



Catherine Carmier

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By the author of *A Lesson Before Dying* and *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, *Catherine Carmier* is a compelling love story set in a deceptively bucolic Louisiana countryside, where blacks, Cajuns, and whites maintain an uneasy coexistence.

After living in San Francisco for ten years, Jackson returns home to his benefactor, Aunt Charlotte. Surrounded by family and old friends, he discovers that his bonds to them have been irreparably rent by his absence. In the midst of his alienation from those around him, he falls in love with Catherine Carmier, setting the stage for conflicts and confrontations which are complex, tortuous, and universal in their implications.

Catherine Carmier Details

Date : Published March 31st 1993 by Vintage (first published 1964)

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Author : Ernest J. Gaines

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From Reader Review Catherine Carmier for online ebook

U. Teresa says

A good first novel of Ernest Gaines. It certainly speaks to what was to come with his regional, local color writing of Louisiana. (More to come)

Jeanne says

An engaging story set in the Louisiana countryside in the sixties when the tension between races was palpable.

Shelley says

I enjoyed his other books more

Chrissie says

So, what's this about **really**?

It is a description of a place and a time. The setting is rural Louisiana in the 1960s. Cajuns, Whites and Blacks are competing for land, for employment and for their very existence.

It is about a dysfunctional family--a father deeply tied to his daughter, a daughter deeply tied to her father, this being the Catherine of the book's title, and a mother who needs to be needed. Each feels emotionally and sexually deprived. They want more. They are not satisfied.

Jackson, the central protagonist of the novel, he is not satisfied either. He left this hometown, has gotten himself educated in California, but has now returned. He is searching for more. Intellectual improvement, a promising future and of course love too. Disappointed by what he saw and experienced in California, he is at a loss of where and how to proceed next.

This is a book about frustrated earnings--physical, sexual, emotional and intellectual. Earnings are so strong and so frustrated that they overflow into violence.

The characters are searching for fulfillment, not always through themselves but through others.

The prose is abrupt, strong, sometimes brutal, interspersed with dialogs mirroring the language of the town's people. Conversations are a mix of black, creole and Cajun dialects.

The story becomes more complicated than you originally think; it is this that raises it up a notch. The telling

is powerful and moving. I ended up liking it, despite the fact that dysfunctional family stories are not my usual cup of tea.

Audible in the US sells the audiobook. It is produced by Blackstone Audio Incorporated. It is said to be narrated by S. Patricia Bailey, but it isn't. It is narrated instead by D.M. Green. Audible should provide accurate information! I have notified them; hopefully the information will be corrected. At the beginning I found the narration to be unprofessional. The tempo and volume varied, words were indistinct and the production of the recording was quite simply poor. As one proceeds the reading becomes stronger and clearer. The annoying variations subside. By the end, Green's reading had improved a lot. I have given the narration three stars.

Mary says

Catherine Carmier was a good book---but not as good as Love and Dust. Of course, that is my personal opinion.

It dealt with racial color, romance, and violence. The thing that put me off was the characters' communication "with their eyes". This occurred too many times to seem possible.

To say that Catherine's family was dysfunctional was putting it mildly. She was abnormally attached to her father. See what you think about this.

It was a sort of "romance" novel. I guess.

Julie H. says

I read this book, originally published in 1964, for a great LEH-funded program at our public library exploring creole identity and experience. It was brilliant! While short (i.e., readable in an evening), the book is deceptively complicated. That is, you read it in a few hours but spend several more untangling the web of what you've just read. It tackles race, class, gender, parent/child relationships (esp. those of parent with child of opposite sex), urban/rural dichotomies, as well as the somewhat predictable opposition of faith vs. intellectualism in southern life. What's so terribly clever is that many of the seemingly irredeemable characters (e.g. Raoul) are actually tragic heroes with Achilles heel and all. Still others, including the compelling Madame Bayonne, are knowledgeable older women with some semblance of "the sight"--or perhaps just really perceptive people. And is Lillian simply stirring the pot, or an intentionally malevolent force in her parents' irrevocably unhappy marriage? The story is set in the 1960s with parallel worlds between the dysfunctional Creole father Raoul and his daughter Catherine (of the book's title) and her lover Jackson--just returned to Louisiana from a 14-year absence during which he was educated in California--and Jackson and his fundamentalist mother, Charlotte. Like most of the characters in the novel, Jackson is at a crossroads where he must decide which of several uncomfortable and downright uncertain tacks he will take.

In addition, there are nifty parallels between cajun and creole cultures as parallel liminal identities during the Civil Rights era. Long story short, every character and the town in which they live occupies a state of transition and increased political unrest. It's a marvelous book with a real train-wreck of a blow out when Jackson and Catherine's father finally come to blows. Literally. Well written, one cannot help but wonder whether Jackson is the author's (Ernest Gaines, author of *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* and *A Lesson Before Dying*) alter-ego. Read it and let me know what you think. Can't wait to read something else by Prof. Gaines.

Toshana says

Stunning tale of jim crow at it's best.

Amanda Blanco says

I adore Ernest Gaines, but it was obvious that this was his very first novel. The dialogue isn't great, the storyline was just okay. It was overeating though to see where he began it all.

Cherryne says

Read the book, clearly not understanding half of the subtext. Finished the book and wondered, what happened? Perhaps I missed something, or maybe I'm not that smart.

Kathleen says

Normally I love Gaines books. *A Lesson Before Dying* was one of the best books I have ever read. Catherine Carmier actually explores much of the same theme (young black educated man comes home, but doesn't intend to stay) as the later book, but it is clear that the author isn't as mature in his writing. The concepts are there, but not the ability to make us love the characters and care about their problems. It took me a long time to read this very short book because I could put it down and did many, many times. Even so, it is worth a read if you are interested in the topic of the life of black Americans in the south.

Meg says

novel

Mary says

Supposed to read this on for my class but didn't like it so punted.

Monica ****can't read fast enough**** says

I am always drawn to stories that feature a return to a family or community after a prolonged absence, and Gaines presents a poignant one in *Catherine Carmier*. Jackson returns not as a fresh faced enthusiastic young man ready to take up the challenge and duty to give to his community what he has received in California, but is instead disillusioned and frustrated with the unfairness and cruelties that seem to be true no matter where he goes because of who and what he is. For Jackson, leaving his small segregated community in Louisiana, was an opportunity to taste freedom through education and being surrounded by people who are more open minded. Unfortunately, Jackson finds a different reality than what he dreamed.

I was immersed in the story almost immediately. I felt for and understood both Jackson and Charlotte's perspectives. Jackson not wanting to be restricted by the harsh social prejudices that are adhered to by all sides in his home town is understandable. All of the racist rules had to have made him feel choked off from opportunities that should be available to him. As a young man wanting to feel respected and valued not only as a man, but as a full human being Jackson can't bring himself to willingly step back into the place that would be assigned to him. Yet, Charlotte wants Jackson to return not only for her own selfish reasons, but to also be a hopeful example to the other young people in the community. The tension from the push and pull of family and community obligation versus the desire to move forward unencumbered by the debt and unfair and unequal social restrictions are painful to witness. Even Jackson's fascination with a young woman, who in his mind should be within his reach, is yet another frustration and hit to his manhood added to his return home.

Unsurprisingly, Gaines smoothly incorporates complex themes of race, colorism, class, gender, and family obligations into a short book. My only complaint is that the ending left me wanting a full conclusion to Jackson's fate that isn't given. However, I have to admit that the ending does work because it leaves issues only half settled, which felt realistic. I am very glad that I am reading all of Gaines' books this year and *Catherine Carmier* was an excellent start.

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HeavyReader says

Read this years ago, once again while on the Ernest Gaines kick. Don't remember liking it very much. My sister may have given the book to me. I know she did give me at least one book of his, signed by the author himself. Gaines was somehow connected to the college my sis attended and periodically did readings and book signings on campus.

Debra says

Just getting started. Finally finished. Not my favorite Gaines book.
