconciliation instead of outright conflict.

Oddly, Turgenev's text also delineates hair style as a type of cross-generational bifurcation. Pavel Petrovich, Arkady's uncle, speaks in disdain towards Bazarov and refers to him as "'That long-haired person'" during his introduction to the young philosophy student (17). In stark relief, Bazarov returns the favor by describing Arkady's uncle as an "'archaic phenomenon'" who "'can't forget the past'" and displays an "'exquisitely shaved chin'" (17). Only pages later, the text features Pavel Petrovich's well-shaved chin" once more as he is also describe as "wearing a stylish morning suit in the English fashion" with "a small fez" crowning his head (22). Pavel Petrovich's Western attire and his clean shaven nature place him in stark contrast with the nihilistic, "long-haired" and seemingly unkempt Bazarov (22, 17). This divide using facial hair appears quite prominently in *Catherine Carmier* as Jackson's facial hair is one of the most telling aspects of his maturation and new identity. Once Jackson returns to the plantation, the text focuses on the ways in which he has changed and after seeing him, Aunt Charlotte reflects, "She did not know whether she liked that little beard and that little moustache that was trying to break out in his face. She had never thought of him as having a beard or a moustache. She had thought he would look the same as he did when he left her" (28, 29). Jackson's physical change is apparent, but the aspect of that change on which she meditates the most is the hair growth on his face. Catherine, too, is drawn to this change and as she speaks to her mother about Jackson's return, she claims, "'He's not so little anymore...He has a moustache now'" (58). For both Bazarov and Jackson, their hair serves as a stark reminder of their extreme difference from their surroundings as well as the philosophical separation from those around them. For Gaines, especially, the moustache acts as a transformative characteristic that reinforces the reality that Jackson no longer resembles the boy who left the plantation; he is now a man and this transformation is supported through his change in perspectives and visual attributes.

Though these novels are about generational conflict and peasant culture, each text also exhibits a significant romantic plot. In *Fathers and Sons,* there are numerous cases of romantic involvement as Pavel Petrovich and Nikolai Petrovich both appear infatuated with Fenechka at various moments throughout the book. Fenechka was once a serf, but she has become Nikolai Petrovich's mistress, and he has already fathered a son with her by the time Arkady returns home. Pavel Petrovich even appears to have a romantic interest with Fenechka, even though she is involved with his brother. Arkady and Bazarov are not exempt from the somewhat convoluted romantic aspects of this novel as they both fall in love with the same woman, Madame Odintsova, before Arkady realizes he is actually in love with her younger sister, Katya. Upon reflection, Bazarov gives in to his affection for Madame Odintsova, but she is unable to feel the same way about him. The romance between Katya and Arkady, as well as the one between Nikolai Petrovich and Fenechka, prove to be successful, while Pavel Petrovich, Bazarov, and Odintsova end the novel in more lonely circumstances. Odintsova's loneliness, especially, is connoted by her last name, which contains the Russian term for the number one ("odin").

While the romantic aspects of *Fathers and Sons* occupy a considerable amount of the plot, these relationships are frequently complicated due to the multiple romantic interests and characters involved. Gaines's story appears to concentrate the numerous romantic relationships of Turgenev's text into one love triangle involving Jackson, Mary Louise, and Catherine. The use of only three individuals streamlines the role of romance in this text, and Mary Louise's passive role in this arrangement is of vital importance. When Jackson returns to the plantation, Aunt Charlotte notices a slight change in Mary Louise's disposition, sensing the emotional connection that once existed between Mary Louise and Jackson before he went to California, and asks, "'You still love him?'" (35). Modestly, Mary Louise replies, "'Yes, ma'am'" (35). As the

plot continues, Brother speaks with Mary Louise about her feelings toward Jackson. He pleads, "'Don't tell me you still love Jackson, Mary Louise'" and even though she claims, "'No,'" he "could tell by her eyes that she was lying" (179). Mary Louise never regains Jackson's affection and he elects to pursue Catherine Carmier, whose skin is much lighter than nearly everyone around apart from her sister Lillian. Catherine "was Negro, but with extremely light skin. With her thin lips and aquiline nose, with her high cheekbones, dark eyes, and dark hair, Catherine Carmier could have easily passed as an Indian" (8). The relationship between race and romance is discussed very early in the text as a barrier that should not be transgressed, and as Jackson comes home to see Aunt Charlotte and Mary Louise thinks he has returned with a white woman. Aunt Charlotte grows almost hysterical and exclaims, "'Lord-don't say that...Don't tell me Jackson done done something like that'" (23). Jackson's desire to become romantically involved with Catherine is not solely predicated on her skin color, but it seems to play a significant part in their relationship, ultimately becoming the reason for Raoul fighting with Jackson. While Gaines is able to incorporate elements of the somewhat difficult romantic relationships of *Fathers and Sons* into *Catherine Carmier*, he untangles these pursuits while also adding the element of race into the text, complicating the peasant narrative by including not only issues of land and progress, but of skin color and a new approach to the traditional Southern plantation romance.

While each of these plot elements correlates between *Fathers and Sons* and *Catherine Carmier*, these books are also structurally similar as well. Turgenev's text consists of twenty eight chapters that are each very brief in page length. *Fathers and Sons* can also be divided due to the three settings of the story itself. The first part of the story takes place at the estate of Arkady's family, which is known as Marino; the second portion of the text occurs at Madame Odintsova's estate known as Nikolskoe; and the final third of the novel primarily portrays the

events at Bazarov's estate. Gaines's novel also employs brief chapters and consists of forty seven chapters. While Gaines's novel consists of more than just three main locations that divide the novel, Turgenev's influence can be seen in *Catherine Carmier*'s division into three parts, which preserves Turgenev's triptych arrangement. Instead of using locations to divide the structure of his text, Gaines uses Jackson's return, his relationship with Catherine, and the action that leads to the confrontation between Jackson and Raoul to divide the text. So, Gaines is influenced by Turgenev's structure, but the Louisiana author modifies the organization in such a way to continue to evolve the peasant narrative while staying connected to the original template[2].

Each of these novels also concerns death, especially the perceived accidental nature of a death, as instrumental for the final action in each text. For Turgenev, Bazarov's death at the conclusion of the text is paramount; and his hero's mortal end is brought about due to a mistake that occurs when he is performing an autopsy on Vasily Ivanovich's brother who "was ill with typhus" (186). Bazarov attempts to clean and cauterize the wound, but his efforts prove ineffective and within a few days he dies from typhus infection after accidentally cutting himself while carrying out the autopsy on an infected man. Gaines appears to appropriate this idea of an accidental death as Catherine's little brother, Mark, is the one who is supposedly killed in an accident. Mark died when he and Raoul were "sawing down a tree in the woods" when "the tree suddenly made a false turn, crushing the boy into the ground" (16). After this event, many "people in the quarters called it murder, but the sheriff, as well as Mack Grover, agreed with Raoul that it was an accident" (16). At the conclusion of the text during the altercation between Jackson and Raoul, Catherine's father confronts his daughter's lover and declares, "'Boy, I don't want any more blood on my hand...I don't want any more gnawing at my heart'" (236). Della

[2] For an excellent analysis of the division of *Catherine Carmier*, consult Mary Ellen Doyle's discussion in pages 82-86 of her *Voices from the Quarters*.

hears him utter these words and reflects, “So he did kill Marky...So he did kill him. And all these years, I thought it was an accident” (242). The reason behind the potential animosity Raoul would feel toward Mark is that Raoul was not Mark’s father. In fact, “Everyone knew that the second child was not Raoul’s” because he “was darker than anyone else in the family” (16). Like Turgenev’s text, Gaines’s novel includes a death that is perceived as accidental, but *Catherine Carmier* has a twist to it and the reader finds out that Raoul is actually responsible for killing Mark. Again, Turgenev’s use of an accident for the death of a character provides a template that Gaines modifies and complicates into an investigation of jealousy, violence, and skin color.

These two novels also manage to make use of literature in a very similar way as well, especially through the invocation of Alexander Pushkin, an author heralded for his literary romanticism. Nikolai Petrovich proclaims, “‘I agree with Pushkin’” in reference to the beauty of changing seasons and Pushkin’s description of this event in *Eugene Onegin* (13). However, Bazarov derides Nikolai Petrovich’s choice in author and scoffs, “‘A couple of days ago I saw him reading Pushkin...Please tell him that’s no good at all. He’s not a child any longer and it’s time he gave up that childish nonsense’” (46). Bazarov expresses disdain for Pushkin because of the author’s links to romanticism, which are at odds with the young nihilist’s own pragmatically logical pursuits. Gaines’s novel also features a reference to Pushkin’s texts, but the reader, Lillian, is not derided by anyone in the story for her decision to read Pushkin. Jackson asks her what she has been reading recently and she replies that she had “started with Victor Hugo, whom she was reading at present, then she went to Dumas, whom she had read only recently. Dumas, like Pushkin, her favorite poet, was part negro,” and from her response it seems clear that race is a decisive factor in her choice (123). While Gaines is inserting some of his own enjoyment of Russian fiction into Lillian here, he is also drawing another distinct connection to Turgenev’s

work through the literature they mention. Specifically, Pushkin was lauded for his elevation of "folk language, especially that of the peasantry" because it could be used "as an inexhaustible source for poetical language in general" (Lopatin 543). Gaines's choice to mention a Russian author who was intrigued with the peasantry is key, as Gaines is keenly aware of Pushkin's heritage as well. Abram Gannibal "was the great grandfather of Russia's greatest poet, Alexander Pushkin" and he "most likely began life as the son of a chief in the ancient sultanate of Logone-Birni" in Cameroon, a country on the western coast of Africa (Schemann). While Bazarov appears critical of a character attempting to engage with Pushkin due to his connection to literary romanticism, Lillian pursuit of Pushkin, particularly for his African roots, appears to refocus the derisive view on Pushkin in Turgenev's text and reclaim him through racial and specifically peasant aesthetics.

Upon reflection of what he had written in *Catherine Carmier* and how he had used *Fathers and Sons* as a template, Gaines claimed, "I could not be as poetic as Turgenev was with Bazarov - having the hero dying, saying those lines - but I could deal with my area and its people" (Lowe 299). Gaines's use of *Fathers and Sons* as a template for his novel is apparent, but Gaines's main contribution to the peasant narrative legacy is a combination of regionalism and racial components. In reference to having his own story to tell, Gaines claimed, "I've always known what I wanted to say, and I wanted someone to show me how to say it, and Turgenev always showed me much more than Dostoevsky ever could. Turgenev's *Fathers and Children* or *Fathers and Sons* showed me more than any book of Dostoevsky" (Parrill 191-192). Turgenev's texts gave Gaines a structure for telling his story and while Jackson is "unable to understand and reconcile the old and the new" while failing "to persuade Catherine to leave with him for the North" at the end of the novel, Gaines's text stands as a towering achievement that does

synthesize the old in the plot and structure of Turgenev's masterpiece while also incorporating the new of Gaines's own upbringing in Louisiana, racial complexities, and evolutions in narrative (O'Brien 26).

CHAPTER 2

FOLKTALES, MYTHS, AND SUPERNATURAL CAPABILITIES

"We had the great landowners, the sharecroppers, the small towns, uptown, and back of town, the swamps, the bayous - there's a story behind every tree. Of course you have the great ghost stories and so on. I read these other writers like Turgenev to see how to do things, but I know the story is already there" (Lowe 320)

The role of myth in various levels of society has remained prevalent due to generational transmission, and one sociological study has shown that "each social class has its own culture" (Lopatin 543). Perhaps the most distinct social class in nearly all populations, due to its ability to serve as a creative power consistently, has been the lower class. This pattern has occurred frequently because "peasants did more than register fashions and forces imposed on them from without. They persisted in seeing things their way, as part of the natural order" (Netting 66). Furthermore, this low class of humanity often "did not openly reject authority; they sought to transcend it" (Netting 67). Even Mikhail Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination* a text heavily concerned with Russian canonical texts, elevates the creative capabilities of this segment of society and the mythologies and superstitions for which these people are responsible through the claim that "the novel's roots must ultimately be sought in folklore" (38). Fascinatingly, similar patterns have emerged in geographically disparate groups that provoke an exploration into their unique intersections. Two of these groups that appear to have formed an unlikely link with one

another are nineteenth-century Russian serfs and twentieth-century American sharecroppers. Few better examples of this connection may exist than the influence of myth between the texts of Ernest Gaines and Ivan Turgenev. For Russian writers, especially Gorky, Pushkin, and Turgenev, Russian literary folklore "was necessary for the further development of Russian language and literature," which meant that it must be recorded (Lopatin 543). In his *Sketches from a Hunter's Album*, Turgenev was able to accomplish just that goal and "Bezhin Lea" remains, perhaps, the strongest example of peasant culture collected and elevated. Ernest Gaines has written and spoken frequently about Turgenev's portrayal of peasants, claiming that Turgenev was his "first great influence" (Gaines 157). By comparing the cataloguing these two authors carry out through their depictions of folktales, myths, and supernatural characterizations, the interplay between the culture of the serf, and that of the sharecropper "historical and geographical" connotations fade away and the reader is left simply with a clear concept of peasant identity (Lopatin 547).

Ivan Turgenev's "Bezhin Lea," a short story published in his *Sketches from a Hunter's Album* offers perhaps the most salient glimpse into traditional folk beliefs and myths of Russian peasants during the nineteenth century. Turgenev's narrator begins the story with an account of his business in the woods for the purpose of "grouse-shooting in Chernsk county in the province of Tula" (Turgenev 100). Though it appears that the narrator is familiar with this territory, he quickly becomes lost as "darkness rose on every side and even poured down from the sky" and he "plunged off in terror" (101). The unnamed narrator wanders "wildly forward" in this darkness as his "heart shrank within [him]" before he is finally delivered into the safety and comfort of a young group of peasant children huddled around a fire in the Bezhin Lea meadowland (101, 102). These children are quite young, the oldest numbering only 14 years,

but they protect their horses in the night and pass the time by regaling each other with folktales and myths that have been passed down to them through their families and communities.

Fedya begins the conversation by telling a story about a goblin that appears in "the old rolling-room" of the paper mill in which he works with his brother (105, 106). The boys in the paper mill hear "the floorboards really bending under him and really creaking" and they also see a spout open to allow water to run over the water wheel, turning the wheel, but they see "nothing there" to carry out these actions (106). The only response that the boys in the paper mill can make when confronted with these occurrences is to fall on the floor and attempt to hide under one another while they are "bloody terrified" (107). Kostya is not entertained with Fedya's tale and begins a story about a "water-fairy" that encounters a carpenter named Gavrila and leaves him "just frightened to death" and as he crosses himself as a means for protection, the fairy condemns him to a life of grief and disappears (107, 108). Ilyusha, too, decides to add to the procession of stories and tells of Yermil's encounter with the lamb that "'looks right back at him right in the eyes'" and "'bares it teeth,'" making otherworldly noises (109, 110). These spectacular stories continue until they hear a terrifying noise from the pond close by and they quickly exclaim, "'God preserve us! God preserve us!' and begin "crossing themselves" (118). Pavlusha responds bravely that the noise is nothing peculiar and that the boys should quickly forget it, adding, "'Your own fate you can't escape'" (118). Soon after this comment, they calm down and retire for the night and in a moment of foreshadowing "Pavlusha raised himself half-way and glanced intently" at the narrator in the "sleep if the dead about the embers" (119). In the morning, the narrator departs from the camp and on his walk home he is "overtaken by the racing drove of horses," and "chased along by [his] acquaintances, the boys" in a beautiful sequence of freedom and natural imagery (119). However, this moment is not the conclusion of the tale. A

brief, three-line paragraph ends the tale and the reader is told "in that same year Pavlusha died" because "he was killed in falling from a horse" (120).

The emphasis on horses in this text is key to an understanding of Russian peasant imagery, but it is also imperative for grasping one of the most salient connections to the fiction of Ernest Gaines his conception of folklore. Traditionally in Russia, "the most important animals in peasant art were horses - or better, steeds," and "the fascination with horses spread beyond decorative art into every corner of peasant life" (Netting 60). These creatures had qualities such as "pride, flamboyance, free movement - which set them above the other domestic creatures" for Russian peasants" and they were consistently placed in an elevated status in artwork (61). Pavlusha's tragic death appears to act as a literary antecedent for Joe Pittman's death in *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* due to the mystical nature of their surrounding occurrences in the text as well as the horses that bring about their destruction.

When asked what he may have wished to change or put more time into in *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* in a 1976 interview conducted by Dan Tooker and Roger Hofheins, Ernest Gaines's first response was to "really think more about the horse and the Joe Pittman thing" (102, 103). In this same interview, Gaines links the "symbolic thing of the horse" to Miss Jane Pittman getting "involved in other things like superstitions, and dreams, and the old voodoo woman" (102). Gaines's repetition of the word "thing" in these comments invites analysis as he repeatedly leaves this image defined in the vaguest terms. He further connects the death of Joe Pittman with mystical occurrences and also wishes that he would have "read much more on folklore, black folklore, on religion and the ministry, on the interpretation of religion. [He] would go further into the voodooism" if he could change the novel (103). The Louisiana author even alluded to a literary antecedent for the horse at one point, claiming "I was thinking

of Moby Dick when I did the horse. I was thinking that nobody should break him, but when I thought, well, I don't want to play with that Moby Dick thing. Moby Dick gets away, and the horse should be broken somehow" (Ingram and Steinberg 40).

Even though Gaines does not explicitly claim an influence from Turgenev in this particular scene, it seems apparent that their approaches to the role of folklore are quite similar, due to the choice the horse as a key mythical figure in the supernatural events of the text. Jane Pittman's husband, Joe, is responsible for breaking all of the horses on Mr. Clyde's property, and after about "Seven or eight years" of living there, Miss Jane begins to have dreams where she envisions Joe dying "Every way possible a cowboy could die," but "one dream started coming back over and over, the one where he was throwed against the fence" (Gaines 92, 93). Eventually, a horse is caught and brought to the property and Miss Jane recognizes her premonition, realizing that "This was the same horse I had been seeing in my dreams" (94). The horse itself is endowed with seemingly mystical attributes as it "was stronger and faster than any horse" Joe had ever seen, could "Run for days and wouldn't get tired," and could even "Leap over a canal that a regular horse wouldn't even try" (95). After seeing the horse display its power and raw strength, many of the men start to apply a supernatural identity to the horse and begin to refer to it as a "ghost," some going so far as to refer to it as a "haint," which is simply a term used primarily in the south for a shapeshifting ghost (95). In fact, this horse's ability to leap over canals proficiently while also being referred to as a haint depicts it as a particularly strong spirit because of the Geechee belief that "these ghosts could not cross water" (Allen). Filled with terror and driven to protect her husband, Miss Jane elects not to see the doctor in town, but instead chooses to put her faith in "the hoo-doo in town" (96).

Miss Jane travels to see Madame Gautier whose house has “candles burning in every corner of the room, and she had seven on the mantelpiece” as well (96, 97). Miss Jane asks Madame Gautier if she can do anything for Joe, but the hoo-doo eventually tells her that Joe will die. In disbelief Miss Jane challenges her, but Madame Gautier claims, “‘Nothing can stop death, mon sha,’” echoing the eerie ethos of Pavlusha’s claim of “‘Your own fate you can’t escape’” (98; 118). Madame Gautier follows her prophetic claim with the proclamation, “‘Death comes. A black horse. Lightning. Guns. And you have grippe”’ (98). When asked to define grippe by Miss Jane, Madame Gautier can only elaborate that “‘Grippe is grippe’” (98). Though undefinable, apocalyptic imagery preceding the introduction of the term grippe and the homophonic relationship between grippe and grip connotes that Joe is already in the clutches of death and cannot be aided or redeemed. Joe, like Pavlusha, must suffer demise from the creature he is employed to command. Furthermore, the demise of these two characters is not illustrated in either text. Pavlusha’s death is described by the narrator in an exceptionally removed manner as “he was killed in falling from a horse” (120). Similarly, Joe Pittman’s death is conveyed to reader when the group of men return from chasing the stallion and they enter the property “with Joe tied to his own horse” (102). The narrative removal from these sequences seems to add to the supernatural elements in each narrative as we are given no real information on Pavlusha’s demise apart from his fall from the horse and Joe’s body is “found tangled in the rope, already dead” with the horse calmly eating leaves off a bush to the side” (102). Each account appears devoid of malice from these creatures, but a simple working out of a fate, that for each character, is equally inevitable and influenced by the mystical surroundings that envelope, and ultimately destroy, them. Gaines reflected on the role of Miss Jane in this text and claimed that by “the very end, Miss Jane becomes a different thing altogether. She becomes almost a recorder of history”

(Tooker and Hofheins 102). Gaines is quite accurate with this comment and the history she records appears twofold: recording that of her husband, but also pointing back to a peasant whose fate was also decided before he mounted his horse.

Gaines's attention to the Geechee belief of the haint and the supernatural elements of black mythology also becomes important during the section about Albert Cluveau, the man responsible for murdering Ned, Miss Jane's adopted son. After Ned is buried, Miss Jane travels to confront Cluveau and proclaims, "'Mr. Albert Cluveau, when the Chariot of Hell come rattling for you, the people will hear you screaming all over this parish. Now, you just ride on'" (127). This idea torments Cluveau for ten years and when it comes time for him to die, "People could hear Cluveau screaming half a mile" away (130). The use of a fiery chariot here is one that is common in African American folklore and finds its roots in 2 Kings 2 where Elijah is delivered to Heaven by means of a fiery chariot, thus bypassing the experience of death and experiencing deliverance into Heaven (2 Kings 2:11). Though Gaines claims that he "did not read [Hurston] until later" in life, she has a brief play that she published in 1932 titled *The Fiery Chariot* in which this concept of deliverance is complicated through "stereotypes of blacks as being superstitious, gullible, and cowardly" (Gaudet and Wooton 35; Hurston 221). While it is quite unlikely that Gaines read Hurston's play before composing *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, his reliance on the fiery chariot myth and the subversion of it, like Hurston, is important for black mythology as it shows a willingness to take traditional folk tales and transform them. For Gaines and Hurston, this alternation of this myth illustrates a willingness to take symbolic Christian imagery and locate it as a contradictory image that results not in deliverance and salvation but in damnation and humor.

These ideas of fate, agency, and influencing the future do not simply stop at Pavlusha, Joe Pittman, and chariots, as hoo-doos are consulted frequently in the work of Ernest Gaines. In fact, Gaines frequently places these supernatural mystics at odds with religious leaders in the community or makes his characters select a certain path by which they will commit. This feature, too, appears prominently in Turgenev's "Bezhin Lea" as moments of a fantastic nature constantly collide with religious actions or symbols. Kostya's tale about Gavrila's encounter with the water-fairy offers a strong template for an opposing viewpoint between folktales and religion, specifically Christianity. When the water-fairy confronts Gavrila and calls him closer, "'the Lord God gave him the idea to cross hisself,'" but Gavrila does not find this task to be easy and "'it was terrible difficult to make the sign of the cross 'cos his arm was like stone'" (107, 108). Providentially, Gavrila receives the ability to move his arm and as he crosses himself, the "'water-fairy stopped laughin' and started in to cry'" (108). When confronted with this religious action, the mystical figure's emotions shift drastically and she taunts, "'If you hadn't crossed yourself, human being that you are, you could've lived with me in joy and happiness to the end of your days, an' I'm cryin' and dyin' of grief over what that you crossed yourself, an' it isn't only me that'll be dyin' of grief, but you'll also waste away with grievin' till the end of your born days'" (108). The water fairy is supremely offended that Gavrila elects to hold fast to religious beliefs when offered companionship and because of his choice, she vanishes, but she foretells a prophecy in her claim that he will "'waste away grievin' till the end of your born days,'" condemning the remainder of his worldly life, but showing no autonomy over his eternal soul (108). At the conclusion of this story, Ilyusha reflects Gavrila's response in the story and he whispers, "'The power of the holy cross be with us!'" (109).

The difficult choice these figures must make between religion and folklore appears again in the next tale told, as Ilyusha, the boy who had just pleaded for the "'power of the holy cross'" to protect them, begins to tell a story about "'a real unclean place'" with "'masses of snakes'" where a drowned man is buried (109). Yermil the dog-keeper travels by this grave and "'sees a little lamb on the drowned man's grave, all white and curly and pretty'" and he "'picks it up in his arms'" (109, 110). The lamb reacts peacefully and "'doesn't turn a hair,'" but Yermil's "'horse backs away from him, snorts and shakes its head,'" in a prominent display of disapproval (110). As their journey continues, Yermil looks into the eyes of the sheep and his gaze is met by the lamb looking "right back at him right in the eyes,'" an action that reflects upon Yermil as strange, thinking that no lamb had ever looked at him in this way before (110). Yermil grows "'terrified'" at this moment and as he speaks lightly to the creature, attempting to calm it, the "'lamb bares its teeth at him sudden-like and says back to him: "Sssh, there, sssh!"'" (110). Just as this lamb begins to snarl Yermil's sounds back at him, the dogs sitting at the campfire with boys and the narrator begin braking and storm off into the woods as if they have sensed a disturbance around them (110). This action and noise from the dogs serves to startle the reader, creating the effect that something horrible has happened in Ilyusha's tale. Ilyusha never returns to Yermil's story and the reader is left to wonder what tragic fate befalls him. This tale appears more sinister than Gavrila's story, but both involve a confrontation of religion and folklore that dooms the protagonist of each. Yermil comes into contact with a seemingly peaceful lamb, appearing to be a straightforward allusion to one of Christ's many epithets, but the religious imagery is corrupted by the malevolent actions of the lamb. Through this inversion of a traditional symbol for Christ, Yermil's tale also acts as a fascinating collision in cultural identity, bifurcating religious pursuits from folk beliefs and acting as a pagan parable appropriating

Christian imagery, even going so far as to subvert a man who has been killed through a type of sinister baptism.

Ernest Gaines appears highly aware of this division that Turgenev sets forth and his fiction also consistently embodies a choice characters must make between folk beliefs and religion. In an interview with William Parrill in 1986, Gaines claimed, "Religion is not a main theme that I'm interested in. It's always there, just like the color of the skin," and continues, "the church is there at all times" (Parrill 186). While Gaines may not confess to being consciously committed to investigations of religious commitments in his text, they certainly seem apparent and are made most evident through their conflict with mystical folk beliefs.

In a 2011 special with PBS, Gaines elaborates on his connection with religion, spirituality, and heritage. Gaines was quite clear in this special that his connection to the church also appears to be most valuable for its intrinsic connection to his ancestors as he claims, "When I'm sitting in the church alone, I can hear singing of the old people. I can hear their singing and I can hear their praying, and sometime I hum one of their songs" (Faw). In this special, John Lowe declares that Gaines's "works radiate spirituality" and that in the texts of the Louisiana author, "man has to believe in something bigger than himself" (Faw). For Gaines, the importance of religion does not appear to be a personal relationship with God, but the community that arises between those who collectively believe in God as he claims, "What I miss today more than anything else-I don't go to church anymore-but that old-time religion, that old singing, that old praying which I love so much. That is the great strength of my being, or my writing" (Faw). While Gaines sees religion and spirituality as a tangible connection to the past, there is certainly conflict that arises in many of his texts due to the tension between the history of religion as a means to pacify slaves and the church as a stabilizing force in the civil rights movement. Mary

Ellen Doyle highlights this tension as she discusses the importance of the church as "the gathering place of the community" in Gaines's work while at the same time there are "numerous preachers who are either fools or abusers of power-or both" (Doyle 31). Perhaps Revered Jameson in *A Gathering of Old Men* offers Gaines's most damning portrayal of church leadership as he "unquestionably is presented as weak and despised by all, including, it seems, his author/creator" and his portrayal as "the only man who falls down when Mapes strikes him" seems particularly harsh (Doyle 190). Gaines's approach to religious leaderships somewhat as his career continues and his depiction of Reverend Ambrose offers a far more sympathetic view to church leadership than any before. It seems that the Louisiana author values the church for its ability to connect and sustain community while transmitting history, but the seat of leadership in the clergy and the failure to act in the face of danger or at times of tumult appear to be where Gaines places his condemnation most frequently.

For Gaines, individuals are confronted with problems and must select which direction they will follow, selecting a religious or mystical path. He makes this decision explicit in the Parrill interview and discusses the conflict of Eddie in "A Long Day in November," claiming that "he goes to the church and the church fails him, so he has to go to the voodoo woman" (186). The failure that Gaines references involves Eddie's wife leaving him because he acts like a fool with his car, staying out late driving it around instead of being at home with her and Sonny. Seeking wisdom, Eddie decides to see Reverend Simmons for assistance finding a solution. Eddie asks, "'Reverend, you sure you can't do nothing?'" and he responds, "'I tried, son,'" and "'Now we'll leave it in God's hand'" (69). The lack of assistance from the preacher and Eddie's frustration shines through Eddie's reflection that "'When you want one of them preachers to do something for you, they can't do a doggone thing'" (69). In this sequence, the

church is depicted as powerless and apathetic, relegating the concept of organized religion to a secondary position in the text. Frustrated and with a lack of options, Sonny's father decides to "'go to that old hoo-doo woman'" because "'there ain't nothing else [he] can do (70).

When Eddie and Sonny arrive at Madame Toussaint's house, she greets him by name and as they enter, Sonny notices a "dog bark three times in the house," the "three old rotten teeth" in her mouth, and the price she charges for consultation, which is "three dollars" (71, 72). Madame Toussaint proceeds to instruct Eddie to run a piece of string "'cross the left side of the boy's face three times,'" and then "She picks up three little green sticks she got tied together and starts poking in the fire with them" (75, 76). To conclude her ceremony, she speaks three words to Eddie and simply states, "'Give it up'" (76). He is unsure of what she is referencing and he asks her to repeat it, but when she repeats it for the third time, she tells him to leave, claiming, "'I said it three times...No more, no less. Up to you now to follow it through from there'" (77). Eddie, still confused, tries to procure more information from her and offers to do work around the house or chop wood in exchange for clarification on her words, but she claims that she "'got three loads of wood just three days ago'" and is now bombarded by men "'who have been dropping in three times a day'" because they are also in "'trouble with their wives'" (78). At the conclusion of this exchange, "Madame Toussaint's big old jet-black dog gives three loud barks" and their conversation is over (78).

Later in the text, Eddie decides to visit Madame Toussaint again to see if he can get any clarification on her previous advice and though she is irritated with him and his behavior, she tells him three times, "'Go set fire to your car'" (93). The advice that Madame Toussaint gives proves to be exactly what Eddie needs and he reluctantly decides to burn the car at the conclusion of the text, which leads to a reconciliation with his wife. The consistent repetition of

the number three throughout this sequence offers an intriguing look at the intersection of religion and folk belief in Gaines's text. Due to their proximity to this mystical woman, these numbers can be seen as corruptions of inversion of the triune godhead in Christianity. Furthermore, Reverend Simmons' powerlessness and Madame Toussaint's advice, which proves to be successful, provokes an intriguing conception of the choice the individuals have between Christianity and folk beliefs. Just as in "Bezhin Lea," individuals must make the choice of the system in which they will place their belief. Individuals cannot occupy both spaces. Gaines even discussed this concept of forsaking Christianity, especially in "A Long Day in November," and claimed that the figures "go back to more basic things, further and further back" (Parrill 186). Echoing Turgenev's presentation of the conflict between Christianity and folklore, Gaines appears to elevate folklore above organized religion, because he sees folklore as a concept that predates organized religion.

While the collision between Christianity and folklore is vital in the work of Ivan Turgenev and Ernest Gaines, these authors employ supernatural abilities, especially related to sight, to explore this conflict while also gesturing towards generational and racial differences respectively. In Turgenev's "Bezhin Lea," even a story such as the one Ilyusha shares about being able to "'see dead people on Parents' Sunday'" appears to draw a significant bifurcation between religion and the supernatural, which is illustrated as seemingly mystical sight in this tale (111). Ilyusha claims that "'on Parents' Sunday you can also see the people who're going to die that year'" and all one must do to experience this event "'is to sit down at night in the porch of the church and keep your eyes on the road'" (111). If these steps are followed, then one will see a procession of all of "'them who're going to die that year'" (111). The events described by Ilyusha place religion and folklore in conflict with one another once again because the mythical

procession occurs as individuals walk directly by those who are seated on "'the porch of the church'" (111). One of the women on the porch actually sees an apparition of herself in the procession and cries out "'God help us!'" (112). Ilyusha's tale about the communal belief of doom for anyone whose specter appears clearly illustrates an elevation of folk beliefs, yet the location for the event is church porch, a sight intrinsically connected with organized religion. The porch appears to act as an interstice in this story, allowing a middle ground between superstitious and religious beliefs to coexist, highlighting the collision in these seemingly disparate beliefs.

Like Turgenev, Gaines is also interested in supernatural abilities for many of his characters and he also employs mystical sight to illustrate his explorations of folklore. This concept of mystical sight appears most prevalently in "Bloodline," where a confrontation occurs between Frank Laurent, a geriatric plantation owner, and his nephew, Copper Laurent. Copper's father was Frank's brother and Copper's mother was a black woman, which is the reason for the animosity behind Frank when Copper returns to the plantation and requests his birthright. When Copper is first described in the text, the reader learns that "'When he talk he don't look right'" because "'He looking right at you, but he ain't seeing you'" (161). Felix continues and claims, "'He was just sitting there, looking out that door, looking far 'way'" (161). Copper is continually described as a man who "'was looking at something far away, or like he was listening to something far away'" and who even when he "'was talking to you, he wasn't seeing you, he was seeing something 'way off'" (204, 206). Copper's mystical eyesight becomes most apparent during his interaction with his uncle at the stories climax and the text declares, "'He was looking at Frank, but he wasn't seeing him; he was seeing past Frank. Like he was talking to Frank, but at the same time listening to another voice'" (212). The text further brings attention to and

complicates Copper's eyesight with the claim that "He was looking down at his uncle. He was seeing him. He wasn't seeing him" (214).

While one possible answer to this issue is that Copper is simply being disrespectful of his uncle because his uncle has been disrespectful to him, that answer to this issue of seemingly mystical sight may appears to come in Gaines's *A Gathering of Old Men* where Clatoo reflects, "Like most of these white folks you'll find round here, when they trying to convince you they'll look you dead in the eye, daring you to think otherwise from what they want you to think" (50). Copper's mystical sight hints at a moment when a black individual will be empowered and he claims that he "'only came this time to look around'" (217). As Copper leaves the plantation, he claims that he will either take his share of the plantation or he will "'bathe this whole plantation in blood'" (217). Copper is looking through Frank while also looking into the future at a time where he will be empowered to take control of what is legally his right.

Ultimately, the concept linking the mystical, Christian, and supernatural events in these stories is fear of that which is unknown and unexplained. The figures in "Bezhin Lea" are constantly described as "'terrified,'" "'frightened,'" "'scared,'" and "shuddering" out of fear (107, 110, 113, 115). Similarly, the characters in Gaines's texts are driven to act because of the fear of losing a loved one either to death or to another man in *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* and "A Long Day in November" respectively. Sonny too expresses fear of the supernatural when he meets Madame Toussaint, reflecting "I get scared of Madame Toussaint" and "'I was scared...Her face was red and her eyes got big and white. I was scared. I had to hide my face'" (76, 79). Each of these stories involving peasants or sharecroppers depict individuals who are intrinsically impoverished. These individuals are frequently unable to attain worldly means for comfort and instead seek out superstitions or religion for reassurance or safety.

However, even the avenues these characters pursue provoke fear as the solutions to the problems or conclusion to the stories often seem to create more terror than what was present in the beginning. This repetitive cycle of panic seems to suggest that neither religion nor superstitions can offer any long-term security or happiness. Additionally, these texts also assert that peasants and sharecroppers are more susceptible to belief in religion and myth because they may be more desperate to improve their circumstances.

Gaines and Turgenev are illustrating ways that peasants attempt to bring order to their world and create autonomy in an existence where they are often robbed of it. Through the distinct collision Christianity, seemingly supernatural events, and folklore, these characters are examples to generations to come of genuine depictions of peasant culture. For Gaines, the template is provided by Turgenev and the Louisiana author adds regional aspects of race and African myth. Gaines claimed, "I wanted to start with an individual, with the problems that an individual confronts and then spread it out to the problems of the race. It didn't accidentally happen" (Tooker and Hofheins 103). Through his texts, Gaines captures "the great landowners, the sharecroppers, the small towns, uptown, and back of town, the swamps, the bayous" all because "there's a story behind every tree" (Lowe 320). The Louisiana author depicts these areas because they are worthy of depiction as there is "a story behind every tree," many of these stories being "great ghost stories" filled with supernatural occurrences and mystical events (320). To create these stories, Gaines "reads these other writers like Turgenev to see how to do things, but [he] know[s] the story is already there (320). By remaking these stories with regional changes and the same collision with religion and superstitions, Gaines continues the legacy of mystical events and beliefs in peasant culture. The Louisiana author also manages to evolve this artform through his emphasis on narrative distance for the peasant. Instead of utilizing frame stories

witnessed by a narrator who is an aristocrat, each of Gaines's stories are told by sharecroppers and these stories are told firsthand by individuals in the peasant culture with no need for a mediator, offering a new way for folklore to be transmitted to future generations.

CONCLUSION

CONTINUING A TRADITION

In an interview with William Parrill in 1986, Ernest Gaines claimed, "I don't think I'm taken seriously yet as a writer to a point where there can be long articles or comprehensive essays about me and my work. I have known people who have done masters on my work. I have known people who have used me in their doctorate, but I'm not one of those people whose work is written about by the major critics" (Parrill 187). Nearly three decades later, this sentiment in the world of scholarship has changed and there are now numerous critical explorations of Gaines's work in existence. As I have mentioned in the introduction, there still is not a book-length exploration focused on the influence of Ivan Turgenev on Ernest Gaines, but with considerable expansion, these chapters could become that text.

As I move forward in my academic career, I hope to build upon what I have set forth in this study. For one chapter, I would like to expand my brief discussion included in my introduction of the roles of Ivan Turgenev's mother and Ernest Gaines's aunt and the way that they shaped the female figures in these men's texts. Additionally, I would like to have a section devoted to the use of triptychs and epiphanies. This chapter would obviously be influenced by the use of groupings of three in each man's work. A clear example in Turgenev's work would be the way Pavel Petrovich's actions come in threes, including the manner in which he greets his nephew by kissing "him in the Russian fashion three times, that is to say he brushed his cheeks three times with perfumed whiskers" (Turgenev 16). The most substantial cause for exploration

would come from a comment spoken by the narrator in "Christ Walked Down Market Street," which Gaines has "always insisted out of everything he had written" was "his favorite story" (Gaudet and Young xii). Within this text, the narrator claims:

> I began to think He might return in the form of the Trinity - Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. So I started concentrating on threes. Whenever I saw three men walking together I paid them very close attention. They could be white, black, Asian, or a mixture of the three. There could be three Jews or three Muslims, I would look them over. He's in all of us, so He didn't have to come back as any one race. I got so hung up on threes. One day I followed three Filipinos up Kearney Street. (Gaines 73)

Interestingly, Gaines has previously claimed that "all the stories he had tried to write that were set away from Louisiana were failures, so this interpretation could offer a considerable validation of those tales, especially "Christ Walked Down Market Street" (Gaudet and Young xii). Perhaps the most tenuous exploration I would also like to conduct between these two authors would involve a look at the role of crazed or unintelligent characters in Gaines, which could be seen as holy fools. With Turgenev's *Fortune's Fool* in mind, I believe there is significant interplay between the concept of the holy fool and the child narrators of "A Long Day in November," "The Sky is Gray," and "My Grandpa and the Haint." Jefferson, from *A Lesson Before Dying*, could also fit quite well into this discussion. To close my lengthened analysis of the fiction of these two authors, I would like to explore the way transportation is treated in the texts of these two men. Specifically, the analysis would revolve around Turgenev's treatment of the boat in "Lgov" and the role of the car and tractor in Gaines's work, especially "A Long Day in November" and *A Gathering of Old Men*. These images are consistently depicted as creations

that destroy, hurt, or seriously hinder the main characters' ability to move or secure their own welfare. In a sense, items that should make life easier result in life becoming far more challenging for the characters of Gaines and Turgenev. In this conflict, these authors gesture toward the supremacy of simplified life and the cost of progress.

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