

Human Courage and Dignity in Ernest J. Gaines' *A Lesson Before Dying*

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ABSTRACT

This research is on human courage and dignity in Ernest J. Gaines's novel, *A Lesson Before Dying*. People are able to face threat, pain, danger, or even death in order to maintain their right and dignity relying on courage. This is library research and applies mimetic criticism proposed by Abrams saying that a work of literature is the imitation of the real world. It depicts human being who struggles to maintain and get acknowledgement of their right and dignity to live in respect and worth. The analysis focused on how courage and dignity raise someone who is desperated into brave and thoughtful to face his death. He is desperated because of a false accusation of being a murderer, compared as a hog, and sentenced to death in electric chair. Comparing to a hog makes him lost his courage and self-esteem. He eliminates himself and does not want to speak with others. His godmother disagrees with it and asks a teacher to teach him that he is a human being and should die as a human being too. Then, he is taught by a teacher of moral and obligation to face his death courageously and show that he is a human being who has duty and responsibility. Finally, he is able to sacrifice his death as a symbol of his courage and dignity to himself, his family and community. It is found that the author Ernest J Gaines through the novel has vividly portrayed human beings who have courage are able to maintain and get acknowledgement of their right and dignity although they have to face threat, pain, danger, or even death.

Keywords: hog, dignity, courage, racism, prejudice

Introduction

A literary work expresses human experiences and problems in a real life. Like an other art, it is essentially an imagination art, that is an art of the writers social support imagination in selecting, ordering, and interpreting life experience. It is a written work which exists in our society as a communicative practise with our social life. It provides excellent opportunities for us to express our personal opinions, reactions, and feelings. The greatest pleasure and satisfaction to be found in literature occur where it begins one back realities of human situation, problem, feeling and relationship (Tyler 1-2).

In the early 1900s, particularly in the 1920s, Afro- American literature, art, music, dance, and social comentary began to flourish in Harlem, a section of New York city. Historically, the Afro-American writers appear between 1885 and 1900, the most violent period of Afro-American's history when almost 2.500 of the Afro-American were lynched in every three days. This period made some of the Afro-American awake and begun their career as an Afro-American writers composing fiction and poetry to impress Whites with their humanity and to win themselves a more comfortable place in racial world of America. The Afro-American fiction and poetry did not only raise the issues of

freedom, social justice, to prove themselves worthy of equality counteract the ideology of racism and many more that refers to the Afro-American social condition, but also show the beauty, the charm, and the artistic values (Jhonson 8).

Afro-Americans are seemed to be the victims of prejudice and discrimination which compounded by the affect of their law and economic status. They live in a racial world in which their children were restricted in the education opportunities and lack of training that make their race will never get a better status in the eyes of Whites. It is very clear that racial prejudice has been a very hard experience for Afro-American in some aspect of life in United States (Handlin : 714). They are always to be the men who are seated in the wrong place. The great wrong race of the world is the Afro-American, and in the American fiction, it had been shouted very loudly. Afro-American always tried to get along and find their community. Most of them have protested to the Whites asking for fair treatment, civil right, and integration into American's life. There was a movement among Afro-American with emphasized their African origin and institution such as Afro-American churches, schools, and societies (Davidson :625).

Ernest J. Gaines is an Afro-American author who explores the full range of Afro-american humanity. He has been nominated for literature's most prestigious award, The Nobel Prize and has contributed in numerous ways to contemporary world in literature. His most obvious gift is his extended and refined construction of the novel as a moral rather than a written text. His marvelous marriage of storytelling with inscription has helped to extend and refine the novel as the living form. He is one of approximately sixty writers from around the world nominated for the 2004 Nobel Prize in literature.

One important difference between Gaines and many other Afro-American writers is that he returned to the South. He is also to show both the historical racial conflict between the Cajuns (French- Canadian

settlers) and Afro-American and also the changes. He knows and Understands the dynamic dimensions of the interactions of two folks' culture. From his narrative voices, it is clear that he is not the intense anger of many other Afro-American writers. There is both anger and understanding in him, a kind of anger that gives the positive changes of the present (Gaudet 3).

Gaines is a professor of English and writer in Residence at the University of Louisiana at Art and Letters (awarded by the government of Franch). He is member of The American Academy of Art and Letters, holder of the National Humanities Medal. His fiction has long been critically acclaimed and taught in university and school for the past twenty-five years, and translated into many languages, including French, Spanish, German, Russian, and Chinese. He received national attention and an audience of million with the selection of his latest novel *A Lesson Before Dying* as the Oprah Book Club selection in October 1997. His contributions to American literature include his mastery of the first person storytelling voice, his use of humor as essential element of human character and his major contributions to establishing an African-American literature tradition based on the memory of the past (Gaudet 4). His reputation as a writer and an artist is secure, equally secure is his reputation as a man, a colleague, a teacher, and a person who devoted to his people and his home state. In his career, he has enriched the body of American literature. He has help to build a strong teaching workshop at the university of Lafayette in Louisiana. His novels have done for the people of Louisiana, they are Blacks with Whites, and Creole with Mulatto (Gaudet 6).

Gaines has written mainly about the Afro-American living in the Southern part of the United States. The theme of his novels and the stories is "an attempt to live with courage and dignity under the deprivation". His characters are usually poor, mostly uneducated, and almost very independent. The conflicts in which they usually find themselves is how to live as a man (Aubert :

483). His major themes are survival with dignity, the search for manhood, and a determination to give voice to an unvoiced people, to the making of a new society that respects the dignity of man, so that they know they have a power to effect the affirmation of their existence by writing themselves into the broadest laws of the culture and social where they live in (Sacramento 1). *A Lesson Before Dying* (1993) is a historical social commentary about the Afro-American community, in the light of one of their own being convicted, tried and sentenced of first degree murder of which he is innocent (Rachel 1).

Alice Walker, in the New York Times wrote that Gaines claims and reveals the heritage of Southern Afro-American and their customs, the community he feels with them is unmistakable and goes deeper even than pride. Gaines is mellow with the historical reflection, supple with wit, relaxed and expansive because he does not equate his character with failure (Gruner 1).

A Lesson Before Dying is a story of an Afro-American young man who is accused of being a murderer of a white bar storeowner. He was accused by two white men who came into the store and found him leaving the bar with money and whisky in his pocket. He was convicted of the crime and sent to the trial. At the trial, his defense lawyer argued that he was innocent, he was being at the wrong place and the wrong time. He took the money because of hunger and stupidity. But, the prosecutor argued that he and the two friends had gone to the bar with full intention of robbing and killing. The prosecutor describes him as less than a man, less than a boy, he is compared to a "hog". The judge told him that he had been found guilty of robbery and murder of the first degree and then he is sentenced to die in electrocution.

It received many honors including a Pulitzer prize nomination, the best fiction award by three organizations; The National Book Critics Association (1993), The Southern Writers Conference and the Louisiana Library Association, and the October 1997 choice of the month in the

"Oprah Book Club". Gaines was named "chevalier" in the order of the Art and Letters by the French minister of culture for his writing and teaching for the first creative course will be a part of the curriculum at every French University within ten years. He thinks that the Afro-American and Whites have more in common than they have differences. He said that what he tried and did in *A Lesson Before Dying* was just writing about people whom he created, imagined, and made them as true as possible. He never thought about their liking or disliking each other, human beings had much more in common than human beings had differences (Bauer 3). For him, *A Lesson before Dying* is a product of a lifetime of nightmares about execution. On the surface, the novel is the story of one man's struggle to accept death with dignity while another man struggles with his own identity and responsibility to his community. But on the deeper level, it explores the process of an oppressed and dehumanized people attempt to gain recognition of their human dignity, to get acknowledgment of their human rights and freedom to pursue their dream. It is also a powerful essential parable about human condition as accessible and universal a tale as was ever penned (Ringle 1).

In the novel Gaines said that the main lesson he hoped people get from reading his book was the lesson of commitment and responsibility, a commitment to one's community and a responsibility to oneself. He is trying to tell the readers what it would be like to be on death row for something of which one has not done and discrimination of which Afro-American had to endure during the 1940s. It also tells about human stereotypes of others and how they are treated more like "hog" than human beings (Ken 1).

One theme that was predominately heard throughout the novel is "action speak louder than words". An example of this is Jefferson's silence as he walks to the chair while everybody in the room worries about the execution and shows remorse of pity, he does not speak. From Jefferson's attitude, there is an important lesson that is heroism

is not only expressed through action, sometimes the simple act is resisting the inevitable is enough (Sacramento 2).

Review of Literature

Clarification of Terms

Dignity is the quality or state of being worthy, honored, and esteemed. To honour and esteem means to assign human beings with high value. Dignity in human beings involves the earning or the expectation of personal respect of esteem. Human dignity is a way of respect in the form of privacy between each people because they have the same sense of worth and value. Dignity gives an individual a sense of value and worth, a high or honourable rank or position, and a part of man common humanity. The existence of human's night dream started that human beings are aware of each other's worth (Wriston 49).

Human dignity is a way of respect in the form of privacy between each people because they have a sense of worth and value, sense of the price of their personality and dignity. They have the ability to act morally and consider their fellow men equally as reasoning creatures. Since man occupies the highest place in the chain of being in comparison with other creatures, they have the unique ability to learn from all the other entities in the universe. Dignity confers man free-will as they are able to choose actions based on the knowledge that he can acquire (Harold 120). It is central to what it means to be human beings. Other creatures have life, consciousness, intelligence, and even some limited ability, but only human beings are responsible to choose their manner of life and hence their dignity. People who have dignity should not blame others for their own difficulty, but rather look for the cause of it. In real life, people usually compare each other, judge each other, give people and themselves their evaluation about everything to measure people worth and dignity (97).

Schuman states that dignity is given to human beings from God and remains unchanged up to their death. It is not bound on time because the decisions accompany

the soul into the eternity. Dignity is different from honor, for honor one can strive because it is given by human beings and can be taken from them. It makes human being have the highest value from the other creatures, they have something more than others which is comparable and measurable (1).

Dignity is a phenomenon of human perception or certain signals from the world trigger an attribution in the mind of perceiver. Certain features in human beings trigger ascription of worth. The perception of dignity in turn elicits a response in the perceiver, the appearance of dignity triggers a desire to esteem and respect the dignified person (Harold 21). The term of dignity is closely connected with the idea of autonomy. Autonomy means self-control and self-mastery, freedom from the way of passion and prejudice, and the ability to actively determine oneself. To live with dignity means to be one's own master, to conduct one's affairs on the basis of the free choices instead of being pushed around by forces beyond one's control. Human beings who live with dignity draws their strength from within, free from the dictates of craving and bias (such as greed, hatred, and delusion) guided by a thirst for righteousness and an inner perception of the truth (Schuman 4).

To perceive dignity, human being refrain their behavior not only with virtue but also with duty, a duty of human beings to owe themselves to be worthy. Dignity enlarge human's mind by raising grand and elevated emotions and giving human beings an understanding as the important truths and the general laws that govern with morality. Endang Susilowati, an Indonesian career struggles to fight for the dignity of the migrant worker's right. She is the director of Panca Karsa Organization who focuses on the protection of migrant workers.

In relation to human beings, courage is considered to be a moral virtue. Moral virtue is a quality or state of excellent in human beings soul that lead to good actions and the ultimate fulfillments of human beings' life. This quality of virtue impulse to act in a certain manner, rather it is the

building of solid and stable disposition within human beings. Courage requires them not to surrender on themselves to the ingenious or compassionate counsels of despair that would induce a man to eliminate himself from the rank of the living but it does not follow from this that every huckster who is fattened and nourished in self-confidence has more courage than the man who yielded to despair (Kidder 135).

Emerson states that courage is the ability of human beings to control their fear when they are in danger, pain, and opposition. It not only gives human beings a proud, high spirit and angry temper but also positive values because it covers mental or moral strength enabling one to venture, to persevere, and to be confident. It also takes human beings to endure unusual risk and sacrifice the material and soul to help other and to struggle the right of the oppressed people. For example, the freedom of human beings to get a better life and a good education for the poor in the world (4).

An action is courageous if it is attempt to achieve and despite penalties, risks, costs, or difficulties of sufficient gravity to deter most people. A courageous person is characteristically able to attempt such actions or maintain such states. People who are courageous have confidence in oneself when considering a capability. They are typically have little fear of the unknown, able to stand up for what they believe in and have to control their fear to risk danger and opposition. Courage is dependent on the sound of judgment for it needs to be known whether the end justifies the risk incurred. It is not the absence of fear but the ability to feel the appropriate amount of fears. Having courage means to do the right things without fear and compromise, to stand up for yourself, and to ignore people who bother you. Courage gives the power of life to affirm itself of the ambiguity power of being that actualizes itself and contradict the will to power (Tillich 30).

Human's courage can be divided into two forms; physical and moral courage. Physical courage means overcoming fears of bodily harm and doing the duty. It is the

bravery that allows human beings to take risk of the fear of pain and danger. In contrast, moral courage is the willingness to stand up with values, principles, and convictions, even that they are threatened. It enables human beings to stand up for what they beliefs are right and regardless of the consequences. Moral courage often expresses by being frank, honest, and sincere with others while keeping the words free from bias or prejudice, and malice or hatred (Kidder 45).

Prejudice is an unjustified attitude involving a fixed, usually negative way of thinking about person or object and a stereotype which is an exaggerated and rigid mental image of a particular class of person or object. Prejudice means simply a feeling of superiority or bias and the prejudging of other people towards personality or groups. The prejudice group becomes a scapegoat and a safety valve during times of popular unrest (47). Hatred is a disease of the mind, like a strong acid which attack the container that holding it. A hate society is a society where malice and every form of violence and wickedness will not be wanting. Hate rise tension in a society and most often lead to violence and destruction. Hate is often directed toward a person or group not for what they are but for what they have, do not have, or for their power over others (Rana 34).

Racism is one of the most pressing problems which needed a great courage in facing it. Racism results when one race views itself as superior over another and determines that it should have more rights than the others. In Indonesia, racism is manifested in many forms, from discriminatory conduct to human right abused based on ethnicity and religion. This has given rise to human right violations in the social, economic, political, legal and cultural society. Racism is also about the prejudice that is rooted in the minds of the people having been nurtured for decades. Just like in the May 1998 riots, Chinese ethnic were targeted for killings, torture and rape, and their houses and shops were looted and burned. Many riots targeting Chinese

Commented [L1]: Insert to the reference

ethnic throughout 1998 were part of the systematic racism that has been part of the mass unconsciousness. This violence was based on the political and economic conflict of interest between the Chinese ethnic with the society. Finally, the government makes an organization to raise the awareness of danger of racism to the stability of society by working towards the elimination of racism and discrimination (Tempo).

To have courage and dignity in the modern life means to be able to look at everything afresh. Habit and sentiment forces human beings very quickly to see things, not as they really are, but in close categories in which they have put them and it does not take them long to organize their own little world and their scale of values. To face up the modern life, humans must be able to have a courageous power to maintain their life. They must be warned about doing more and doing better and be aware of their hopelessness (Schuman 9).

Method

This research applies mimetic theory proposed by Abrams who states that mimetic orientation is the explanation of art essentially the imitation of aspect of the universe. That art of painting, music, dancing and sculptor, Socrates said are all imitation. Everything is comprehended in two categories, the imitable and imitation. Aristotle in *Poetics* also defined poetry as imitation (8-9). It has been stated with compendious clarity by Sydney; 'The poet nothing affirms, and therefore never lies' (Hough: 1966: 42). Yet the 'imitation' of the poet, though not specific objects with substantial historical existence, are not cut off from the real world. Shakespeare's Othello is not an imitation of an actual man who has actually existed but he is an imitation of a man. Achilles' shield in Homer is not an imitation of any shield that has ever existed before. Yet he is also an imitator: he makes them by analogy with things that have existed. In this case all objects in literature have an analogical relationship to the object in the real world (Hough: 1966: 44-45). The novel *A lesson Before Dying* is a crucial tool for the author, Ernest J. Gaines

to represent or portray the people's life real condition, particularly low class people who undergo injustice, racism, prejudice, however, they are able to cope with courage and dignity.

This is a library research method where all data are taken from the library and internet. The primary source is the novel, *A Lesson Before Dying* written by Ernest G. Gaines, and the secondary sources are collected from literary criticisms, sociological writings, biography, and internet browsing. All these data are taken together to make meaningful interpretation and give good contribution to the research. The novel is studied by making interpretation that it is a life reflection of human happiness in real life.

Findings and Discussion

A Lesson Before Dying is a story about 256 pages and divided into 31 chapters that talks about an Afro-American young man who is accused as a robbery and a murderer of a white bar store-owner, and sentenced to death in the electrocution. He is accused by two white men who find him leaving the bar with money and whisky in his pocket. Then he is sent to trial. His lawyer argued that he was being at the wrong place at the wrong time, but the prosecutor argued that he had gone to the bar with full intention of robbing and killing. He is described as less than a man and compared as a hog. Comparing to a "hog" makes him terrified, infuriated, and obsessed by the possibility that he is a hog. He mimicking a hog's behaviour and jeering at his friends and families. He refuses to speak to them because he thinks that it will be impossible to help him but his godmother never give up to help and visit him. She asked a teacher to teach him about how to live as a human being and die as a human being too. The teacher successful to make him understand that he is a human being who is important to his family and community. Finally, he becomes toughful and brave man who accept his death with honour and dignity.

The central character of is Jefferson. He is uneducated black man who is raised

by his godmother, Miss Emma. He is an easy hopeless and simple man. He has spend his entire life on the plantation working for poor wages. He has always worked without protest, and believed that his place in the world is the lowly one. He loves children, listens to the music, and enjoys his Nannan home-cooking. He becomes sensitive and pessimist man because the whites treat him badly and call him a dumb animal. He is accused of a crime he had never committed and then sent to the jail. In the jail, he spends his time lying on the bunk, facing the wall, or staring at the ceiling. Living in the jail cell makes him feels isolated, remains cynical, defiant and painful man. He refused and didn't want to speak to his family or friend because he thinks that is would be impossible to help him.

The minor characters of the novel are Grant Wiggins, Tante Lou, Miss Emma, Sam Guidry, Vivian, Rev. Ambrose, Henry Pichot, Paul Bonin, Mathew Antoine, Inez Lane, Farrel Jarreau, Odessa Freeman, Irene Cole, Joe Claiborne, Thelma, Joseph Morgan, Louis Rougan, Miss Baule, Edna Guidry, Rita Lawrence, and Miss Eloise Bouie.

Courage

Courage is the ability of human beings to control their fear when their are in danger, pain, and opposition. Courage offers and gives human being moral and mental strength to face their problems in life and help them to find and learn about human' values from the conditions of life they have been faced. Gaines presents the central character, Jefferson, as an innocent young man who is trapped and being at the wrong place and at the wrong time, accused of being a murderer and then sentenced to die in the electric chair. At the trial, the public deffender describes him as less than a man, less than a thing, and he is compered to 'a hog'. All of the words make him remain quite and takes the words in his heart, but the words "hog" leads him toward growing awereness of himself as a human being who is worthy and respected.

Gaines shows the unjust treatment towards Jefferson and how it has to be accepted.

Jefferson who is innocent becomes the representation of the racist whites' hatred and prejudice towards people particularly the Afro-Americans: "Twelve white men say a black man must die, and another white man sets the date and time without consulting one black person. Justice?" (Gaines 157). His death has been decided by the white men although has not been sentenced by a jury of his peers but by a group of racist whites have. They are whites who have prejudice of Afro-Americans and life. Miss Emma says: "I don't want them to kill no hog, Miss Emma said." I want a man to go to that chair, on his own two feet." She wants to fight for the dignity of her family. She is a courageous woman who struggles for the right of her godson, Jefferson, to die as a human being. She thinks the Whites' decision in the courthouse is so unjust that she has to defend Jefferson's right by taking the responsibility to go to Henri Pichot's house to get the visitation from Sheriff Sam Guidry. Not only I was going up to Henri Pichot's house agains my will, but I had to perform all the courtesies of chauffeur as well (Gaines 16). Agreeing to visit Henri Pichot's house, Wiggins shows his willingness to comply with Miss Emma's wishes to help and do what is best for Jefferson.

"I'm a old hog." He said. "Youmans don't stay in no stall like this. I'm a old hog they fattening up to kill."

"Old hog don't care what people say."

"You're a human being, Jefferson," I said.

"I'm go'n show you how a old hog eat," he said. He knelt down on the floor and put his head inside the bag and started eating, without using his hands. He even sounded like a hog (Gaines 83).

Demonstrating how a hog eats, his behaviour horrified Wiggins. His condition makes Wiggins realizes how deep is the inhumane treatment that Jefferson feels which has affected his phyche. In this case, Jefferson's behaviour is the symbol of irony as the response of the inhumane treatment he has been received from the whites. After being expelled from society, he can not find

any reason to live decently knowing that he will be executed. He lost his self-esteem and carelessness for his own hygiene: He had not washed his face or comb his hair for days. He wore one of my khaki shirts and a wrinkled pair of brown pants. He didn't have on shoes. They were stuck under the bunk (Gaines 82).

Jefferson is degraded, isolated and treated as though he was less than human being, compared to "a hog"; and then sentenced to die for a crime he did not commit. His silent and crude behaviour mirrors the inhumane way he has been treated.

"You know what I'm talking about, don't you? His eyes said. They were big brown eyes, the white too reddish. You know, don't you? His eyes said again.

His eyes mocked me. They were big brown eyes, and the white were too reddish, and had been thinking too much the past few weeks, and the eyes mocked me.

His big brown eyes with reddish whites mocked me." (Gaines 73, 74). Gaines uses the paradox to refer to Jefferson's eyes "his eyes said" to show Jefferson's mindset of pain and fear knowing that he is going to die for a falsely accused crime. Gaines also uses the repetition of "they were big brown eyes, and the white were too reddish" to show that Jefferson is discriminated and oppressed by the the racist whites.

Then the author creates character Wiggins to teach Jefferson although is first rejected by Jefferson but he keeps on trying to persuade Jefferson to be taught. He has courage to accept all the possibilities and responsibility, better or worse. He not only sacrifices material and moral for Jefferson but also for his people by staying and living in the plantation school. Teaching Jefferson is more important than the white people who lie to Jefferson. Wiggins convinces him that he can be a hero for himself, for his family and his community:

"Do you know what a hero is, Jefferson? A hero is someone who does something for other people."

"He would do anything for people he loves, because he knows it would makes their lives better. I'm not the kind of person, but I want to be you could give something to her, to me, to those children in the Quarter. They are saying that you don't have it that you are a hog, not a man. But I know they are wrong (Gaines 191).

Jefferson finally accepts his death courageously. He is able to control his personal feeling about pain and fear to face his death. He is also able to release his hatred toward his captors and accept his fate. He shows his family and community that he is a man who has responsibility to keep the dignity and right of his community.

"What I got left, Mr Wiggins- two weeks?"

You can look at me, Mr Wiggins; I don't mind."

"I'm go'n do my best, Mr Wiggins. That's all I can promise. My best." (Gaines 224-225). He devotes his courage which makes him brave to face his death in the electric chair.

The author strengthens Jefferson's courage by creating character Paul, a white, to be the witness in the execution who Jefferson believes in as a real friend. He wants Paul to be with him when the execution is begun. Paul describes that Jefferson is a courageous man who faces his death with no more fear: He didn't seem frightened: he appeared tired. Paul could see how red his eyes were and knew that he have no slept at all. Paul asked him how he felt, and he said he was all right (Gaines 244-245). Jefferson finally realizes and finds himself as a man who ever been raised by his godmother. His understanding about the meaning of love from his godmother by standing "as a man" is the important thing to his family. He finally shows Wiggins, Tante Lou, and his community that Miss Emma had not rise "a hog" but a human being. He becomes a new strongest man to face life although in a second of waiting for his death.

He was the strongest man there: "Tell Nannan I walked". "Straight he

walked. I'm a witness. Straight he walked." (Gaines 253, 254). Gaines also shows that Wiggins with his courage and responsibility has successfully and patiently taught Jefferson to stand in courage to face the false accusation even death.

Dignity

Dignity is the quality or state of being worthy, honoured, and esteemed. To esteem person means to assign to them a high value of confidence that encourages and sustains. Keeping dignity, someone takes up time, energy, and obligation in doing his or her job and responsibility. People who has dignity are respected and aware of each other worth. In order worth, dignity is closely related to ethnical concepts of virtue, respect, autonomy, and human's right, and also associated with enlightened reason.

In this novel, the author creates characters Jefferson and Grant Wiggins as a portrait of people who have and perceive dignity. Gaines shows Jefferson's dignity in facing death with honor and dignity, while Grant Wiggins is shown in duty and responsibility. Wiggins does not want to be a teacher and live in the plantation church in the rest of his life. He hate that place, and he does not want to spend the rest of his life by teaching in the plantation church. He has an inner conflict: leaves the plantation and marries Vivian or teaches his community. He struggles to make a decision in his life between happiness or duty and responsibility to teach Jefferson and prove to the whites that Jefferson is "a human being" not "a hog".

He dedicates himself as a teacher by teaching the Afro-American children in the plantation school for he realizes he is a part of his community to teach them to understand the importance of having responsibility and how to live as a man with respect and dignity. He shows his dignity to his family by taking the responsibility to give a passionate and powerful speech to Jefferson: moral, duty, patience and compassion especially to his godmother Emma for his behaviour hurts her and what

he can do to ease her pain, to give her something to be proud of. He asks:

"Jefferson, do you know what "moral" means?" I asked him

"Do you know what obligation means?"

"No matter how bad off we are," I said, "we still owe something. You owe something, Jefferson. Not to me. But for your godmother. You must show her some understanding, some kind of love."

"That is for youmans," he said. "I ain't no youmans."

"Then why do you speak, Jefferson?" I said.

"Human beings are the only creatures on earth who can talk. Why do you talk? And wear clothes? Why do you wear clothes?" (Gaines 139).

The author then shows us Wiggins' wisdom words saying that he cannot be a hero but Jefferson can be. Why? He confesses that he hates to live there and teach, he wants to run away and live for himself and for a woman and nobody else: "That is not a hero. A hero does for others. He would do anything for people he loves, because he knows it would make their lives better. I'm not that kind of person, but I want you to be" (Gaines 191). Jefferson realizes that he is a man like all human being, who has dignity with moral and obligation. He shows his obligation to "take the cross" for the family and community: "Me. Me to take the cross, your cross, nannan's cross, my own cross. Me. Me. Mr. Wiggins. "He went to the celldoor and grasped it with both hands (Gaines 224).

The author uses a reference, diary as a symbol of Jefferson's legacy. Having no land, poverty, or material wealth to leave behind, the diary becomes a single testament to his life. By recording his thoughts and feelings as he awaits execution, Jefferson writes himself into history. His diary becomes the historical document that provides and represents people account of life.

Through his diary, Jefferson, alone with his private thoughts is able to acknowledge his part in the tragic events surrounding Alcee Grove's murder and to accept responsibility for his actions. He has

realized that he was not only guilty of having “in the wrong place at the wrong time” but he is also guilty of choosing and making the wrong choice. He sacrifices to end his life in the electric chair for the crime he never committed, shows a valuable worth to his own as a symbol of his personal dignity. He has learned to stand and reclaimed his manhood despite of dehumanizing environment which destroying his soul. Similarly, Wiggins is a good teacher that has dignity to make a transformation in Jefferson’s life. He shows a deference for his education as well as his consideration for Jefferson. through his teaching talent, transforming Jefferson from a hopeless man to be a brave and toughful man.

Although the people of the Quarter are materially poor they are rich spiritually. They are proud and hard-working people who love, support and protect each other; family and community. To show their respect for Jefferson, the people of the Quarter have agreed to refrain from working on the day of his execution. They are gathers at the plantation church and school to show their mourns for Jefferson’s tragic execution:

A white sharecropper must have been plowing the ground, since no colored people were working today. Even those who worked up at the big house for Henri Pichot or for other White people along the river had taken the day off. No one sat out in the porch, no one worked in the garden, no one walked across the yard or in the road (Gaines 247).

When the date of Jefferson’s execution has been set, Wiggins’ attitude toward Jefferson changes damatically. He finally stucks by the horror and tragedy of Jefferson’s situation and recognizes the brevity and fragility of Jefferson’s life. He realizes that his visits to Jefferson are not an obligation but a privilege. Wiggins has been given an opportunity to make a profound diffrence in the life of a fellow human being.

Gaines ends the story by the death of Jefferson in the electric chair to show that

not only Jefferson who gets lessons to realize what it means to be a man and die with honour and dignity, but also Wiggins understands that respect and dignity comes by helping and teaching Jefferson not for just Jefferson but for all the people in the community.

Conclusion

After studying the novel it is concluded that Ernest J. Gaines in *A Lesson Before Dying* wants to show that human being must have courage and dignity to survive in prejudice, hateful and racist world. The novel can be seen as the portrait of people who undergo prejudice, hatred and racism, but can amazingly path them by getting dignity and courage.

The author presents Jefferson as the portrait of people who has courage to face death for false accusation. He is placed at a wrong place and time, accused as a murderer and robbery for a crime he did not commit and sentenced to death in the electric chair. He becomes the victim of the racist, prejudice, and hateful world where he lives. Describing as less than a man and compering to a hog make Jefferson despair, terrified, infuriated, and obsessed himself that he is no better than a hog. Ironically, his crude behaviour is a mirror of the awereness of himself as a human being who has courage and dignity.

Courage is the ability of human being to control their fear of danger, pain, and opposition. People who have courage are able to face threat, pain, danger, or even death in order to maintain and get the acknowledgement of their right and dignity in life. Jefferson is a courageous young man who is able to control his fear of danger and pain to face his death, and also release his hatred toward his captors.

Dignity is shown through the responsibilty of Grant Wiggins to teach Jefferson about love with moral and obligation and teach the community about the important to have duty and responsibility. Jefferson’s death in the electric chair as “ a human being” is a symbol of human’s courage to maintain their dignity. With this, Gaines want to emphasize

that there is no limitation for human beings to live with the same right and dignity since they are created equal. *A Lesson Before Dying* is a literary work which offers one of the most important things in human's life, courage and dignity to live as human beings who are worthy and respect.

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